

LOGAN POINT ■ 2

A
**PROMISE
TO PROTECT**

A NOVEL

**PATRICIA
BRADLEY**



Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Patricia Bradley, *A Promise to Protect*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2014. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2014 by Patricia Bradley

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2281-4 (pbk.)

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Patricia Bradley, *A Promise to Protect*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2014. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

1

Tony Jackson shouldn't be dying in a ritzy hotel room in downtown Memphis on a hot July night.

He shouldn't be dying at all.

"Who shot you?" Sheriff Ben Logan pressed a blood-soaked towel against the victim's chest. The left sleeve of Tony's Armani suit had bullet holes where he'd lifted his arm in defense. Otherwise the bullet would have killed him instantly.

This meeting wasn't supposed to go this way. Tony would show up, deliver his information. Ben would save the day.

The coppery scent that hung heavy in the air turned his stomach as Tony's life drained away, his blood staining the plush white carpet. Ben cradled Tony's head and glanced toward the opened door. Where was that ambulance?

Tony wrapped his fingers around Ben's wrist, and Ben leaned closer to the man he couldn't keep from dying. "Stay with me, man."

"Tell Leigh . . ." Tony's breath grew shallow. "I'm . . . sorry." The grip faltered.

"Hang on, buddy."

Sirens. Ben snapped a look behind him to where a few people had gathered in the hallway. "Tell them to hurry."

"Your dad . . ." Tony closed his eyes and took a shuddering breath then coughed, blood gurgling in his chest.

Ben jerked back to the dying man. “What about my dad?”
“I’m sorry . . . should’ve told . . .” He coughed again. “Something . . . got to tell . . . Blue . . . dog . . .”

“Don’t die on me.” What did Tony know about his dad’s shooting?

“Both know . . .” Tony’s voice faded.

Ben eased the man’s head up. “Stay with me. Tell me who did this to you.”

Tony closed his eyes, then his lips moved, and Ben strained to hear.

“Protect . . . Leigh.”

“Come on, man, you’ll—”

Tony’s eyes popped open, the light in them fading. “Promise . . .”

Ben couldn’t escape the haunting gaze. “I . . .” The words lodged in his throat.

Tony tightened his fingers on Ben’s wrist. “Say it.”

“I . . .” He swallowed. “I promise.” The grip eased as Tony slumped in his arms and slipped into eternity.

A low moan escaped Ben’s lips. He dropped his head, sending a prayer heavenward as Tony’s death settled in his chest like lead. He’d let him down. *Just like with Tommy Ray*. Ben pushed the thought aside. Revisiting the past wouldn’t bring either back.

He pulled his arm free from under the body and stood. What a waste. Tony had been only a few years older than Ben, thirty-five at most. He’d liked what he’d known of Leigh’s brother, even though they hadn’t run in the same circles. By day, Tony worked at Maxwell Industries as the chief financial officer, and by night he gambled with the high rollers.

Tonight, he’d gambled and lost.

Ben’s hands curled into fists. Tony’s death was wrong on so many levels, but now the living became his priority. Unclenching his fists, he tugged his cell phone from his pocket and dialed his chief deputy. “Wade, what’s your location?”

“I’m at the Thunderbird.”

“Get over to Bradford General and shadow Leigh Somerall.”

“Come on, Ben, it’s my night off. I have a date.”

“I don’t care if you’re in the middle of proposing, get over there. Someone murdered her brother. They may be after Leigh too.”

“Tony’s dead?” Shock rang in Wade’s voice. “How?”

“I’ll fill you in later. Just get over there and keep her under surveillance.”

“Do you want me to tell her about Tony?”

Ben fingered a small Boy Scout medallion in his pocket. It’d be so easy to let Wade take care of this. He could even plead he needed to stay and aid the Memphis Police. *Coward.* “No. I’ll tell her. Just keep your eye on her until I get there.”

Ben broke the connection and slapped the phone against his palm. He didn’t have a clue how he’d tell Leigh her brother was dead. He knelt one last time by Tony’s body.

Protect Leigh. Tony’s dying request.

How could he protect someone who hated his guts?

Ben rocked back on his heels. Tony had mentioned a flash drive when he’d called earlier in the day. On the off chance the killer hadn’t taken it, he wrapped his hand in a handkerchief and checked Tony’s pockets, not only for the USB drive but for his cell phone. Knowing who Tony had talked with today might help in the investigation. His eyes widened when he pulled out an almost-inch-thick wad of folded one-hundred-dollar bills. Maybe Tony was going over to the casinos in Tunica after their meeting.

But there was no flash drive and no cell phone. Just like there’d be no information on what Tony knew about Ben’s dad.

Getting that information was why Ben had driven to the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, room 5210, where he’d discovered Tony dying in a pool of his own blood.

Rising, he glanced around the room. From what he could see, Tony hadn’t brought luggage or clothing. The black duvet cover appeared untouched, and the gold damask draperies were closed.

An unopened bottle of Scotch sat on a corner table beside the wing-back chair. On the floor, a silver ice bucket lay near the doorway.

In his mind's eye, Ben saw Tony set the Scotch on the table and pick up the ice bucket. The killer must've been waiting for him when he opened the door. Backed him into the room, then "Bang! You're dead." Probably used a silencer. Then all he had to do was close the door and walk down the hall like any other guest.

Ben stepped out into the burgundy-carpeted hall as the elevator dinged and paramedics spilled out. He held up his hand. "You're too late."

Another elevator opened, and Detective Olivia Reynolds emerged, flanked by two uniformed cops. He groaned. A homicide detective with the Memphis Police Department . . . and his cousin. She was not going to be happy he'd brought a murder to her doorstep. "I don't remember saying anything about a homicide when I called 911."

"I was in the neighborhood." Livy's mouth quirked upward. "And hello to you too, Ben. What brings you to Memphis?"

"Checking out a lead." He jerked his head toward the open door and then followed the petite detective inside the room.

His usually unflappable cousin caught her breath. "Tony Jackson? He's the victim?"

"Afraid so."

"Oh, man, this is bad." She stared at the body. "I just saw him at church on Sunday."

Even though Livy lived in Memphis, she still made the thirty-minute drive to church in Logan Point each Sunday.

"Tony was coming to church?"

She eyed him. "Yeah. But you'd have to be there to know."

Heat crawled up his neck. "Hey, by the time I ride herd on those nine- and ten-year-olds in Sunday school, I need a break. Was Leigh with him?"

"You didn't need a break *before* Pastor John started his series

on forgiveness. But to answer your question, no, Leigh wasn't with him. Does she know what's happened?"

"Not yet."

"I don't envy you, having to tell her." She gave him a thoughtful stare. "Didn't you and Leigh have a thing for each other in college?"

He shot her the flintiest stare he knew how. Yeah, they'd had a thing, and hearing from her this week had almost blown him away. "*Ben, Tony needs your help.*" Even now, his heart thumped a little harder, remembering her voice. That was why he'd kept his distance since she returned to Logan Point six weeks ago, a widow with a young son. He'd stayed just close enough to know she still had that chestnut hair framing her face. His memory supplied the rest. Green eyes. Porcelain skin. A smattering of freckles across her nose.

"What happened?" Livy flicked her hand. "Oh, I forgot, you're Mr. Love 'Em and Leave 'Em."

"She did the leaving." He squared his shoulders. "Let's get my statement over with so I can go. I don't want someone else getting to Leigh first. She may not be safe." Wade should've called by now.

"What are you talking about?"

"Tony's last words . . . he told me to protect her."

"You think whoever did this might go after Leigh?"

"I don't know. Tony didn't live long enough for me to find out. I've sent Wade to shadow her at the hospital, but he hasn't checked in."

Livy took out a notepad and pen. "Let's step out into the hallway, and you can tell me why a Mississippi sheriff is involved in a Memphis murder. But first, are you carrying?"

He pulled out the .38 Smith and Wesson holstered in his front pocket and handed it to her. "Hasn't been fired since I cleaned it two days ago."

She took the gun and sniffed the barrel before handing it back to him. He followed her into the hallway, where the two uniforms stood guard. "Why were you meeting Tony *here*? Why not in Logan Point?"

Ben slipped the gun back in his jeans. “No clue. He called me on my cell phone this afternoon. Said if I’d meet him at the Peabody, he’d give me information on Dad’s shooting and a flash drive he said the U.S. Marshals would be interested in.”

“What was on it?”

Ben glanced toward the door, the taste of disappointment bitter. “Not a clue—he didn’t get a chance to tell me anything, and he doesn’t have the flash drive on him. His cell phone is missing too. But he does have a wad of hundreds.”

“You went through his pockets?”

“You would have done the same thing.” He rubbed the knotted muscles in the back of his neck.

“You know better than to—”

“Look, Tony was from Logan Point. I’m sworn to protect the people there, and I let him down. I thought I might find something to help me catch whoever did this.” He pulled himself up to his full six-one height. “I want to work with you, Olivia, but either way, I’ll get the person who did this. His murderer will be brought to justice.”

She pursed her lips. He felt heat rising in his face, but he held her steady gaze.

Livy gave him a hint of a nod. “We’ll work together.” She scribbled in the notepad then tapped her pen against the page. “Why would he be carrying so much money?”

“Tony liked to gamble.”

“Did he say anything other than the bit about Leigh?”

Ben replayed the scene in his head. “Something about blue and a dog, but I have no idea what that’s a reference to.”

“Was she aware you were meeting Tony tonight?”

“I don’t know. She contacted me a couple of days ago, said Tony wanted to talk to me, but not on the jail line. I gave her my cell phone number.”

“Why didn’t he want to talk to you on the land line? Did he suspect your phone is bugged? Have you checked it?”

“Do you think I’m totally incompetent?”

“Don’t get testy. What did he say when he called?”

“He wanted me to get in touch with the U.S. Marshals Service. Said he had information they would be interested in, and he was bringing it tonight.”

“Why did he come to you instead of going straight to them?”

“It’s no secret I have friends in the U.S. Marshals Service. Guess he figured I might have pretty good connections.”

Livy paused in her note taking and glanced up at him. “Didn’t you interview with them about a job?”

“Yeah.”

“What happened?”

“They filled it.” He avoided her gaze, instead stared at the gold numbers beside the door to the hotel room. His dad would still be sheriff of Bradford County if Ben had been with him instead of in Memphis on that interview. “All I’m interested in now is keeping my town safe and finding out who shot my dad. And Tony.”

The corner of Livy’s mouth turned down as she put the pen in her purse. “I stopped by the house the other day to see Sheriff Tom. He tried to talk, so I think he knew me. He just couldn’t say my name.”

The stroke had happened on the operating table while the doctors dug out the bullet. “The speech therapist doesn’t give us much hope that he’ll get a lot better. Appreciate you stopping by—visitors do him good.”

Ben’s cell rang, and he jerked it from his pocket. Wade. He didn’t bother with preliminaries. “Is Leigh okay?”

Wade cleared his throat. “I can’t find her.”



“Hi, this is Tony. Sorry I missed your call. Leave your num—”

Dr. Leigh Somerall punched End on her phone and then jerked open the door to the stairwell and hurried up the steps from the

Bradford General's cafeteria to the first floor. Why wasn't Tony answering?

He was fine. He was with Ben Logan.

Ben. The name evoked memories better left in the past. But he'd promised to help her brother, and the sheriff better not disappoint this time.

At the nurses' station, the RN on duty handed her a sheet of paper. "Jimmy West's PT and INR as well as his CBC came back while you were downstairs. Looks like it was a nonpoisonous snakebite after all."

"Thank you, Cathy." Leigh glanced over the report then made a notation on the nine-year-old boy's chart and handed it back to the nurse. Her first snakebite case. "After I talk to the parents, you can unhook him from the IV."

Cathy bent over the keyboard, typing in the discharge orders. She raised up. "Oh, I almost forgot. The ward clerk said Wade Hatcher was looking for you."

Leigh's heart hitched. Maybe it was about Tony. Or not. The last time she saw Wade, she got the distinct impression he intended to ask her out. "Do you know what he wanted?"

Cathy shrugged and shook her head.

Leigh glanced past the RN, searching in vain for Ben's stocky deputy. Evidently it wasn't too important. She tucked the chart under her arm and knocked on the patient's door before pushing it open.

Jimmy's mother leaned against the wall, her arms crossed and eyes closed. His father sat beside the ER bed, holding his son's good hand. Leigh tweaked the boy's toe, and his eyes blinked open. "Good news, Mr. and Mrs. West. It looks like Jimmy's snakebite was nonpoisonous."

The father's shoulders relaxed, but not the heavy brows that pinched together. "You're certain?"

"Yes. His blood count is perfect, as is his clotting time. I do

want you to watch the wound, and if it shows signs of infection, take him to his regular physician for antibiotics.”

“Oh, thank you, Doctor.” The mother moved to the side of the bed and brushed her son’s hair back.

Jimmy sat up, wincing as he drew his hand to his chest. “You . . . you’re not going to cut my hand off?”

Leigh’s lips twitched. She knelt down until they were eye level. “No, Jimmy. You’re going to be just fine.”

His eyes widened. “You sure?”

The boy made her think of T.J. “I’m sure.” She patted his good hand and stood to address the parents. “The nurse will be in to give you instructions and to remove the IV, and then you can go home.”

After acknowledging the parents’ thanks, Leigh tucked the chart under her arm. Just before she opened the door, she glanced over her shoulder. Jimmy’s mom rested her head against her husband’s chest as his arms wrapped around her. A Hallmark moment.

It almost made coming home worth it. Almost made her forget it was only the end of July and she had ten months and twenty-nine days left until she could leave Bradford General and Logan Point. That was when her National Health Service contract would end and her student loan would be paid off. Then she would be free to pursue a position at Johns Hopkins. She’d had to turn down one offer because the position didn’t fit the qualifications of the payback program, and no way was she going into private practice with debt hanging over her head.

Leigh slipped from the room and pulled her phone from her pocket. Nine-thirty and still nothing from Tony. Back at the nurses’ station, she made a few more notes on the chart and then leaned back in the chair and flexed her shoulders.

“You look tired,” Cathy said.

In the month Leigh had been at the hospital, she’d come to regard the competent nurse as a friend. “I meant to go to bed earlier last

night, but TJ wanted to watch a movie.” Spending time with her son was worth losing sleep over.

“I don’t know how you did it—going to med school and raising a child by yourself.”

“I had help.” Her friend Sarah, who had taken them in. “But it wasn’t easy then, and it still isn’t. It’s like everything a mother does is measured. Either it goes in the Good Mom column or the Bad Mom column.”

“I know what you mean,” Cathy said with a chuckle. “I heard someone say you saw patients at Helping Hands today.”

“Four hours.” She loved her time at the free clinic, and the hours spent there counted toward her loan.

“Why don’t you put your feet up for a second while everything is slow?”

“I think I will.” Leigh had learned to catch rest whenever she could during her residency. But even as she leaned back in the chair, her mind returned to her son. Lately it seemed everything she did fell in the Bad Mom column. Like uprooting him from everyone and everything he knew by transferring from the UM Medical Center in Jackson to the hospital in Logan Point. She should have refused to come back home even though Tony kept insisting. That would have been the smart thing to do, but Leigh had never been able to say no to her brother. But at least last night scored one for the Good Mom side.

Now, if she could only rest her eyes for five seconds . . .

“Dr. Somerall, Sheriff Ben Logan asked to see you in the doctors’ lounge.”

Her eyes flew open, and she stared up at the ward clerk. “Is anyone with him?”

The clerk shrugged apologetically. “I don’t know. The night supervisor called. That’s all she said, except that Dr. Blakely will cover for you.”

Fear, sour and metallic, filled Leigh’s mouth. Tony and Ben were

supposed to be together. After giving Blakely a quick report on her patients, she hurried to the doctors' lounge.

Tony is with Ben.

The words kept rhythm with her slapping feet. In the lounge, Ben stood alone at the window. The instant he turned, she knew.

Tony was hurt.

"Ben?" Icy prickles stabbed her heart. It wasn't a question of bad. It was a question of how bad. "Where's Tony?"

His Adam's apple bobbed as he stepped toward her. The light from the overhead fluorescent cast dark shadows under his eyes. She'd expected him to be in uniform, not jeans and a polo shirt.

"I'm sorry, Leigh. I don't know any other way to tell you except . . . he's dead."

"Tony's dead?" Coldness seeped into her cheeks. Her stomach roiled and tried to expel the sandwich she'd eaten less than an hour ago. She grabbed the back of a chair to steady herself. "You were supposed to help him."

His shoulders squared. "I know. I'm sorry. I keep thinking . . . if only I could've gotten to the Peabody ten minutes earlier, but there was a wreck on the parkway."

"Peabody? What was he doing at the Peabody?" She sank into the chair and rubbed the hard vinyl of the armrest, her finger finding a jagged tear in the material.

Ben knelt in front of her, sweat beading his face. "He wanted to meet at the hotel. Didn't you know?"

Of course she didn't know. "He said he was having dinner with you." She closed her eyes as Ben's voice droned on.

"He'd left a key at the front desk. When I opened the door, I found him on the floor. The bleeding was bad. I called 911, but I knew it was too late. He . . . he said to tell you he was sorry." Ben patted her arm. "I'm so sorry."

She drew back. Her brother got himself killed, and all he could

say was he's sorry? Tears stung her eyes, and she flicked them away. "How did it happen?"

"Shot. In the chest. He . . . he died in my arms."

"Shot?" Not bigger-than-life Tony. Sure, her brother could be a hotshot, and he had swagger, but it matched his smile . . . and no one would love her son better than his uncle Tony. The gray walls closed in, smothering Leigh. No, this could not be happening. "I want to see him."

"That's not a good idea. They've taken his body to the morgue."

"You think I haven't seen a dead body on a slab before?"

"You haven't seen your brother on a slab."

Leigh flinched. Maybe she shouldn't have been so sharp. He was right. That wasn't how she wanted to remember Tony.

"Did . . . he say anything else?"

Ben wiped his face on his sleeve. "Yeah. He told me to protect you. It scared me half to death when Wade couldn't find you."

"Is that why he was looking for me?" She furrowed her brow. "Protect me? From what?"

"I was hoping you'd know." Ben stood and dragged another chair close to her. "Do you know any reason you'd be in danger?"

"No."

"How much do you know about our meeting tonight?"

"Nothing. I never even understood why he asked me to call you." She pressed her fingers to her temple. "I can't believe you're grilling me."

"I'm not grilling you. I just need a little information. He never mentioned a flash drive? Or that he knew something about who shot my dad?"

She jerked her head up. "Your dad? So this is about you now? About who shot your dad? My brother is killed, and all you can think of is your dad's case? I don't *know* who shot your dad. Maybe Tony knew, but I don't. And you know something else? Right now,

I don't care. I want to know why my brother is dead, and if you can't tell me, then just leave."

He held his hand out. "Leigh, I . . . I didn't . . . I'm sorry."

She couldn't take the pity emanating from his face, his eyes. Dark chocolate eyes. How could she even notice them at a time like this? She stood and escaped to the window that faced a small walking park. Pity was the last thing she wanted from Ben Logan. In fact, she didn't want anything from him. He let her down once. He wouldn't get the opportunity to do it again.

"I want to be here for you, Leigh."

You had your chance ten years ago. Leigh clenched her fist. "Just leave."

She didn't think he would, but when she turned around, he was gone. She turned back to stare through the window. Giant oaks stood guard around the small grassy area, their canopy a backdrop for the one flickering security light.

As usual, it was up to Leigh to help herself. She hugged her stomach and leaned against the wall. Tony was dead. How many times had she delivered news of death to a family? She'd always tried to be compassionate, caring. Maybe she hadn't been compassionate enough. Perfect enough. Maybe God wanted to teach her a lesson.

She licked her parched lips and blinked against the stinging in her eyes. Searching for a tissue in her pocket, her fingers closed around the plastic key ring Tony had given her when she finished her residency, and she pulled it out. *How do you keep a doctor busy for hours? Turn over . . .* She turned it over and read the same message.

Leigh's knees buckled, and she slid down the wall.

Her wacky brother would never make her laugh again.