

LOGAN POINT ■ 1

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

A NOVEL

PATRICIA
BRADLEY



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To Jesus, my Lord and Savior

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1

*Death unfolds like a budding flower,
Tentatively, sweetly.
Unfurling in majestic power
Until then, my love . . . until then.*

Black roses last week, now spidery words scrawled on a scrap of paper with “Meade Funeral Home” printed across the top. Someone was stalking her, and they wanted her to know it.

Taylor Martin sucked in a sharp breath and tried to ignore the icy shiver traversing her body.

He was here.

Hair raised on the back of her neck. She turned in a circle. Heavy clouds hung low, shrouding the tall firs with their mist. An air ambulance waited in the clearing to lift off for Seattle as soon as Beth Coleman’s vitals stabilized. Only a few members of the search and rescue team remained at the crime scene, packing their gear.

Whether he was one of the men who came out to comb the woods for the kidnapper and his victims, or he’d simply followed her here to this remote area southwest of Seattle, it didn’t matter. What mattered was that he’d been close enough to touch her, to put the note in her pocket.

To kill her.

An artery in her temple pulsed. He had to know she volunteered her profiling skills to the Newton County Sheriff's Department.

A puff of wind brought a light fragrance. Old Spice. The scent her dad had worn. She frowned, seeking the source of the after-shave, but only encountered Dale Atkins striding toward her. The leathery-faced sheriff was her advisor and, tonight, her chauffeur. It wasn't him—Dale was a Grey Flannel man.

Perhaps the stranger with him? Her gaze flicked over him, barely registering the broad shoulders, plaid shirt, and jeans. No, too young for Old Spice. She looked past him and realized the scent had dissipated.

Had she imagined it?

The sheriff touched her arm. "You're white as a sheet."

She held up the scrap of paper. Old Spice tickled her nose again. She sniffed it and made a face. Aftershave lingered, potent. Another piece to add to the puzzle.

"Taylor, what is it?"

"This was in my coat pocket." She shoved the paper at him. "Someone wants me dead."

Dale scanned it, his eyebrows pinching together in a frown. "How did it get there?"

"I don't know." Taylor wrapped her arms across her stomach.

He tore a sheet from his notebook and folded it into a pouch before putting the note inside. "Have you worn your jacket all day?"

"Not all day." Her teeth chattered, and she ran her hands up and down her arms. "Lunchtime. I took it off then. Slipped it back on when the helicopter arrived for Beth Coleman."

Dale took off his black cap with "Newton County Sheriff" across it and smoothed his gray hair. "Could it have been in your pocket awhile?"

"No." She fisted her hands. "I haven't worn the jacket since it came from the cleaners."

"Are you sure?" He waved his hand at the expanse of Douglas firs. "We're—"

“I know where we are. In the middle of a logging road a hundred miles from nowhere.” She caught her breath as heat crawled up her face. This was not like her. “I’m sorry. Can I see the note again?”

Taylor unfolded the pouch and studied the words. The cadence and the words reminded her of a student in her victim profiling class—the Goth student who’d been popping up in odd places, like the pharmacy and the jewelry store. The one she figured had left the anonymous boxes of candy on her desk and then the flowers.

The black roses were what made her zero in on him—they matched his black hoodie and black jeans and black hair—black everything—but she’d dismissed it all as a student’s crush. But candid photos and now this note were not things she could just dismiss. “Scott Sinclair has been following me, and a couple of his papers had notes like this doodled in the margin.”

The stranger stiffened. “I don’t know what’s in that note, but Scott wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

The words shot from his mouth, his Southern accent zinging Taylor, reminding her of how syllable by syllable her ex-fiancé had hammered her drawl away. For the first time, she really looked at the man who stood shoulder to shoulder with the six-foot-one sheriff. Around her age, maybe a little older. Thirty at most. And with the saddest, most beautiful hazel eyes she’d ever seen.

Taylor took in the planes of his face and wondered whether he fought a losing battle with his beard each day or if the five o’clock shadow was deliberate. Either way, he carried it well. But he didn’t look like law enforcement, which was what Taylor assumed he was when she had seen him with Atkins earlier. Up close, she realized he wore his hair too shaggy for a cop. More like a lumberjack. Probably with the search and rescue team.

She cocked her head at him. “And you know this, how?”

“I’m sorry,” Dale said. “I should have already introduced you two. Nick Sinclair, Dr. Taylor Martin from Conway University. She found the link between the kidnapper and the Colemans.”

The sheriff put his hand on her shoulder. “This young lady is

well known in the field of victomology and teaches a pilot class at the university. She aims to be the best profiler in the country one day. Personally, I think she's already the best."

Taylor's cheeks blazed at the sheriff's high praise. But she wasn't that young. She'd be twenty-nine in exactly one month, June seventeenth. She looked away, catching sight of the air corpsman as he slammed the helicopter bay shut. She hoped Beth Coleman made it to Seattle.

Dale chuckled. "She doesn't like me bragging on her, either."

She shrugged. "It's not really about being the best, just doing my best."

He nodded toward the stranger. "Nick is a writer."

Taylor almost snorted. "Researching a book, I suppose."

"No. I'm looking for my brother. Scott Sinclair."



Maybe Nick's tough love campaign with his alcoholic brother had been all wrong. He tried to wrap his mind around the accusation this Dr. Martin had leveled at Scott. Kind of hard when the woman had taken his breath away. Not that he hadn't noticed her statuesque beauty when he first arrived at the crime scene earlier in the afternoon.

She had the kind of beauty found in high-class fashion magazines—raven hair pulled into a silky ponytail and cheekbones most models would kill for. But it'd been the startling blue eyes that drew him in like a boy to candy. Right now, they were flashing lightning bolts at him. Just like Angie's when he'd rubbed her the wrong way. "What do you have against my brother, anyway?" The private investigator's report hadn't indicated bad blood between Scott and the professor. Only that he'd taken a couple of her courses.

"Nothing." She tapped the pouch. "This sounds like something he'd write."

His brother a stalker? No way. "Do you mind if I read it?"

"You've got to be kidding. This is evidence."

“What does it say, then?” He didn’t blink under her intense scrutiny.

“It’s a poem,” she said finally. “Death unfolds like a budding flower, tentatively . . .”

She could quit reading any time. The poem sliced through his memory with the precision of a laser. *Unfurling in majestic power* . . . “You say it’s on a funeral home’s letterhead?”

“Yep.”

Was it possible . . . no. Scott would never hurt anyone. But he had still lived at home when the verses first appeared in one of Nick’s short stories. Nick licked his lips, his conscience prodding him to reveal the words were his. “This poem—”

Three hundred yards away the helicopter screamed to life, drowning out his voice, and the moment of confession passed. He turned toward the chopper, blinking against the wind that whipped his body. Less than a minute later a steady *whop-whop* filled the air as the orange chopper lifted with the victim.

When the noise abated, the sheriff cleared his throat. “Be a miracle if Beth Coleman makes it to Harborview alive.”

“Yeah.” Even though he wasn’t from the Seattle area, Nick had heard of the level-one trauma center. He said a silent prayer as the chopper disappeared over the tree line. Taylor, he noted, said nothing, her blue eyes unreadable.

A deputy called to the sheriff, and with a nod, Atkins pocketed the note and left them.

Taylor stuffed her hands in her pockets. “So, why are you here looking for your brother?”

“Because he’s the only family I have left, and I haven’t seen him in almost three years.” Not since he showed up drunk at Angie’s funeral.

Her expression softened. “I’m sorry about that, but why here? At this crime scene?”

“Oh.” He’d misunderstood her. “I didn’t intend to come to the crime scene. I had a lead Scott was in Newton, and when I

stopped by the sheriff's office this afternoon to discuss it, Sheriff Atkins wasn't in since he was here, but I overheard the dispatcher give directions to one of the search and rescue teams, and I sort of tagged along, thinking I might get a chance to talk with the sheriff."

"But you stayed. And it's almost eight o'clock."

The beautiful professor had noticed him. A pang of guilt tempered the pleasure from that knowledge. Then the undercurrent of her words nailed him. "Okay, so you were right. I figured out pretty quickly the sheriff doesn't know where Scott is, but I was here, and I thought I could help . . . and I don't often get a chance to do research like this."

She rested an elbow on one hand and tapped her finger against her jaw. "Okay, that explains why you're here today, but what took you so long to look for him? You said he'd been missing for three years."

"I didn't say he was missing." He flushed. He didn't know this professor, and he certainly didn't want to air all his problems with his brother. Or that he'd been practicing tough love, hoping Scott would hit rock bottom and reach out to him. Except it hadn't worked, and recently he'd felt an urgency to locate his brother. "I . . . had cut off contact with him and lost track of where he was living. I only engaged the investigator recently." He stiffened at her questioning gaze. She was waiting for why, but why was none of her business.

"I see. Well, if you find your brother—"

"Dr. Martin!"

A man hurried toward them holding his small daughter tight against his chest. The sheriff had identified him earlier as the victim's husband, Jim Coleman. Nick's gaze shifted to Taylor, and the naked longing in her eyes rocked him. A knife twisted in his heart. He'd seen that look before in his wife's eyes when she'd talked about wanting children.

"Thank you, Doctor." Jim grasped Taylor's hand, pumping it.

"Nothing to thank me for—just doing my job." Taylor nudged

a rotted branch with the toe of her shoe. Dank spores blew over the rotting leaves, filling the air with their musty scent.

Jim hugged his daughter closer. “No. You’re the only one who believed me. You saved my daughter and my wife.”

Little Sarah blinked open her eyes and pulled her thumb from her puckered lips. “Will Mommy be okay?”

The child’s chocolate-brown eyes stared up at Taylor, her brows knit together. Alarm darted across the professor’s face. “I—”

“I told you, honey. She’ll be fine.” Coleman smoothed a strand of blonde hair from her eyes. “She’s going to the hospital . . . I promise. They’ll make her all better.”

It was plain Taylor didn’t want to mislead the child, but as Sarah continued her doe-eyed gaze, Taylor sucked in a breath. “I’m sure your daddy’s right.”

“Thank you,” he mouthed, then nodded and hurried to his car.

“You did the right thing,” Nick said.

Taylor exhaled a long breath. “I don’t know. What if she doesn’t make it?”

“She could definitely use a miracle.”

This time there was no mistaking Taylor’s pursed lips.



Taylor stared at the ground, seeing the image of Beth Coleman lying in the wet leaves, blood staining her cashmere sweater. Miracle? That meant she’d have to pray, and if she thought it’d do any good, she would. It wasn’t that she didn’t believe in God or that she didn’t believe he answered prayers for some people. He just didn’t answer hers.

“Sorry to have to leave you, but I have work to do.” She turned to walk up the hill where Dale was wrapping up the investigation. “If you find your brother, call the sheriff, please,” she called over her shoulder.

“Wait, I’d like to discuss Scott with you.”

Something in his voice halted her. What was it he’d said? *He’s the*

only family I have left. She glanced at the third finger on his left hand. A wedding band. The sad eyes. “Your family, what happened to them?”

“What?” Nick took a step back.

Taylor rubbed the burning in her neck. She was too tired to be standing here having this conversation with Nick Sinclair, and it wasn’t like her to be so direct, but something about Nick made her want to know. Besides, it was too late to take back her question. She lightened her tone. “You said Scott was all the family you have left. What happened?”

He kicked at a dirt clump, and mud smeared across the toe of his cowboy boot. “My wife . . . died over two years ago, my parents a long time before that. I have to find Scott.”

Their deaths explained his acquaintance with grief. And she understood grief. It also explained why he felt he had to find his brother. “I have to finish up here, but if you want to stop by the university tomorrow, we can talk. Just call me first.”

She rattled off her cell number, then wondered if she should have. It might be an invitation to disaster, given the way her heart kicked up a notch when he looked at her with those eyes.

He jotted her number on a card and snapped a short salute. “Yes, ma’am.”

As Taylor walked the short distance toward the command center, a coroner’s hearse crept along the logging road with the kidnaper’s body. His suicide meant no answers to some of her questions about why he kidnapped Beth Coleman and her daughter. A shadow crossed her heart. She half-halted, the skin on her neck prickling.

Someone was watching her.

She scanned to the left. One of the men who’d helped with the search ducked his head. She started toward him, noting his longish hair and camouflage hunting jacket. As she got closer, his fingers flew over his phone. Texting. Not stalking her.

Just peachy. Was she destined to suspect every scruffy male who glanced her way? Taylor retraced her steps.

“Ready to take me home?” she asked when she found Dale.

“Give me a minute with Zeke.”

“Sure.” As long as Taylor didn’t have to deal with the prickly Zeke Thornton. Dale’s chief deputy challenged her on every idea she came up with, always asking *why*, and if she was honest, he probably made her better. But he could be so irritating.

Taylor leaned against the sheriff’s cruiser as the minute stretched into forty-five, and the gray twilight turned into nighttime dark. The kind of dark where you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. The kind of dark that made her think of her dad. The kind of dark she hated.

Finally, Dale returned, and Taylor slid into the passenger side and fastened her seat belt, inhaling the stale odor inside the aging patrol car that had seen too many cups of coffee and onion-topped burgers. Thoughts of her dad lingered. Tomorrow she would delve again into her search for him, but at this point, all she had was a cold trail that was getting colder.

Dale’s voice cut into her thoughts as he pulled the Crown Vic onto the highway. “You did a good job today. You worked that crime scene like a pointer hunts quail. You didn’t give up.”

“Yeah, but with Ralph Jenkins’s death, we can only guess why.” Still, the sheriff’s words soothed the aches in her body. At times she felt like a bird dog on the hunt, sniffing through evidence, looking for the connection between victim and assailant hidden beneath the surface 75 percent of the time. Today her instincts homed in on the father’s past and scored a direct hit. Except, something bothered her about the case, but nothing she could put her finger on. She sighed. It was probably that she couldn’t question the kidnapper.

“I wish Coleman had told us sooner about that wreck fifteen years ago.” The kidnapping and shooting appeared to be Jenkins’s revenge for the death of his wife and girls in an accident that hadn’t been anyone’s fault.

“Well, you were dead-on right.”

Yeah, she had great instincts when it came to other people. So why was finding her father so difficult? And on more than one level.

She unwrapped a lemon drop, then popped it in her mouth, the candy tart on her tongue. Her cell phone rang, and she glanced at the ID. “Do you know anyone with a 901 area code?”

“Not off hand,” Dale said.

She answered, putting the phone on speaker. “Martin.”

“Dr. Martin? This is Nick Sinclair. Scott’s brother.”

“Yes?” She should have known giving him her number would prove to be a mistake.

“I know it’s late, but I’d really like to talk to you about my brother tonight.”

“I’m busy right now. And I don’t want to discuss him over the phone.” She checked her watch. Nine-thirty. She never went to bed before midnight, anyway, and this might be an opportunity to get information on Scott. “However, I’ll be home shortly, and I can give you thirty minutes.”

“That’d be great. I won’t stay longer than that, I promise.”

After giving him her address, she hung up and turned to the sheriff. “Can you hang around?”

“Sure. I have a couple of questions for him myself.”

Taylor slipped the phone in her pocket. What could be so urgent to Nick Sinclair that he couldn’t wait until tomorrow? She thought of the poem. Could he have slipped it in her jacket? No, he hadn’t been around for the other “presents.” “What’s your take on the poem? Do you think it’s Scott Sinclair?”

“Possibly. What’s more important is why you think it’s him.”

“I didn’t until I received the black roses. I had no clue who was sending me candy.” In late March, every week a box of Godiva chocolates had been placed on her desk. No one ever saw the gifter, but Taylor figured one of the male students had a crush on her. That happened sometimes with a student and a professor. Then in late April, the black long-stemmed roses appeared.

“Those roses sure fit that strange getup he wears,” Dale said. “What do the kids call it? Goth?”

“Yeah.” Scott always showed up in class wearing a black T-shirt

under a black Nike jacket with a hoodie, black jeans, and black tennis shoes. And jet-black hair.

“Those photos, though. They put a different slant on the situation, and now this note really changes it. I’ll bring him in for questioning again.”

The photos had arrived right after the roses. Shots of her shopping, jogging, at the pharmacy, at a ball game, Taylor doing everyday tasks. Just knowing whoever took the pictures lurked that close sent a shiver through her body.

Dale had questioned Scott after the photos arrived, but the only connection to him had been the black roses, and even that had been tenuous. Several stores in the area sold the flowers, and none of the clerks identified Scott. With no concrete evidence, the sheriff couldn’t hold him.

“I can usually size someone up pretty quick, and Scott Sinclair didn’t strike me as dangerous,” Dale said.

“Same with me. He was always somewhat shy, especially in those first classes last fall. Turned beet red when I asked him about the candy and roses. Mumbled something about not knowing what I was talking about. But then he dropped my class.”

The sheriff turned his blinker on and made a right turn. “The thing is, no one saw him at the crime scene. How did he get the note in your coat?”

Taylor had asked herself that same question over and over. And came up blank. “He could’ve changed his look, and there were a lot of volunteers.” She picked at a hangnail. “Maybe it wasn’t him. Could’ve been anyone, even someone at the cleaners.”

“I’ll check that tomorrow. It also could be connected to a past case, even before you came to Newton.” Dale drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. “You’ve helped to put away a couple of pretty bad guys, and criminals have long memories and bigger grudges.”

“Sometimes I think I should have stayed in my nice, safe classroom.”

“You have a cop’s heart, Taylor.”

She didn't know about that. Her thoughts chased around in her head. "The paper doesn't actually have my name on it. Maybe it's just a sick joke."

"We're going to check it out. Until then, you need to be extra careful."

Taylor intended to do just that. She swayed against her seat belt as the sheriff turned onto Rainey Road and picked up speed.

Dale rested his hand on the armrest between their seats. "Um, how're you doing? About, you know—"

"Fine." Taylor clipped the word off, then softened her voice. "I *really* don't want to talk about Michael."

Silence rode with them for a mile before Dale reached and patted her arm. "You were too good for him. You're young. Give it time."

She turned and stared though the window at the dimly lit houses whizzing by. Her biological clock ticked off another day every twenty-four hours. Of course, women bore children into their late thirties and early forties now. Which was fortunate, given her history with men. But that history made dreams of having children, the white picket fence, and the fairy-tale ending rather unlikely. The image of little Sarah Coleman in her dad's arms sent an ache through her chest.

The front tire centered a pothole, jarring her.

"Sorry, didn't see that." He cocked his head toward her without taking his eyes off the road. "There's something I tell my girls. At the right time, God will bring the right man into your life, but you have to wait for his timing."

"Let it go, Dale." Like God even cared. "I'm not looking for anyone."

Nick Sinclair's face with his day-old beard surfaced in her mind. *No*. He would be the last person she would ever date. Too good looking, like Michael. Not that he'd be interested in her—she'd just accused his brother of stalking.

They neared her winding driveway, and the car slowed, then turned beside her mailbox. "If you'll let me out here, I'll pick up my mail." Taylor unbuckled her seat belt. She'd rather get her mail

now, before he left. After getting out, she poked her head back in the car. “Go ahead, I’ll walk.”

Dale’s brows knit together.

“Climbing back in just isn’t worth the effort,” she said.

“Make the effort. We’ve just been talking about someone stalking you. And, it’s pitch black. Not even a moon.”

“Come on, it’s not like you’re leaving me—you’ll be at the end of the drive. Besides, you won’t be here tomorrow night when I get in from the university.” Taylor tried to laugh, but the sound stuck in her chest. She wished she’d never told him how she hated the dark. She straightened her shoulders. Time to face the monster under the bed. “I need to do this.”

“Sorry.” He shook his head. “You don’t have to get back in the car, though. I’ll just drive slowly ahead of you.”

High winds moaned through the pines in her yard as she fished a penlight from her purse and pointed the beam toward the ground. Taylor retrieved several envelopes from her box, almost losing them in a gust of wind loaded with the threat of rain.

The tiny light flickered then came back to life, cutting a narrow swath through the darkness between her and Dale’s cruiser ahead. Her feet crunched on the loose gravel, the only sound other than the wind. She focused on the bouncing light until she rounded the curve.

Dale parked and climbed out of the cruiser. He jerked his head toward her house. “Why didn’t you leave your porch light on?”

Hadn’t she? Taylor tried to think back to when she left. She remembered now, the bulb had burned out. “I meant to replace the bulb this morning, but I forgot.”

They climbed the steps, and Taylor fumbled in her purse for her key. “You don’t have to do this.”

“Did you forget Nick Sinclair is dropping by?”

She slapped her head. “It’s been a long day.”

“It wouldn’t matter if he wasn’t coming.” His face cracked into a grin. “I do it all the time for my girls. We get together for dinner, and afterward I go in and check out their apartment. Make sure it’s secure—it’s what dads do.”

The words echoed in her empty heart. For a second, she envied Dale's daughters. She unlocked the door and let him go ahead of her.

"Where's the light switch?"

"I'll get it." Taylor followed him into the house. A strong odor of Old Spice filled her nose as she flipped on the living room light.

Nothing. Her flashlight cast an eerie circle on the far wall, then flickered and snuffed out. Taylor swallowed a cry and shook the light. Her heart hammered against her ribs. The light twitched on again, a faint shaft in the dark.

"Get out of here." Dale shoved her toward the door. He barked into his shoulder mic. "I need backup, 302 Rainey Road. Now!"

He unsnapped his holster and pulled his gun. Footsteps scuffed somewhere to her left. Before she pinpointed the direction, a bone crunched and Dale yelled. His gun spit flame, and a deafening roar boomed in the enclosed space. Gunpowder burned her nostrils.

"Dale! Where are you?" Taylor swept the dim light to her left. He lay crumpled on the floor. A man whirled toward her with a pipe in his hand, his face hidden by a hood, a Nike emblem on his jacket. The flashlight flickered off again. *No! Stay on!*

Darkness pressed in on Taylor. She couldn't move. Old Spice threatened to smother her.

Air whooshed overhead. She jerked back, kicked, and slammed into soft tissue.

"Umph."

Taylor dropped to the floor and scrambled for Dale's gun, her fingers probing under his body. Blood pounded in her temples. The gun wasn't there. He groaned. Had to get him out. Her breath ragged, she stood and tugged at him.

The pipe sliced the air again. She ducked—not low enough. Pain slammed down the side of her skull then her shoulder. White light pierced her vision, splintering into a thousand points ringed with darkness. Taylor staggered, grabbing air. Strength flowed from her body. She fought the black fog filling her head.