

CEMETERY MONOLOGUES

Written by:

TERRI L. ATKINS FEBUARY

**THE ASSASSINATION OF PINEVILLE, LOUISIANA
MAYOR JOHN EMMET WALKER**

&

**THE TRIAL OF
WILLIAM MCMANUS**

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MAYOR EMMETT WALKER**

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Terri L. Atkins February

(March 6, 1911, Mayor Emmett Walker in shirt sleeve, open vest, wire framed glasses. Back to the audience, head down, he turns, hands up in surrender. He speaks with authority and education.)

The day I died, my hands were empty.

(Raises head to look at audience)

No gun, no weapon, no thought of attacking Mr. William McManus, although I thought him unreasonable and querulous. You see, he and his family are at the center of my story.

(Drop hands and indicate grave)

Here is where I, Emmett Walker, Mayor of Pineville, Louisiana, lay buried.

The good citizens of our town knew me as just and impartial. In fact, some friends would say that I “put my shoulder to the wheel” and I was ready at “making things go” here in Pineville.

So I ask you, why would William McManus, deliberately and in cold blood, shoot an unarmed man in the middle of the day in the center of town with dozens of witnesses?

(Deep breath)

(He removes his glasses with left hand and reaches for hanky in right back pocket of trousers.)

It all began June, 1910...

(Wipes glasses as he begins story)

...that is when Robert McManus, the son of William McManus, came before my court.

Several of the witnesses, who were all colored, testified that on the evening of June 15th, 1910, Robert McManus pulled a gun on their hayride party.

Now I ask you, how could those Negroes have known the McManus family was standing vigil over a dead infant?

In a fit of belligerence, young McManus fired his gun toward the Negroes. Naturally he denied this.

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The following morning bullet holes were found in the hay bales of the wagon. The fact that children were riding on the hay near the point of impact was cause enough for my verdict of “Assault with a Deadly Weapon”.

I should have sent Robert to prison. Instead I gave him a fine of twenty-five dollars plus court costs or serve time in our lock-up.

(Put glasses back on.)

There were rumors that William McManus’ wife, **Lizzie Baden McManus, kept things stirred up.** William would have put his son in lock-up, but **that woman wouldn’t put up with her boy behind bars!**

So on March 6, 1911, the case went to the District Circuit Court of Appeals in Alexandria. Judge Blackman upheld my verdict.

2:30 that afternoon, my brother-in-law, Matt Rembrent was with me in my office when William came in with his boy, Robert. Naturally, I was expecting payment...

(Quick frustrated pause)

Damn, if the man didn’t want to bargain with me! He wanted Robert to do service or time in the lock-up; wanted anything except to pay the fine. He should have thought of that before appealing the case!

I told him to come back to the office at 3:00. I had to talk to the Town Attorney first.

After McManus left I locked up the office and strolled over to Charles Turner’s store just up the hill.

(Motion toward Main St. away from the river.)

The post office is connected to it and Turner is the Post Master. I used his phone to call the town attorney about the case and then passed through to check for mail.

When I strolled outside to the gallery, William McManus was standing there waiting.

I knew he was anxious for an answer, but this irritated me and I wasn’t ready to deliver the affirmation right there on the street.

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(Looks over his glasses, focuses on a man in the crowd)

I looked at him,

(Places left hand on glasses)

Put my left hand up to take off my glasses...

(Right hand moves to his back)

...At the same time reaching with my right hand to get my kerchief out of my back right pocket to clean them...

(With hands in place jolts at impact and acts out the body movements)

I felt a sudden jolt under the arm and searing pain in my left side!

A second shot rang out!

He was killing me! Why was he killing me?!

I ran across the street like my hair was on fire, MY ARMS WERE UP in surrender!

(Raises both arms)

I yelled at him, **“DON’T SHOOT ME!”**, but two more times he fired!

“HE HAS KILLED ME!!”

“MATT!” Where is Matt Rembrent?

I slumped down in the street against a light pole.

(Remain standing but relax upper torso as if slumping)

Voices grew distant as everything faded.

Was that my little daughter I hear crying out to me, “DADDY, DON’T DIE!”?

Please God! Don’t let her see this!

(Pause)

William McManus, the cold blooded killer of husband, father, son and officer of the law.

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Cut me down in the street before all the people...before my darling little girl...the second one to see me...as I lay dying in the street.

(Deep breath)

They say the funeral was the largest ever seen in Pineville.

The little chapel here was filled to capacity. Mourners stood around the windows outside listening to the service. Parish wide, people came to honor me...to console my desolate family.

This was small consolation to a dead man leaving seven children fatherless, an elderly mother and the most virtuous of women, my dearest wife, penniless, homeless and in great need.

(Pauses then brightens)

I should tell you, there is one bright spot in the truth.

As if the angels of heaven had spoken to the good people of Pineville. An anonymous friend requested that a subscription, listing contributions for the relief of the straightened circumstances of my family, be made available!

The Town Talk Newspaper carried the same script and list of new donors every day until a total of \$700.00 was collected for the building of a home for my family.

J.L. David, my successor, donated his entire first month's salary as mayor, \$45.00.

The Cleveland Naps not only donated \$50.00, they determined to make Pineville their permanent home for spring training. The boys played a benefit game and gave all proceeds to the fund.

So many fine people, friends and strangers contributed to the welfare of my widow and orphaned children. Now my soul waited for the moment we would be together again.

My life was short; I died in the line of duty caring for my family, friends and my town.

This is my story, J. Emmett Walker, Mayor.

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(In work clothes and a coat, Actor stands with back to audience, hands folded behind his back. Slowly turns around, Begin solemnly.)

Now Ladies and Gentlemen, I am William McManus.

Ya'll heard about me from Mr. Walker over there on the other side of the cemetery.

That is, you heard **his side** of the story. Now in all fairness, ya'll may want to hear my side...I know! I know! Can anyone believe a condemned man?...A murderer?

Now first, ya'll gotta' know the anguish our family was goin' through the night my son, Robert lost his head and shot his gun around the Negroes on their hayride.

My wife, Lizzie was inconsolable over the loss of a grandbaby. With our grown children mourning, women bawling, men whispering, the coloreds riding by, **whooping it up** while we kept vigil over the corpse...

(Start to be defensive.)

Well; let's just say there was a lot of high emotion!

(Accusational)

Mayor Emmett Walker took the side of the coloreds at Robert's trial. He fined Robert Twenty five dollars or time in jail!

(Become more and more defensive.)

I was just a carpenter...**a DANG good carpenter**, but so help me, twenty five dollars makes a lot of groceries!

My Lizzie...well...she just wasn't gonna' throw that kind a money away. Robert was willing to go to the lock up, but Lizzie wouldn't hear of it. She insisted we appeal the case.

We figured Judge Blackman with the District Appeals court would overturn Mayor Walker's verdict.

DANG IT! If the Judge didn't stand with Walker's decision!

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Only now we were expected to pay the money! No jail time and the court costs were more too!

I was certain Emmett Walker and Judge Blackman were in this together.

Robert's wife came down ill because of the whole matter; my Lizzie was in such an upset state about it all. We weren't about to pay that Mayor even one copper penny!

Lizzie was a Baden when I met her. We may have been poor, but she had her dignity and **DAMNATION! If that dignity didn't hound me like a badger in a bad mood!**

So I followed Walker to his office up there on Main Street.

(Indicate Main St. away from the river.)

Told him I wasn't goin to pay the fine. He could keep Robert in the lock-up or let him work it off.

I didn't like his answer and I might have said some things he didn't like, but I left the office and planned to meet him after he made an inquiry about it.

I saw he was using the phone in Charles Turner's store and since my wagon was parked there it seemed like a good place to wait.

I checked the wagon and found the gun I keep for emergencies. I had no intention of using it, but I kept it with me.

Seemed like a suspiciously long time before Walker came out to the gallery where I stood waiting.

He came out the post office door, didn't look pleased to see me there.

Everyone knew Walker could use both hands at the same time...

(Reenacts movements of both Walker and himself)

So when he raised his left hand to his glasses I knew he was trying to distract me!

I was sure he was pulling a gun with his right hand and I was afraid for my own life!

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(McManus aimed with both hands on the gun. Actor should stand holding hands together as if he is firing a gun.)

I fired!

It hit him and then that sneak ran away. I couldn't see anything. I didn't know if I was still shooting or how many bullets I fired. They said at the trial I shot at him four times.

A witness claims I told him, "I wanted to show that S.O.B. how to prosecute my boy about some damn Negroes!"

I don't remember it.

(Pause, Contemplative)

I saw Walker slump, didn't know if he was dead or not, just took the wagon and went on home.

I was gathering some food and ammunition to take to the woods for awhile. I wasn't ready to face my wife and family...or the law.

Then the sheriff came in and took me to the lock up.

At my trial, man after man swore to my excellent character.

Of course the stakes were **against** me...Walker was a gentleman's son...Matt Rembrent, Walker's brother-in-law, witnessed the meeting in the mayor's office...Emmett Walker became an instant folk hero when he died...Sympathies for his family were in every newspaper in the Parish.

The newspaper account of the killing spread like poison ivy.

That's why the jury came from other parts of the parish.

I was sentenced to life imprisonment without capital punishment.

(Pause)

Life imprisonment...

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Some a ya'll are asking, "Why did this murderer, this assassin, only serve thirteen years?"

Friends and family pulled together, pulled some legal strings, along with my, "Excellent Character", I was free to live a long life.

In fact, I lived to be the oldest citizen of Pineville, Louisiana. I lived to the age of **ninety four** before the Good Lord took me.

Ninety Four...

(Pause)

That's a lot of years to repent of my deeds.

The irony is...my nephew became the Mayor of Pineville for twenty eight years. Ya'll might know Fred Baden.

When Fred was growing up I told him I always regretted taking the life of another man... something I never could forget...NEVER.

(Pause)

When asked about living so long there's not much to say, except,
"Don't...ever...murder."

(Bows head as he places hands behind him again then turns from audience.)