

The Trial of Max Pukker  
A Play in Three Acts by Robert K. Goddard

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## CHARACTERS

BAILIFF: A uniformed officer of the court.  
40s/50s.

COURT CLERK: An officer of the court.  
30s/40s/50s.

COURT RECORDER: A somberly dressed person.  
30s/40s.

JURY: Twelve people from the audience.

THE HONORABLE B.J. ROLLINS: The judge. 50s/60s. Male or  
female.

MAX PUKKER: The defendant, a former general  
contractor and now a framing  
subcontractor. A bitter man with a  
hot temper. 40s.

BRAD SCOTT: The prosecutor, confident and  
arrogant. 40s/50s.

LISA BISHOP: Counselor for the defense. Largely  
inexperienced. 30s.

WITNESSES, IN ORDER:

ELIZABETH JONES: Lives in a trailer park and was  
Mary Lou's next-door neighbor.  
60s/70s.

LUCIEN BERGERON: A Cajun and former employer of the  
late Mary Lou Pukker. A shady guy  
with a murky past. 50s.

NAOMI ROBERTS: A dispatcher for the Flint County  
Sheriff's Department. Late 20s.

LISA KITCHENS: Emergency medical care technician  
for Flint County. 20s/30s.

DR. NOEL (OR NORA) HARRIS: An emergency room physician at  
Flint County Hospital in  
Riverdale, Mississippi. 50s. Male  
or female.

MATT TAYLOR: A Flint County Deputy Sheriff. The subject of an alleged attempted murder by Max Pukker. 30s.

PETE JOHNSON: A detective with Flint County Sheriff's Department. 40s.

SALLY HOLLAND: Chief crime scene investigator for the Flint County Sheriff's Department. 40s/50s.

DR. CLAUDE (CLAUDIA) NORTON: Flint County Medical Examiner. 50s/60s. Male or female.

WILLAIM E. PETTIGREW, PhD: Forensic Scientist with the Mississippi State Crime Laboratory. 50s/60s.

JOESPH BLAIR: A former employee of Max Pukker and currently on probation for felony drug possession. 20s.

EUGENE WILSON: An employee of The Flint County Waste Management Authority. 20s.

LAMAR WILLIS: A former employee of Max Pukker. 30s.

PAUL FONTENOT: A Cajun with a shady past and co-owner of a Riverdale restaurant and nightclub. BERGERON is his partner.

GREG STINSON: Oil rig worker and former pawn shop employee. An old high-school days friend of Max Pukker. 40s.

#### SETTING AND TIME

SETTING: Riverdale, Mississippi, near Jackson, in the main courtroom of the Flint County Circuit Court.

TIME: The present, the first Tuesday morning in September.

## ACT I

*Early Monday Morning in  
September.*

*At Rise: The scene is a  
courtroom. The jury is seated,  
attorneys for the prosecution  
and the defense are seated at  
their tables. The bailiff,  
wearing his uniform, the court  
clerk, and the court recorder  
are in their places. The  
defendant is seated at the table  
with his attorney. All are  
waiting for the judge to make  
his appearance. Judge Rollins  
enters, through a side door,  
wearing his robe. JUDGE ROLLINS  
is liberal about the two lawyers  
moving about, but they must have  
permission to approach the  
witness.*

BAILIFF

*(Calls out loudly.)*

All rise!

*(Everyone stands.)*

Hear yea, hear yea, hear yea. The Circuit Court of the 20th  
District is now in session; the honorable Judge B.J. Rollins  
presiding.

*(JUDGE ROLLINS walks briskly to the bench, takes a quick  
look around the room to make certain everyone is in place,  
sits down, and nods to the BAILIFF.)*

Be seated!

*(Everyone sits and the BAILIFF returns to his position.)*

JUDGE

*(Looks at some papers, jots something on one of them, then  
looks at the Jury.)*

The case before this court is the state of Mississippi versus  
Maxwell G. Pukker. The state has charged the defendant with the  
murder of Mary Lou Pukker, the assault and attempted murder of  
Flint County Sheriff's Deputy Mathew A. Taylor; and the  
premeditated murder of Flint County Sheriff's Deputy Edward A.  
Wiggins. The defendant has pled "not guilty" to all charges. The

state is represented by the Honorable Bradley Scott and the defendant is represented by the Honorable Lisa Bishop.

*(Looks at the tables where the attorneys are seated.)*

Is the prosecution ready?

SCOTT

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

Is the defense ready?

BISHOP

Yes, your Honor.

JUDGE

Mr. Scott, you may begin your opening statement.

SCOTT

*(Stands, walks to the podium, faces the jury, puts his fingertips together, apparently gathering his thoughts, while looking each juror in the eyes, one at a time.)*

Members of the jury, the crimes the defendant has been charged with are linked like stepping stones in a garden pond, as the murder of Mary Lou Pukker led to the attempted murder of Deputy Matthew Taylor, and then the murder of Deputy Wiggins in a futile attempt to cover his trail.

*(Beat.)*

Maxwell Pukker had an argument with his former wife, Mary Lou Pukker in her mobile home, on the night of April 19<sup>th</sup>, and in a rage, struggled with her and broke her neck. Immediately afterward, he left the scene in his loud pickup truck.

*(Beat.)*

A few minutes later, he realized he had to hide the body, so he went back to Mary Lou's trailer. But instead of driving his loud pickup truck into the trailer park, where Mary Lou's neighbor would surely hear his return, he parked his truck behind an abandoned building about a quarter of a mile away, and walked to the trailer park, carrying a shovel, his gun, a heavy duty contractor's trash bag, and a flashlight.

*(Beat.)*

He placed Mary Lou's body in the contractor's trash bag, packed a couple of suitcases with her clothes and personal items, loaded the body and the suitcases in Mary Lou's Toyota Camry, and drove to the swamp at the end of Dry Creek Road; a place where he often hunted and fished, intending to bury the body and the suitcases there.

*(Beat.)*

But at the end of Dry Creek Road, he was surprised by Deputy Matt Taylor, knocked him unconscious with his shovel, and then shot him twice in the chest. Fearing backup was on the way, he left the scene and drove out onto Pisgah Road, where he tossed the body and possibly the suitcases, over a bridge into the swollen waters of Dry Creek. He then drove the Camry back to the abandoned building where he left his truck and drove his truck back to his apartment.

*(Beat.)*

The next day, he learned that Deputy Taylor had been wearing body armor and only suffered a concussion and some bruises but had lost his memory of the events at Dry Creek Road. Deputy Taylor was released from the hospital on Sunday, April 21<sup>st</sup>.

*(Beat.)*

On Monday morning, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, fearing that Deputy Taylor would eventually recognize him, the defendant went to Deputy Taylor's home out on Three Hill Road to murder him.

*(Beat.)*

But he found Deputy Ed Wiggins fast asleep in a folding chair on the fishing pier at the pond behind the cabin, mistook him for Taylor, slipped up behind him, and coldly put a bullet in the back of poor Deputy Wiggins' head with the same gun he used on Deputy Taylor on Friday night out on Dry Creek Road.

*(Pause.)*

The state will prove that the defendant, Maxwell Pukker, carried out these events just as I have described. The state will prove it beyond a reasonable doubt, with credible witnesses and a preponderance of evidence.

*(Nods to JUDGE ROLLINS and sits down.)*

JUDGE

Counselor, do you wish to make an opening statement now, or do you wish to defer until after the state rests its case?

BISHOP

Your Honor, I'd like to address the jury now.

JUDGE

Very well. You may proceed.

BISHOP

*(Moves to face the jury.)*

Members of the jury, the prosecution was right about one thing. During this trial, the state will present many witnesses and a lot of evidence. However, you will see that the testimony of all their witnesses and every scrap of evidence presented against Maxwell Pukker is circumstantial. You won't hear a single

witness say that he or she saw the defendant commit any crime whatsoever!

*(Beat.)*

Now Mr. Scott must prove beyond a reasonable doubt, that the defendant committed the crimes with which he is charged. I intend to show you that considerable doubt exists in this case. Not just reasonable doubt, but considerable doubt!

*(Resumes her seat.)*

JUDGE

*(Shows some surprise at the brevity of BISHOP'S statement. Nods to SCOTT.)*

Mr. Scott, you may call your first witness.

SCOTT

*(Rises.)*

The state calls Elizabeth Jones.

*(JONES enters, with the aid of a walker and dressed rather carelessly. Her grey hair is pulled into a knot atop her head. Stops in front of the witness stand, where the BAILIFF is waiting, and looks all around as if awed by the crowd and being the center of attention.)*

BAILIFF

Please raise your right hand.

*(JONES complies.)*

Do you, Elizabeth Jones, swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

JONES

I do.

BAILIFF

*(Motions to the witness stand.)*

Please take the stand.

*(JONES takes the stand with difficulty due to arthritis and the BAILIFF returns to his normal position.)*

SCOTT

*(Goes to the podium.)*

Mrs. Jones, please tell the court where you live.

JONES

At the Shady Acres Trailer Park out on De Soto Road.

SCOTT

*(Using the laptop at the podium, places a drawing on the TV*

SCOTT (Cont'd)

*screen that shows a road marked as De Soto Road, the entrance into a trailer park, and the first two trailers on the right after entering the trailer park. The first trailer next to the highway is marked as PUKKER and the adjacent rectangle is marked as JONES.)*

Mrs. Jones, please look at the TV screen.

*(Brief moment while he waits for Jones to find the TV screen.)*

This is the state's Exhibit 101 and is a drawing that shows the location of your trailer and the location of Mary Lou Pukker's trailer.

JONES

Yeah, I can see that.

SCOTT

*(Points out the gap between the trailers.)*

Now, is the distance here about right, given the width of the two trailers on the drawing?

JONES

Yeah, that's the way it is.

SCOTT

Could you ever hear conversation from Mary Lou's trailer or hear other sounds, like people moving around, or the TV?

JONES

*(Nods her head several times.)*

If somebody was talking real loud or arguing, I could hear just about every word that was said—not that I tried to you know.

SCOTT

Mrs. Jones, it appears that this window of your trailer is about even with a window on the Pukker trailer. Is that correct?

JONES

Yeah, that's my kitchen window and the other one is the window in their living room.

SCOTT

Could you see into Mary Lou Pukker's trailer through your kitchen window?

JONES

Well, I don't make it no habit to spy on people, but if it was



JONES (Cont'd)

night-time, I could see right into that living room.

SCOTT

Have you ever seen Mary Lou Pukker's ex-husband, Max Pukker?

JONES

Yeah, I done seen him lots of times.

SCOTT

Do you see him in this courtroom?

JONES

*(Points at the defendant.)*

Humph! That's him right yonder.

SCOTT

Let the record show that the witness has pointed to the defendant.

*(Beat.)*

Now, Ms. Jones, did you see the defendant at Mary Lou Pukker's trailer on the night of April 19<sup>th</sup>, this year?

JONES

Oh yeah, her ex-husband come up at five thirty, but she weren't home, so he left.

SCOTT

I mean later in the evening, Ms. Jones. Did you see the defendant visit Mary Lou later, well after dark?

JONES

Yeah, 'bout nine, I heard her ex-husband's old truck come up again. I got up and looked out my kitchen window and saw him go in.

SCOTT

*(Removes the drawing from the TV screen and replaces it with a photo of MAX PUKKER'S truck.)*

Mrs. Jones, the image now on the TV screen is the state's Exhibit 102. Do you recognize the truck?

JONES

*(Leans forward, squints at the screen, and nods her head.)*

Yep. That's the one I seen at nine o'clock.

SCOTT

*(Removes the photo of the truck from the TV screen.)*  
Afterward, were you able to watch your TV in peace again?

JONES

Lord, no! He weren't inside the door more than a minute or two when I heard him cussing and yelling at her. So, I got up and looked out my kitchen window at her trailer.

SCOTT

Could you hear what the defendant was yelling at Mary Lou about?

JONES

Yeah. He done come to pick them young'uns up for the weekend at five-thirty and nobody was home. Then she wouldn't answer her cell phone and when she finally did come home, at about eight-thirty, them young'uns wasn't with her. And it took her two trips in and out of that trailer to unload all them new clothes she'd bought.

SCOTT

How long did they argue?

JONES

Two or three minutes, I reckon. Then they stopped and was just talking. I went back to watching TV again and about twenty minutes later, they started yelling again, only worse than before. This time, they was louder and they was tussling with each other.

SCOTT

And how do you know they were *tussling*?

JONES

*(Shows a little impatience with SCOTT.)*  
Why, 'cause I done gone back to my kitchen window.

SCOTT

By saying they were *tussling* with each other, what exactly do you mean?

JONES

Well, he was holding both her arms and was just a shaking her-like you'd shake a bad young'un. Then he yelled in her face, real loud, "I'll break yore damn neck before I let you move my girls to Florida!" Then she got a hand loose and clawed him good. But he got around behind her, with his arm around her neck, and took her down to the floor.

JONES (Cont'd)

*(Pauses, then with a sad face, shakes her head from side to side.)*

It was real quite over there for a few minutes, so I went back to watching my TV. Then I heard the trailer door slam shut and heard his old truck start up and take off.

SCOTT

Did you note the time when the defendant left?

JONES

I checked the time on my TV, and it was nine thirty-five.

SCOTT

Did you hear any sounds at all from Mary Lou's trailer after the defendant left?

JONES

No.

SCOTT

Did you see or hear anyone else drive up, or park between the trailers, or knock on her door after the defendant left?

JONES

No.

SCOTT

What time did you go to bed?

JONES

A little after eleven. I turned the TV off, then took my pain pill and went on to bed.

SCOTT

Did you chance to look out your kitchen window again before going to bed?

JONES

Yeah, when I took my medicine. I looked other there and saw her lights were out and her car was gone.

SCOTT

What kind of car did she have?

JONES

It was one of them Toyota Camrys. A dark red one.

SCOTT

Thank you, Mrs. Jones. The state tenders the witness.  
(Returns to his table and resumes his seat.)

BISHOP

(Rises and crosses to the podium.)  
Ms. Jones, you saw the defendant pull Mary Lou to the floor,  
correct?

JONES

Yeah.

BISHOP

You didn't see the defendant hit her or choke her or break her  
neck, did you?

JONES

Well...no, I didn't see nothin' like that.

BISHOP

How long had Mary Lou and her children been living in the  
trailer next to yours?

JONES

'Bout three and a half years.

BISHOP

During all those years, did she have any male visitors other  
than the defendant?

JONES

(Rolls her eyes at the ceiling.)  
Lordy, yes!

BISHOP

Did you ever see any of her male visitors?

JONES

Yeah, now and then.

BISHOP

How did you know when she had visitors, if they weren't arguing  
loudly, fighting, and you weren't looking out your kitchen  
window at her trailer?

JONES

Sometimes, I would hear a car pull in behind hers, but mostly I would hear a car door shut.

BISHOP

Were there times when you looked out your kitchen window and saw that Mary Lou had company, but you had not heard a car drive up or a car door shut?

JONES

Yeah, there was times like that.

BISHOP

Earlier, you told Mr. Scott that you didn't hear anyone, including Mary Lou, go in or out her trailer door, didn't hear a vehicle drive up or leave, and didn't hear any car doors open or shut, between the time the defendant left and when you looked out your kitchen window at a few minutes after eleven, didn't you?

JONES

I didn't hear nothin'.

BISHOP

Is it possible, Ms. Jones, that you fell asleep for a little while after the defendant left, and that's why you didn't hear anything?

JONES

Well...Yeah...I reckon so.

BISHOP

*(Using the laptop computer at the podium to put the state's Exhibit 101 back on the TV screen.)*

Mrs. Jones, this is the state's Exhibit 101 that was shown to you earlier. Are you sure this is an accurate drawing showing the two trailers and the area surrounding them?

JONES

Yeah, that's the way it is.

BISHOP

*(With the laptop cursor points out the areas she asks about.)*

See these two spaces here, the one between the Pukker trailer and the woods by De Soto Road and the one right behind your trailer, here.