

# RELATIVELY CLOSE

JUDY SERRANO



Black Rose Writing  
[www.blackrosewriting.com](http://www.blackrosewriting.com)

© 2012 by Judy Serrano

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publishers, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a newspaper, magazine or journal.

The final approval for this literary material is granted by the author.

First printing

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

ISBN: 978-1-61296-082-1

PUBLISHED BY BLACK ROSE WRITING

[www.blackrosewriting.com](http://www.blackrosewriting.com)

Printed in the United States of America

*Relatively Close* is printed in Gentium Book Basic

## PRAISE FOR JUDY SERRANO'S BOOKS

“...I quickly realized that Judy Serrano really knows how to leave us readers hanging and drooling for the next book.”

—Stephanie Fatta, *Beauty Brite Reviews*

“Serrano has once again left me wanting more, so much more. So eager to turn page after page. Becoming enthralled with Lilly and the Montiago family, you will find yourself wrapped up into their lives as if it were your own.”

—Jodie Baker, *Uniquely Moi Books*

“As for the author Judy Serrano I can't wait to read her next book. She writes with such passion and enthusiasm with lots of twists and turns, and full of adventure and excitement. She is such an amazing writer, you never know what to expect.”

—Patricia L. Foltz, *Way2Kool Designs*

**Prior Books in this Series:**

*Easter's Lilly*

*Brother Number Three*

## Author's Note

I wanted to say thank you to my husband Miguel for always supporting my writing endeavors. I would also like to thank him for designing and creating the book cover. His talents do not go unnoticed. A special thanks goes out to my boys, Miguel III, Theo, Tad and Enrique for giving me the time to write and believing in me.

Thank you to all of my friends and readers who have followed me along this journey and made these books possible.

Of course I want to thank my publisher, Reagan Roth and the staff at Black Rose Writing, for making my dreams come true. Reagan believed in me from the start and I will always be grateful.



RELATIVELY  
CLOSE





## Chapter 1

*"BANG"*

Max fell to the ground followed by Hector. Max shouted out, "Junior, I forgive you," as his eyes began to close. I fell to the floor... hard. Max pushed me down as the bullet flew in our direction. I sat up to find that Max had a hole in his chest and Hector had blood pouring from his side. The bullet must have gone right through Max and into Hector. Junior was standing there holding the gun, not moving. Diego sprang into action. He grabbed the gun from Junior. "Maria! 911!" he shouted to his girlfriend. She began to dial. "It was an intruder!" he shouted again. "Probably from the Malone organization. Do you all understand?" Maria and I both answered immediately with a, "Yes sir," while Regina, Hector's wife, sat at the kitchen counter obviously in shock.

"Junior!" Diego called. "Take off your clothes and throw them into the fireplace. Take a shower. You need to wash all of the residue from the gunshot off of your body. I'll get rid of the gun." He took the gun from my son and Junior followed him up the stairs.

"Max, Max!" I reached for him. He grabbed my hand.

"Baby girl," he gasped, trying to catch his breath.

"Max, you fight for me, do you hear me?"

"Yes, baby girl, I live for you." That was something he said to me the last time he was shot in the chest; only the last time he said it in Spanish. He opened his eyes for a minute and I could see the fear poised like a dark cloud, ready to rain.

"Diego!" I screamed. "Diego! Where are you?"

"He's taking care of the gun, Lilly," Maria reminded me. "Give him a few minutes."

It wasn't too long before he came running back into the room;

although it felt like an eternity. He pulled out a credit card and put it on Max's wound. Max let out a yell that made me shudder. "Go check on Hector," he told me.

I ran to Hector and knelt down beside him. "Talk to me," I said. "Hector, talk to me." He reached out for my hand. "I have never been able to forget you, Lilly." I could hear his voice begin to weaken. "I need you to know that I am still in love with you."

"I know, Hector, I know," I whispered, putting my lips closer to his ear. He squeezed my hand and then closed his eyes. I looked at Diego.

"Wake him up, Lilly. Wake him up!" I slapped his face a few times gently and he looked up at me.

"Max... Max..." Hector gasped.

"Hector, save your strength," I told him.

"Max, is he..? Max..." he was muttering, barely conscious.

"He's alive," I answered. "He's alive."

"Lilly," Diego called. "Were you hit?"

"No, they both took the bullet though."

"Lilly, it's okay," Hector whispered weakly. "I'd do anything for you."

"Lilly," Max reached out his hand across Diego to me. I quickly became overwhelmed.

"Regina!" I yelled. "Get over here, now!"

She continued to sit motionless at the counter. Maria came running to me with a towel and pressed it against Hector's side. He opened his eyes. "I love you," he whispered and closed his eyes again. I kissed his forehead and moved back over to where Max was lying on the floor.

We heard the sirens, and the paramedics made it into the kitchen. Regina was still sitting at the counter, looking as though someone had shot *her*. They put them both on gurneys.

"The wives can come but the rest have to follow in a separate vehicle," one of the paramedics told us.

"Regina!" I yelled. "Come on!" She still did not move. I got into the ambulance and Diego pushed her in beside me. She still said nothing.

## *Relatively Close*

“Regina,” he’s your husband. You have to get it together... for him.” She sat there almost in denial. It was as though she thought that if she didn’t respond, none of this would be real. “I can’t believe this,” I said. “He’s been shot. It’s time for you to act like a real wife.”

“I guess I don’t have the experience you do with the correct *mob-wife* protocol.” She blurted. I was really starting to become angry with her.

“Do you love him?” I yelled. She looked at me with empty eyes. “Do you love him?” I shouted again. “I can’t be with him right now, so you have to be the one to help him. Do you understand me?” She still said nothing. I kissed Max’s cheek. He was fading in and out of consciousness but I knew Hector heard every word I said. “You hold on for me, Max... hold on for me,” I pleaded, brushing the tears out of my eyes. His eyes opened suddenly and I could feel him squeeze my hand. Hector reached across the gurney for Max’s other hand and Max grabbed it. They were really scared this time.

We got to the hospital and I was happy to see that Diego and Maria were already there. I ran into Diego’s arms and he held me close. “Both of them, Diego. I can’t lose both of them,” I said as my voice began to crack.

“We won’t lose them. My brothers are tough, remember?” Maria took Regina to a chair and Regina sat there almost lifeless.

I let go of Diego and walked over to her. “What the hell is wrong with you?” I asked. “Why can’t you be there for him?” She finally looked up at me.

“He doesn’t want me,” she responded. “So, who’s it going to be, Lilly, your husband or your lover?” I stepped back in astonishment. Hector and I hadn’t been lovers for years. “I’m sure when Hector asked if Max was dead he was hopeful.” That was it. I felt my heart beat accelerate as all the blood in my body rushed with incredible force into my face. Before I knew what was happening I lost all control and hauled off and smacked her right across the face in front of God and all his people. Everyone in the waiting room stopped what they were doing and looked at us. She

recoiled quickly and put her hand on her cheek. Diego grabbed my arms, gently from behind and moved me out of the way. He put his hands on both sides of her chair and put his face so close to hers that I wasn't sure if they were touching.

"You will do what is expected of you for the family and the organization. You will go to your husband's bedside and give him whatever it is he needs to want to live." He paused and looked at me. "Even if it's Lilly." His voice was calm but threatening. Tears welled up in her light blue eyes.

"Fine," she said in a reluctant tone.

"That is not the answer I'm looking for," he continued.

"Yes sir," she said in a sarcastic manner. Maria and I exchanged glances.

Diego stood up and walked back over to me. "Let's go to the emergency room and say goodbye before surgery." All four of us went and saw Max and Hector together in a back room.

Max was in bad shape. He wasn't as young as he used to be and this wasn't his first bullet to the chest. I took off his oxygen mask and kissed his lips. "Sweet, like sugar," he murmured. I smiled. "One more?" he asked me. "One more time." I kissed him again and he put the backs of his fingers to my cheek. "We're forever, right baby girl?"

"I will be here waiting for you," I assured him. "And yes, daddy, forever." He loved it when I called him that and he made an attempt at a weak smile. The nurse came in and told us it was time. He squeezed my hand, hard.

"You have to let him go now," she told me.

As I let go of his hand a piece of me went with him. "I love you, daddy!" I shouted. He gradually disappeared out of sight, down the hallway. Regina was standing next to Hector but there was no communication going on. "Maria," Diego called. "Please take Regina for a quick walk. I think she needs some fresh air." Maria did as she was told and Diego looked at me.

"Diego?" I asked, a little confused.

"Lilly, you know how I feel about this sort of thing. Give him a reason to live. Go..."

*Relatively Close*

I cautiously headed for Hector's bedside and removed the mask. "You heard the man," he started. "Give me a reason to live... I think I have about 30 minutes."

I laughed. "See now that's what I mean by dirtier," he smiled and looked over at Diego.

"She says I'm dirtier than Max," Hector explained. Diego shook his head.

"Besides," I continued. "You'd just be getting me warmed up in 30 minutes." He reached for my hand and I moved my lips close to his ear. "I love you, Hector, you know that," I whispered.

"You are the reason I get up in the morning," he replied. "If we didn't live together, my world would be so empty."

"Shhh," I said. "Don't say things like that."

"I wish you chose me," he continued. "I am totally and completely under your spell."

"Sometimes I wish I chose you too," I admitted. "I miss you. Sometimes I ache inside for your touch. Even now."

"Oh brother," Diego blurted. I made a face at him.

Hector reached for my cheek with his hand. "Please Lilly." He paused but I knew what he was going to ask me. "A kiss. Just one kiss."

"Wrap it up," Diego said. "The girls are coming back."

I kissed his lips a few times, softly. I was beginning to feel a little warm inside. He smiled at me as though he knew. Then I put the mask back on and quickly sat in a chair against the wall before Regina came back inside. The nurse came and asked Regina if she wanted to say anything to him before he left. She removed the mask and kissed him. Then she replaced it and said, "Thank you." They wheeled him away.

We all got up and headed for the waiting room. Regina sat with Maria and I sat with Diego. He had his arms around me as I sat there trying to hold it together. "I'm so very proud of you," he told me.

"For what?" I asked. "For loving both of them? For allowing both of them to love me?"

"Lilly-pad, I don't think you have any control over who loves

you.” He smiled.

“You know what I mean, Diego,” I continued. “I should have been stronger.”

“You have been thrown into a very complicated way of life. I think you should feel proud of the way you have survived it all.”

“I’m not feeling very proud right now,” I told him.

“I’m proud of you for not falling apart. You have really grown up, my Lilly-pad.” I smiled. He was obviously trying to lighten our very grave situation.

“Why does Maria put up with you?” I asked.

He laughed. “What do you mean?”

“You are here with me, and she is there...” I paused. “With her,” I said in an unfavorable tone, pointing to Regina. “Why does she let you comfort me?”

“Maria knows the rules,” he answered.

“What rules?” I asked.

“Lilly comes first,” he continued.

“Diego,” I looked up at him with disapproval. “You should not have a rule like that.”

“She understands that you’re the most important person in the world to me. She’s okay with that.”

“What if you marry her?” I reminded him. “She will no longer be okay with that, I assure you. Look at Regina.”

“I am not Hector. I don’t spew my feelings all over the table. But just the same, you know they’re there.” I put my head back down on his shoulder while we waited.

A few hours went by without a word. Regina was asleep on a neighboring couch and Maria and I were both leaning on Diego’s shoulders. Finally a doctor came in. “Mrs. Montiago.” Regina jumped up and I answered, “Yes, we’re here.”

“Hector came through with flying colors. The bullet was removed and there was no damage to any internal organs.”

“What about Max?” I asked beginning to feel a little panicked.

“Maxwell was in a little worse shape,” he said. I think I was holding my breath. “Although the bullet escaped out the back, he lost a lot of blood. We had to remove his spleen, which is okay, but

it had already ruptured. His system was poisoned. They are both in recovery. Max should be fine but I just want you to be prepared.”

“When can we see them?” Diego asked. “And please put them in the same room. This will make it easier for us all since they’re brothers. They are very close.”

“Yes, they share everything,” Regina said shooting me a nasty glare.

The doctor looked at her a little confused and said, “Two hours. Why don’t you go get something to eat and come back? I expect they should be lucid by then.”

“May I see Max, for a minute?” I asked. “Just for a minute?”

“Come back in two hours,” he said and walked off down the hallway. I hugged Diego and he kissed the top of my head.

“I told you, they’d come through this.” Then he reached for Regina’s arm and pulled her to him. “Do not toy with her. I will most certainly make sure you regret it.” He let her go and she almost fell off balance. We all went to the cafeteria to have some lunch. Regina was her usual talkative self.

“I hope Junior’s okay,” I added.

“Marisol is watching the kids. I asked her to keep a special eye on him,” Diego assured me. Marisol was our new nanny. We had to *remove* Angel when we found out she was on Polo’s payroll. Polo, being one of our greatest adversaries, bribed her into letting his men into our home a few years back. We thought we were paying her well but apparently not well enough. Marisol was checked and re-checked before she was hired. Diego put someone on her to watch her consistently just to be sure this kind of thing didn’t happen again. Being a Montiago had its pitfalls sometimes.

The police walked into the cafeteria. “Regina,” Diego warned. “Behave yourself. You don’t want to find out what I can do when you defy me.”

“Mrs. Montiago?” My hands began to shake.

“Yes, I am she and this is Hector’s wife, Regina Montiago.” We both shook their hands. “This is my brother-in-law Diego and his good friend Maria.”

“I know this is hard on everyone but we need to find out who

did this to your husbands.” Diego looked at Regina.

“It all happened so fast,” she said. “I’m not really sure.”

Diego came to my rescue. “Two men, hoods and masks, came in and shot them while they were cooking breakfast. We were totally unprepared. They are FBI agents and very good shots. They really caught us by surprise. When they saw they were both down... they were gone.”

“Any idea who it could have been?” one of them asked.

“Hector and Max just brought two organizations down. Polo Montiago’s and John Malone’s. Could be from either side.”

“Descriptions?” the other one asked.

“About 5’9” or 10, medium build. I told you they had hoods and ski masks on... that was all we saw.”

“Thank you for your time,” the other one said. “We’ll be in touch.”

They walked off and Diego looked at Regina. “Thank you.”

“I still think he should be punished. A 13 year old boy pointing a gun at my husband.” She made a fierce face at me. “All because of you.”

“That’s enough,” Diego scolded. “She was with Hector before you were even on his mind. Keep that in your head when you get all teenager on us.”

“He doesn’t want me,” she said again. “I should just go home.”

“I think you will learn to do as you’re told,” Diego restated.

“Do it,” Maria said. “You’ll lose everything if you push him.”

Regina looked at me. “What can he possibly do to me?” she asked. “He has no power.”

“He has your baby under his roof, doesn’t he?” I reminded her. “And where are you going to go? Back to Juan?” She suddenly got very quiet.

“I’ll go see him and stay here as long as you say,” she said realizing her limitations. “I’m sorry, I’ll do better.”

“Good girl,” Diego said in a patronizing tone. He pushed her hair off of her tear stained face. “That’s what we need from you.”



1

Two hours went by and it felt as though time was moving in slow motion. We were finally invited to see the boys. "Hector is awake," the nurse told us. "He's asking to see you," she told Regina. "This way, Lilly," she said, as they headed down the hallway.

She looked at Diego in disgust. "You see... he doesn't want me."

"Just do what you're supposed to do," he repeated. "It will be all right. He's probably just groggy from the medication."

We went into the room and Regina went to Hector. Diego and I went to Max. "Max," I said. "Max it's Lilly." But he lay there motionless, breathing with the help of a ventilator.

"He'll wake up," Diego said. "He's just tired, that's all. He'll wake up." We walked over to Hector who was both awake and in good spirits. "At least one brother is awake," Diego added.

"No, no..." he said. "He's not awake. NO...!"

He started to make an attempt to get out of bed but Diego and I pushed him back down. "It's only been a little while, Hector," I assured him. "He'll wake up." He grabbed my hand and squeezed it.

"You have to believe I didn't want anything to happen to him." He looked up at me with tears in his eyes. "Do you believe me, Lilly?"

"Of course," I answered. "I'm just glad you're up and around. You can help us wake him when you get out of here in a few days."

"Ah... home," he said looking up at Regina. "I can't wait to go home and be with my family." Regina smiled and Hector squeezed my hand.

"Junior," I reminded Diego. "We have to deal with Junior."

"I'll take the lead on this, Lilly," Diego insisted. But it was too late. He was standing at the door.





© Black Rose Writing