

# REJECTED: CLAIMED BY THE ALPHA MAFIA

## TAKING A BULLET

Zane:

I feel a pang of pain flash through my chest as I watch her beautiful eyes shut. This is the second time I feel tears in my eyes, and it is all because of her. If someone had told me a day would come when I would love and care for someone more than I did for myself, I would call them a liar, but here I am on the brink of tears for this woman.

With my hands gripping her tightly, I lift her in my arms, then I open the doors of the car, laying her gently in the back seat. I kiss her forehead.

"As long as I am alive, no one will ever hurt you," I say, then I slam the door shut, getting into the passenger seat.

I pause for a moment, taking a deep breath, trying to get myself together before hitting the road.

"You have to be a man and save the woman you love," I say to myself as I turn on the ignition, then I grip the steering wheel hard, setting out on the road.

Reaching for my pockets, I take out my phone, and I put a call across to Rufus.

"I am on my way, and I hope everything is ready?" I ask.

"Yes, sir," he replies, then I end the call, wheeling the car out of the hotel.

I try to keep a straight mind as I drive straight to the airport. This is for the best, and when I figure everything out, then we will be together with nothing in the way.

As I pull up to the airport, the lights from the runway pierce through the windshield, casting harsh reflections. I spot Rufus standing by the jet with a car waiting for me. I take another deep breath before cutting the engine and stepping out of the car. The cool night air hits my face, but it does nothing to quell the storm raging inside me.

Rufus walks up to me.

"Everything's ready, boss."

"Good," I say, then we exchange car keys. "You know you will have to drive all night to get to Grandville?" I ask, and he nods.

"I am aware, sir, and I am fully prepared. Treasure is here as you asked, and she is waiting in the jet," he adds. I pat his back before walking back to the car.

I open the back door gently, scooping her up in my arms, then I plant a kiss on her head.

"I will be back tomorrow or next," I say to her as though she can hear me.

Then I walk toward Rufus, who is waiting to take her in, but I find my hands stiff and reluctant to give her up.

"Sir, we need to leave as soon as possible, as we are almost behind schedule," Rufus says, while I stare down at Kiara in my arms.

Finally, I hand her over to him.

"I am aware, Rufus. Take good care of her," I say to him, and he nods.

As he takes her in his hands, I feel a pang in my chest, which makes me question my choices once more. The pain gnaws at me in full, but I do not want to give in, so I walk to my car, then I get into it and drive off without looking back.

The farther I drive from the airport, the heavier my chest gets, but I can't take it. Soon, I reach the hotel, and I rush inside to our room, hurriedly packing up our stuff. I put a call across, and my men make it to the room, helping with the luggage. They take it out, and we head to the airport.

I have only completed one out of three tasks, and I need to be home to finish off. Soon, we reach a different airport where another jet waits, and we board at once, heading home.

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A few hours later, I am back home, staring at my reflection in the mirror. The small glass of antidote sits on the table. My bloodshot, sleep-deprived eyes tell the story of how badly Kiara's absence gnaws at my soul. But I can't let it break me. Not now.

As I walk to my closet to grab my gun, all I can think about is her. I wonder if she is awake now. What would she do? Would she hate me? Curse me for taking her away, or would she cry out in fury, unleashing the storm that I've always known lies just beneath her surface?

My heart races. Its dull ache spreads through my ribcage as I reach for the drawer, pulling it open to reveal the cold, metallic weapon. Next to it lies something I haven't touched in years-a rosary. The sight of it sends a shiver through me, reminding me of my childhood.

I'm not the praying type, not since the night my parents were taken. But maybe now, more than ever, I need something-anything-to hold on to. My fingers curl around the rosary, and I wrap it around my wrist like a shield, hoping it might bring some kind of strength for what I'm about to do.

Without hesitation, I pick up the gun and load it with the argentum bullet. Standing in front of the mirror, I can see the desperation in my eyes. The man I used to be has totally slipped away, and I have no control over my life.

I raise the gun, the barrel cold against my skin as I aim it at my left arm. My chest tightens, but I hold steady, my finger hovering over the trigger.

"God," I whisper, my voice barely audible. "I don't ask for an easy life. I never have. But don't make me suffer more than I already have. Losing my parents was enough, but don't take away the last hope I have of staying human."

My finger squeezes the trigger.

The gunshot explodes in the small room. Pain slams into me, white-hot and searing. The argentum burns as it rips through my flesh, spreading like fire under my skin. I gasp, the air stolen from my lungs as I stagger backward, my vision blurring. It feels like a thousand needles digging into every nerve, and yet I don't stop.

Gritting my teeth, I dig my fingers into the wound, blood slicking my hand as I search for the bullet lodged deep in the muscle. I finally grasp it, pulling it out with a guttural groan that echoes in the silence of the room.

My hand shakes as I reload the bullet, blood dripping from my fingers. The room spins around me, but I can't afford to care.

I raise the gun again, this time aiming lower on my arm, and fire once more. The second shot is worse, the pain more intense, as if the argentum is spreading faster now, eating away at my body. My knees buckle, and I collapse onto the floor, clutching my arm as the poison spreads through my veins.

With shaking hands, I dig into the wound again, wrenching the argentum bullet free. My vision dims as darkness creeps around the edges of my sight, but I force myself to reload once more, the cold metal slick with blood as I slam it into the chamber.

This time, as I pull the trigger, the bullet tears through my skin and bone with such force that I almost black out. I drop the gun, my body falling limp against the floor, my pulse slowing as the argentum poison works its way through me, eating me alive from the inside out.

My hand fumbles for my phone, shaking uncontrollably as I dial the number.

"Call my father," I say. "Tell him I've been hurt. I'm dying.."

The phone slips from my grasp as I crawl toward the antidote on the table. My fingers brush the glass, trembling as I reach for it. I can feel my heartbeat slowing. Finally, I manage to grip the antidote, and with the last ounce of strength I have, I down its contents, feeling the cool liquid slide down my throat.