

REJECTED: CLAIMED BY THE ALPHA MAFIA

GIVING UP THE EMPIRE

Zane:

As the paramedics wheel Boris into the ambulance, I trail behind, my legs heavy and my thoughts tangled in guilt and fear. My father lies pale and almost lifeless on the stretcher. The sight claws at my insides. This is my fault-my father's life hangs by a thread because of me, and my fiancée is in danger, yet I have no idea what I am doing. I am utterly useless.

"We'll do everything we can to stabilize him," a female paramedic says, but her voice is distant, drowned out by the chaos inside my head. I barely register her words as everything in my background blurs, except for the paramedics at the back of the ambulance. One presses the defibrillator paddles against Boris's chest, calling out instructions to the others.

For a moment, nothing happens. The beeping from the ECG is flat, giving a single, piercing tone that feels like a countdown to the inevitable. Then, suddenly, a faint rhythm flickers to life on the monitor. A series of steady beeps follows, growing stronger. The paramedics exchange glances, nodding as relief flickers on their faces.

"Mr. Malibu." The paramedic calls out again, and her voice hits me like a splash of ice water. My breath rushes out in a sharp exhale, the weight on my chest easing slightly as I'm drawn back into the present. My father's heart is beating again-there's still hope.

Before I can say anything, the doors of the ambulance swing shut with a loud clang. The lady taps me on the shoulder, then she rushes to the front of the ambulance as the siren blares heavily in the air. My legs begin to walk, and I rush to my car at once, trailing behind them until they get to the hospital.

When they pull the stretcher out, Boris's eyes flicker open, giving me more hope, but I stop by the door, waiting until they have taken him far into the hospital. Then I walk into the reception, making my way to the front desk.

"That's my father, and he just had a heart attack. Keep me informed on anything that happens," I say, dropping my card with the nurse at the desk. "What about the paperwork?" she asks, and I pause to catch a breath.

"My sister will come around to do the paperwork," I say to her, then I walk away without waiting for her to speak.

As I walk through the sliding doors, a thousand emotions crash down on me at once. I make my way to my car, slamming the door, and throwing my head backward. Then I reach for my pocket, taking out my phone. I place a call to Gia.

"Boris is at St. Lucy hospital, and you have to get there quick to do the paperwork. I do not think he wants to see me right now," I say as soon as she picks up.

"What? What happened to him, or rather what did..." I end the call before she can finish, then I shut my eyes, trying to focus on the problem at hand.

A thought crosses my mind, and a part of me tries to reject it, but when I weigh everything at hand, I realize I have no choice left. So I place a call to Yusuf. The call goes through, but he doesn't pick up. I call two more times, and there is no response, so I decide to find him. I drive hurriedly back to Boris's house, then I get one of his men to prepare a helicopter.

There is only one place Yusuf can hide-his property in the Flora hills. He purchased it when he turned twenty. When we were younger, he would take me there, and we would party all week, hiding away from Father. Everything turned sour when he felt Father preferred me to him. He wasn't entirely wrong, but his anger at being directed at me alone is something I will never understand.

Shortly, the helicopter lands on the spare helipad on Yusuf's property. I know this is probably one of the worst plans, and I could get killed, but I have no choice. As soon as it comes to a halt, I make my way out of it, and before I can take a step, about a dozen armed men surround me. I throw my hands in the air. One of them steps up, pressing a shotgun to the back of my head.

"I want to see your boss," I say to him, and he scoffs. "Keep your guards up, boys," he says, then he pushes me forward with the gun, while his men grab the man with me. I begin to move until we get to the front of the house.

There on the balcony of the two-story building, Yusuf stands with a cigar in his hands, his eyes covered in shades. When he sees me, he leans on the balustrade, placing his leg in between one of them.

"You really want to die in my hands, Zane," he says, and I glare at him with no words. He puffs his cigar, then he chuckles.

"Speak, or a bullet will go into your head this moment," he says as he takes off his glasses and hangs them on his shirt.

"Father is in the hospital," I begin, and he chuckles.

"He keeps going to the hospital, and he never dies. I guess I have bad luck," he says, then he takes a puff of his smoke while laughing.

Suddenly, his laughter turns into a frantic cough, and he begins to hit his chest. A servant walks through the door of the balcony with a glass of water, which he downs in one go before he turns to me.

"Why are you here?" he asks with a straight face.

"I need your help. Kiara has been kidnapped, and Father's men will not do," I say to him, and he scoffs. "I know that half your men or all are werewolves, so they will come in handy," I say to him, then he holds his gaze for a moment before crushing the butt of his cigarette on the top rail of the balustrade.

"Search him!" he orders the man.

He nods with the gun still pressed at the back of my head, then he taps around my body, dipping his hands into my pockets to look for weapons. He takes out my wallet and phone, tossing them on the ground. When he is done manhandling me in the name of searching, he gives Yusuf a thumbs up.

"Bring him in!" Yusuf commands, and he takes the gun off my head.

I walk towards the front door, which is opened by a man on standby. Then I make my way into the house, which sends nostalgia running through my body. The scent of the house is still the same-basically alcohol and weed. Everything is still the same, but I do not miss it. The life I have now seems better, and I am willing to fight for it.

When I get to the balcony, Yusuf offers me a seat, but I do not sit.

"I'd rather stand, as I do not have much time at hand." When I say this, a smirk spreads on his lips.

"Zane, always in a rush. Mr. Rush Hour," he calls me the name he hasn't called me in almost a decade now. He would tell me when we were younger that I took life too seriously.

"I am quite in a hurry, and I know what you want, so let's cut to the chase." My heart pounds in my chest when I say this.

If Boris knows I am about to give out his entire empire, it will take the will of God and the strength of all heavenly bodies to bring him back to life.

"You are here to trade the empire? The companies and everything Father has signed in your name?" he asks, and I hesitate before I mutter a yes. He lets out a short laugh, his gaze fixed on me for a moment, before he lights another cigar at once. He gets to his feet, walking around me, then he inhales his cigar and puffs it into my face.

"Look at that, my little brother is a businessman," he says, but I ignore him. "I was in doubt you would find love, but you did. You are really an enviable man right now. Father gave you everything, and you found love," he says, letting out a chuckle.

"Each second we waste is precious, Yusuf, so can we get to business?" I question, and he nods.

"Okay, okay, business," he says, then he takes a step back.

"I will sign all the properties to you, and I will leave town, too. You can have it all, but in return, I want your monetary share." When I say this, he lets out a cackle, clapping his hands.

"My little brother is indeed a businessman."