

REJECTED: CLAIMED BY THE ALPHA MAFIA

I'LL CARRY HER

Zane:

It's been three days since I left Kiara at the cottage, and life has been anything but easy. Her memory haunts me, infiltrating my dreams and daily life. I can't shake the guilt of sleeping with Gia, thinking she was Kiara-a foolish mistake born from a desire I was supposed to despise.

I wish I had the damn cure. I would have given it to her, but my pride got in the way, and now I'm paying for it. I didn't even like Natalie that much; I was just trying to spite Kiara. I went too far. What is this whirlwind of emotions? I push myself out of bed, needing a breath of fresh air. I haven't left the house in three days.

As my feet touch the ground, my legs wobble, barely able to support my weight. I steady myself against the wall, gripping my chest, trying to catch my breath.

"Sir," Rufus calls out, placing a hand on my shoulder. I glare at him through sleep-deprived eyes, sweat trickling down my face. "Food is ready. I advise you eat something since you haven't eaten since yesterday," he says, and my brows knit together.

"Did I say I was hungry?" I snap, standing straight. "You never do your job right. Leave before..." Before I can finish, I collapse to the ground. I really do need food; the last thing I had was breakfast two days ago, followed by a steady diet of alcohol. Yesterday, I was too tired to leave my bed.

What have you done to me, Kiara? I wonder.

"Sir, are you alright?" Rufus asks, rushing to my side.

I slap his hands away. "I'm fine! I don't need your help."

No one can see me weak. Weakness leads to disrespect, and I already have too much on my plate to add killing my servants. I push myself up, steadying my body, and sit back on the bed.

"Fetch my food," I order Rufus, who nods and leaves the room.

After he's gone, I throw myself back onto the bed. Rufus returns shortly with a tray of food, placing it on a small stool in front of me. The aroma of spaghetti bolognese fills the air, but instead of being pleasant, it churns my stomach.

I force myself to eat, savoring each bite despite the nausea. Once I'm done, I order the plates to be removed and sit with my eyes shut, contemplating what to say to my father about all the missed calls.

"Sir," Rufus's voice interrupts my thoughts. I open my mouth to speak, but he beats me to it. "The doctor has called. He says he has good news."

I push myself out of bed, facing Rufus. "Release him at once and keep watch over him. I'll be down in a minute." He disappears, and I rush through my bath, feeling a weight lift from my chest, a smile threatening to break free.

It feels like being a kid again, dressing up to go to my favorite park or see a movie. I pray the doctor has a cure. Deep down, despite everything, I don't want Kiara to die. Not now, not ever.

Once I'm dressed, I head downstairs to the living room where the doctor waits, his feet bound in chains, two of my men flanking him.

"I think I have your cure, sir," he says, holding up a tiny bottle.

I snatch it from him, inspecting it like I know what to look for. Excitement bubbles inside me, but I keep my face stern. "There should be more," I say, raising an eyebrow.

He nods. "I made a lot. You can have all of it if you grant me my freedom."

I look from the old man to my men. "Go check what he has to offer. If it's genuine, report back to me," I tell Rufus, who bows and leaves the room. He returns shortly with good news.

"Very well. We'll go to the cottage. If the potion cures Kiara, you'll have your freedom," I say to the doctor, who nods. "Rally the men. We leave in half an hour," I instruct my men.

Kiara:

It's been three days since I cured myself, and I've been surviving on the herbs and the little food Zane provided. I hate it here and want to escape, but I'm cursed and need to study the grimoire vigorously to find a way.

I'm in the living room, absorbed in spells, when I hear the gates opening. My heart races, thinking my ears are playing tricks on me. I get up and see a fleet of cars flooding in. Panic surges. I jump to my feet, shutting the secret door and placing the lamp back in position. Rushing to my room, I throw the spell book under the bed and drape a cover over myself.

The door to the house bursts open, and Zane marches in, his face unreadable. He walks up to me, his expression hard.

"Out of the benevolence of my heart, I've decided to bring you the cure. After this, I'll take you home."

My eyes widen. I'm finally leaving?

"Open up," he says, twisting the cap off the bottle. I scrutinize the contents. It's fake-I can tell by the color. The real potion should be black, not white.

Ariana walks in, and I let out a loud cough, hitting my chest. She rushes to me.

"Drink it!" Zane demands, and Ariana steps back, fear in her eyes.

"I'd like Ariana to give it to me. She'll be gentle, please," I say softly. Zane glares at me, then turns to her.

"Very well," he says, handing her the bottle and stepping back.

Ariana sits beside me, touching my forehead. I pull off the cover. "I'm fine. I cured myself. Throw that away." Her eyes widen in shock.

I grab the potion, rush to the window, and pour it out. "I'll explain later," I say, handing her the bottle.

I pull out the grimoire from under the bed, lifting my dress. "Fasten this to my belly," I instruct her, handing her a cloth.

"Faster, we don't have much time."

She works quickly, securing the book to my stomach. I smooth my dress down, ensuring it's hidden. Then I collapse to the ground, screaming.

Zane bursts in, and I exchange a look with Ariana, who plays along perfectly.

"I gave her the potion, and she fell," she says, fear in her voice.

"It's the potion's effect. She'll be stiff for a moment and needs to be carried," Zane says.

I roll my eyes inwardly, imagining what would have happened if I'd taken the fake potion. It would create a healing illusion while killing me inside.

Rufus moves to lift me, but Zane stops him. "I'll carry her," he says, and my eyes widen.