

LOGAN POINT ■ 3

GONE WITHOUT
A TRACE

A NOVEL

**PATRICIA
BRADLEY**



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Patricia Bradley, *Gone Without a Trace*
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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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In memory of my mother, Frances Bradley

Prologue

A little before midnight, a small jon boat skimmed across the lake located just outside of Logan Point. The electric trolling motor hardly broke the deathly quiet of the first hours of the New Year. The man at the tiller pulled his coat tighter with his free hand and lowered his head against the cold, dense fog that shrouded him.

The fog was both a blessing and a curse. No one could see him, but neither could he see anyone. In the bottom of the flat metal boat lay a black bag, and his gaze kept returning to it. If he was caught dumping it, he would pay more than a fine this time.

A low horn raked his senses, and he jerked his head around. Dead ahead through the thinning fog, twin lights from a barge bore down on him like avenging angels.

He swore. There weren't supposed to be any barges coming downriver tonight. He gunned the thrust on the trolling motor, barely getting out of the barge's path. The wake rocked the small boat, and he fought the dizzying motion.

That had been close, but at least now he knew he was in the deepest part of the lake. He decreased the thrust, putting the boat in a controlled drift. Once he regained his balance, he hefted the

weighted bag. The boat rocked in the water and almost tipped over as he slid the body over the side.

He risked a light on the water and within seconds only ripples gave evidence of his deed. He paused briefly to stare at the widening rings and then pointed the twelve-foot boat toward shore.

This was not an auspicious beginning to the New Year.

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The vacant warehouse in downtown Memphis reeked of decayed wood, dust, and mold spores. Livy Reynolds stood backed against a square brick column, her SIG Sauer at the ready. Her breath made little puffs of white smoke in the cold February air even as sweat trickled down the side of her face. It was a lousy way to start off the week.

She chanced a peek around the brick to survey the cavernous room. Straight ahead, a stairwell led to a second level, on her right a double doorway opened to the outside. Six feet from her lay the skeleton of a bird that had flown into the building but hadn't been able to find its way out. She scanned the columns that lined the room. Mac was behind one somewhere to her left. The bank robber could be anywhere.

From the corner of her eye, she glimpsed Mac in his Kevlar vest as he darted to a column nearer the stairway. She knew what he was doing—if the thief made it to the upper level, they'd be open targets. Where was backup?

The gunman fired. The bullet chipped the brick by her partner's head.

“Give it up,” Mac yelled. “No need to die today.”

Another bullet answered the demand. In the silence that followed, Livy pressed against the brick column, her heart pounding

against her ribs, her mouth too dry to even wet her lips. A vision of Justin Caine appeared beside her, and she squeezed her eyes shut.

The gunman ran to the stairs, shooting toward Livy's position. Mac whipped around the column and returned fire. Caine's image disappeared, and Livy pushed herself away from her hiding place into the open. The gunman fired again, and a piece of brick broke off, grazing her cheek.

Her brain slipped into slow motion. His face came into focus. Her mind recorded the gunman's eyes as they bored into hers, his blond hair sticking out from the Redbirds baseball cap, the thin mustache. The blood rushing through her head drowned out all sound.

Livy brought her gun up, finger on the trigger. *Center mass.* Her eyes blurred, and once again Caine appeared between her and the gunman. She hesitated, unable to shoot.

The gunman turned toward Mac.

"No!" Her scream echoed in the empty warehouse as she pulled the trigger. The shot went wide, and the gunman fired. She could almost see the bullet's trajectory toward her partner before it knocked him backward.

The outside doors burst open, and a deafening explosion filled the room as a flash of light blinded Livy. She dropped to the floor and covered her head before she realized it was a flash grenade deployed to disorient the gunman. When her head quit spinning, she rose to her knees, still holding her head. Someone touched her shoulder, and she flinched.

"Sorry, Detective."

With her ears ringing, Livy read the SWAT officer's lips rather than heard him. Then the shaking started. First in her arms that she hugged to her stomach. Then to her whole body.

She turned, seeking Mac. She'd let him down. He had to be okay. Officers hovered over his unconscious figure on the floor.

A man with a medical bag raced past her, followed by more men with a stretcher.

“You all right?”

She couldn’t stop her teeth from chattering. “Mac? Is . . . is he okay?”

Darkness passed across the officer’s eyes. “I think he will be. Paramedics are just getting here.”

Mac had on his vest. He couldn’t die. She pulled her gaze from the scene and back to the officer. “The gunman?”

His lip curled. “He folded like a baby when he recovered from the flashbang and saw that beam of light on his chest. Cuffed and ready to be transported.”

The ringing in her ears had lessened, and Livy caught most of what he said. She struggled to her feet and staggered when she saw Mac with his shirt ripped open and electrodes on his chest.

The officer caught her. “Take it easy,” he said. “You’ll be dizzy until the effects of the explosion wear off.”

Again, time crawled to a standstill as the paramedic spoke, his mouth opening and closing as he instructed everyone to step away. The medic at Mac’s head sat back, and the officers surrounding them moved, glancing at each other the way only fellow officers could. The paramedic pressed the shock button, and Mac’s body jumped. She jumped as well, and real time returned.

“We have a rhythm! Let’s transport.”

A flurry of activity erupted as her partner was loaded onto a stretcher. A first responder noticed Livy and asked if she’d been checked out.

“I’m fine. Take care of Mac.”

Because *she* hadn’t.



The next afternoon, Livy fired ten rounds at a target thirty-five feet away. She brought the target close. All ten rounds had hit

the bull's-eye, and Justin Caine was nowhere in sight. But then, he couldn't be. She holstered her gun and removed her shooting glasses and earplugs. It had taken her most of the afternoon to work up the nerve to come to the firing range. Now it was time to talk to her partner.

The drive in the waning light was much too short, and in less than fifteen minutes, she rang Mac's doorbell. Her insides quivered like Jell-O, and she wasn't certain she could do this. But she had to try. At the hospital, she'd seen the question in his eyes, a question he hadn't been ready to ask, and she hadn't been ready to answer.

Livy wasn't sure even now she could tell Mac what happened in the warehouse. She'd gone over the details with Captain Reed. The department psychologist would be next. So far, no one had asked about her mental state at the time of the shooting, but she knew it was coming.

Mac's front door opened, and Livy took a step back. She hadn't expected his ex-wife to be here.

"Livy, I'm glad you're here. Mac was wondering why you didn't come by this morning." Julie's smile crinkled the skin around her eyes. She stepped aside for Livy to enter. "He's in the den."

Questions crowded Livy's mind as she walked through the living room to the den. She knew Mac and Julie had a "friendly" divorce, but even so, she'd been surprised to see her at the hospital. Especially since he'd been injured. Danger in Mac's job was the reason Julie had left him. And now here she was at the house. Not that it bothered Livy in the least.

All thoughts of Julie left her when she rounded the corner into the den. Mac sat in his recliner, much paler than she expected. She avoided looking into his eyes. "Well, you're looking great. I see you're still hooked up."

Mac touched the monitor on his belt. "Yeah. The doctors want to make sure the old ticker doesn't kick out of gear again."

Livy sat stiffly in a chair across from him and placed her hands on her knees.

“Are you okay?” Mac asked.

Still not looking at him, she nodded.

Julie entered the room and picked up a glass beside his chair. “I, ah, think I’ll run to the grocery and pick up a few things for you. Your pantry looks like Old Mother Hubbard’s.”

When they were alone, Mac cleared his throat. “The doctor didn’t want me to be here alone, so Julie’s staying a few days.”

Livy didn’t know why that news bothered her. It wasn’t like they had a romantic relationship. She licked her lips. “You don’t owe me an explanation.”

“I know, but we’re partners, and I don’t know, I just wanted you to know.”

Silence fell between them. She took a deep breath. She had to get this over with. “Look, I’m—”

“What—” Mac spoke at the same time.

“You go first,” she said.

“Okay.” He leaned forward. “What happened yesterday in the warehouse?”

The image of the teenage boy she’d shot flashed in her mind. She rubbed her hands on her jeans. “I don’t know. One minute I’m fine, the next Justin Caine is in there, standing next to me.” She lifted her gaze, blinking back the tears that scalded her eyes as the night eight weeks ago, when she shot and killed a seventeen-year-old suspect, replayed in her head. “I . . . I’m sorry, Mac. I let you down, but it won’t happen again.”

He started to rise, and she held up her hand. “Don’t get up. I’m okay. I promise.” If he tried to comfort her, she would lose it, she knew she would.

He studied her for a minute. “Maybe you just need a little more time. It’s only been two months since the shooting. You shot Caine

in the line of duty, and there's no shame in having trouble with killing someone. I'd be worried if you weren't."

"I keep playing it over and over in my mind, trying to make it come out different. Maybe if I'd waited for backup or—"

"Backup wouldn't have changed anything. It was dark in that alley—you had no way of knowing it was a toy gun. You told him to stop. To give it up, right?"

She had, hadn't she? Livy replayed the scene for the millionth time. Stopping at the convenience store for a soda, hearing someone demand money, seeing the robber with a gun, and then chasing him into a dark alley. "*Put the gun down! Now!*"

"Of course I told him, but what if he was trying to give me the gun?"

"Did he say he wanted to do that?"

"No. He didn't say anything."

"Then quit second-guessing yourself. The kid had just robbed that store with what looked like a real gun. And even though you were off duty, you were doing your job."

Mac always knew what to say. She clasped her hands together in her lap and picked at a hangnail. "I worry that you could've been killed yesterday because I freaked out."

He ran his hand over his mouth, and she caught the hesitation in his eyes. Her stomach sank to her knees. "If you have something to say, spit it out, Mac."

"Okay. I think you need to see the department psychologist again."

If she did, she'd be sitting behind a desk all day, viewing surveillance video. "I can handle this. I went to the firing range before I came here. All bull's-eyes."

"Shooting at a target isn't the same thing as facing someone with a gun. At least take the rest of the week off."

"I took off yesterday and today. Besides, Ellsworth didn't take time off after that drug bust went bad, and he shot and killed someone."

“That was different.”

“Why? Because I’m female?”

“You know me better than that. Look, I know when you need a little time to pull it together.”

“This time you’re wrong.” She held the gaze he leveled at her. “I’m fine. I promise.”

His eyes narrowed. “If you don’t want to see Dr. Robinson, go to someone in private practice, because if you don’t, what happened in the warehouse will happen again. And next time the outcome might be different, Olivia.”

Mac’s words rang in her head all the way to her apartment. He didn’t think she was mentally fit for duty. What if he was right? She let herself into her dark apartment and flipped on a light, revealing a room that needed more decoration. She’d moved into the high-rise a year ago to be closer to downtown and hadn’t taken the time to add her personal touch. Maybe she’d take Mac’s advice and do that this week. She had vacation time coming—three years’ worth. But what would she do after buying a few pictures and table decorations? Ramble around the empty apartment? No. Weekends she didn’t work or spend in Logan Point were bad enough, and because she focused most of her time on being a cop, she had no close relationships other than family, hadn’t had a serious date since a college romance that went bad. Come tomorrow morning, she’d be on the job.

Like she did every evening, Livy slipped her holster from around her waist and placed it on the bookcase. She flipped through a stack of movies. Maybe she’d live vicariously through a movie romance while she ate supper. In the kitchen she rummaged through her cabinets for something to eat. Mac’s cabinets weren’t the only ones that were bare. Sighing, she turned to the freezer and took out a frozen dinner. Sirloin tips and wild rice with mushrooms.

Fifteen minutes later, she sat in front of the television, watching two women with guy problems swap homes in different countries.

“And all that funny stuff, those years of your life that you wasted, that will eventually begin to fade.” Livy mouthed the words Iris spoke. Later when the old scriptwriter explained what a “meet-cute” was, she clicked the movie off. Maybe she could find a soccer game somewhere.

Because tonight she just couldn’t watch a movie that ended with “and they lived happily ever after.” Those endings only happened in the movies.