

The Trial of Max Pukker

A play in three acts by Robert K. Goddard

Synopsis

MAX PUKKER, is being tried for the murder of his ex-wife, Mary Lou Pukker, who he allegedly killed in a rage by breaking her neck, the attempted murder of TAYLOR, a deputy who surprised him when he tried to bury the body, and the murder of Deputy Ed Wiggins, whom Max Pukker mistook for Taylor, who survived the first attempt . BRAD SCOTT, the experienced prosecutor, only has circumstantial evidence, but a preponderance of it. LISA BISHOP, counselor for the defense, is relatively inexperienced. Her mission is to plant enough doubt in the minds of the jurors that they have a reasonable doubt as to Max's guilt, as she has no concrete evidence to present in his favor.

During the trial, Bishop uncovers a relationship between the murdered deputy Ed Wiggins and Mary Lou Pukker, that only ended one month before Mary Lou died of a broken neck. This relationship was unknown to the prosecution and the investigators. Bishop makes a strong argument that Wiggins may have killed Mary Lou, and with his best friends' (Deputy Taylor) help, framed Max Pukker. Then, lest Taylor blackmail him, Wiggins tried to kill Taylor, but failed. Then he tried again, but was killed by Taylor, who also tried to frame Max for that murder.

Bishop also shows during the trial, that BERGERON, Mary Lou's employer, and FONTENOT, his partner, are questionable characters with a shady past in New Orleans. Bishop suggests that possibly, Mary Lou had discovered that Bergeron was embezzling from a twenty-million-dollar trust fund he was managing for his deceased New Orleans law partner, Thibodeaux, who died of a broken neck by a home burglar who was never caught. Both Bergeron and his current partner, Fontenot, were suspects in that crime.

Bishop shows that the investigators zeroed in on Max Pukker from the start and never seriously considered that others could have a motive, means, and opportunity. This myopia resulted in deficiencies in investigations of the crime scenes, which cannot be cured now.

Bishop also produces an important rebuttal witness, whose testimony if believed, proves that someone else killed Mary Lou and Wiggins, and tried to frame Max Pukker, by placing the murder weapon in his truck and by planting other evidence at the crime scenes.

The jury, made up of twelve people from the audience, must decide which witnesses to believe and which not to believe. There are three possible outcomes: guilty of all charges, a hung jury, and not guilty of all charges. Based on the evidence presented and the character of a couple of witnesses, the jury should not return a guilty verdict. It will be interesting to see how ordinary people handle the power given to a jury.

