



## Liam's Witness Protection (Man on a Mission Book 4)

By Amelia Autin

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It's not Liam's job to protect Cate. But after he discovers everything she's been through, he makes it his personal mission to ensure she'll have her day on the witness stand. Staying by her side 24/7 may mean opening his heart to a woman who's unable to offer hers.

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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Award-winning author Amelia Autin is an inveterate reader who can't bear to put a good book down...or part with it. Her bookshelves are crammed with books her husband periodically threatens to donate to a good cause, but he always relents...eventually.

Amelia currently resides with her Ph.D. engineer husband in quiet Vail, AZ, where they can see the stars at night and have a "million dollar view" of the Rincon Mountains from their back yard.

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She didn't look like a prostitute. That was the first thing that came to Liam Jones's mind when he saw her standing next to a bench outside the courtroom. He didn't know what he'd expected—not exactly—but it wasn't a fresh-faced woman in her midtwenties wearing a summery dress in pastel swirls of pink and green, bare legs and sandals. Her blond hair was shoulder length, clean and shining, and held away from her face by cloisonné combs in a way that made her look heartbreakingly young.

There was a definite family resemblance to her cousin, Liam's new sister-in-law, Angelina Mateja. So she had to be Caterina Mateja. Which meant looks were deceiving. If he hadn't known who she was, if he hadn't known she was testifying in his brother's human trafficking and prostitution ring conspiracy case, he'd have pegged her as a model—tall, slender, almost delicate in appearance, aloof, with a touch-me-not air. And a definite attitude. She was listening to two men in impeccable dark suits and power ties that shrieked they were the prosecutors on the case—one a dapper man in his fifties, the other younger than Liam. *Prepping their witness?* he wondered idly. *Isn't it kind of late for that?*

And though he couldn't hear what they were saying, he knew damned well Caterina Mateja wasn't at all happy with whatever they were telling her. Two other men wearing identical black outfits, badges and side-arms—all of which Liam recognized—stood on either side of her, obviously providing her with protection.

A longtime Diplomatic Security Service special agent, Liam wasn't there in a professional capacity. Not officially. Officially he was on vacation for the next three weeks. But his brother Alec also a DSS special agent—not just a special agent, he reminded himself with a smile of familial pride in his brother's accomplishments, *the regional security officer at the US embassy in Zakhar*—had asked him to meet him at the courthouse this morning for the start of the trial. As a witness Alec had been precluded in a pretrial motion from sitting in the courtroom for the proceedings. But there was nothing stopping Liam from being there, and Alec had asked him to attend as a special favor. Not that Alec had told Liam a lot about the case ahead of time, nor would Liam discuss the trial with his brother while it was under way. But this case was important to Alec—a career maker—and Liam would do anything for his brother.

Liam glanced at his watch. He was early, but that was par for the course with him. He planned his days carefully—planned his entire life that way, actually—and he didn't like leaving things to chance. Traffic in Washington, DC, was rarely predictable, often troublesome even in the summer, so Liam almost always arrived early for whatever he had going when he was in town. He was *never* late. Not even in New York.

He leaned casually against one of the rotunda's marble pillars, careful to keep his distance as he waited for his brother. Alec had told him US Marshals were guarding Caterina Mateja since she was a crucial witness in

this trial, more crucial than Alec, who had orchestrated it all. So even if Liam hadn't recognized their outfits and badges he would have known who the two men were.

Liam was armed—he'd had to display his DSS badge and show the guards his SIG SAUER P229R in its shoulder holster in order to bring a weapon into the building past the metal detectors—and he had no intention of making the marshals think he was a threat to their witness.

But even from this distance he couldn't help notice how beautiful she was. How graceful her hands were as she tried to make some point to the prosecutors. How altogether classy and patrician she looked standing there arguing with them but never losing her cool. Anyone less like a hooker he'd yet to see.

Movement out of the corner of his eye had Liam turning sharply in its direction, then he grinned. "Hey," he said as Alec came up to him.

"Thanks for coming."

"Told you I'd be here."

"Yeah, but sometimes things crop up, so I'd have understood if you couldn't make it. When did you get in?"

"Late last night. Thought about taking the train down from New York, so at least I'd get a little sleep on the way, but decided to drive after all. I'd have been here earlier, but there was a screwup with the guy covering for me at the UN."

Alec grimaced. "Speaking of screwups, I hate to tell you this, but the trial won't actually start until tomorrow—I just found out or I'd have called you. The jury was supposed to be seated this morning, and the trial was going to open with the big guns—Caterina Mateja's testimony—but it's been put off for a day. Last-minute pretrial motions. Sorry I got you down here a day too soon."

Liam shrugged. "Not a problem. I didn't have any other plans."

"So you're really on vacation? For three whole weeks? How'd you wangle that?"

"Three whole weeks," Liam agreed, then affected a pious air. "Clean living."

"Yeah right," his brother scoffed.

"Well, it might have something to do with the fact that I haven't taken any vacation at all so far this year, and my boss would like me to use up some of it before he sends me out of the country."

"That's sounds more like it."

Liam grinned. "So are we on for dinner tonight? Or do you have to rush back to your blushing bride?" He made a sound like a squawking hen, devilishly teasing his brother the way they'd done to each other since they were kids.

Alec cursed him genially, fake-punched his shoulder, then grinned, too, and said, "Angel's given me the night off—she's having dinner with her cousin." He tilted his head in Caterina Mateja's direction. "I'm off-limits there. I'm not supposed to have any contact with her—the trial judge was quite clear about that. But

the restriction doesn't include Angel since she's not a witness in this trial. And Caterina will need her moral support."

He shook his head regretfully. "The defense attorneys will rip her to shreds if they can. They'll paint her as black as the judge will let them get away with. A vengeful prostitute is what they'll call her, out to get her former lover—so they'll say—any way she can for dumping her. Even lying to convict him."

"Any truth to that?"

Alec bent a hard stare on his brother. "I'm going to pretend you never asked me that question."

Liam shook his head. "Look I know she's your wife's cousin and all that, but—"

"But nothing," Alec said in a steely voice. "You don't know what Caterina's been through. If you had any idea...if you knew the courage it's taking for her to face these men—*especially* Aleksandrov Vishenko—and testify in open court, you wouldn't—"

The chatter of submachine gunfire and screams from civilians echoing through the cavernous rotunda interrupted whatever Alec had intended to say next. Both brothers spun toward the gunfire, reaching simultaneously for their SIG SAUERs. And both brothers saw immediately they were shielded from the gunmen's sight by the marble pillar they were standing behind.

*How the hell did they get Uzis past the metal detectors? Past the guards at the door?* were Liam's first thoughts, but he didn't waste more than a couple of seconds on those questions. His gaze swung toward the woman he was pretty sure was the intended target. The marshals had her down on the floor, covering her body with theirs as they tried to return fire. Both prosecutors were also down—but not voluntarily. One was obviously dead, a grim sight. The other was still alive, but for how long was anyone's guess. And the marshals weren't faring much better. One was wounded in the thigh, the other had taken a spray of bullets to his nonshooting arm and shoulder. Both were doing their damndest to shield Caterina, but they were caught out in the open with only the bench for shelter and no warning. And semiautomatics were a pitiful defense against submachine guns.

"Cover me," Alec said, darting to his right, not even waiting for acknowledgment. Liam switched his gun to his left hand—*thank God I'm ambidextrous*, he thought—operating on instinct and training that was second nature after so many years, not to mention a lifelong knowledge of his brother. He peered around the marble column, took careful aim and fired a volley of shots at the men with the submachine guns to distract them from Alec circling around behind to get the drop on them. Liam had the savage satisfaction of hearing a scream of pain as one of his shots found its target.

*One down*, he thought, still on autopilot. *One to go*. He switched his gun back to his right hand, moved in the other direction and fired again from the other side of the column, emptying the clip. His spare clip, which he carried in his jacket pocket, was already in his left hand. Seconds was all it took to eject the empty clip and slam the full one home. Seconds he didn't really have, because one of the Uzis was still firing.

But then he recognized the sound of Alec's SIG SAUER, followed by an agonized scream—*not* Alec's voice. When he slid cautiously out from behind the pillar he saw Alec kicking the Uzis away from both downed gunmen, and he started running toward his brother. But Alec had other ideas.

"They're dead," he shouted to Liam across the rotunda. "Get Caterina the hell out of here. She dies, this case

dies, too."

Liam hesitated for only a second. Then he turned in the direction of Caterina and the US Marshals shielding her. "Diplomatic Security Service," he announced quickly, displaying his badge before the men could draw a bead on him. "That's my brother over there with the gunmen. He's DSS, too."

Both marshals were bleeding heavily, but they were still conscious. "Your brother's right," one man gasped. "It might be just those two, but who the hell knows? Get her to safety." He rolled off Caterina as he said this, and Liam—still carrying his gun in his right hand—reached down with his left hand to help her to her feet. Blood had dripped from the wounded men onto the dress she was wearing, and there was blood on her arm, but Liam was glad to see she appeared to be unhurt. Shocked. Dazed. But physically untouched.

He grasped her arm as a courtroom door down the hallway opened and a dozen spectators spilled out, along with the deputy assigned to that courtroom. "Come on," he urged, pulling Caterina behind him, shielding her with his body just as the marshals had done.

It took no time at all for Liam to decide going out the front door was too risky. He didn't know what other exits there were in the building, but he did know there was a garage downstairs. A garage where he'd parked this morning, not knowing that spending the few extra dollars to park beneath the courthouse instead of a couple of blocks away would be a lifesaver.

He hustled Caterina to the nearest stairwell—he knew better than to try for an elevator that could become a death trap—never letting go of her arm. He'd just thrust her through the doorway when he caught sight of two men moving purposely toward them. But the men were on the other side of the rotunda, too far away to catch them if they didn't dawdle.

Time seemed to stretch out in that odd way it does when adrenaline is pumping, and Liam's thoughts raced ahead of his body as they clattered down the stairs. *Garage. SUV. Police station? No, too many unknowns. Uzis in the courthouse. Conspiracy? Those two men. Good guys or bad? No way to tell. Need a bolt-hole. Safe house. Who to trust?*

Alec, of course, but Alec couldn't be a part of this. Not now.

Liam practically threw Caterina into the backseat of his SUV. "Get down on the floor," he ordered brusquely. He grabbed a blanket out of the emergency pack he kept in the rear, and spread it lengthwise over Caterina's body. "Don't move. Don't even breathe. I don't want anyone to see you, not the parking attendant or anyone else."

He drove out of the garage at a sedate pace, not wanting to raise suspicions if he squealed his tires in his haste to escape. But his eyes were on the rearview mirror, watching to see if anyone exited the stairwell he and Caterina had used. *So far so good.*

He paid the attendant with a twenty, refusing to let himself display the slightest hint of impatience as he waited for his change. He didn't bother with a receipt. He'd just rolled up the window when he saw two men in his rearview mirror. Running in his direction. He couldn't be positive, but they sure looked like the same men who'd chased after them upstairs.

Liam floored the accelerator. Then he was on the streets of DC. He turned left, and left again, then gunned the engine as the light turned yellow, watching sharply to see if anyone ran a red light to follow them. It

wasn't likely—the men pursuing them had been on foot, so he didn't really expect a chase car that quickly—but he wasn't taking any chances. No one ran the red light, so Liam drove five blocks, turned right, left and right again, then pulled his SUV onto the freeway heading toward Virginia. Virginia, and anonymity. Anonymity equaled safety. At least for now.

Traffic was light on the freeway out of the city in the middle of the morning, and Liam made good time. He only needed part of his attention to drive, and he returned to ponder the question he'd asked himself earlier. Who to trust? His fellow DSS agents at the Bureau of Diplomatic Security? His boss? The State Department? The FBI?

Though he knew better than to text while behind the wheel, Liam suddenly pulled his cell phone out and hit speed dial two for Alec—his SUV's Bluetooth capability would allow him to talk hands-free.

"It's me," he said when Alec answered. "Just wanted you to know we had two pursuers on foot." He quickly described what the two men looked like and how they were dressed. "Could have been Fibbies, but I doubt it. They just didn't have the *look*, if you know what I mean. Didn't see any guns, but that doesn't mean anything. If they were bad guys they're probably long gone by now, but just in case..."

"We'll check it out. You got clean away?"

"Yeah. Heading out of the city as we speak."

"You got a destination?"

Liam laughed a little. "Anywhere but here, bro."

"Caterina okay?" The concern in Alec's voice was obvious. And just as obviously, his concern wasn't all professional.

"Not a mark on her."

"Keep her safe."

"You know I will."

There was silence on the other end. Then, "Call Cody when you get the chance," Alec said.

"You read my mind. What's the situation there?"

"Both shooters are dead, but you already knew that. No ID, nothing to say who they are. The serial numbers on the Uzis were filed off, but the FBI thinks they might be able to raise them—we might get lucky there."

"What about the people they shot?"

"The lead prosecutor's in the morgue, the other one's critical. I think the marshals are going to make it. Hey, gotta go. The FBI's bearing down on me again, and I don't want them to hear this conversation."

After Alec hung up, Liam's thoughts kept circling back to the events as they had unfolded. *Uzis in the courthouse*, he reminded himself. He knew they were Uzis—the sound was unmistakable. This hadn't just

*happened.* Someone had plotted and planned very carefully. *How did they get Uzis past the metal detectors and the guards?* he asked again, still without an answer. At least not a palatable answer. Because the answer was—they couldn't. That meant a conspiracy. A conspiracy that included someone with enough authority, enough clout, to smuggle the submachine guns in. Someone with a lot at risk. Someone who would do anything to keep Caterina from testifying.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Carmen Jensen:**

What do you consider book? It is just for students as they are still students or that for all people in the world, the actual best subject for that? Simply you can be answered for that concern above. Every person has distinct personality and hobby for each and every other. Don't to be pressured someone or something that they don't need do that. You must know how great as well as important the book *Liam's Witness Protection (Man on a Mission Book 4)*. All type of book is it possible to see on many options. You can look for the internet methods or other social media.

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#### **William Reyes:**

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