



CROSSHAIRS

PATRICIA BRADLEY

NATCHEZ TRACE  PARK RANGERS

Praise for *Obsession*

“A fantastic suspense read with tension at all the right spots! Fans of Patricia Bradley will not want to miss this one.”

Write-Read-Life

“Patricia Bradley remains one of my favorite authors in the romantic suspense genre. I loved this story! I loved the characters, and I also loved the setting. This book has it all—it is full of suspense and mystery, has lots of twists and turns, and more!”

Life is Story

“Mississippi and suspense writer Patricia Bradley’s second installment of the Natchez Trace Park Rangers series weaves plot twists and thrills that her followers have come to know and love.”

Mississippi Magazine

“A skillfully-written thrill ride set on the Natchez Trace in Mississippi.”

Interviews & Reviews

Praise for *Standoff*

“Bradley has done it again with her unique brand of mystery and intrigue, penning another gripping tale of greed and betrayal, as well as redemption and hope. Brimming with action, romance, and page-turning thrills, *Standoff* will hook readers. What a fantastic start to a brand-new series!”

Elizabeth Goddard, award-winning author
of the Uncommon Justice series

“An explosive start to a brand-new series by Patricia Bradley that suspense lovers won’t want to miss. Full of family secrets, a mysterious old flame, and murder.”

Lisa Harris, bestselling author of the Nikki Boyd series

“With a plot as twisting as the villain’s schemes, Patricia Bradley’s *Standoff* spins a tale that will keep the reader racing through the pages and wondering ‘Who is the killer?’ until the thrilling conclusion.”

Lynn H. Blackburn, author of the Dive
Team Investigations series

“Patricia Bradley’s latest release, *Standoff*, is an action-packed Christian suspense novel. Patricia Bradley is an amazing romantic suspense writer. The whole novel was well-written and engaging from beginning to end.”

Urban Lit Magazine

“My first ever Bradley book, and I very much enjoyed it! I really wish that I could give it more than 5 stars. Her style of writing is astounding! I’m a fan for life.”

Interviews & Reviews

“*Standoff* is an engaging and suspenseful read that you won’t be able to put down! If you love romantic suspense, this one definitely needs to be on your to-read list!”

Bookworm Banquet

“Patricia Bradley knocks it out of the park with the first installment of her new series! Twists and turns, romance, action and suspense galore keep readers glued to the edge of their seat until the very last page.”

Write-Read-Life

Books by Patricia Bradley

LOGAN POINT SERIES

Shadows of the Past

A Promise to Protect

Gone Without a Trace

Silence in the Dark

MEMPHIS COLD CASE NOVELS

Justice Delayed

Justice Buried

Justice Betrayed

Justice Delivered

NATCHEZ TRACE PARK RANGERS

Standoff

Obsession

Crosshairs

NATCHEZ TRACE  PARK RANGERS

CROSSHAIRS

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Patricia Bradley, *Crosshairs*

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In memory of my nephew, Bradley
Haynes. Like I always said, “Brad, you’re
my favorite nephew.” To which you
replied, “I’m your only nephew.”
October 19, 1976–August 23, 2020

Come on! It was almost midnight, and the light in Cora Chamberlain's bedroom blazed like a neon sign.

He ground his teeth as rain poured from the skies, running off his black slicker.

Tornado watches had been issued for the area, and while those were as common as mosquitoes in the springtime, he never remembered a June tornado in Natchez. Still, it'd be his luck for one to hit the town tonight. Especially since nothing else had gone right, starting with the phone call an hour ago from Miss Cora, when she only teased him about the journals she'd found. It was why he stood in a copse of trees outside her antebellum home.

"You'll never believe it, but I discovered two more diaries!" Miss Cora's voice wavered, but even at ninety-two, it had not lost its cultured tone. *"I scanned the first few pages of the oldest one, and I believe it was written the summer before Zachary Elliott was killed. I'm certain I'll find proof my great-grandfather Chamberlain was innocent of murder. Do you know what that means, Sonny?"*

Only his runners called him Sonny now. Well, except for the aging spinster and her sister who he'd known since he was a boy. *"Of course I do,"* he said. *"If it has the information you've been searching for, you'll be able to clear his name. Why don't you let me come over—you can read one, and I can read the other. You'd get your answer much quicker."*

"It's too late tonight—maybe tomorrow. No. Ainsley is here . . . I do wish

I knew where I put that first journal. Then I would have the complete set to finish my book."

He ground his teeth. Once again she was rambling.

"Maybe one day you'll find it." Or not. Especially since it was in a safe in Sonny's apartment over the Blue Lantern. "I can be there in ten minutes."

"You're a dear boy," Cora said, "but it's much too late. After Ainsley leaves will be soon enough."

And that was why he was waiting in the rain for her bedroom light to go out. He owed people money, and they were pressing him for payment. He had a week at most to come up with fifty grand.

He'd stolen the first journal, thinking a private collector might give him a few hundred dollars for the leather-bound book because of the historical value, but no takers. Last week, he'd stumbled over the diary again when he'd been looking for anything he could sell and remembered Cora mentioning Adele Kingston had threatened to sue if Cora published what was in it.

Sonny had always heard the devil was in the details, and details of the murder over 150 years ago had not been in the journal he already possessed. It stood to reason if the new diaries were written not long before the murder happened, the details he sought would be in them. Details Jack Kingston would pay to keep private.

Sonny caught his breath. What if Ainsley decided to stay with Cora tonight instead of with her grandmother? He immediately dismissed the thought. Cora would have mentioned it.

If he was a praying man, Sonny would pray the old woman wouldn't mention his name to her niece. She'd never liked him, and now Ainsley Beaumont was in some sort of law enforcement. She'd probably think he was taking advantage of her great-aunt. And she would be right.

His gaze darted to the house across the street where Cora's sister lived. Rose's house was already dark, and so were the houses on the opposite corners of the intersection. Good.

Stop worrying. Miss Cora had promised not to tell anyone she'd found the new journals, and she was old school. If she told you something, you could bank on it.

When he asked where she'd found them, she babbled some nonsense about showing him later. Well, he wasn't waiting for later.

He rubbed his hand over his eyes, wiping away the rain. The corner light on the first floor dimmed to black. Things were turning around. He'd give her thirty minutes to fall sound asleep before he entered through the cellar and crept up the secret passageway that opened into the library on the first floor where Cora worked at her computer.

The woman was remarkable to navigate computers the way she did at her age. Too bad she had to die. It shouldn't be too hard to make it look as though she'd died of natural causes in her sleep. A pillow should do the trick.

He flinched at a sudden pop of lightning followed almost instantly with thunder that shook the ground. As he looked up, more lightning revealed a thick wall cloud. He didn't have time for violent weather tonight.

However, maybe the noise of the storm would hide his breaking and entering, and he wouldn't have to wait thirty minutes. Sonny slipped away from the woods, then dashed to the cellar steps at the back of the two-story house and descended to the doorway. When another bolt of lightning lit up the sky, he thrust a fallen branch from the nearby magnolia tree through the glass pane above the handle just as the follow-up clap of thunder shook the windows.

Once inside the cellar, he eased behind the stairs and stood motionless, letting rain run off his slicker and listening for any sign he'd been heard. When no telltale footsteps sounded, he used the flashlight on his phone to illuminate the wall and find the small hole in the second panel of wood.

Once he triggered the latch, the door swung open noiselessly,

and he quietly climbed the steep stairs. At the top, he unlatched the sliding door, pushed it to the side, and stepped into the library. He'd learned about the secret stairway as a young boy when his father replaced the door in the basement with a hidden panel for Miss Cora.

Once again, he stood perfectly still while the storm raged outside. So far, no tornado sirens sounded. When he was certain Cora hadn't heard him, he flicked on the light from his phone again and scanned the room, stopping at her desk.

He frowned. Where were the journals? They should have been on the cherry desk beside Miss Cora's laptop—that's where she put everything. They weren't on the table beside it either. Sweat beaded his face. He had to find them.

A thorough search of the desk revealed no journals. Could she have taken them to her bedroom? What if she had referenced them to someone in an email? He stood behind the desk and booted up her computer, relaxing after he found nothing pertaining to the journals in her sent box.

"What are you doing here this time of night?"

He whirled around. Miss Cora stood in the doorway, looking like an avenging angel with her white robe cinched around her and her finger pointed straight at him. "Sonny?"

"Where are they?" He took a step toward her. "The diaries. What have you done with them?"

She turned her head slightly toward the bedroom. He'd been right—she'd taken them to her bedroom. He rushed past her, knocking the old woman out of the way.

Sonny ignored the resounding crack her head made when it hit the floor. He found one diary on the table beside her bed. *Where is the other one?*

He quickly returned to the library and shook her. "Where is it?" he demanded, then frowned. She was so pale. He felt her wrist. No! She couldn't be dead. Not until she told him where it was. Maybe in a safe somewhere?

The front door banged open. He froze.

“Cora! Wake up! There’s a tornado coming!”

Rose, Cora’s sister. But he thought she’d gone to bed.

“Where are you?” Her voice, so like her sister’s, rose to a high pitch. “We have to get in the cellar!”

Maybe he should kill her too. No. The police would assume Cora fell and hit her head, causing a brain bleed, but two deaths would cause suspicion. Ainsley was probably with Rose anyway.

He would find a way to return and tear the house apart if he had to in order to find that other diary. He could not take a chance on anyone else finding it. He dashed toward the secret passageway.

“Cora! Where are you?”

“You check her bedroom, and I’ll check the library.”

That had to be Ainsley. The door had barely closed behind him when he heard her cry out.

“Oh no! Gran, quick! The library!”

Seconds later he heard her say, “Siri, call 911!”