

**[“Sides” for the April 16, 2010 one act play, *Madness & Murder: The Mystery of Mary Hensoldt*. This play is presented as a fundraiser for the Museum of the Coastal Bend. The evening will begin with a silent auction, followed by dinner, and culminating with the one act play by Gary Hall; the play is adapted from his book *Murder & Malice: Crimes of Passion from Victoria County, Texas*.]**

**Judge Coleman**

I see that the complaint is signed by Adam Jatho, Ernst Melchior, and Isaac Kibbe. Mr. Kibbe could not be with us today, but I believe we have the other two gentlemen present in the courtroom. Let me remind you that is a hearing, not a trial. No attorneys are present; therefore, I will be asking the questions. Mr. Jatho, let’s start with you. [Note: Jatho’s name is pronounced Yah-toe.]

**Jatho**

[Rises from his chair and stands before the judge’s bench, profile to the audience.]

Yes, your honor.

**Judge Coleman**

First, please tell me your relationship to Miss Hensoldt.

**Jatho**

She is my sister-in-law, judge.

**Judge Coleman**

Since your signature is on the complaint, perhaps you can outline what you see to be the problem.

**Jatho**

First of all, I’m sorry Isaac Kibbe could not be here today because some time ago he was appointed Miss Hensoldt’s guardian. You see, she seems to have had a break with reality. She borrowed \$120 dollars from Mr. Huck in order to build a small rental house behind her property. Then she refused to repay Mr. Huck. I offered to pay the debt for her, as long as she would give me some security, but she positively refused. She said it was a trick on my part to obtain her property.

**Judge Coleman**

I see. Please continue.

**Jatho**

Miss Hensoldt's property on Main St. is in dire need of repair. The hurricane of August, 1886 greatly damaged the roof, yet when any of the family members spoke to my sister-in-law about making repairs, she said a man had torn the roof off, and it was his duty to put it back. The house is unlivable, yet she insists on continuing to live there. She is convinced that if she leaves her house that I or others will make a move to acquire the property. This simply is not true.

**Judge Coleman**

Excuse me for interrupting, but can you tell me the extent of Miss Hensoldt's property and its estimated worth.

**Jatho**

Your honor, she owns a two story building on Main Street and two small rental houses behind the building. I would guess the worth of her property would be around fifteen hundred dollars, but that was before the injury to her property by the storm of last August.

**Judge Coleman**

I see. Would you say that your sister-in-law is cordial to you and other family members?

**Jatho**

Well, she is friendly with *some* family members, but not with me. To be honest, I have not spoken to her for some time. She hates me and imagines I desire her property. I assure you this is not the case. However, her property is going to ruin, and soon it will be worth nothing. The report of her dancing around the kerosene lamp is another concern. Had the lamp turned over, the whole house could have caught fire. The buildings on Main Street are very close together. Mr. Praeger's house is just twenty-five inches from *her* house. I measured. There's Alden's livery stable just a short distance from her house. All of it could have gone up in flames due to her behavior. I believe she is not in her right mind, and I fear that if she is not restrained in some way, the outcome will be tragic.

**Judge Coleman**

I see. Do you have anything else to add?

**Jatho**

No, your honor. I believe that about covers it.

**Judge Coleman**

Okay. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Jatho. You may resume your seat. Next I'd like to hear from Mr. Melchior.

[Melchior rises and stands exactly where Jatho stood before.]

Mr. Melchior, please state your relationship to Miss Hensoldt and give me a brief description of *your* concerns.

**Ernst Melchior**

Your honor, just like Mr. Jatho, I am her brother-in-law. I married one Hensoldt sister, and Mr. Jatho married another. Miss Hensoldt is the unmarried sister of our wives. I don't know that I have much to add to my brother-in-law's testimony. The situation is as he has stated. The family is gravely concerned about Mary's property and her welfare. I have tried to help her as much as I can, but she refuses my help.

**Judge Coleman**

I see. Is there anything else you could tell us that your brother-in-law did not?

**Ernst Melchior**

Only this, judge. Just yesterday I approached her about paying her taxes. She said she would pay her taxes when she settled her lawsuit regarding property on Main Street. This lawsuit is in her imagination only and is for a whole block of Main Street. She has no such suit pending. Also, she told her neighbor Mr. Praeger that she empties her chamber pot into his cistern. The Praeger family is afraid to drink the water, and subsequently they've emptied their cistern. Also, her other neighbor, Mr. Mack, has had problems with Mary. She told his hired hand to cut down a tree that was on her property so she could use it for firewood. But the tree was on Mr. Mack's property. I'm afraid these whimsies of hers seem to be growing.

**Judge Coleman**

This *is* very peculiar behavior. Is her attitude toward you the same as towards Mr. Jatho? Does she hate you, too?

**Ernst Melchior**

[Turns to Mary and gives her a kindly smile.]

No, your honor. We have gotten along fairly well, and I hope she still considers me her friend. I have no malice towards her, but it seems that the last two or three years her behavior has become more unusual. I do know that there is a family disposition of insanity. Another member of the Hensoldt family went completely insane many years ago. I fear for my sister-in-law. Her house is going to fall down around her unless something is done soon.

**Judge Coleman**

I see. Anything else, Mr. Melchior.

**Ernst Melchior**

Just this, your honor. She has *also* told me that some man tore the roof off her house and that he should put it back. When I made a proposition to her to rent her building for \$25 a month, she

answered, “*That is just what Mack, Jatho, and Praeger want. As soon as I move out, they will take my property.*” I really have nothing else to say, your honor. It’s a sad case.

**Judge Coleman**

Thank you, Mr. Melchior. You may take your seat. Miss Hensoldt, I would now like to hear from you. If you have anything thing to say in your defense, now is the time.

**Mary Hensoldt**

[She rises from her chair and stands in the exact spot where her brothers-in-law stood. She holds a handkerchief in her hand and wrings this from time to time demonstrating her nervousness. However, she does not cower. She stands erect, with her head up. She is a proud woman, and throughout she presents a demeanor of defiance.]

Mr. Coleman, I have heard what Adam and Ernst have said about me, and I find it very upsetting. To tell you the truth, I feel the vibration of *schadenfreude* [*sha-den, froi-de*] in this room.

**Judge Coleman**

I beg your pardon. Shodden what?

**Mary Hensoldt**

*Schadenfreude*, Mr. Coleman. It is a German word. There is no exact equivalent word in English. You see, I was born in Germany in 1834. My family came to this country when I was a young woman, but I still remember some of the old ways, some of the old words. *Schadenfreude* means “*deriving pleasure from the misfortune of another.*” I can’t help but think that some citizens in this town, some people in the very room, find my appearance here today pleasurable. They would like to see me take a tumble. I am not particularly popular.

**Judge Coleman**

And why do you think that is, Miss Hensoldt?

**Mary Hensoldt**

I have strong opinions, Mr. Coleman. I am not demure. I’ve taken care of myself for a long time. I make a living with my sewing and I stand alone. If I choose to live in a home that needs repair, that is my business. Some people don’t like a woman to be strong. They would prefer it if I were a shrinking violet, but I assure you I am not!

**Judge Coleman**

I notice that unlike the previous witnesses, you refrain calling me “judge”. Can you tell me why?

**Mary Hensoldt**

Mr. Coleman, if I thought you were in a position to judge me, I would certainly use the title. However, I don't see why anyone should judge me. I am a maiden lady trying to make a living, and I wish to be left alone. I can't help but notice that everyone in this room, beside myself, is male. Why are my sisters not present today? Do they not have a say? Why beside myself are there only men in this room?

**Judge Coleman**

That is neither her nor there, Miss Hensoldt. I think we can get to the heart of the matter with the witnesses we have. [pause] Also, I have before me two letters of affidavit. One is from Mr. Kibbe who is your temporary guardian. The other is from Carl Jaschke. Can you tell me something about these two men in reference to their role in your life? [Note: Jaschke's name is pronounced Yahs-key.]

**Mary Hensoldt**

Some time ago Mr. Kibbe was appointed my guardian. He *has* been kind and respectful, but I can't say I am very happy about the situation. What fifty-three year old adult would want a guardian? After all, I am *not* a child! Carl Jaschke is a renter. He rents a small wood frame house at the back of my property.

**Judge Coleman**

Again, I have the affidavits of both men in front of me. Mr. Kibbe says, and I quote, "*I have found Miss Hensoldt rational at times and at other times exceedingly flighty.*" Regarding your house, he goes on to say, "*Now that the property is injured, it is depreciating in value all the time and ultimately will be worth scarcely anything.*" You do agree, Miss Hensoldt, that your home is in need of repair?

**Mary Hensoldt**

Yes, I admit that. But it is *my property*, my property to do with as I wish.

**Judge Coleman**

But Miss Hensoldt, we have ordinances in this town regarding property. We don't want ramshackle buildings, especially on Main Street. Looking over Mr. Jaschke's affidavit, I see some troubling accounts of your behavior. He writes that once, when he knocked on your door, that from your upper porch you poured a bucket of water on his head. Is this true?

**Mary Hensoldt**

[smiles cunningly.]

Well, it may have been mop day. I may have been throwing out the mop water and he simply got in the way. I can't recall.

**Judge Coleman**

In another instance you told Mr. Jaschke he could borrow a desk, and when he came to retrieve it you told him he would have to come back because you had three hundred thousand dollars in the desk that you had to remove. Do you have that kind of money, Miss Hensoldt?

**Mary Hensoldt**

Mr. Coleman, if I had that kind of money, I doubt very seriously I would be standing here.

**Judge Coleman**

And why is that?

**Mary Hensoldt**

Because people who have that kind of money and act a little strange are called "*eccentric*". We overlook their behavior. But if you are poor and do a few things out of the ordinary, people call you crazy. Again, I don't recall saying anything about a large sum of money to Mr. Jaschke. I am a seamstress, Mr. Coleman. I do not make a great deal of money. Still, I get by.

**Judge Coleman**

You may resume your seat, Miss Hensoldt. [long pause.] I am sorry to say that with the testimony before me, I feel I have no other choice than to sign the papers that will have you committed to the Lunatic Asylum in Austin. I hope you realize that I am doing this for your own good. [Hensoldt at first looks angry, but then hangs her head in defeat.] I pray for your welfare and hope that the asylum will improve your mental state. Court is dismissed.

[end of "sides" for auditioning purposes.]