

## ***The Plinko Bounce*, by Martin Clark**

### ***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy***

Martin Clark, a former Virginia circuit court judge, has been writing legal thrillers since his retirement from the bench. His latest crime drama, *The Plinko Bounce*, is set in rural Patrick County, Virginia.

Serving as a Public Defender for nearly 20 years, attorney Andy Hughes is facing burn-out. Many of the clients he represents are repeat offenders—his colleagues refer to them as “reliables.” Frustrated by the revolving-door court system, Andy is ready for a career change. When a law school classmate offers him a high-paying position at a prestigious Richmond law firm, Andy tenders his resignation. Before Andy leaves the Public Defenders’ office, one last homicide case lands on his desk.

Damian Bullins, the man Andy is tasked to defend, has a long rap sheet of prior convictions for violent assault and robbery. A homophobic racist, Bullins is accused of murdering a Black woman, Alicia Benson, in her own home. Alicia was the wife of prominent businessman Cole Benson. When Bullins was arrested, he confessed to the crime, and his clothes were splattered with the victim’s blood.

Peter Morley, the showboating district attorney assigned to prosecute Bullins, is running for a seat in Virginia’s State Senate. Anticipating that the Bullins case will be an open-and-shut winner for him, Morley pumps up media attention. A simple clerical error, however, complicates the case. Bullins then decides to change his plea to “not guilty” and take his chances with a jury trial. Andy is professionally bound to defend a remorseless felon whom he despises.

*The Plinko Bounce*, the novel’s title, is a metaphor for unpredictable, random outcomes. Plinko, a game of chance on “The Price Is Right,” involves contestants dropping plastic chips into a vertical board. Prizes are determined by the dollar-amount spots where the bouncing chips arbitrarily land.

When the Bullins case goes to trial, Andy knows that its decision could bounce either way. Early in his career he had learned that “jury trials can be determined before the lawyers give their opening statements or a single witness testifies, that honest people often see the world differently—there are forgivers and there are punishers, loophole sticklers and believers in rough justice.”

Martin Clark’s judicial experience is evident in his novel’s razor-sharp courtroom scenes. For readers who enjoy well-crafted legal thrillers, *The Plinko Bounce* is a guilty pleasure.