

# Protect Me

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My fingertips grazed across the rough fabric of a dingy comforter with a sickening striped pattern that made me want to throw up. Yet again. Another motel room. I tugged at the hem of my tan pants. My blonde brows knit together, and I patted my hair that was securely curled in place.

“How long this time?” I asked, Lent. My husband.

“Just a bit. Brian said they’re staying in the room next to us,” Lent responded.

His voice always reminded me of someone who had swallowed a large bull frog. As if on cue, he cleared his throat and began his usual coughing fit. His large body caved over, and he gasped for breath. I rolled my eyes. The man had never even smoked. My fingers twitched at the sudden want to light one of my own slim cigarettes.

I looked around again, my hand still placed securely on one of the two queen-sized beds. The carpet was a bland gray. The beds were placed neatly apart with light fixtures hanging above them and emitting a dim yellow light. A single dial phone sat between them and I imagined wringing the wire between my fingers. A chill went up my spine at the thought of all the different people who had stayed in this room. We never stayed in high dollar Hotels. No. That was too much for Lent. A bed was all he cared about; despite the fact he would always say we needed to seem normal. My lips twitched.

“Want to go outside?” Lent asked. As if he had not just had a coughing fit.

There were no windows in this room, instead a large sliding glass door complimented the opposite wall. I made my way slowly towards it without responding and slid it open with

trembling hands. A quaint round garden table and chairs greeted me as I stepped into the cool evening air. Lent chuckled right behind me at my lack of a response.

“You think anyone has been murdered in this room?” I asked.

“No telling, but probably Louise,” Lent said.

“What’s the agenda this time?”

Lent pulled his body down into a chair and exhaled. He ran a hand through his neatly combed hair.

“The victim said she heard them talking when they thought she was knocked out. They are going to stay here for a few nights before they go back to their usual pawn shop broker and unload what they stole.”

I nodded. “I guess this is our only chance then.”

“Yup.”

I sat down forcefully in front of him and lit one of my cigarettes.

“Do you have to smoke those? You know how my asthma is,” Lent said.

“Do you have to drag me across the country chasing demons no one cares about and tell me to act normal?” I flicked the cigarette in irritation and took a long drag.

Lent’s fist clinched, and we sat in silence for a few moments. He pulled at his patterned tie before we heard shouting. My eyes widened. It was coming from the room beside ours. The words were slightly muffled, but we could still hear them.

“Damnit Jeff! Where’s the ruby necklace?” Someone shouted. Followed by the sound of smashing glass.

“I did what you said. I took it to the shop to sell it. How do you think I got us lunch.” A muffled but apparent masculine voice said.

“I said we had to cool it for a few days. How much did you get for it?” Another masculine voice said.

“I got eight hundred!”

“You fool! That thing was worth ten times that!”

Lent and I bolted upwards out of our chairs. This was our cue. If they were already getting rid of the spoils they had taken. We rushed from the patio, leaving it open. I pulled my small pistol from my pants pocket and Lent already had his drawn as we barged from the room.

We thought they had been arguing in the room next to ours, but we were mistaken. Instead, both were standing in the hallway. The first man was portly, with a balding head and held two bags from the nearest burger joint along with a large wad of cash. The other man facing us had to be at least six feet and his face was beat red. We stopped as our door clicked shut and the larger man looked at us. His eyes widened.

“Hands up. Detective Lent Sander’s and Louise Sander’s,” Lent said.

Lent jumped to the side and I squealed as the first man shoved the portly one out of the way. He had a sinister look in his eyes that was unnerving. In what felt like slow motion, the motels' walls shrunk as the man pushed towards us. His arm shifted as Lent aimed his firearm, but it was too late. The mans enormous fist smacked against Lent’s face and he crumpled to the ground.

“Chester Rodgers! Detective Louise Sander’s. You are under arrest,” I said, while taking aim at the man’s head.

He smiled at me and began advancing on my slight form. The hallway shrunk even further. A loud “POP” echoed through it, and I tried to sigh in relief, but my lungs felt as if they had filled with tar. The large man sat slumped in his own crimson puddle at my feet. I tried to take a deep breath, but I still could not. I looked over to Lent, who was rubbing his head and rising to his feet. He looked at me and his gaze penetrated mine in shock.

“What?” I asked. The words choked out and filled my mouth with a disgusting metallic taste.

“Louise,” Lent said.

I looked back at the overweight man. He had dropped the burger bags and the cash was splayed at his feet. He stood with a pistol of his own stretched towards my chest. He dropped it and threw up his arms.

I tried again to take a deep breath, but my lungs just were not working. The metallic taste was overpowering as I slumped to the side. Lent caught my limp body.

“We got them,” I said.

He nodded his head. His eyes darted up to the overweight man. “Yeah baby, we got them. God Lou... I’m so sorry,” Lent said looking back down at me as my eyes drifted shut.