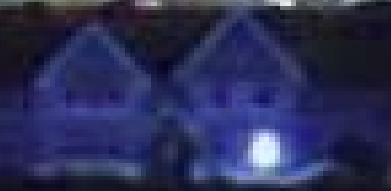


#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ALONG
CAME A SPIDER AND JACK AND JILL

JAMES PATTERSON

**HIDE
AND
SEEK**



Hide and Seek

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PROLOGUE

I LAY WITHOUT moving in the low, narrow crawl space under the front porch of our home near West Point. My face was pressed tightly against the brutally cold, frozen ground littered with dry leaves and scratchy brambles. I knew I was going to die soon, and so was my baby girl. The words from a song,

Crosby, Stills, and Nash- “Our house is a very, very, very fine house “- played in my mind.

“Don’t cry . . . oh please don’t cry,” I whispered into my baby’s ear.

There was no way out-no escape from here, at least not carrying the baby.

I was smart, and I’d thought of every possible escape route. None of them would work.

Phillip was going to kill us when he found our hiding place. I couldn’t let him. I just didn’t know how I could stop it. I kept my hand lightly over Jennie’s mouth.

“You mustn’t make a sound, sweetheart. I love you. You mustn’t make a sound.”

I could hear Phillip raging above us inside the house. Our house. He was rampaging from floor to floor, ransacking rooms, overturning furniture.

Angry. Relentless. Absolutely crazy. Worse than he’d ever been. It was cocaine this time, but really it was life that Phillip couldn’t handle very well.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are, Maggie . . . come out, Maggie and Jennie . . . it’s only Daddy. Daddy’s going to find you anyway,” Phillip screamed over and over until he was hoarse. “Come out, come out, Maggie . . . game’s over.

“Maggie, I command you to come out wherever the hell you’re hiding, you disobedient little bitch.”

I lay shivering under the old sagging porch. My teeth were chattering again. This couldn’t be happening. It was unthinkable. I gently held my little girl, who had wet her pants. “You mustn’t cry, Jennie. Please don’t cry. Don’t cry. You’re such a good little girl. I love you so much.”

Jennie nodded, and stared into my eyes. I wished that this were a nightmare. That it would go away. But it wasn’t a bad dream. This was as real as my mother’s fatal heart attack when I was thirteen years old and the only one home. This was even worse.

I could hear my husband, my husband, stomping up and down the stairs of the house. He was still screaming . . . hadn't stopped screaming for over an hour. Pounding his fist against the walls. Captain Phillip Bradford. Math instructor at the Academy. Officer and gentleman. That was what everyone believed, what they wanted to believe, what I had believed myself.

The hour stretched to two hours.

Then to three hours in the pitch-black, freezing-cold crawl space-in this living hell.

Mercifully, Jennie had finally fallen asleep. I held her to my chest, tried to keep her warm. I wanted to sleep myself, give up the fight, but I knew I mustn't do that. It was very early in the morning. One of Phillip's witching hours-maybe three A.M.? Maybe four?

I heard the front door slam like a clap of thunder in the night. Loud footsteps exploded on the porch just over my head.

Jennie woke up. "Shhh, " I whispered. "Shhh. "

"Maggie! I know you're here. I know it! I'm not a stupid man. There's nowhere to run to."

"Daddy . . . Daddy!" Jennie cried out, the way she had so many times in the safety of her crib.

A flashlight suddenly shone under the porch. Bright, terrifying light blinded me. A thousand sharp splinters in my eyes.

"Peekaboo! There you are! There's Jennie and Maggie. There's my two girls,"

Phillip shouted in triumph. His voice was so hoarse and raw, it was nearly unrecognizable. I could almost make myself believe that this insane man wasn't my husband. How could he be?

TWO deafening shots came from his gun. He fired right at us. He meant to kill either Jennie or me, maybe both of us. I had a surprise for Phillip, just this one time. Peekaboo yourself! I fired back.

SOMETIMES, I FEEL as though I'm wearing a horrifying scarlet letter—only the letter is M, for Murderess. I know this feeling will never completely go away and it seems so unfair. It is unfair. It's inhuman and indecent.

The memories are jagged and chaotic, but at the end so vivid and horrifying that they are etched into my brain. They will be with me forever.

I'll tell you all of it, sparing no one, especially myself. I know that you want to hear. I know this is a "big news story." I know what it is to be "news." Do you have any idea ? Can you imagine yourself as a piece of

news,

as cold black type that everybody reads, and makes judgments about?

Area newspapers from Newburgh, Cornwall, Middletown called the first shooting the worst “family tragedy” in the history of West Point. To me, at the time, it seemed as though it had happened to someone else. Not to Jennie and me, or even to Phillip, as much as he may have deserved it.

Yet a dozen years later, after time and my own denial had clouded the events still further and made even my emotions hazy, a second killing has forced me to remember West Point in all of its horrible vividness.

I obsessively confront the questions that pound in my brain: Am I a murderer?

Did I kill not one, but two of my husbands?

I don't know anymore. I don't know! As crazy as that sounds, I honestly don't.

It gets terribly cold here-sometimes it seems as cold as it was that Christmas Eve when Phillip died. All I can do is sit in this prison cell, in torment, and wait for the trial to begin.

I decided to write it all down. I'm writing it for myself-but I'm also writing it for you. I'll tell you everything.

When you've read it, you decide. That's how our system works, right? A jury of my peers.

And, oh yes, I trust you. I'm a trusting person. That's probably why I'm here, in all of this terrible trouble.

Hide and Seek

BOOK ONE

Star-Crossed

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