



May God Have Mercy: A True Story of Crime and Punishment

John C. Tucker

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In some states by law, in others by tradition, judges imposing a sentence of death complete the grim ritual with the words "May God have mercy on your soul."

In 1982, in Grundy, Virginia, a young miner named Roger Coleman was sentenced to death for the murder of his sister-in-law. Ten years later, the sentence was carried out, despite the extraordinary efforts of Kitty Behan, a brilliant and dedicated young lawyer who devoted two years of her life to gathering evidence of Coleman's innocence, evidence so compelling that media around the world came to question the verdict. The courts, ruling on technicalities, refused to hear the new evidence and witnesses. Finally, the governor of Virginia ordered a lie-detector test to be administered on the morning of Coleman's scheduled execution, and in a chair that to Coleman surely looked like nothing so much as an electric chair.

In John Tucker's telling, this story is an emotional and unforgettable roller-coaster ride from the awful night of the crime to the equally awful night of the execution. Perhaps it was not Roger Coleman whose soul was in need of God's mercy, but the judges, prosecutors, and politicians who procured his death.

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