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# *One Angry Man?* A New Look at an Old Film

*Michael Wheeler*

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*In this satire written from the perspective of the fictional defendant in the film 12 Angry Men, the arguments used by the dissenting juror to prove the possibility that the defendant is innocent are explained in ways that actually support his guilt.*

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I did it, you know, just about the way the prosecution said I did. That testimony — from the old guy downstairs and the lady across the street — was pretty much on the money. So when the jury walked back in the courtroom and that stubby foreman stood up and said, “Not guilty,” nobody was more surprised than me.

For two or three years I was baffled. I mean, how could you figure it? I killed my old man, there were witnesses, they found my knife — and still the jury lets me walk. How come?

Then one night I was watching TV — and I almost fell off the couch. They’ve made my trial into a movie called *12 Angry Men*! I guess the lanky guy, the architect, wrote it all up and sold the story. When they made it into a movie, he was played by Henry Fonda. In real life he didn’t look that good.

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I can't vouch for what happened in the jury room — he was there and I wasn't. But if it was anything like the show, the Fonda character took the truth and turned it into pure fantasy. Not that I'm complaining.

All that business about the lame old man, for example. I don't care how long it took him to get from his bed to the door, he saw me. And he heard me, too, I bet, just like he swore he did.

Just before midnight I was going out, but I didn't have any dough. I was poking through my father's wallet when he woke up and we had maybe our millionth fight. So I pulled out my knife, and, yes, I held it low, just like Jack Klugman said, so I could slice *up*. I yelled, "I'm going to kill you," at the top of my lungs and everything was quiet so I suppose half the neighborhood heard me, especially if they had their windows open.

But my father pushed me, and I fell against the table and dropped the knife. Then I hit the floor hard. I figure that's what Mr. Downstairs heard. Anyway, I kind of struggled to my feet, and when I grabbed for the knife, I must have gotten it upside down. But it did the job. My father screamed, pretty loud, too, but by now that el train was making a racket as it was rattling by outside, and nobody heard him, that's for sure. He didn't fall down so much as he just sort of sagged, just like all the air leaked out of him.

I knew I had to get out of there quick but I took time to wipe the prints off the knife. Now you may think that I should have taken it, too, but unless you've been in one of those situations, you can't say how you're going to react. It was stuck in pretty good and anyway I didn't want to be carrying the knife and getting bloody and all that.

A couple of hours later, after I had cooled down, I knew I had to go back. Somebody would find him, and if I was gone, I would be the one and only suspect. I figured that I could discover the body and call for the cops. Only they were there first. You win some and you lose some.

So the stories the two witnesses told match up fine. Only what the old man heard was *me* falling, not my father (how could he know?) so he had plenty of time to get to his door. And the lady across the street, I never saw her, but I'm sure that she saw me. You know that part where E. G. Marshall finally changed his vote to not guilty when everyone remembered that her nose had those funny marks made by glasses? Nobody goes to bed with their glasses on, he said, so her testimony was thrown out.

Well, that lady was at my trial every day for a week. She sat way in back, but her beady eyes drilled into me like she was a hawk and I was some helpless pigeon. Once in a while, when the judge said, "Recess," she'd slip on a pair of glasses to read a book. When things started up again, she'd tuck them away. She could see long distances just fine.

Whenever that movie shows up on late-night TV, I always tune it in. I don't know if the architect guy who wrote the story still gets paid — or if he's even alive — but I figure I owe him, you know what I mean. Maybe the twentieth time I saw it, I finally realized that I owe my numbskull lawyer,

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too. He didn't do anything for my defense, thank goodness. If he had challenged the lady on her eyesight, the district attorney would have explained the whole thing. But when the architect did the same thing in the jury room, the real story never came out. Hey, I'm not knocking it, that's just the way the system works.

Sometimes I wonder what the deal was with the architect. Was he really worried about due process and all that, or was it just a personal thing? He seems like kind of an odd duck, the way he stared out the window in the beginning of the movie and didn't really mix up with the rest of the guys. It's almost like he wasn't part of the group even before he knew what the others wanted to do. Sometimes I think that if eleven of them had voted not guilty, he would have voted guilty, just to see if he could have turned them around. And he could have, too.

Why am I telling you all this? Well, you asked me. And the thing with my father, that was years ago. They can't put me on trial again; that would be double jeopardy.

But about anything else I did or didn't do since that day, I got nothing to say.