



**NOAH'S  
RAINY  
DAY**

FOURTH IN THE LIV BERGEN MYSTERY SERIES

**SANDRA BRANNAN**



GREENLEAF  
BOOK GROUP PRESS

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

Published by Greenleaf Book Group Press  
Austin, Texas  
www.gbgroup.com

Copyright ©2013 Sandra Brannan

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher.

Distributed by Greenleaf Book Group LLC

For ordering information or special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Greenleaf Book Group LLC at PO Box 91869, Austin, TX 78709, 512.891.6100.

Design and composition by Greenleaf Book Group LLC  
Cover design by Greenleaf Book Group LLC

Publisher's Cataloging-In-Publication Data  
(Prepared by The Donohue Group, Inc.)

Brannan, Sandra.  
Noah's rainy day / Sandra Brannan.—1st ed.

p. ; cm.—(The Liv Bergen mystery series ; 4)

Issued also as an ebook.  
ISBN: 978-1-62634-017-6

1. Missing children—United States—Fiction. 2. Kidnapping—Investigation—United States—Fiction. 3. Cerebral palsied children—United States—Fiction. 4. Suspense fiction. 5. Spy stories. I. Title. II. Series: Brannan, Sandra. Liv Bergen mystery ; 4.

PS3602.R36485 N63 2013  
813/.6 2013939126

Part of the Tree Neutral® program, which offsets the number of trees consumed in the production and printing of this book by taking proactive steps, such as planting trees in direct proportion to the number of trees used: [www.treeneutral.com](http://www.treeneutral.com)  
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

13 14 15 16 17 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition



*To Jake*  
*A warrior, raised by angels*





# PROLOGUE

*Noah*

**THE GOOD NEWS IS** I think I broke my leg.

The bad news is I don't know if anyone at school would ever believe how it happened. Or worse, I'm not sure if anyone will ever figure out how I got here.

It's getting cold now and I don't do so hot when I get cold. Ha! I made a funny. Emma would have laughed at that one. I wish she were here right now. Well, not really. I'm glad she's not. She's safe, at home where she's warm and not somewhere so moldy and smelly. And dark. I just meant I wish I could tell her my story. She's the fastest at listening to me with her "five-finger" method, and she'd understand why I think it's so cool that I broke my leg, even though Mom would be sad and Dad would be worried.

Emma didn't listen to me yesterday. Maybe if she had, I wouldn't be in this pickle. That's what my dad calls a sticky situation. A pickle. It makes me laugh, the way he says it. My foot keeps sliding on the ground beneath me like I'm standing on a slippery pickle, which helps me forget about the pain in my other leg. And the sound of whimpering beneath the pile of clothes nearby. Right now I can barely hear the whimpering. My ears keep plugging up because I can't stop wrinkling my nose at the rotten smell. Not

like pickles. Worse. But I try to listen. Listening is important, especially for a spy like me.

My little sister didn't not listen to me because she was mad or anything; she was just distracted. That's the word my mom always uses for Emma when she's too busy to spend time with me. Distracted. Since it was Christmas and knowing how hard it is for me to focus on anything but Santa this time of year, my mom might be right.

But normally she's not. Not about Emma being too distracted when it comes to me. I know better.

Emma has a life, too. It shouldn't always be about me. We've talked about that. Emma and me, when Mom and Dad aren't around. Well, not really talked. More like Emma talks for the both of us. But at least she's honest about what I'm trying to say even if she disagrees, and she gets it right more than she gets it wrong.

She's pretty good for a nine-year-old whose older brother is trapped in his own body.

Let me back up because I think I'm getting ahead of myself. Story of my life. Getting ahead of myself. It's my destiny, considering my mind is constantly outpacing my body.

I'm twelve, almost a teenager. I'm in the same grade as my little sister, Emma, who's nine. Mainstreamed. I was born premature and weighed less than two pounds.

I have severe cerebral palsy.

My brain works like any other kid in my grade. Maybe better, according to one of my doctors, since the gray matter seems to be the only part of my anatomy that works normally. Nothing else seems to. My mind tells my hand to move or my mouth to open, but for some reason, the signal gets lost somewhere along the way. My body won't cooperate. My stomach doesn't work so good with food going in or all that other stuff coming out. I have trouble swallowing. And I overheard a teacher say that an older kid with cerebral palsy died of a heart attack in her class a few years ago. My hearing is better than people think, although my sight isn't so great. I was born so early that I had to be on oxygen therapy, so I have only a little vision with one eye and see only shadows with the other. Unless I have my contact in. Then I can see great. It's like a bionic eye.

I can't run.

I can't walk.

I can't even crawl.

If I work at it—concentrate really hard—I can roll over on my own. It takes every bit of my strength and if I land wrong, my muscles are too tired to move. Sometimes I pin my arm beneath my body and it starts tingling really bad. And sometimes when I flip over I land on my nose, which makes my eyes water and my contact lens pop out. Then I'm nearly blind again.

My muscles stay all bunched up and tight. "Contracted muscles" is what the adults say when they talk. But they also talk about contracting a disease, which I know I don't have, or signing a contract, which I couldn't do even if I wanted to. So it's just easier to talk about muscles being bunched up. At least that's how Emma describes it. So I do, too.

One time, a specialist warned my parents that my contracted muscles would someday shorten so much that the bones in my wrists and arms would break. My mom covered my ears, but it was too late. I heard her scolding the specialist as my dad wheeled me out to the waiting room. She asked him what he was thinking and why he felt it was his place to have such an adult conversation in front of me. I heard her remind him that I wasn't deaf and that I was just a kid.

But I heard it all the same. And I've felt my muscles getting tighter—can almost hear them growing shorter—which makes me wonder when my bones will snap like twigs. SNAP! SNAP! I never dreamed I'd be lucky enough to have my first broken bone from such an exciting event like tonight. Or last night. It might be after midnight. I can't tell what time it is anymore.

As I grow colder, the only thing that runs through my head is that awful bedtime prayer about "if I should die before I wake."

If I *should* die before I wake—and I am hoping I'll eventually fall asleep so I can forget about the cold for a little while—I know I will die happy, because I broke my leg doing the best I could to protect the boy who was kidnapped, the one from TV who everyone's talking about.

I don't want to die.

I want to live.

And after thinking about my life, after hours of sniffles and tears in the dark, I can honestly say I tried my hardest to save the little boy.

Now it's up to Auntie Liv to find me. To save the day.

I've decided to call this my rainy day. Mom always told Emma and me to save up for a rainy day, so I've saved up all my hopes and prayers for today. I've prayed hard several times already for God to let Auntie Liv figure out my story. The story I've been trying to tell all day. Since Christmas morning.

As the night keeps getting colder and darker, I've been trying to find a sliver of sunlight, something that will bring me hope. And in the dark, I feel thankful for what my parents told me about my birth. They said when they laid eyes on me they understood how Noah must have felt seeing that first ray of sunshine after forty days and nights of rain.

And if I had to be honest, I'd admit that I'm scared. Really, really scared.

And it feels like I'm trapped in the rainiest of all days.

My name is Noah.



# CHAPTER 1

**WALL-TO-WALL PEOPLE.** Everyone was too busy to notice each other, let alone him.

Perfect.

A tinny version of “Jingle Bells” scraped through the airport PA system. Occasional reminders that smoking was not allowed in the airport punctuated the obnoxious and too-frequent warnings—“Trains from other terminals are arriving. Please stand clear of the doors to allow passengers to disembark before boarding”—that floated up the escalator from the floor below.

He hated the holidays. The loneliness. Everyone but him feeling so happy.

Tugging at the blue vest that had ridden up over his expansive belly, he pushed the empty candy wrapper with his broom and watched the crowd scurrying about through the main terminal. He kept a careful eye on the smallest of holiday travelers, particularly any whose parents made detours to the nearby restrooms.

Just one. He only needed one.

The tattered candy wrapper, companion to the sentinel line of dust gathered by his push broom, had tumbled across every inch of the tiled

floor over the past three hours as he backtracked over this particular section at least a dozen times. The same wrapper. A wrapper that once contained his breakfast. This wrapper never quite made it from the floor to the garbage can, despite his diligence and effort to sweep it away.

No one noticed.

No one ever noticed a janitor. The simple disguise was his favorite, like an invisible cape. He could have chosen scrubs, a park ranger outfit, a construction vest, or a security guard's shirt and cap and gone somewhere else. But nothing was more effective than pretending to be a janitor.

And he needed today to go well.

He was nervous enough as it was, forced to try again. He had vowed to himself it was over. Never again. Especially after what had happened last year. He couldn't afford to lose another one. Couldn't afford to choose unwisely. Couldn't afford to make a mistake. But he knew it was the right thing to do. For them. Even if no one had come to save him when he was a child.

He needed to give a child the best Christmas gift that could ever be given to another human being. A better life. With him.

So above all else, today he needed to be at his best.

A janitor. Invisible. He'd felt no indecision this morning as he rifled through the choices in his basement. Today he needed to be expedient and effective. He needed a win. Not even those who legitimately worked at the airport would notice him, especially since he had no intention of going anywhere near the watchful eyes of the TSA agents at security screening. If they realized his blue vest wasn't quite the same color as theirs or that his name badge wasn't quite the same size, they may ask Denver International Airport employees whether they recognized him, revealing him as an imposter.

That wouldn't do.

He planned to linger between the ticketing entrance near short-term parking and the security screening area just above the escalators that led down to the trains. Plenty of shops and restaurants in the main terminal rimmed the restricted rope lines that led to security screening, which was crowded with travelers who were awaiting security checks before they headed toward the concourses.

And there were plenty of bathrooms.

On the occasions when he could no longer resist his duty to help free a child from its situation, his cover as a janitor had been his most successful to date. Particularly in crowded public places—at the Rockies stadium, at Larimer Square, and at Cherry Creek Mall. His past experiences had helped bolster his confidence this morning, along with the good fortune of finding an open parking spot in short-term parking right near the door. It was just yards from a family bathroom with a door that he could lock from the inside.

Perfect.

When he had sat in his parked car hours ago, readying himself by pulling on the blue vest over his coveralls and slipping on the glasses with white tape wrapped around the plastic frame between the lenses, he had noticed the gleam of excitement in his eyes and the angle of the nearest security camera mounted on the concrete wall nearby. It had a busted lens—a good omen. He would succeed today, he had thought. And this would be the last time. He'd get it right. Prove his father wrong. Possibly in record time.

But he hadn't expected it to take this long. And as his confidence had dwindled, he felt his anxiety growing. Only his resolve to help those who suffered as he had as a child compelled him to keep looking. And the idea of being successful on Christmas Eve further motivated him.

Holidays sucked. Christmas was the worst. Too many people. Too many smiles. Too many packages being tenderly carried to their rightful places under countless trees. Didn't he deserve a little something under the tree this year?

Yes. Of course. That was why he was here. He just had to have patience, patience and discretion.

The longer he remained huddled against the wall, the more likely it would be that someone would notice his ineffectual labors. But he was safe here under the overhang, away from the cameras' ranges. He had escaped his cover being blown about thirty minutes ago when he was over by the food court beyond the ticketing counters. Only feet from where he had stood, pushing his broom in the shadows, some old bat had dropped her bag of popcorn in her awkward attempt to rise from a dining table. Several

travelers had glared in his direction as they stepped over the spilled popcorn. He had pretended not to notice. He had turned his back as he pushed the candy wrapper in the opposite direction, away from the food court where he'd be expected to sweep up a real line of food wrappers.

He wore his navy blue stocking cap, pulled down on his forehead. His thick, black-rimmed glasses obscured much of his face and certainly his eyes from being recognized. The pretense of limited peripheral vision was complete. Believable. The earpieces of his headphones were jammed deep in his protruding ears, which gave him the excuse to ignore any demands for his services. Just to be on the safe side, he meandered toward the bank of restrooms, hugging the wall under the overhang and pushing the tumbling candy wrapper.

But he was safe, invisible. Just a janitor gripping his broom. A shiver crawled up his spine. Gripping a broom. A child's grip. In the closet. The closet filled with mops and brooms. Locked. Where his father had kept him. Where he had imagined growing up to be a janitor just to keep his mind off the darkness. And loneliness. In a way, his father was to thank for this clever disguise, he supposed. Especially since as an adult, he now had so many to choose from compared to the three sets of identical uniforms his father had forced him to wear throughout his childhood—a pair of blue denim husky dungarees, a white beefy T, and a crisp, white button-down shirt. He might as well have been wearing a “kick me” sign to school.

His stomach growled.

It had been too long since he last ate and he simply hadn't eaten enough then. His large, doughy fingers uncurled from the broom handle and reached between the ties of his blue vest into the pocket of his olive-drab coveralls. Just as his fingertips reached the edge of the king-sized package of peanut M&M's, he saw him.

Like a camouflaged hunter spotting a trophy elk in his scope, he kept his movements slow and deliberate. He eased the candy from his pocket without making a sound while he studied his prey.

A tall, lanky man wearing a BlueSky Airlines uniform was walking—more like prancing—off the escalator that brought arriving passengers from the underground trains. The man headed toward the Buckhorn Bar

and Grill. The bar was across from his safe haven under the overhang by the restrooms. It was less than thirty yards away.

The airline employee carried himself as if he were tethered to electric voltage. He was all jitters and nerves hidden by a phony smile plastered on his face. The man made a beeline toward a perturbed woman standing just beyond the row of barstools that separated the restaurant from the main terminal. She didn't look happy. Her fists were planted on her hips. Her foot was tapping and her eyes looked angry.

Perfect. A lovers' quarrel. There was no better distraction.

As the airline employee approached, he gave the irritated woman a quick peck on the cheek and leapt into a long, animated explanation trying to appease the irritated, foot-tapping, ball-fisted lover awaiting him. It was not important what the two lovers were so worked up about on this otherwise peaceful Christmas Eve. What was important was that Santa had not forgotten him this year. His Christmas gift had just arrived.

Delivered by a BlueSky Airlines employee, one of Santa's elves.

It was a little boy. A beautiful, blond boy. A sad boy who needed him. Like a puppy from the pound. He'd save him.

The airline employee had long since released the little boy's hand. The boy was lingering beside the quarreling couple, circling around the area. Just beyond the bar, busy pedestrian traffic was ebbing and flowing through the main terminal from the ticketing area to security and from the underground trains to the baggage claim areas.

Dressed in a beautiful hunter-green Christmas outfit, the boy danced about, oblivious to the tide of travelers. The boy was oblivious to his distracted escort, oblivious to the woman's fury, and oblivious to the invisible janitor across from the bar who was fixated on his every movement.

An unaccompanied minor.

He spied the airline wings pinned to the little boy's vest lapel that confirmed his assumption. It explained the tall, nervous man and his inattention to the boy. The child was traveling alone from one place to another and just passing through Denver International Airport.

What good fortune!

He closed the distance between them, careful to stay close to the wall

yet out of the spatting lovers' peripheral vision. He stood between the boy and the small family bathroom that was nestled between the expansive bathrooms dedicated to men and women only. The family room, which was really just an oversized restroom intended for mothers and fathers to help their young, offered him privacy with its locking door.

Pushing the small line of gray dust and the well-traveled candy wrapper toward the door, he felt the weight of his concealed backpack against the small of his back, under his blue vest, and smiled. Opening the door, he set the broom just inside and turned back toward the child. He rattled the bag of M&M's. The child looked up. And stopped dancing.

The child saw the bright yellow bag and a dimpled grin spread across his smooth, white cheeks. After cutting a quick glance in his escort's direction, the boy tiptoed toward the man with the bag of candy.

"What Child Is This?" was playing on the PA overhead, and he scanned the airport before he ducked, unseen, into the bathroom with the bag of M&M's.

The boy followed.