

I Killed Sam

Robert Steadman

Mission Point Press

978-1-954786-52-3

I Killed Sam is an engrossing legal thriller in which a battered woman who was pushed too far seeks some form of justice.

Based in truth, Robert Steadman's gripping thriller *I Killed Sam* is about a murder trial that rocked a small Michigan community.

In the 1950s and after years apart, Betty, one of Bob's first loves, walks into Bob's legal office and announces that she killed Sam, her abusive husband and the town bully. With confidence fed by his considerable trial experience, Bob decides to help Betty navigate the complex legalities of their era—a time when husbands are able to rape their wives without fear of repercussions. Assisting them is Jim, a former police officer who investigates Sam's death, despite the fact that the prosecutor would like to treat it as an open-and-shut case.

Following the events of Betty's trial, the book captures each pivotal moment well. It comprises early legal research, the prosecution's efforts, and the work put into Betty's defense, too. But the book also contextualizes the crime, covering Betty's nightmare life with Sam, including frequent beatings, sexual assaults, and threats against their young child.

There are hints of a rekindled romance between Bob and Betty, who pine for lost days and dream of what might have been. Betty's world is otherwise grim, though. Desire is generated for her to achieve some measure of justice.

Bob narrates from a distant future, resulting in the added benefit of hindsight. His struggles to juggle Betty's trial with his other legal responsibilities are considerable; there are financial implications to his decisions, as well as social ones, given the small town setting. Around him, residents and neighbors struggle with, and worry about, more common legal matters, too, like contracts and wills. They help to flesh the setting out—and to position Bob as an inspired litigator. He is attentive to daily legal matters, but is also creative when it comes to Betty's case, arguing that Betty defended herself in a state of temporary insanity. He confronts sexist understandings of "wifely duties" head-on, giving the jury cause for compassion.

At Bob's opposite are Sam and his father, who are characterized most in terms of their depraved acts. They become symbols of the period's awful treatment of women. The prosecutor is menacing, too: a corrupt local whom Bob runs legal circles around. Such easy villains result in exiting drama as Bob mounts his aggressive defense—as well as hope that justice will prevail.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (January 13, 2022)

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