

Murder by Mary McGuire

An exclusive report from Dennis Knight

She booted up the Apple, opened a blank page, centered the cursor at the top, and typed the word *Murder*. She thought it a fine, unadorned title for a sure-to-be best seller, added her byline, and rejoiced. It was a beginning.

She considered fragments and combinations of phrases for a captivating first paragraph, but quashed them all as being too weak or too wacky. After several minutes, Mary McGuire relaxed, rolled back from the keyboard, and decided a short break would spur the process. She clicked Save, preserving her work-in-progress and confirming to herself she had indeed started on her goal of writing the great American story. She went to the kitchen and commenced another goal, a daily one, to brew the great American cup of coffee. That was seven years and thousands of pots ago.

In the interim, along came Romeo. He courted Mary for months and praised always her coffee. They were attorneys and rising stars: governmental affairs for him, intellectual property law for her. After their marriage they rented a suite for their separate practices in a converted mansion on Capitol Hill. It was a nice arrangement, sharing a secretary, a coffee maker and riding the light rail together almost every day.

Mary's law practice was quiet and cerebral, involving patents, trade secrets and the technical, as well as registering and defending copyrights in the creative fields of music, art, literature and software applications. It could be rough and tumble but ultimately it was sanely centered on logic, time and proof thereof.

Mary took vicarious pleasure in hearing Romeo tell about his exploits and the players in the legislature and, more recently, the corridors of Washington. He profited from the industry of regulatory government, one that celebrated the art of spin and skirted the weight of law. He was a lobbyist whose work focused on influencing power and policy in minerals, oil and gas. He had talent for persuasion, knew where the skeletons were hung and where the skids needed greasing. He earned far more than any elected official.

As the couple's finances flourished Mary began thinking about children. That was until three months ago when Romeo traveled to Washington to meet a senator and his aide concerning some sort of exploration in the tropics. He traveled more frequently and the durations grew longer. He finally came home at the end of April, just hours after she received the letter from his attorney.

You know where this is going, so I will jump to the end. A week ago, Mary brewed a fresh pot of strong coffee, opened her computer and found her piece again for the first time in seven years. Under the existing title and byline she typed her story, chapter by chapter. This morning, she posted manuscripts of *Murder by Mary McGuire* to Random House and the Denver Police, and caught a flight to Madagascar where they grow great coffee and they don't extradite.