

REJECTED: CLAIMED BY THE ALPHA MAFIA

FAMILY MAN

Zane:

"That is what I am telling the young lad. I enjoy seeing young people in love because it reminds me of the good old days. The adrenaline mixed with fear when you are about to make the move that will change your entire life."

For some reason, they think their words are encouraging, but they are only making me scared, and I am trying hard to push away the thoughts that are questioning why I am trying to buy a ring for Kiara. As they keep taunting me, I look down at the finely polished marble floor beneath. I try to hold down my feelings as I remember Kiara's voice asking me to be more gentle with people.

"Look around, young lad; pick something nice for your lady," Jerome says, and I force a smile, looking around the store, which has cases lined with plush, dark velvet, showcasing a carefully curated collection of sparkling jewels. Ranging from diamond rings, necklaces, and bracelets that sit perfectly on the ring cushion.

I walk around, staring at the rings, but none catches my attention. They are all beautiful, but I want something different and not very common. After I have gone around the cases, I shake my head.

"They are all good, but I do not think any of them match what I want," I say to the old man, who adjusts his glasses to look at me. "I want something a little special. The rings look good and expensive, but something simpler and better."

When I say this, he runs his hands over his beard. "I might have what you are looking for, but it is very expensive," he says, and I glare at him with my brows raised.

"Try me," I say, and he walks to a safe behind the counter, opening it and taking out a box. He places it in front of me, and I look at the polished dark mahogany ring box. I open it up to see a soft blush pink velvet cushion that cradles the diamond, enhancing its rare rosy hue. As I stare at the ring, he pulls out a diamond tester, then he places it on the ring, and I watch it hit the green mark.

"Limited edition," he says, and I stare at it, imagining how beautiful it will look on Kiara's fingers.

"I will take it," I say to him, then Theo clasps his hands together.

"It is beautiful," he says, and a smile crosses my face.

"It is five hundred thousand," Jerome says, and I nod, then I take out my phone as he calls out the account number. I place a call to Rufus at once.

"I sent you an account number. Wire five hundred to it," I say to him, then I end the call.

About a minute later, the man's phone beeps, and he looks at it with a smile forming on his lips. "It is nice doing business with you," he says, then he takes the ring to package it while I wait there with Theo.

He is done in no time, and he hands me the packaging. I thank him, then I walk out of the store with a million thoughts swirling around my head. I am about to propose to a woman my father wants dead, and it scares me so much, but nothing makes me happier than her.

"My work here is done," Theo says, hopping on his bike.

"Wait!" I call out again, then he faces me with a smile on his face. I want to thank him for taking me to the jeweler and making me choose the finest ring I have ever seen.

"Let me buy you lunch. That is the best I can do for you at this point; I mean you..."

"I cannot do that," he says, cutting me off. "I accept your gesture, but for fifteen years now, I have never had lunch outside my home. My wife will be angry if I break that now, and it is almost lunchtime. She will be waiting with the kids."

His words once more cause me to feel emotions I cannot quite process.

"How about a drink? Just one tall glass to thank you," I say to him, and he nods.

"You know there is a bar by the corner, and a drink wouldn't hurt." I get into my car, trailing him behind to the bar by the corner, only to end up in the Whiskeys and Wonders bar. A bar that holds a lot of memories for Mindy and me.

It is just one drink; I say to myself as I take a deep breath, getting out of the car. I walk into the bar with Theo, and we make our way to the counter, where we take a seat on the stools in front. Theo rings the bell on the counter, and the bartender shows up to serve us.

"Zane?" the man in a cap calls out, and I look up to see Ethan. I cannot believe he is still working here as a bartender. We exchange handshakes.

"It has been a while, man, and I cannot believe Zane Malibu is back at Efla," he says, and I force a smile.

"I do not intend for a lot of people to know either," I say to him, and he throws his hands in the air.

"That is chill, man; I ain't a snitch," he replies.

"I want two tall glasses of martini," I say to him, and he nods, then he goes to get to work while I sit there with Theo, who is on his phone.

My thoughts are still clouded, and something in me wants to speak with this man. He has a wife and kids in a happy marriage, so who better to speak with?

"You have five kids, right?" I question, and Theo looks up, placing his phone on the counter.

"Yeah, the oldest is fifteen, and the last is five," he says, and I nod my head with a smile on my lips. Ethan returns with our drinks, then he places them in front of us. I take out a hundred-dollar note, then I drop it on the counter.

"Keep the change," I say, and he fist bumps me. I sip from my glass, then I face Theo.

"So... what makes a marriage successful and happy like yours?" I ask, and he places his glass back on the counter after taking a sip.

"A happy wife. You need to know what makes your wife happy, and when you hit those things, then your marriage will be blissful," he says, and I nod.

At least I am on the right path, I say to myself. I have managed to get around Kiara's moodiness skillfully, and I am doing my best to keep her happy.

"What about kids? Were you scared as a first-time dad, or...?"

"Everyone is scared to be parents, Mr. Malibu. Taking care of another human isn't a joke, but when you find the right person to do it with, then it becomes easier. We have had our highs and lows, but we keep working towards providing and being the best versions of ourselves for the kids," he says, and I swallow hard, forcing a smile.

I gently sip my drink without asking any more questions.

"I didn't mean to scare you," Theo breaks the silence. "But having kids is no joke, but I am sure you will be a good family man. You already love your partner so much, so that is a step forward. But do not allow the kids to make you lose your spark. Love your partner as much as you loved them in the beginning. Also know they will change. The body of a woman changes with kids, but never give up on her. That is when you should love her more and let her know how beautiful she is."

His alarm goes off in that moment, and he gulps down the contents of his glass.

"Time's up," he says, then we exchange handshakes.

"See you in the evening, Theo." He walks away, then I ask Ethan to pour me another glass.

I sit there, taking in Theo's words. My thoughts travel far that I forget myself for a moment until I feel someone's hands on my shoulder...