

James Street

Sarah Vail

## Chapter 1

The first time he killed was an accident. Now, it was such a rush, he couldn't stop. He had entertained the thought of killing before. He and Lily Johansson were married only a couple of months when a tiny thought niggled at the edge of his consciousness. The thought grew and exploded until his every waking moment was consumed by thoughts of killing her. He even dreamed about killing her at night while he slept.

Lily was all sweetness and light until they were married. Then she turned into a shrew that would put Katharine from Shakespeare to shame. Demanding, angry, abusing him continuously with her vile criticism. No matter what he did, it was always wrong. He hated her. Then, that night four years ago as he watched her studying the evening newspaper, he wondered how a woman as beautiful as she could be so ugly inside.

He had just settled into his comfortable chair and started to relax from a grueling day at work. She demanded that he get her a glass of wine. He didn't dare complain. He didn't want to start anything with her.

James Street

Sarah Vail

Begrudgingly, but silent, he went to get it for her. He reached into the cupboard for a glass and he knocked over a small prescription bottle. After pouring her glass of wine, he started to set the bottle upright. Lily had been too lazy to tighten the top, when the bottle slipped through his fingers the lid came off. He'd been horrified. Lily would go ballistic and shred him to pieces with her vicious great white shark mouth.

He remembered the hot little pop in his brain and the blinding fury that rushed over him, turbulent and boiling, then sudden quiet calm an instant later as he watched the shower of tiny white pills bouncing, clicking, and clattering against the Formica countertop and the floor. One minute he was mercilessly oppressed. The next he saw his freedom.

He should've dumped the glass of chardonnay when three pills from the prescription bottle splashed into the pale yellow liquid. He didn't. Besides, Lily would've ripped him a new one for wasting good wine. By the time he'd finished collecting the little white tablets from the kitchen floor, the ones that had plopped into the glass had dissolved. *Colorless. Odorless. Tasteless.* Toxic as hell.

Within hours, Lily Johansson had died of ventricular fibrillation. He would've been happy just to be free of her, but the woman had left him a million-dollar insurance policy as a bonus.

James Street

Sarah Vail

Tonight, he sat in the restaurant booth upholstered in plush cranberry velvet at the Skyline Grille. Watching the entry and waiting like a lion in the tall brown grass of the Serengeti. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the evening lights of Seattle flicker and dance on the undulating waters of Puget Sound. He toyed with the cap from the amber bottle of Lily Johannsson's magic pills. When he was sure no one in the restaurant was looking, he took out four tablets. The Skyline Grille was Amber Brown's favorite night spot. Intimate, elegant. High atop the Edison Bank Tower, above the noise and confusion of the city. The crisp white linen tablecloth reflected the pinkish glow from incandescent electric candles. Outside the window, towering skyscrapers glittered in the moonlight. Against a background of sorrowful strains of violin, gentle piano notes tinkled a melody. This was indeed a place for lovers.

He glanced down at the face of the gold and stainless Tag Hauer he'd bought with his insurance windfall. Amber was predictably ten minutes late. He poured the expensive pinot gris into her wineglass. With a brush of his thumb against his palm, he deposited four tablets into the wine and watched the tiny pills melt into the alcohol.

Within minutes he saw Amber weaving her way toward the booth where he sat. What a fabulous woman she was! In her sleek pin-striped business suit, she looked younger than her thirty years. Her wonderful, shapely legs were smooth and tan beneath expensive silky hosiery.

James Street

Sarah Vail

Other men in the restaurant stopped mid-sentence and gaped, wide-eyed, at her as she bustled past their tables. Amber was gloriously sexy.

“Am I late? I’m sorry, darling.” Her throaty voice settled on his ears like a dove. She slid into the booth next to him, leaned forward, and pecked his cheek. All his senses suddenly came alive as he breathed in the luscious scent of her perfume.

He wanted to kiss her, but his rage bubbled up; he caged it behind a teeth-gritted smile. She didn’t notice. They never did. Before he handed her the potion, he swirled the liquid around in the wineglass.

“It’s no problem, darling. I’d wait forever. I ordered wine for us; a nice pinot gris, your favorite. Is that okay?”

“You are the sweetest man on earth.” She kissed his cheek again and took hold of his arm, squeezing it against her. He closed his eyes and felt his hands involuntarily clench into fists. Violent lust. Violent anger. Both barely contained. When he opened his eyes again, he was amazed how much her profile reminded him of Lily. Lily and her glorious money. Soon, he would have control and the bank account would be full again. Amber lifted the wineglass to her lips and sipped.

James Street

Sarah Vail

## Chapter 2

Deputy District Attorney Tim McAndrews pulled the collar of his overcoat up around his neck as added protection against the pouring rain. He snapped open his umbrella and stared at the multistory parking garage from under the shelter of the green-striped awning overhanging Jake's Deli. By now, the girl that had fascinated him for the last seven months would be parked and starting her brisk walk through the garage, down the stairs, and to the traffic light here at James Street, where he waited. Until now they had only shared a few glances, a few smiles, but this morning he vowed to himself he would speak to her.

Tim had tried many times to screw up his courage and say "Hello." But each time his eyes met hers and he opened his mouth to speak, the words vanished into thin air and opportunity disappeared with them. Each time a

James Street

Sarah Vail

brief smile would cross her lovely lips, and she would hurry on her way and vanish into the city.

There were lots of pretty girls in the city and there were pretty girls in his office, but she was different. Something about her made him linger here to watch her spring lightly down the stairs like a dancer from an old 1930s' musical. She was like the memory of the movies he'd watched with his mom when he was six or seven, on rainy days, when outside play was impossible.

Unlike this cold and dreary morning, the first time he saw her sunshine filled the sky and blossoms fragrant and pink burst forth from the trees along the streets of Seattle, contrasting the hard edges of brick, concrete, and steel. He'd just finished a tough game of racquetball with Bradley Hollingsrow, a prominent defense attorney who the governor was considering for the bench. Very few of the young Assistant District Attorney's had this chance. But Tim had worked hard to earn the reputation of a tough, smart prosecutor and many of the older lawyers and judges whose careers were made respected him. Maybe he reminded them of their younger days. Hell, he was smart. Top of his class in law school. He had a great conviction record after only four years at the D.A.'s office. He'd earned their respect. The two men had just taken seats at the sidewalk tables outside under the green-striped awning, ready to enjoy a good cup of coffee. Maybe it was the soft clicking of her high heels against the slab stairs--he didn't remember exactly why he'd looked up just at the moment she

James Street

Sarah Vail

descended the last few steps from the parking garage--but he had. She wore a summer dress that drifted and swirled around her like a silk scarf in a breeze. Every fluid step announced romance and passion. He'd been completely overwhelmed. So much so that Hollingsrow had craned his neck to see what had captured his attention. When he turned back, a big grin swept across Hollingsrow's face.

"Beautiful isn't she? Want to meet her?" he'd asked.

"Do you know her?"

"Sure. I handled her divorce about three—maybe four years ago."

"Yes. I want to meet her." Tim had been surprised to find she was single and knew a formal introduction coming from Hollingsrow would be like a recommendation. But Judge Mattison had unexpectedly joined their table and the lovely girl crossed the street and slipped away. After that Tim was handed a big child abuse case and Hollingsrow was appointed to the Superior Court. Life happened and they never met. Today he would make sure they did.

*Was it love at first sight?* Tim had never really believed in it until that day. Feeling a momentary twinge of insecurity, he checked his image in the storefront window and scrubbed his hand over his short cut blond hair.

He glanced at his watch. 7:55 A.M. Where was she? She was late.

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