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WORK SAMPLE: Plot outline & 3k word chapter

Genre: Billionaire Romance

TITLE: The Billionaire's Engagement

WORDCOUNT: 30-50k words

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Plot Outline:

Xander Jericho is a billionaire whose fortune comes from precious gemstones. His father owned a sapphire mine, and he is trying to expand into emeralds and rubies. One day, he visits a small jewelry store named Pearl's to ask about their supply and sources, trying to get some insight into his rivals. He meets Karissa, a saleswoman at Pearl's, and whisks her off her feet, romancing her into the high end world of gem and jewelry dealers.

Xander recently invested in a new claim that is pulling out extremely rare yellow sapphires, but he's having a hard time priming the market for these jewels. The mine is in Belize, and he often flies Karissa out there to relax on the beach while he visits his property.

Meanwhile, his largest competitor, Alfred Verita, is trying to squeeze him out by decreasing the value of his jewels. Zander meets Alfred's daughter, heiress and socialite Anneliese Verita, at a party. He can tell she's trying to seduce him in order to steal his company's secrets, so he decides to play along and see what she is playing at.

Xander's second hand man and best friend and mine operator, Jerome Laudley, returns from the mine in Belize and shows him an absolutely spectacular gem - the cream of the crop from the mine. Xander shows it to Karissa and asks, if someone proposed to her with that, would she say yes? She says of course she could, thinking he means her. Jerome and Xander have Karissa help them design an absolutely gorgeous engagement ring that would be perfect to show off the jewel, often asking her what a woman would want, whether this would make someone more likely to say yes, etc.

In September, the annual Global Gemstone Society Gala is held - a black tie affair that's essentially the main event for the world of gemstone collectors and sellers. Xander says the ring is being designed to show off at the Gala, which is why it's so high stakes. Karissa intends to be Xander plus one at the Gala, but at the very last minute, Jerome intercepts her instead and claims that Xander is too busy managing the politics of making sure his ring takes Best In Show. Karissa is stuck on the edges of the party, with Jerome making it impossible for her to see Xander.

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Then, there's a huge kerfuffle. When his masterpiece ring was unveiled, it was not alone in its velvet display case - it came with a marriage proposal. From Xander to Anneliese. Anneliese squeals in delight, realizing just how special the ring is, and accepts on the spot. Xander and Anneliese are swept up in the paparazzi cameras, with everyone gushing over Anneliese's incredible ring and the new "gemstone power couple."

Humiliated and heartbroken, Karissa leaves the Gala. What she doesn't know is that this was Jerome's plan, not Xander's. He knew that Anneliese would accept the proposal, and that this would skyrocket the value of the golden sapphires. Seeing a Jericho Company jewel on the finger of a Verita heiress, not to mention all the publicity and fuss over their engagement, would ensure the success of their investment.

The next day, Xander arrives at Pearl's to apologize to Karissa, explain everything, and grovel for her forgiveness. He swears that he has no intention of marrying Anneliese, has fired Jerome, and will do everything he can to get back the ring that should belong to Karissa. They are able to do so with a lawsuit that proves that the design was primarily hers, since she kept all her drawings and work she did on the ring's design.

As soon as they get the court win and Xander is given back the ring, he proposes, for real this time, and Karissa accepts.

Sample Chapter:

Karissa had taken two days off after the Gemstone Gala, expecting to be spending time with Xander during the convention. But since she certainly wouldn't be attending any more Gemstone Society events with Xander, spending two days wallowing in her apartment didn't sound like fun.

After the humiliation of watching the man she thought was the love of her life propose to another woman, Karissa needed a distraction. Going to work would occupy her mind so she wasn't just picturing Xander out with some stupid heiress who was wearing the ring Karissa expected to be hers. Plus, Xander kept trying to call her, and being on the floor at work was a great excuse to keep her phone turned off.

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Since she wasn't actually on the schedule for that day, Karissa knew her arrival at Pearl's Jewelry would be a surprise to Shelley. Still, she hoped her manager wouldn't ask too many questions and just let her spend a shift or two in the shop.

"I thought you had the day off," Shelley said when Karissa walked in, looking up from the display case she was windowing.

"I felt like coming in," Karissa mumbled as she grabbed her key lanyard and slipping it over her head.

"What happened to all that Gemstone Society gallivanting you were planning to do?" Shelley set the window bottle down and stood up, hands on her hips. She was never one to let a half-answer drop without follow up questions. "They've still got stuff going on through the weekend. You're not hanging out on the arm of your gemstone guy?"

"He doesn't need me for those," Karissa said, reaching for the glass cleaner herself. "It's just industry stuff."

Of course, this was a lie. There were plenty of fancy luncheons and evening gatherings that Karissa had intended to be at. He'd even taken her shopping for all the clothes she'd need - a beaded Stella McCartney mini for an outdoor lunch; a longer Versace gown for another evening event, and a super chic Burberry jacket for a meeting of industry leaders.

Realizing that this would be the last time Karissa would need new clothes for some outing with Xander, and the last time he'd swipe that black card with a wink and a grin, Karissa felt a wave of sadness crash over her.

"Did something happen? He didn't do anything stupid, did he? Men can be so clueless. He better not have broken your heart, or I'll head down there myself and tell him off."

Shelley was trying to be supportive, Karissa knew, but she really didn't feel like explaining the whole situation.

"No, it's fine." Karissa grabbed the bottle of glass cleaner and started wiping down a nearby case, despite the fact that it was completely streak free. In fact, it was even possible that Shelley had just finished cleaning that one. Karissa didn't care. She just needed somewhere to put her frustrated, angry energy. "I was just tired of all the schmoozing, you know?"

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“Alright,” Shelley said, in a tone that indicated she didn’t believe Karissa, but was choosing not to pry. “Well, you’re welcome to take a shift today, but with all the gemstone dealers in town, it’ll probably be slow. Anyone looking for fine jewelry is probably downtown.”

Karissa shrugged. It didn’t matter to her how busy the shop would be. She continued to furiously scrub at a non-existent spot on the glass, doing her best to ignore the glimmering engagement rings on display beneath it.

“Is that your phone? I think I hear it ringing in your bag. Maybe that’s him calling! You should answer it.”

Karissa rubbed her forehead. On any other day, she’d be thrilled to work for a cool manager who let employees break rules sometimes and answer their phones while on the clock. But today, she knew it was Xander, and she wasn’t interested.

“No, it’s probably just a wrong number or something. Sorry about that. I’ll turn it off.” Karissa grabbed her phone out of her purse, careful to keep the caller ID hidden from Shelley’s curious gaze, and held the button down, not caring that if the call ended mid-ring, Xander would know that she was actively avoiding his calls.

“Whatever you say.” Shelley gave a theatrical shrug. “Well, since you’re here, let me go call Abby and see if she wants to take the day off.”

Just as Shelley disappeared into her office, the delicate bell over the shop door tinkled. Karissa looked up, ready to greet the customer and grateful for the excuse to stop chatting with Shelley.

Standing in the doorway, holding a giant bouquet of flowers she could smell from feet away, was Xander.

“I tried calling,” he said, looking sheepish. “And I went by your house. I thought you didn’t have work today.”

“I always work on Saturdays,” Karissa snapped, refusing to look Xander in the eye. “Even when other people are out running around at parties and whatever.”

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“I told everyone I’d be gone today,” Xander said. “I canceled all my private meetings with other mine owners and gemstone distributors, because we need to talk -”

“Talk about what?” Karissa interrupted. “Designing your wedding ring, now that you’re engaged? Is that what you want from me?”

“No!” Xander took a few steps toward her, but Karissa stayed behind the jewelry counter. “I’m not engaged, Karissa, please.”

“Not engaged?” Karissa let out a shocked little laugh. “Xander, I was there! There for the big proposal, the splashy champagne, her posing for all those pictures with the ring I helped you create!”

“It’s not real.” Xander sounded so plaintive that Karissa finally let herself look up and meet his eyes. They looked as devastated as she had felt the night before, and she felt herself soften a little as he continued. “Karissa, please, let me explain.”

“Go ahead.” Karissa unfolded her arms, leaning back against the jewelry shop’s wall.

“Uh...” Xander seemed less confident that Karissa was used to seeing him. He looked around as if he needed somewhere to set down the giant bouquet. “Could we go somewhere? To talk?”

“No.” Karissa stood her ground. “I’m working. You say what you have to say here, or you wait for me to get off my shift.”

“Okay.” Xander shifted the flowers from one hand to the other. Karissa noticed that he was still wearing the green banded Vacheron Constantin watch from the night before, despite the fact that he always took his watches off to sleep and generally didn’t wear his most expensive pieces out during the day. He looked awful - certainly not like a man who’d just gotten engaged to a famous, beautiful heiress.

“I wanted to see you last night, really, I did. Jerome just kept shoving me around, introducing me to all these dealers and investors, and - it doesn’t matter. I should have come and found you, even if it meant being rude.”

Karissa just shrugged, waiting for Xander to go on. But just then, the door to the back of the shop opened and Shelley reappeared.

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“Hello! How can I help you?” Karissa had heard Shelley’s customer greeting so many times she could probably do a pitch perfect impression of it. It sounded weird, though, when the person she was talking to was Xander. Xander, who had only ever set foot in the shop in an attempt to gather dirt on his enemies in the industry. Xander, who had left Karissa a sobbing mess the night before because courting some diamond titan’s daughter was more important.

Xander, who right now was looking a bit lost, standing in the middle of a small jewelry store with a comically large bouquet, being greeted by a woman who thought he was just another guy trying to buy a tennis bracelet for his wife.

“I’m actually here to see her,” Xander said, gathering his composure and flashing Shelley that charming smile.

“You’re here for Karissa?”

“Yes.” Xander held up the flowers as if in offering. “In fact, might I ask you an enormous favor? I was hoping to speak with her privately, but it seems she’s currently on the clock - might I prevail upon you to let her leave with me for an extended break?”

Shelley looked at Karissa with a thrilled expression on her face, her eyes raised in a hundred unspoken questions. Karissa could see that Shelley was intrigued, almost giddy, about Xander’s sudden arrival. She had done her best to keep the details of her romance with the billionaire private at work, but now she would face no end of questions from her well meaning boss.

“Of course she can go on break! Go, go!” Shelley was nearly shooing Karissa out the door, so excited by the prospect of young love that she paid little attention to Karissa’s protests. “Do you need some water for those flowers?” Shelley asked, taking them from a gracious, grateful Xander. Karissa knew that when she returned to Pearl’s, which she meant to do as soon as possible, they would be in a huge crystal vase, and Shelley would be gushing over the romantic gesture.

If only she knew.

“Well?” Karissa demanded, as soon as they had left the shop and the door shut behind them.

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Xander's car was waiting just outside, and he held the door open for her. Karissa didn't feel much like getting in an enclosed space with the man who'd just trampled all over her heart, but it was hot outside, and the car's interior was comfortably air conditioned. She slid over the leather seats, taking a spot as far away from Xander as possible.

"Shall we get something to eat?" Xander had his phone out, presumably looking up fine restaurants in the area. But Karissa wasn't going to be wined and dined out of her feelings. She didn't care if she never tasted a vintage Lafite Rothschild again, if it meant not being let down and hurt like this anymore.

"No," Karissa said, folding her arms and staring out the window. "I'm not hungry. Let's just talk here."

"Okay." Xander signaled to his driver to drive around the block, then pressed a button that lifted the divider so he and Karissa could speak privately.

"The whole engagement was Jerome's idea," Xander said, once the car was moving. "He kept telling me that if I could get photos in the press of a Brighton sapphire on the finger of a Verita, especially Anneliese, it would make the value skyrocket. He wanted me to keep dating her, to get more serious, so I could give her a gift like that, but she was just so..." Xander trailed off for a moment, watching the city go by outside. "I didn't want her. I wanted you."

"Yeah, you made that obvious when you proposed to me over her - oh, wait. You didn't."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," Xander pleaded. "I didn't propose to her. Jerome put that note in the display box. I was just as shocked as everyone else when it came out. And then everyone was shoving cameras in my face, and Anneliese was screaming, and Jerome had all the press there, and I didn't know what to do. I tried to find you as soon as I could get away, but my driver said you'd gone home."

It was a crazy story. Almost impossible to believe. Jerome was Xander's best friend. How could he set him up like that? And how could Xander have let that happen? Karissa had always know him to be so in control. It didn't make sense that he'd just let himself be snowed under by an obnoxious socialite and a bunch of paparazzi.

"What did Anneliese say? You told her it was all fake, right? Or does she think you're in love with her?"

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Xander winced, running a hand through his hair before taking a deep breath and continuing. “We talked later that night, after all the chaos died down. She says she knew it was a publicity stunt, but went along with it because she wanted the ring and the magazine covers. Her plan is for us to milk this a bit more, then have a quiet and amicable breakup in about six months.”

“SIX MONTHS!?” Karissa caught herself shouting when a woman with a baby stroller looked at her across the parking lot, then lowered her voice. “You’re going to date Anneliese Verita for six months?”

“No! No, of course not.” Xander held his hands up. “No, I told her it had all been a mistake, and that we should all just forget it. She wasn’t so happy about that.”

It seemed Xander had managed to embarrass two women in one night, though Karissa would guess that Anneliese was probably less heartbroken about the whole thing and more just annoyed.

“It doesn’t matter about Anneliese,” Xander said, reaching across the sun-warmed table to take Karissa’s hands in his. To her own surprise, she let him. “I knew you were there, and that you’d seen everything, and I wanted to explain as soon as I could, so you wouldn’t be hurt. But you were gone, and Jerome was making everything so crazy...” Xander’s eyes flashed with anger, a chilly note in his expression. “Jerome isn’t working with me anymore. I made sure of that. He can go back to France and mess around with his dad’s watch shop, but I doubt anyone will hire him after all this.”

“I’m sorry,” Karissa said softly. And she did feel sorry. Not for Jerome, but sorry for Xander, who had lost his best friend and business partner in such a nasty way.

“It’s fine,” Xander said with an airy wave of his hand, as if dismissing the entire concept of Jerome and his betrayal. Karissa knew that wouldn’t be the end of it, but could tell that in this moment, Xander wanted to talk about something else instead. “What’s important to me is you. I knew I had to make things right with you. I was up all night, I couldn’t sleep, I was so worried about how you must feel in all this. I’m so sorry, Karissa.”

Karissa took a deep breath. Five minutes ago, she thought she would never want to see Xander again. She never could have imagined that he’d show up with a huge bouquet and a story that

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would make her feel like everything was going to be okay again. Suddenly, her eyes were filling with tears of relief.

“I thought you’d abandoned me,” Karissa said, reaching over to take Xander’s hand.

Rather than just hold Karissa’s hand, Xander pulled her close, gathering her in his arms as they nestled together on the car’s leather seat. “In fact, if I wasn’t sure before, the whole mess with Anneliese made me realize - it’s you I want to be married to. If you’ll have me.”

“Is this a proposal?” Karissa sniffled, then laughed. It all seemed too surreal to be true.

“Yes.” Zander slid off the seat and took a knee on the floor of his car, swaying slightly as the driver took a turn. “Karissa Jaylee Ackerson, will you marry me?”

“Yes!” Karissa grinned. Xander pulled her into a deep kiss, and eventually the two were tangled up on the plush carpet floor of his private car. It was quite a different proposal than the one she’d witnessed last night. This one was intimate, just the two of them, no flashing cameras or shouting crowd.

And, best of all, it was real.