

LOGAN POINT ■ 4

SILENCE IN THE DARK

A NOVEL

PATRICIA
BRADLEY



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Patricia Bradley, *Silence in the Dark*
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The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:8

Prologue

Ten-year-old Bailey Adams huddled with the Carver twins on Cassie's bed. They'd given up pretending Cassie and Jem's parents weren't arguing or that their dad wasn't drunk. Bailey avoided their eyes, knowing how embarrassed they were. "Maybe I should just go home."

Jem shook her head. "No, stay. He'll go to sleep soon, and tomorrow it'll be like nothing ever happened."

Cassie threw back the blanket. "I'm going to tell them to stop!"

Jem grabbed at her arm and missed. "You'll just make it worse."

"I don't care. I can't stand it anymore."

She wasn't gone five minutes when it sounded like firecrackers exploding in the living room. And screams.

"No! Don't shoot!"

Another boom.

Silence.

Jem jumped from the bed. "Cassie! I have to go help her!"

"No! He might shoot you."

"My daddy wouldn't hurt me. You climb out the window and go next door to Mr. Arnold's house and call the police." Jem ran out of the room.

Bailey's thumping heart jerked in her chest as she turned and stared at the open window.

Another gunshot bolted her into action as footsteps stomped down the hallway. She climbed through the window and ran for all she was worth to the neighbor's.



A week later at the funeral home, Bailey slipped away from the room where three caskets lined the wall. Every time she heard someone say how lucky she was, her insides cringed at how she'd run away. Why did she live and Cassie and Jem and their mother have to die? What if she'd stayed and tried to talk to Mr. Carver? Maybe he would have listened and the twins would still be alive. She should have stayed . . . but sweat ran down her back just thinking about it.

She found the washroom and hunkered down in one of the stalls. She didn't think she could face one more person. The restroom door opened, and Agnes Baker's nasally voice filled the room.

"Such a pity."

Just her luck to be caught in the same room with the worst busybody in Logan Point.

"I know. I heard he started drinking and lost his company and that gorgeous house."

"Really? I hadn't heard that."

"They say he was gambling too. Christine Carver was a saint. And those two beautiful girls. Only ten years old and so sweet and innocent."

Correction. Maude Arnold was the worst busybody. Bailey just hoped they didn't want the stall she was in.

"Well, I've heard that God only takes the best," Agnes said.

"Explains why the Adams girl survived without a scratch."

"Maude, you shouldn't say things like that. And you certainly don't joke about it."

Bailey's cheeks burned as she stared down at her Mary Jane shoes.

"Well, it's true," Maude snapped. "Don't you remember when she hid my keys in Vacation Bible School? And wouldn't tell where they were until I threatened to paddle her? That girl gets into more trouble—"

Bailey flung the stall door open. "Excuse me."

"Bailey! I didn't mean—"

She glared up at Maude. "Yes, you did. You don't think I'm good enough to go to heaven."

She walked out of the washroom, her head held high.

But what if Maude was right?

What if she wasn't good enough?

1

PRESENT DAY

VALLE ROJO, IN CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO

Bailey Adams lifted the 9mm Smith & Wesson and aimed at the water bottle nestled in a bank twenty-five yards away. She squeezed the trigger. The bottle jumped in the air, and she fired again, hitting it once more.

“Bueno!” Elena clapped.

Bailey lifted her eyebrows. “English, please.” Her smile took the sting out of the words.

“Very good. How did you get so good?”

She aimed again. “My dad taught me to shoot when I was fifteen.”

Too bad he hadn’t taught her earlier—maybe Jem and Cassie would still be alive. Her breath hitched. Where did that come from? She hadn’t thought of the twins in years. The gun wavered, the weight too heavy to hold up, and she lowered her hand. She tried to lick her lips, but her mouth had turned to cotton.

“Are you all right?”

She glanced down at the gun. Would she have run away if . . . She shook her head as if to break free of the memory. Woulda,

coulda, shoulda did nothing but keep the memory alive. “Yeah. Now it’s your turn.”

Her friend eyed her but took the gun Bailey held out. Once another plastic bottle was in place, Elena quickly shredded it.

“Very good yourself,” Bailey said.

Elena tilted her head. “You are a strange missionary. You handle a gun like a pistolero, yet you let Father Horatio run you out of the valley. Why?”

Bailey skittered her gaze away from the question in Elena’s eyes. *Because running is what I do.* She holstered the gun. “I think it’s time to head back. Miguel is probably ready to leave, and it’ll take at least thirty minutes to reach your village if we take the lower trail back.”

“Sí. It was kind of Miguel to allow you to come along on his visit to his family.”

That’s what she liked about Elena. She didn’t push subjects Bailey didn’t want to discuss. They hiked in silence along the trail, Bailey admiring the emerald mountain vistas when a clearing allowed an occasional view of the river below. The rest of the time, she mentally ran through her litany of excuses for not staying: it just wasn’t working out . . . she caused more harm than good . . . she was needed at the church school in Chihuahua. Excuses were something else she was good at.

No excuse covered the fact that she hadn’t worked hard enough. If she had, a way would have been found for her to stay. They rounded a bend on the trail, and Bailey caught her breath. Not twenty yards from where she stood, bright flowers dotted a plot of ground. Reds, purples, all colors. Her heart pounded in her throat. Poppies. Mexican opium poppies.

Elena pulled on her arm. “It is not good for us to be here. Come. Quickly.”

Bailey nodded. But as she turned to leave, a man stepped from the rows. His eyes widened when he saw her, then narrowed. She

stared, transfixed by his intense blue eyes. Elena pulled harder. “Run,” she hissed.

He started toward them. “Hey! *Qué haces?*”

Bailey turned and ran the way she’d come. Minutes later, the whine of a four-wheeler split the air. He was coming after them. The trail forked, and she followed Elena on the narrower path.

“This way,” Elena said as she branched off again on an even smaller foot trail.

Thank goodness her friend knew this area. They half-ran and half-stumbled on the overgrown path until they reached the edge of the village. Bailey collapsed against a scrub oak. “Do you think he’ll find us?”

Elena sank beside her. “I doubt he will look. He probably wasn’t even coming after us—there are so many poppy fields around here, if they chased everyone who stumbled across one, they wouldn’t have time to do anything else. He probably was going to check on another plot.”

“When did the farmers start growing poppies?”

Elena shrugged. “A few years ago. At first it was only one or two farms, but now probably half the farmers in the village have poppy fields.”

Bailey had no idea it had gotten that bad in the village. “Did you see the man? He didn’t look like a farmer to me.”

“No. I was running too hard.”

“He was an Anglo.”

“You must be mistaken. Gringos do not come to the poppy fields.”

A shiver crawled down Bailey’s spine. She knew what she saw and would never forget the cold stare he’d fixed on her with eyes the color of blue ice. “I think we should report the field.”

Elena’s fingers clamped her wrist like a vise. “Do you want to get me killed?”

“Of course not.” Bailey struggled for an answer. The villagers

never viewed growing marijuana in the light of others being harmed. It was a way to feed their families and that was all that mattered to them, especially when Father Horatio encouraged it. She didn't realize so many had switched from marijuana to opium.

"Then you will say nothing?"

She held Elena's wide-eyed gaze. With a sigh, she said, "Let me think about it."

Bailey would say nothing for now. The poppy field wasn't going anywhere, and it would be a few weeks before the opium could be harvested. When she came back from the States, she would report it anonymously, and no one would be the wiser.

Elena hugged her. "I wish you didn't have to leave so soon."

"Me too. I miss Valle Rojo."

"You had the best tea parties, and I learned so much at the computer classes. I miss your teaching."

"But not me?" Bailey teased.

"Of course, but it is easier when you are not here to . . ." Her friend frowned. "*Tu pincha mi conciencia.*"

"English." Their friendship had started when Elena wanted to practice her English, but by the time Bailey left Valle Rojo, Elena was even more than a friend. She helped Bailey organize the tea parties that brought the village women to the church and even taught some of the Bible classes.

Elena pressed her lips together. "Sometimes you were like pretty shoes that are too tight."

"I only wanted you to know your worth." She hated that she hadn't been able to make a difference in the village or help her friend deal with an alcoholic husband.

"I know. You just cannot change overnight what has always been."

So she'd discovered. And as usual, she didn't stand well against attack, preferring to cut and run. Still, it hadn't been her decision to leave but the mission board's, after the so-called priest ramped

up his campaign to get rid of her. “Father Horatio could have asked me politely to leave. He didn’t have to put the rattlesnakes in my car. I’m surprised he hasn’t found me today and demand that I leave.”

“He’s in Chihuahua this weekend.”

So that was why Elena had invited her to visit. She’d known the priest would be away. Not that he was an actual priest. The folk-healer-slash-spiritual-mystic had proclaimed himself one and taken the name Father Horatio. And because he had success in healing, many in the village followed him, especially the men.

She’d run afoul of the man when some of the women came to her tea parties, then came back for the Bible studies and stopped following him.

Her friend ducked her head. “I have not told you, but I have been teaching the Bible studies again. And I’ve been thinking about asking Pastor Carlos if I can start the tea parties.”

Pastor Carlos, bless his heart, believed change took place very slowly, and that had been her problem with Father Horatio—Bailey had moved too quickly. She turned to stare at her friend. “Elena, that is absolutely wonderful.”

She lifted her chin. “I got tired of my conscience pinching, and I still had the instructor’s book you left.”

“I always said you were a natural-born teacher.” Bailey smiled at Elena, hoping her friend could see the admiration she felt. To go against Father Horatio took courage. Remembering his vile tactics to get rid of her, Bailey had second thoughts about encouraging Elena. “But would your husband allow it? And Father Horatio—what does he say?”

Elena shrugged. “As long as I’m home to cook his meals and keep his clothes ready, my husband won’t care. And I don’t care what Father Horatio says. He isn’t even a real priest.”

Bailey squeezed her hand. “In three days I fly home, but when I come back, I hope you’ll come to Chihuahua and visit—you

could ride with Miguel sometimes, and I could see to it that you get home. I'd like to show you the school where I teach, maybe give you more material to use with the women here."

Elena broke a stick off the scrub oak tree and scratched the ground with it.

"You will come?" It angered Bailey that for all of Elena's bluster, her husband would be the one who decided.

"I will try. But why do you go home now? Isn't the school in Chihuahua still in session?"

"My sister that I told you about has come back, and—"

"They found her?"

"Yes, and the man who took her has been arrested. I couldn't wait until June to see her. And one of my students needed someone to escort her to visit her grandparents, so I'm killing two birds with one stone." She stood and brushed the seat of her pants. "I better find Miguel and see if he's ready." She took a card from the tote around her waist. "Here's my email address. You can use Pastor Carlos's computer at the church to write me, so I expect to hear from you."

"I will." Elena stood and hugged her. "Be safe. And please do not report what we saw today."

Bailey returned her embrace. "You be safe too."

In the state of Chihuahua, that meant staying under Father Horatio's as well as the drug cartel's radar.



Three days later, Bailey savored the rich atmosphere of the small Chihuahua cafe as the sun warmed her face. She would miss this while she was in Logan Point. A guitar played in the background as she cut up an egg and sausage burrito for the kindergarten student she was accompanying to Mississippi. "Did you show your uncle the new bows I brought for your hair?"

Four-year-old Maria pulled the red and white bows from her

tiny purse. “Do you like them, Uncle Joel? We’re going to put them in my hair after we eat.”

Joel McDermott leaned toward her. “I like them very much, sweetheart. Did you tell Miss Bailey thank you?”

Maria nodded and picked at her food.

The child seemed so much more subdued than at school, but it could be nerves about flying. Or it could be because she was leaving her uncle, who had taken over raising the child after her mother’s death. But Bailey figured once she was with her grandparents, she would perk up.

Bailey speared a piece of sausage for herself and lifted the fork to her mouth. Her eyes widened.

No. It couldn’t be Danny. Not here in Chihuahua.

She returned the fork to her plate as Danny Maxwell sauntered through the outdoor cafe toward their table, his dark blond hair falling over his forehead. The pounding of her heart drowned out the soft guitar music.

He stopped at her table, and she tipped her head up to look at all six feet of him. “Not lost, are you?”

Sea-blue eyes lazily slid from Bailey to her companions, then back to her. “I’d say you were the one lost since I’m a regular to the area. Last I heard, you were in some small town near Mexico City doing your missionary work, not in one of the most dangerous states in Mexico.”

She twisted the napkin in her lap. So he hadn’t heard she’d fled rural Mexico for the city. She took in a breath to steady herself, but he spoke again before she could explain.

“I had no idea that you knew Joel.” He nodded to her companion, then, not waiting for her answer, he shifted his attention to the child. “Hello, Maria. You are looking as pretty as ever.”

She beamed at him. “Hi, Mr. Danny. Do you know my teacher, Miss Bailey?”

“Indeed I do.”

“Did you know she’s taking me to see my grandparents?”

“I didn’t.”

Danny shot Bailey a look she couldn’t read. Surprise, maybe. If so, then they were even. She shifted her gaze from him to her companions. Joel McDermott stared at her, puzzlement in his pale blue eyes, while excitement lit Maria Montoya’s darker blue ones.

Joel pointed first at Bailey then at Danny. “You two know each other?”

“We were engaged once.”

Bailey drilled him with her gaze. “Since I said no to your proposal, we weren’t engaged.”

“You first said yes, then a day later changed your mind. Close enough.” Danny offered his hand to Joel. “Good to see you, man. Just called your secretary for an appointment this afternoon, and she put me off until tomorrow. I understand why now.”

“Wrong conclusion, unfortunately. I’m dropping Bailey and Maria off at the airport and then going back to the office.” Joel took a sip of coffee and then pointed at the chair next to Bailey. “But since you two are friends, why don’t you join us?”

Danny scratched the space above his lip. To hide a grin, she was sure.

“Only until my food arrives.”

He took the chair next to her, and Bailey wanted to disappear. She’d dreaded running into him when she returned home, and now here he was. Why was he being so nice? They hadn’t parted as friends—he’d made it plain that friendship wasn’t what he wanted.

A flutter in her chest made her catch her breath. And why did her heart have to go nuts on her right now? She shook the fog from her brain and addressed Joel. “So how do you and Maria know Danny?”

Danny answered for him. “The company he works for produces the porcelain dinnerware for Maxwell Industries. I met Maria at the office last year.”

The somberness in his eyes made her think it was after Maria's mother had died. In the weeks after the funeral, the child had missed school on numerous occasions, and Bailey discovered later that she'd spent the time in the care of one or more of the secretaries in Joel's office.

"And he took me to get an ice cream." Maria's eyes danced.

It was clear she had succumbed to Danny's charm. That she remembered him surprised Bailey. But he was a hard one to forget—she ought to know.

"Do you live close to Miss Bailey? Maybe I can come see you too."

Danny shot her a quick look. "You're coming to Logan Point as well?"

Bailey nodded. "While Maria is spending a couple of weeks with her grandparents, I'll stop off in Logan Point. Robyn's home and I want to see her." She'd asked for a leave as soon as she learned Robyn was home, and then Joel had asked if she would take Maria with her.

"What Robyn did was amazing. And I've never seen anyone change as much as she has," Danny said.

"You've seen her?"

"Yeah. In town at Molly's Diner with her daughter and husband." He chewed his bottom lip. "So you planned on slipping in and then leaving, hoping I wouldn't find out."

"I didn't say that." She was not discussing their past in front of Joel. She checked her watch. Their flight wasn't until two thirty. Four more hours. She wished it was sooner so they would have an excuse to leave. She glanced at Maria's half-eaten food. "Finish your meal, sweetie. We have a plane to catch."

"If you had let me know," Danny said, "I could have flown you home in my plane and saved you the hassle of flying commercially."

"That would have been super." Joel raked his fingers through his short-cropped red hair. "We could still—"

"No." She had no intention of flying home with Danny. Being

that close to him for however long it took to fly home would not work. Especially with him in that black cashmere turtleneck that hugged his lean body and showed he'd been working out. "We've already made plans to leave today, and besides, your parents are expecting us tonight."

Danny pricked her heart with his slow smile that always made her feel like she was the only one in the world who mattered.

"I had a friend who flew out of Chihuahua a while back. Plane had mechanical problems, and he sat in the airport for ten hours before boarding. How about I program my Mexico number into your phone. That way if there is a delay, you can call me. I'm sure her grandparents would rather wait a day than to have Maria all exhausted."

"Great idea," Joel said. He waited for Bailey to hand her phone over.

She fumbled in her purse and finally dragged out the smartphone Joel had given her and handed it to him. "Thank you for being so thoughtful, although I bet your friend wasn't flying a premier airline." Neither of them even seemed to notice the saccharine in her voice.

Danny held his phone out. "I don't have your number for Mexico. Why don't you put it in?"

She took the phone and punched in her number, purposefully transposing the last two digits. She did not want him calling her. When he leaned over to exchange phones again, his woody after-shave brought back memories she wanted to forget.

"Good. Glad we got that settled." Joel turned to Danny. "Now, what did you want to discuss?"

"I'll catch you tomorrow. I'm sure you and Bailey have things you need to talk about before you take them to the airport."

Bailey jumped on the opportunity. "Joel, we do have a few things to go over."

"And my food has arrived, so I'll take my leave." Danny stood

and flipped his gaze over her once more. “Be sure and call when you get to Logan Point.”

“Oh, I will.” As soon as he left, the frozen smile slid from her lips. She slipped the phone back into her purse. Like she’d ever call him.