



Announcement of Murder

If he hadn't been such an outright prick, maybe he would have lived to see his next birthday. But Alan Puckett had spent the past decade making the lives of everyone on Madawood Lane, in the town of Ruby's Trove, hell. Everyone had said they were surprised someone hadn't had him killed yet. The thing that everyone thought but never said was that the neighbourhood would be a much better place when he finally kicked the bucket. Everyone hoped but no one admitted, so when Alan Puckett was actually murdered, the list of suspects seemed never-ending. Some had the opportunity, some had the means, but every single one of them had the motive.

Let's talk, for a moment, about Alan, shall we? An older gentleman, Alan spent his working years terrorizing the lumber industry. He was a man who believed in hard work for a decent living, respecting one's elders and that, above all else, money talks. Over the years, he supplemented his 'decent living' by suing anyone he could. He knew the law and had a feisty lawyer, and that, coupled with a heart of sheer ice, lined his pockets all the way to a house on Madawood Lane.

It was a small house, which he then bulldozed to make way for a barn-esque monstrosity. The colour of vomit, his grand estate was then trumped by an even more horrendous barn-esque garage, complete with a second story. This, he joked with anyone willing to give him some attention, was so he could keep an eye on the town in all directions.

The day came that he finally retired. He sold his company for a tidy sum, ensuring that the buyer paid all fees associated with the transaction. Shortly after, he and his wife, Rose, sold their house in the city, packed up and moved to the quiet seaside town of Ruby's Trove, where Alan planned to live out his days fixing up his classic cars and obsessively mowing his lawn.

What he had not realized, however, is that times were changing. The little seaside community in which he planned to spend his retirement, a place filled with other cottagers around his age, was becoming more and more appealing to the younger generation. What he didn't know, or perhaps didn't care to consider, is that those in the community despised him. When he was only using his cottage for two weekends a month, the community could deal with it. When his truck arrived on a peaceful Friday evening, there was a collective, internalized groan as the other residents knew they would, no doubt, have to placate him as he insulted them about the colour of the stain on their deck and the occasional weed that popped out of their lawns. They would inevitably have to listen to stories of how he triumphed over this person in court or threatened that person until they gave in and paid him... every story had him the hero.

When he moved up to the seaside town of Ruby's Trove for good, the community knew no good would come of it, that eventually they would each receive a phone call from his lawyer for some reason or another. One by one, houses went up for sale, and each time he asked them why they were selling, they came up with some excuse – it was a seller's market, or they were just downsizing, but the truth was, nearly the entire community left to get away from him.

And, one by one, the seaside houses of Ruby's Trove sold to new people, younger people who had no idea what lie in wait for them behind the spiky gates at 529 Madawood Lane.

It was common knowledge among the residents of Ruby's Trove that Alan Puckett never smiled, but those who lived around him knew that wasn't true; there was only one thing that made the old man smile – one thing that would crack his wrinkled, stone-like face into a grin: his pug, Rocky.

Alan got Rocky when he was a puppy, and trained him, via an electric shock collar, into becoming almost as surly as Alan himself. Not a neighbour could walk by without Rocky attacking the gate, but Rocky never left the Puckett's property, and was never taken for walks. Alan was convinced that Rocky was always cold, and dressed him for the outdoors in a colourful poncho to keep him warm. Each morning, when Alan returned from getting his morning coffee at the local cafe, Rocky would wait for him on the porch. Once Alan Puckett had backed into the driveway and shut the gate, Alan would yell a release command and Rocky would run the length of the yard to greet his owner. Alan would pick up his dog, and for a split moment seem just as normal as everyone else as he laughed and smiled while Rocky licked his face. But then, within seconds, Alan was back to his awful self, leering at his neighbours as he stomped to the house, slamming the door behind him as he entered.

Yes, no one spoke it aloud, but every single resident of Madawood Lane was thinking it – which is why, when Alan keeled over in his driveway this morning, those who saw it happen reached for their phones to call for help and paused, ever so briefly, to reconsider. Perhaps I will use the washroom first, thought one, as she put her phone down but, instead of using the small bathroom right behind her, she climbed the stairs to make use of the one on the far side of the house instead. Another reached for his phone and was about to dial, but then remembered a very important text he forgot to respond to the evening prior. After that, he reasoned, I will call the paramedics.

And so it was that by the time help did actually arrive, there was nothing they could do for curmudgeonly old Alan Puckett. His wife was stupefied to the point of being unable to speak, and paramedics assessed her on the scene. Neighbours gathered around to watch him be wheeled on a stretcher into the ambulance, all watched in silence as he was taken away, the heaviness of what had just happened creating a collective silence.

As you all know, a few hours later, all of us residents of Ruby's Trove arrived at the beach to enjoy a barbecue – something not unheard of in this idyllic seaside town, but definitely something that had not been enjoyed the same way since Alan Puckett had moved to Ruby's Trove full time. Children ran and played, dogs barked, fireworks were set off and everyone cheered, someone brought a guitar and music was played as loud as the residents liked as they danced with one another.

This is how we, the residents of Ruby's Trove, are together right now, but unfortunately, our festivities must be brought to a halt, as the police have arrived. Of course it wasn't Alan Puckett who called them this time – that would be impossible. Ladies and gentlemen of Madawood Lane, detectives have discovered that Alan Puckett's death was no accident – they believe he was murdered!

We have all been escorted to the Wired Lobster Cafe, THE place to get a cuppa in the town of Ruby's Trove, and a bit of a hang out during the hours that Alan Puckett wasn't there... A beloved landmark in this quaint, seaside community, it seems only fitting that we investigate Alan Puckett's murder in the very place he sipped his coffee each morning, inevitably stealing the cafe's newspaper when he left.

Alan seems to have died of anaphylactic shock. How that happened though, no one yet knows. Detectives have been trying to retrace his day to see what could have killed Alan Puckett. Alan was a creature of habit though, doing the same thing every day without fail in the same way. Each morning he got up, started his truck and let it run while unlocking his gate. The gate was padlocked, and security cameras lined the property, keeping everyone on and around the property under constant surveillance. He would then pull out of the property, park his car and leave it running while he locked the gate behind him.

From there he always came to The Wired Lobster Cafe, where he enjoyed a morning coffee while he read the Trove Times, the local newspaper. Once finished his cup of coffee, he would take the cafe's copy of the newspaper and leave, returning home immediately, where he would reverse the process of leaving.

If it wasn't for that moment of joy that could be witnessed each morning when Rocky the poncho-wearing dog ran up to greet him, it would be nearly impossible to find a redeeming quality in Alan Puckett. So, it's not strange to the residents of Madawood Lane to get together to mark the death of their neighbourhood tormentor, each with their own reasons for being relieved, if not outright happy, that Alan Puckett was finally gone.

And yet, the coroner and police can't yet explain what caused this anaphylactic shock and ensuing death, so our evening of reverie is, unfortunately, once again, brought to an end by Alan Puckett. Even in death it would seem he has the ability to ruin everyone's good time.

Residents of Ruby's Trove, it's time to become sleuths! A number of residents have already been identified as suspects, and they will make themselves known to you shortly. Question them, as a detective would, to determine who had the motive, means and opportunity to kill Alan Puckett this morning!

Ask the suspects if they saw anything suspicious, or if they know of anyone who would have wanted Alan dead, although be warned, that could be a very lengthy list indeed. Ask questions such as "Where were you at the time of the murder?" "Can anyone verify your whereabouts?" "Did you see anything suspicious around the time of the murder, or regarding Alan Puckett?" The answer to these questions will no doubt lead you to form your own questions, which you can and should ask to propel your investigation forward.

You may need to question each suspect more than once to have them reveal their secrets, so ensure you form your questions well. If a suspect knows the answer to a question you ask, they are sworn to answer, and answer truthfully. If, however, you ask a question to which they can not provide a relevant answer, they have been instructed to respond with the phrase "I have nothing to say about that". If you hear that phrase, take it to mean that you are on the wrong track and change your line of questioning. Remember, if a suspect offers an alibi, do your due diligence and double check that alibi to ensure no one is lying about their whereabouts!

While no one is sad that Alan Puckett is gone, it is up to us now to discover his killer or killers, and finally put this story of Alan Puckett and his reign of terror to an end. Find the suspect nearest you and begin your investigation – good luck!