

# WU?<sup>@</sup>therep

## WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

By **Agatha Christie**

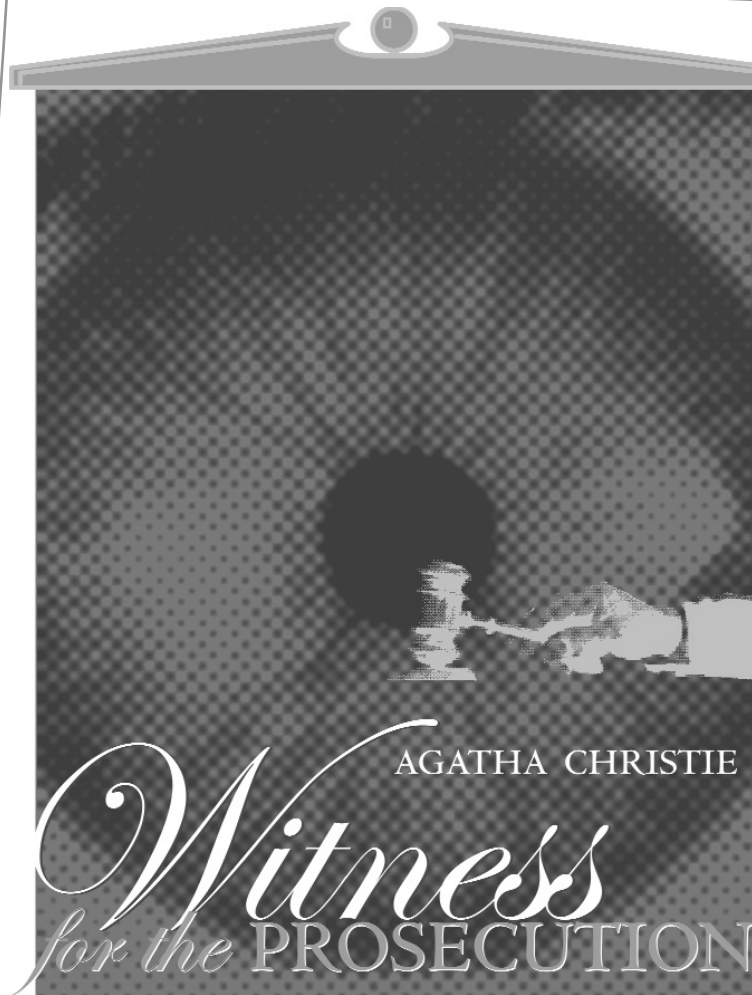
Directed by **Michael Evan Haney**

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# the 411

At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast.

But we also know that some things

are worth slowing down for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together

**WU? @ THE REP**—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions **(A/S/L)**, a plot summary **(FYI)**, background information on the playwright **(F2F)** and other NTK information.

Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means **IRL**, anyway.

## CU@therep!

### The Teacher's Lounge



In an effort to make our educational materials more accessible to students and easier for educators to incorporate into the classroom, we have adopted a new, more student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org) for additional information regarding the production elements, such as scenery, costumes, and lighting.

Any materials, either from this guide, or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom. As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

**NEATO!**

The activities included here address the following Show Me Standards: CA 1, 2, 5, 6, 7; FA 1, 2, 3, 5; SC 7; SS 3, 6, 7 and Illinois Learning Standards: 1, 2, 4, 5, 11, 14, 18, 25, 26, 27, SEL 2, 3.

## MIHYAP: TOP TEN WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED AT THE REP

**10. TBA** Ushers will seat your school or class as a group, so even if you are dying to mingle with the group from the all girls school that just walked in the door, stick with your friends until you have been shown your section in the theatre.

**9. SITD** The house lights will dim immediately before the performance begins and then go dark. Fight off that oh-so-immature urge to whisper, giggle like a grade schooler, or yell at this time and during any other blackouts in the show.

**8. SED** Before the performance begins, turn off all cell phones, pagers, beepers and watch alarms. If you need to text, talk, or dial back during intermission, please make sure to click off before the show resumes.

**7. TMI** Not to sound like your mom, but "if you need to go now, you needed to go then." Leaving the theatre during the performance is disruptive, so take care of any personal needs before the show starts.

**6. RTM** When you arrive at the theatre, read the production program. It's like a deluxe version of liner notes and a free souvenir, all in one.

**5. P-ZA? NW!** Though your ability to eat ten slices at one sitting may impress your friends, no one wants to listen to you chew, slurp, or smack, so please leave all food, drink, and gum outside the theatre.

**4. TLK-2-U-L-8-R** We know that you will be dying to discuss what you see onstage with your friends, but please wait until intermission. Any talking—even whispering—is very distracting for both the actors onstage and the audience seated around you.

**3. LOL** Without you, we really wouldn't have a show. It's your job to laugh when a scene is funny or maybe even shed a tear or two in a tender moment. However, since you are not the audience at *The Jerry Springer Show* please refrain from inappropriate responses such as talking, whistling, making catcalls or singing along with the performers.

**2. SOP** While it's great that you want a celeb picture of your day at The Rep, the theatre is off-limits to the paparazzi. Flash photography interrupts the performance and along with videorecording is prohibited by Actors Equity rules. You can sneak a peek at production photos on our website, [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org).

**1. LLTA** Let the actors know that you respect their work by remaining for the curtain call at the end of the performance. Show your appreciation through applause.

# A/S/L

SIR WILFRID ROBARTS, Q. C., one of the premier barristers in England has an outstanding record in court and a keen sense of observation.

CARTER is Sir Wilfrid's exacting Chief Clerk.

GRETA'S lack of attention to detail and overly forward nature make her an interesting choice for Sir Wilfrid's typist.

LEONARD VOLE is an amiable, unemployed young man who stands accused of murder.

JOHN MAYHEW represents Leonard as his solicitor and arranges for Sir Wilfrid to take the murder case.

EMILY FRENCH, the murder victim, was a wealthy middle-aged woman whose enthusiasm surpassed her judgment.

JANET MACKENZIE'S official duty in Miss French's home is Housekeeper, but she also regards herself as her employer's protector.

INSPECTOR HEARNE, a seasoned veteran on the police force, investigated the crime scene the night of the murder and is the arresting officer for Leonard Vole.

ROMAINE HEILGER VOLE, Leonard's German-born wife, remains unshaken by his arrest and trial.

JUSTICE WAINWRIGHT presides over the case.

MR. MYERS, Q. C., the prosecuting barrister, is one of Sir Wilfrid's most loathsome opponents, not only because of his legal skill, but also his dramatic courtroom manner.

DR. WYATT is the coroner who testifies regarding Miss French's time of death.

THOMAS CLEGG is an assistant in the forensic lab at New Scotland Yard who provides evidence about bloodstains found on Leonard's clothing.

## READ MORE ABOUT IT

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books and websites.

Bargainner, Earl F. *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1980.

Barnard, Robert. *A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1980.

Fitzgibbon, Russel H. *The Agatha Christie Companion*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1980.

Haining, Peter. *Agatha Christie: Murder in Four Acts*. Great Britain: Virgin Books, 1990.

Keating, H.R.F. *Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.

Osborne, Charles. *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*. London: HarperCollins, 1982.

Wagoner, Mary S. *Agatha Christie*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986.

<http://www.nd.edu/~rwoodbur/christie/christie.htm>

<http://www.mystery.net>



# EYE



IN *WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION*, Mistress of the Mystery, Agatha Christie, crafts a tightly woven courtroom drama centered on the case of Leonard Vole, an easy going, down-on-his-luck young man whose only crime is helping a lonely, middle-aged woman retrieve her packages from the street. Vole, the latest client of expert defense barrister, Sir Wilfrid Roberts is charged with the murder of Miss Emily French, a well-to-do single fifty-something. Apparently, Vole met Miss French when he picked up some parcels that she dropped while crossing the street. She was grateful, and when she noticed him seated behind her in the theatre a few days later, invited him to her home. Soon, he was a regular visitor, calling on her as often as twice a week and even helping her with her business affairs. According to Vole, she became quite fond of him, perhaps even possessive, preferring that he visit without his wife. However, he insists that nothing untoward ever took place, that their relationship was more that of a doting aunt and an adoring nephew. Although he admits that he certainly could have used her help monetarily, he maintains that he never received even a halfpenny from his new friend and is as shocked as anyone when he learns that her will names him as her sole heir. Now, Miss French has been found murdered in her home and in light of Vole's poor financial situation, his sudden and unlikely bond with the victim, and his newly acquired inheritance, he is the chief suspect in the case.

WHEN HE DISCOVERS—by reading the newspapers—that the police are interested in speaking with him, he voluntarily gives an account of his whereabouts on the night of her death, admitting that he did visit her earlier that evening. He is unconcerned though, because he has an ironclad alibi in his wife, Romaine, who confirms his statement that he was home by 9:30, the time at which the murder is alleged to have taken place. At the insistence of his wife, he consults with a solicitor, John Mayhew, who after hearing his account of events, takes him to Sir Wilfrid's chambers. Just as Vole finishes recounting his story for the barrister, the police arrive to arrest Leonard. Roberts assures him that he will do everything possible to help him, even though both Mayhew and Roberts agree that they have never seen a more desperate case on paper. In spite of what would seem to be an insurmountable stack of circumstantial evidence against Vole, the two veterans of the court find their client believable, even empathetic and determine that the success of the case lies with the impression that the young man's wife makes on the jury.

THEY COULD NOT be more accurate in their assessment, nor could they be more shocked by the information that Romaine divulges both in and out of court. From the time that this "remarkable woman" takes the witness stand, the action hurtles toward a final scene that will rival any surprise ending *Law & Order* can muster. Don't miss the last five minutes.



# face & face

ONE OF THE distinguishing characteristics of Agatha Christie's mystery fiction is that the people who inhabit her books are wonderfully human. Even her most clever culprits are inevitably flawed, and in a classical sense, it is these flaws that bring about their downfalls. Perhaps her attention to the weaknesses of humanity is due, in part at least, to her own continued connection with everyday existence, even after she was visited by celebrity. Fellow British mystery writer, H.R.F. Keating recalls a few illustrations of the gracious and down-to-earth nature of Ms. Christie below:



*Rather unexpectedly Agatha came to the Club's [Britain's prestigious Detection Club] annual general meeting, held principally to decide whom to propose for our somewhat exclusive ranks. This was a highly informal affair. Agatha, as it chanced was next to me, then a member of only a few years standing, eagerly taking part. So, imagine my dismay...when she threw in a suggestion, "Isn't there a young man who writes books set in India?" [She is referring, unknowingly, to Mr. Keating] One of those times when, as my character Inspector Ghote might say "I wanted to sink into the earth like the Goddess Sita." However, in those days the Club was run...by that excellent writer of legal mysteries, Michael Underwood, and...he managed to say something that put our slightly out-of-touch President into the picture. What it was exactly I was too deep under the earth to hear.*

*Another occasion, again in my early days as a club member: At our Annual Dinner my wife, Sheila, found herself sitting next to Agatha. Sheila, recalling that Agatha much disliked talking about her books ("Where do I get my ideas?" she said once with a touch of acerbity. "At Marks and Spencer's stores."), was struck almost dumb. However, at last rescue arrived. Sheila asked how Agatha had got up to London for the dinner and in replying motorways were mentioned.*

*From then on conversation, on that ever-interesting if everyday subject, flourished. It gives us, I think, an insight into what made Agatha so popular, her shared everyday humanity.*

*There was, too, a significant incident that Julian Symons, who succeeded Agatha as President, has recorded. He had been delayed in arriving at one of the dinners for members and their guests which we hold twice a year at London's Garrick Club. He came in hurriedly, took an empty chair, opposite Agatha's, and settled down, only to realize that...his fingernails were black-rimmed with dirt. And, worse, he soon saw that Agatha was eying them speculatively. He felt he could almost read the thoughts passing through her mind. An otherwise respectable man sits down at a public dinner with his nails harbouring black dirt. Where had he just been? What has he just been doing? Could he have been burying the body of his wife? And be trying now to establish a hasty alibi? As Julian has pointed out, such everyday details used as clues were one of the things that made Agatha's detective stories so accessible.*

*And a final memory. There was one occasion when Agatha said she would, after all, take the Presidential role at the Club's annual dinner. So, clad in the red satin robe that had been made for the Club's first President, G.K. Chesterton—and, it has to be said, filling it as amply as that great rolling genius ever did—she read out her part of the ceremony of inauguration with totally unexpected gusto. It often happens with the reticently shy: put them on a stage, give them someone else's words to say, and they are transformed from shrinking violet into trumpeting fierce-coloured African Queen Lily. So, the sight of Agatha, proclaiming phrases like "Is there anything you hold sacred?" with just the right mixture of merry jokiness and public solemnity is one that will be with me, I am sure, for the rest of my life.*

# IRL

THE BRITISH LEGAL SYSTEM, which serves as the primary backdrop for the action in *Witness for the Prosecution* varies from the U.S. structure in several ways, most notably in the number and variety of roles within the profession. Following is a breakdown of key terms used in the English courts. To help you understand the distinctions between the two systems, choose a prominent case currently in the U.S. courts and track its progress, noting what players are involved at each stage of the trial.

## LAWYERS

A lawyer is anyone who practices law. That includes solicitors, barristers and legal executives. That means that a solicitor is a lawyer and a barrister is also a lawyer.

## SOLICITORS

Solicitors work in litigation, and work relating to business outside of court.

In litigation solicitors generally advise clients, prepare cases and advocate in the lower courts. Only recently have solicitors been able to present their own cases in court. Traditionally the solicitor provided details of their clients case to a barrister who actually advocated in court, as Mayhew does for Sir Wilfrid in *Witness for the Prosecution*.

The second and larger part of a solicitor's work is all the nitty gritty legal work outside of court in a range of different areas, such as: commercial transactions, land, corporate matters, share and property dealings, property conveyancing, family and civil matters, making wills, advising on tax matters, and estates. Solicitors often give general and specialist legal advice.

## BARRISTERS

Barristers are legal advisers and advocates in the higher courts. Advocating cases in court means that barristers have to be able to speak and think quickly on their feet as the evidence develops. The mission statement of a barrister would be to make sure all points of law, and facts that favor their client's case, are brought to the courts attention and that justice is done.

Possibly the most famous fictional barrister is Rumpole of the Bailey, a rather portly, irreverent barrister, partial to small cigars, cheap claret and spouting poetry at every opportunity.

## QUEEN'S COUNSEL (QC)

Some of the top barristers who are marked out as outstanding are made Queen's Counsel. The QCs, as they are known, are usually instructed in serious or complex cases. Most senior judges were once QCs. A barrister Member of Parliament who becomes a Minister is automatically made a QC. In the play, both Sir Wilfrid and the prosecutor, Myers, are members of this elite group.

SOLICITORS AND BARRISTERS are unique in that solicitors are instructed what to do by the general public, but a barrister is 'briefed' or instructed by the solicitor who has first contact with the client. Barristers have little or no contact with members of the public. Barristers, however, are generally independent of a solicitor and can make their own decisions on how to conduct a case. Although there are exceptions to both, generally solicitors work in the lower courts and barristers in the higher courts. There are far fewer barristers than there are solicitors.



The regulatory and representative body for solicitors in England and Wales is The Law Society. The regulatory and representative body for barristers in England and Wales is The Bar Council.

Solicitors are usually self-employed, in partnerships, or organized into firms of varying sizes. Solicitors also work in local government, law centers, the civil service and in commerce and industry. Barristers are essentially self-employed but sometimes share an office called a chamber. The first act of the play takes place in Sir Wilfrid's chambers.

### LEGAL EXECUTIVES

Legal Executives are legally qualified professionals employed largely by solicitors and usually specializing in a given area of law. The professional body for Legal Executives is the Institute of Legal Executives.

### THE MONARCH

The Queen is the Head of State, the head of the executive, judiciary and legislature. The Queen has in principle a lot of power, but in fact acts in a constitutional role with her actions governed by convention. The Monarch is entitled to advise, warn and encourage Ministers. The Palace of Westminster, containing the House of Commons and the House of Lords, is a Royal Palace and everything that is done there is in the Crown's name, as the Queen gives assent to all new legislation. This is notable in the play, as the jurors swear to "well and truly try and true deliverance make between our sovereign lady the Queen and the prisoner at the Bar".



### THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE GOVERNMENT

The Government is led by the Prime Minister who is appointed by the Queen. Royal Prerogative is exercised not by the Queen but by the Prime Minister in her name. The Prime Minister normally holds a majority of the party members in the House of Commons. The Government is sometimes called the 'executive' because it is responsible for carrying out or executing the laws of the country. The Government can propose laws, in the form of bills, but does not actually make new laws, as this is the work of Parliament as a whole.

### LAY MAGISTRATES (JUSTICES OF THE PEACE)

Lay magistrates sit on a magistrates court hearing mainly criminal cases. The majority of criminals are heard in this type of court.

Lay magistrates are 'lay' because they are ordinary people. They don't have any formal legal training and don't need any previous experience in the legal system to do the job, but they do receive practical training. They are advised by law clerks who are qualified on law and procedure. These magistrates ensure that the local community is involved, and come from a range of backgrounds.

They sit in groups of three, as a bench, but with shortages they sometimes sit in twos. It is not lawful for them to sit alone. On a bench at least one has to have had training in leading the bench. Lay magistrates are not paid but they may claim expenses and an allowance for loss of earnings, similar to the way that Americans are compensated for serving on jury duty.

## THE JUDGES

A judge can hear both criminal and civil cases. A judge applies the current law, and decisions made can sometimes set legal precedents. When there is a jury, they are there to advise on matters of the law and sum up with evidence provided by the defence and prosecution teams. Judges also pass sentence.

Sometimes judges are joined by another judge and jury, a jury, or just sit there all alone. Different types of judges have differing judicial status. The lower-level judges are known as 'Inferior Judges' and the higher-level judges are known as 'Superior Judges.'

To be a judge one must already be an experienced lawyer and be appointed by the Lord Chancellor, usually for life. Inferior Judges can be removed on the grounds of incapability or misbehavior, but Superior Judges can only be removed following a motion of both Houses of Parliament.

### Superior Judges

The High Court has High Court Judges and is divided into three divisions headed by different people. The Queen's Bench Division is headed by the Lord Chief Justice, The Chancery Division is headed in name only by the Lord Chancellor but in reality by the Vice Chancellor, and the Family Division is headed by the President of the Family Division.

The Court of Appeal, which is divided into

two divisions, has Lord Justices of Appeal who are senior judges. The Civil Division is headed by the Master of the Rolls, and the Criminal Division is headed by the Lord Chief Justice.

### Inferior Judges

Inferior Judges are Circuit Judges, District Judges and other Judicial Officers. Circuit Judges hear cases in the Crown Courts and County Courts. The Crown Courts are divided into six 'circuits' throughout England and Wales. Crown Courts are also heard by Recorders, who are barristers paid to act part-time as a Circuit Judge.

District Judges work in magistrates' courts but sit alone. Until 2000, these District Judges were known as Stipendiary magistrates, but were renamed to recognize their professional status. They are legally qualified and salaried. Before becoming District Judges most were either barristers or court clerks, and have to have at least seven years legal experience.

## THE JURY

The jury are the foot soldiers of the legal system and are crucial to the legal process. Twelve people, between the age of 18 and 70, are summoned at random from the public using the electoral register for each case.

The jury, or jurors', job is to listen to all the facts of a case and give a verdict or decision on its outcome. The jury should all agree on a verdict, but if a verdict isn't unanimous then a majority decision is all right as well.



*Costume rendering  
by costume designer  
Elizabeth Covey*







### THE LORDS OF APPEAL IN ORDINARY (THE LAW LORDS)

The Lords of Appeal in Ordinary are more commonly called 'The Law Lords.' The Law Lords are the 12 judges who are the final court of appeal for England and Wales. They are the senior judicial members sitting in the House of Lords to decide appeals which usually come from the Court of Appeal, and sometimes straight from the High Court. The Law Lords sit in benches of five per case, called an Appellate committee.

They are appointed by the Queen, on the advice of the Prime Minister, and given Life Peerages so that they can carry out the judicial work of the House of Lords. 'In Ordinary' means that they are salaried members of the Lords working full-time at the judicial business of the House.

### LORD CHANCELLOR (AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS)

The Lord Chancellor is the head of the judiciary in England and Wales, a member of the Government at cabinet level, and traditionally the Speaker of the House of Lords.

As the head of the judiciary the Lord Chancellor is responsible for the administration of courts and the legal system. The Lord Chancellor is also the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, and responsible for the development and implementation of Government policy on the legal system.

### THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND THE SOLICITOR GENERAL

The Attorney General and a deputy known as the Solicitor General are the government's principal law advisers. They are usually members of parliament, known as law officers, and head the Legal Secretariat.

The Law officers deal with questions of law that arise on government bills and legal policy. They advise on international and domestic litigation involving the Government, as well as with questions that arise in connection with the European Community and international law.

This information is excerpted in part from <http://www.bbc.co.uk>.

# IRL<sup>2</sup>

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S writing is characteristic of what is known as the Golden Age of mystery, a period of fiction from the 1920s through the 1940s, in which the crimes in question are solved using pure, rational thought. Two basic approaches to reasoning apply in these cases, as well as in any logical argument: deductive and inductive reasoning. Both manipulate three basic elements, the claim, the evidence and the assumption, in order to reach a sound



conclusion. This technique applies to everything from students writing an argumentative essay to doctors diagnosing illness

to detectives tracking a criminal.

THE CLAIM IS what the argument is essentially about, a positive statement that requires support to be believed. The evidence provides the facts, statistics, opinions or examples needed to prove the claim while the assumption is an underlying belief that connects the claim to the evidence. When using inductive reasoning, we move from specific to general information, first examining evidence, then applying it to an assumption and finally, producing a claim to reach a conclusion. Doctors routinely use this approach when diagnosing patients. A patient reports that she is suffering from congestion, low-grade fever and a cough. This is the evidence that the doctor will combine with her pre-existing assumption: people with colds have congestion, low-grade fevers and coughs. The conclusion, or claim that the doctor reaches is then, this patient must have a cold. This process can be seen in criminal investigations when detectives collect fingerprints from a crime scene, identify those prints as belonging to a particular person, and conclude that that individual may be involved in the crime.

DEDUCTIVE REASONING works in reverse order, in that it begins with a general assumption, then adds specific evidence, and results in a claim. This approach is less effective in the doctor's office than inductive reasoning, because it generally results in patients diagnosing themselves; however, it is still useful for criminal investigation. Much of the case against Leonard Vole in *Witness for the Prosecution* is derived from deductive reasoning. For example, Vole is the primary suspect, in part because he is an unemployed young man who routinely visits a wealthy woman who is twice his age. This involves two basic assumptions: 1) Unemployed people are in need of money, 2) Young men don't spend time with older women without having an ulterior motive. When investigators combine these assumptions with specific evidence about Vole, such as his visit to Miss French's home the night of her murder, they reach the claim that he must be the murderer.

THIS MANIPULATION of claims, evidence and assumptions to reach logical conclusions is referred to as a *syllogism*. The only problem is that syllogisms can be valid, meaning that they are logically sound, but not necessarily true, meaning that they are inaccurate. For example, it is often difficult for doctors to accurately diagnose illness because patients do not always provide complete evidence. A patient may complain of cold-like symptoms, leading the physician to incorrectly diagnose a cold; however, if the patient also mentions that she lives with several cats, the doctor may also investigate the possibility of an allergic reaction to the cats. Watch the play carefully for a faulty syllogism because the evidence and the assumptions are not always what they seem.

# RBTL

Practice your own investigative skills by reading the short mystery below. Then use deductive or inductive reasoning to figure out what Lieutenant Melch knows that Sergeant Sprott does not. Visit our website at [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org) for the full solution.

"Larry Black's blaring radio was enough to wake the dead!" declared Betty Beedy. "Of course, the walls in these trailers are paper thin. Anyway, I went over to give him a piece of my mind, found his front door open, and saw his feet sticking out in plain view."

"Must've been quite a shock," Lieutenant Melch said. It was 11:45 p.m., and the lieutenant was just getting up to speed.

"Not as big a shock as when I stepped inside and saw he'd been plugged between the eyes! Why, if the killer'd still been on the scene I could've been next. Then you'd have a double murder on your hands. I bet you wouldn't like that, would you, officer?"

"No," Melch agreed. "Tell me, Ms. Beedy, did you see or hear anything else?"

"Nope. I just flicked off the radio and hightailed it back here to call you folks."

Melch glowered. "You shouldn't have touched the radio, ma'am."

"Well, I sure wasn't gonna listen to anymore of that awful rock music!"

Melch returned to Larry Black's trailer, and found Sergeant Sprott standing out front with two women, one honey blonde, the other brunette. "Lieutenant, this is Allison and Maggie White. They live just across the way. Allison just got home a few moments ago, but—"

"I saw the killer," blurted Maggie, the brunette. "Plain as day."

"What?" exclaimed the honey blonde. "You didn't tell me that."

"I didn't have a chance, what with the police being here."

"What happened?" Allison demanded.

"Hold it!" A scowl creased Melch's big face as he glared around. Then,

focusing on Maggie White, his eyes softened.

"Just what did you see, ma'am?"

"That woman running from Larry's place. I'd gone out to the kitchen to take something to help me sleep and—well, I lifted the blind a little to look across at Larry's and there she was—running out his door." She sobbed into a pink hanky.

"There, there." Melch patted her shoulder. "If you mean Betty Beedy, I've already talked with her. She admits finding the body and calling us."

"But did she tell you about throwing the murder weapon in the trash can?"

"What?" Melch blinked.

"I saw her," Maggie added. "She stopped at Larry's trash can, threw something in and then—then went on to her place."

"You saw her throw in a gun?"

"I saw her throw in something."

Everyone waited silently while Sergeant Sprott crossed to the garbage can, leaned all the way into it, then pulled himself out. "Sprott, what're you doing?" asked Lieutenant Melch.

"There's a gun in there, right on top." Sprott replied. "I leaned down to sniff the barrel. It's been fired recently, sir."

Melch stared. "Smelling a garbage can?"

"Well, I didn't want to touch anything."

Melch smiled, then swung back on Maggie White. "You referred to Black by his first name. Were you friends?"

She nodded. "We just broke up last night. He couldn't be faithful to any one woman, and I—"

"He was a heel!" Allison snapped.

"Please, Allison—"

"Well he was. Gave you nothing but heartache."

"So the two of you broke up, eh?" Melch asked.

"Yes, but, I'm not lying about what I saw tonight. That woman threw something in Larry's trash can."

"How about the gunshot, ma'am?"

"The gunshot?"

"Yes. Did you hear it?"

"No. I—" Tears started down her cheeks.

"Now look what you've done!" Allison White snapped. "Of course Maggie didn't hear the gunshot. The radio was too loud. But she did see the killer."

"Maybe, ma'am. Maybe." Melch pursed his lips. "Sprott, stay here with these two. I'm gonna have another chat with Ms. Beedy."

"You think I killed Larry Black?" Betty Beedy gazed at Lieutenant Melch, then burst into tears.

"Oh no, not another crier," Melch murmured under his breath.

"Just a couple tissues," she continued after blowing her nose. "That's what I threw in the can. When I saw him shot like that. . . . My stomach got queasy. I saw a tissue dispenser, grabbed a couple to cover my mouth, and—"

She stared at the floor. "I guess I'm not as tough as I try to make out."

"I'll check the can for tissues," Sergeant Sprott said as they left the Beedy trailer.

"Go ahead," Melch replied. "But it won't prove a thing. She could've thrown both the gun and the tissues in."

"But then we're at a dead end!"

Melch smiled grimly. "Wrong. The killer slipped up. Killers usually do."

Reprinted from [mystery.net](http://mystery.net)

"The Trailer Court Killing"

by Guy Belleranti

Solve-it #284 - July 2005

Originally appeared March 1998





# SWDNT?

***“The evidence of a devoted wife unsupported by any other evidence may not be completely convincing, Mr. Vole.”***

- Why would Sir Wilfrid be concerned about the validity, or at least the perceived validity, of Mrs. Vole’s testimony? Is love or loyalty an acceptable reason to lie? Would you lie to protect someone for whom you care?

***“It [Vole’s story] must a true one. It couldn’t be so idiotic if it wasn’t true. Put all the facts down in black and white and the whole thing is utterly damning. And yet when you talk to the boy, and he blurts out these damning facts, you realize that the whole thing could happen just as he said.”***

- Have you ever found yourself in a situation such as Mr. Vole’s in which all the evidence seemed to suggest that you were guilty (of a lesser crime, perhaps) but you maintained your innocence? How did you deal with the doubts of others? Were you able to persuade them of your case? If so, how?

***“Nine out of the twelve in a jury box believe a foreigner is lying anyway. She’ll [Mrs. Vole] be emotional and upset and won’t understand what the prosecuting counsel says to her...You’ll see, she’ll have hysterics all over my Chambers.”***

- Sir Wilfrid has already made a number of assumptions about Mrs. Vole without having met her. Are these fair conclusions to draw or are they based in unfounded stereotypes? If they are stereotypes, what fuels them?

***“And we’re probably three credulous fools—taken in by a young man with a pleasing personality.”***

- Is Sir Wilfrid correct in judging that people are more likely to believe in and be empathetic toward someone who is attractive or pleasant? How has his theory played out in recent celebrity trials?

***“One can get tired of gratitude.”***

- What does Mrs. Vole mean by this statement? Is gratitude sufficient grounds for a marriage? How might this cause a relationship to deteriorate?

***“Any woman can fool a man if she wants to and if he’s in love with her.”***

- Are Mayhew and Sir Wilfrid on target with this statement or are they being sexist about the manipulative nature of women or the gullibility of men?

*The following quotations are also by Agatha Christie, though not from Witness for the Prosecution. How do you think each applies to the scenario of the play?*

***“Where large sums of money are concerned, it is advisable to trust nobody.”***

- If Ms. Christie is correct, does this mean that wealth must automatically result in careful and distanced relationships? Is it possible for people to see beyond financial status, on either end of the spectrum, or is our character and behavior shaped by what we earn?

***“I don’t think necessity is the mother of invention—invention, in my opinion, arises directly from idleness, possibly also from laziness. To save oneself trouble.”***

- Have you ever observed this principle in action—someone being extremely creative in order to avoid work? What are the positive and negative results of this mindset?

***“If one sticks too rigidly to one’s principles, one would hardly see anybody.”***

- Is this an endorsement of illegal or unethical behavior or a judgment of our culture? Does the mainstream nature of an otherwise negative behavior make it more acceptable—essentially, is the argument that “everybody’s doing it” a valid one?