



FATAL WITNESS

A PEARL RIVER
NOVEL

PATRICIA BRADLEY

Praise for *Counter Attack*

“Balancing a slow-burning romance with a twisty mystery, this will keep Bradley’s fans hooked until the final page.”

Publishers Weekly

“Plenty of action and interesting details about the dark web and police procedure keep this thriller with light Christian messaging moving.”

Booklist

“*Counter Attack* opens with a chilling snippet that takes us into the dark web, a murderous game, and a killer’s quest for revenge. Buckle up, because *Counter Attack* by Patricia Bradley takes you on an intense ride!”

Reading Is My Superpower

“Patricia Bradley introduces her new Pearl River series with a bang with *Counter Attack*.”

Life Is Story

“What a great read! Infused with tension that comes with the search for a killer, this book will have readers flipping the pages late into the night to find out what happens.”

Lynette Eason, bestselling, award-winning author
of the *Danger Never Sleeps* series

“If you like your romantic suspense to include a twisted villain, a deadly plot, and a second chance at love, look no further than *Counter Attack*. I couldn’t put it down!”

Lynn H. Blackburn, bestselling author
of the Defend and Protect series

“Checkmate! Patricia Bradley hits the mark again in this fast-paced, high-stakes suspense you won’t be able to put down!”

Natalie Walters, award-winning author
of The SNAP Agency and Harbored Secrets series

“*Counter Attack* grabs you from the first page and doesn’t let go until the end. The story plays out like a fast-paced chess game, with plenty of action and red herrings to ratchet up the suspense.”

Sarah Hamaker, award-winning author
of the Cold War Legacy series

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PATRICIA BRADLEY



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan
RevellBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bradley, Patricia, 1945– author.
Title: Fatal witness / Patricia Bradley.
Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2024. | Series: Pearl River series ; 2
Identifiers: LCCN 2023022654 | ISBN 9780800741631 (paper) | ISBN 9780800745592 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493444731 (ebook)
Subjects: LCGFT: Christian fiction. | Detective and mystery fiction. | Romance fiction. | Novels.
Classification: LCC PS3602.R34275 F38 2024 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20230605
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023022654>

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24 25 26 27 28 29 30 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my readers.
Thank you for reading my books!

And to my sister, Barbara,
who was the one who told me I should write a book
set in the Chattanooga area.

And in memory of Lonnie Hull DuPont.
Thank you for taking a chance
on an unknown writer ten years ago.
You changed my life. You will be missed.

The back door slammed, and nine-year-old Danielle Bennett jumped. Her daddy was home. She held her breath, waiting to see which Daddy it was. The one who laughed and swung her up in the air or the one who yelled and broke things . . .

Her heart sank as he yelled at her mama to get things packed. When she yelled back that she wasn't going anywhere, Danielle covered her ears, but it didn't do any good. She prayed Daddy wouldn't be mean. Remembering the last time that happened made her sick to her stomach. She should have done something. Stopped him . . . or called someone.

"Danielle! Get in here!"

She flinched.

"Now!"

If she didn't go, he would come after her. She laid her Barbie on the floor and trudged to the kitchen, slipping inside the room quiet as a cat.

Her dad shoved her mama toward their bedroom. "Get packed. We have to leave. Now!"

Mama turned and crossed her arms. "Why is he coming here, Bobby? What does he want?"

“His share of the diamonds,” he said. “We need to leave before he gets here. Now get to packing!”

“No! You have to take them back!”

“You’ve been talking to your mother, haven’t you?” He jutted his jaw. “Don’t you understand? They’re our way out—” He cocked his head as tires crunched in their drive. “He’s here!” He slammed his fist against the table. “If you’d done what I’d said, we’d be out of here.”

“Me? You’re the one who broke the law! And now you’re even stealing from your partner.”

His face was so red Danielle thought he might explode. Then his face changed, and he didn’t look so mad. “I’m sorry. I’m just . . .” He swept her up in his arms and turned to her mama. “You stay here. I’ll see if I can talk our way out of this. But first, I’ll hide Danielle.”

She looked over his shoulder as he rushed her out of the kitchen. Her mama’s face . . . Danielle had never seen it so white.

“It’s going to be all right, Little Bit.”

Danielle’s stomach squeezed. Daddy smelled funny . . . he always smelled funny when he yelled at Mama. She buried her face in his shoulder, not wanting to remember.

They stopped at a row of cabinets in the hallway, and he opened the door to the one they put her in when storms were coming. “I want you to get in here, and no matter what happens, you stay here until Mama or I come get you. Can you do that?”

“Why, Daddy?”

“Because it’s very important.” He knelt and pushed a board on the wall, and it slid open. Then he put something inside, but she couldn’t see what it was before he closed it. Her daddy motioned her inside the cabinet. “Climb in.”

Once she was settled, he stood and stared solemnly at her. “Promise me you’ll stay here no matter what you hear. Will you do that for me?”

Danielle nodded solemnly.

"I want to hear you say it—I promise."

"You're scaring me, Daddy."

"Hurry! You have to promise."

Tears burned the back of her eyes. "I promise."

He shut the door, and darkness closed around her like a blanket. She scooted back against the wall and pulled her knees to her chest. It was hard to breathe . . .

Suddenly there was shouting. Someone was yelling at her daddy.

The house filled with booms. Then it was eerily quiet.

Danielle's heart beat so fast she thought it would jump out of her chest. She felt for the door and remembered her promise. Maybe Daddy would come get her in a minute.

Danielle waited as long as she could, but she had to go to the bathroom. Daddy would be mad if she wet her pants. Slowly, she eased the cabinet door open and crept down the hallway in her bare feet, not remembering when she lost her shoes. A noise in the kitchen drew her. Maybe it was Mama and Daddy . . . Danielle eased down the hall, remembering not to step on the squeaky board at the door.

She rubbed her eyes, trying to make sense of what she saw. Across the room, her daddy lay on the floor beside her mama. A man knelt beside them. Danielle must have made a noise because he looked up, right at her.

She whirled around and raced down the hall to the cabinet and pulled the door shut. Danielle curled into a tight ball and closed her eyes. Seconds later footsteps pounded down the hallway past the cabinet.

"No, no, no!"

A crying voice awakened her, and she blinked open her eyes.

Why was it so dark? She couldn't see *anything*. She stilled as footsteps hurried down the hallway.

"Danielle?" a voice called softly. "Where are you, honey?"

Her body started shaking, and tears ran down her face. Suddenly the door flew open, light flooding the little space she was in.

"Danielle?"

She blinked at the brightness and shrank back.

"It's me, honey. Are you all right?"

She didn't answer, instead staring at him as a horn sounded in the distance.

"We've got to get out of here," he said and reached inside the cabinet.

She wanted to fight him, but her arms wouldn't move.

He pulled her out and carried her through the front door to a four-door pickup parked in the driveway. Once he settled her in the backseat, he said, "It's going to be all right. I'll take care of you."

She stared at him. "Who are you?"