

Chapter 10 ~ Mason

After I'd shattered my phone, I'd grabbed my work phone and my bike key and raced out to follow Sage home. I knew she was crying and needed to know she'd made it to her apartment safely. She was just turning the corner at the end of my street, and when I caught up to her -- staying far enough back to keep her in my sight but on her visual radar -- I was relieved to see she was driving carefully.

I'd followed her up to her apartment and stood outside the door, listening to make sure everything was OK inside her place.

But it wasn't; not really. She was crying loud enough that I could hear her and I wasn't sure who I wanted to tear apart more: Eva, for pulling all of her shit, or me for not having cut off all contact with the viperous bitch long ago -- and of course, the motherfucking kiss in the alley that ruined Sage's and my relationship.

This was my own fault, and hearing the evidence of my girl's heart-breaking broke me in a way that nothing ever had before. My gut was churning, my muscles were tensing and I had to talk myself out of busting into her apartment and forcing her to listen until she believed me.

But how many people would think a legal paternity test -- witnessed, transacted perfectly according to protocols -- could be tampered with? Even knowing Eva was a nasty bitch, it was a huge leap from nasty to playing with lives by falsifying information. Especially given that we were already dealing with Sage not trusting me because of the alley kiss. Believing I was guilty of fucking Eva made a helluva lot more sense than someone tampering with the results of a legal paternity test.

I stood there until she stopped crying, feeling like I needed to stand guard for some reason -- and the irony was, I was the one she needed guarding from since I'd been the one to cause this insanity. So it was about two hours later that I reluctantly headed home where I let out Cashew, fed him his (very late) dinner, then grabbed my bottle of Glenlivet and threw myself on the couch.

Where I proceeded to fucking obliterate myself until I passed out. I needed to not think, to not remember that look on Sage's face when she processed what those results were telling her -- a look of utter betrayal mixed with anger and loathing and heartbreak. It killed me to think she believed Eva's doctored test results. She knew I'd never lied to her -- knew it. And I knew that she knew it. I'd needed her to believe me last night, but trust was a fragile thing and I'd shattered hers as surely as I'd shattered my phone. Just as I was starting to think about different and creative ways to make Eva suffer for what her lies had done to Sage, the nine shots of whiskey began to take effect and I blacked out.

When I woke up in the morning, Cashew was poking his long nose in my face, watching me with that terminally-soulful expression greyhounds had. I know the feeling, buddy.

I tried not to move because my head was pounding like a bitch and I felt like I was going to get sick for the first time since my college drinking days. Breathing in through my nose, I willed my stomach to stop rolling and churning, all while wondering how Sage was doing this morning. My heart hurt probably worse than my head at this point. How do you end up hurting the one person you would never want to hurt? By being a fucking careless idiot.

My thoughts then turned to Eva. How in the hell did she do it? How in the fucking hell did she do it?

I sat up carefully, thinking it through despite my pounding head. She'd arrived at the lab as we were leaving, so that was one possible place for her to fuck with the results, but since she'd had her lawyer with her, I didn't think it was likely -- unless her lawyer was in on her scheme. Not out of the realm of possibility with this crazy bitch, but that didn't seem like the most logical place to start.

That led to the lab that the results were mailed to for testing. That also seemed like a stretch, but I felt strongly it was the most obvious place to start looking into this fucking disaster. Still moving carefully, I brewed myself a cup of coffee, then while it cooled down, I showered and dressed for the day. After the aspirin I'd downed took effect, I grabbed Cashew's leash and we went for a slow walk, giving him plenty of time to sniff and do his business.

When we got home, Cashew immediately went to sleep because the world's fastest dogs were lazy as fuck and spent most of their time sleeping. I pulled up the name of the lab and pulled up the address, which turned out to be only four hours away. Definitely merited an in-person visit with a few goodies from my bag of tricks to get the information I needed.

Then I called the guys who'd attended Drake's get-together and asked them to meet me at my house tonight with their wives. Since that night had been pivotal in so many ways, I wanted to find out more about what happened after I walked out into the alley with Eva and made the biggest mistake of my life. They all agreed to come over, but I wouldn't tell them why, simply asking them not to tell anyone else about the get-together. Even though I didn't think any of them were in contact with Eva, I needed to be certain she didn't catch wind of this. I wouldn't put it past the conniving bitch to show up and cause more trouble.

Interestingly, not one of them said anything about Eva being pregnant or congratulated me on my impending fatherhood. That told me two things: Eva hadn't been spreading her lies to my friends and she hadn't seen them in a while. For some reason, she was lying low and keeping this earth-shattering news to herself -- either that, or she wasn't even pregnant, which put an entirely new twist on the lab results. Somehow, I believed she was pregnant, but I didn't know who the father was. I only knew who the father wasn't.

I'd spent the day researching paternity tests, how they could be falsified and what the penalties were for tampering with the results. I'd found that a judge could hold a person in contempt for lying about or falsifying the results of a paternity test. The contempt order could end with criminal charges, and I decided I'd settle for nothing less than jail time. The bitch deserved it for hurting Sage and fucking me over. I may very well have lost Sage forever over this, but whatever the ultimate outcome, I refused to let Sage be tortured by the thought that I'd lied to her about what happened in the alley and that I'd fathered a baby with Eva.

My five friends and their wives came over that night for pizza and beer. Except for Nate, this was the same crew that had gathered to remember Drake.

We shot the shit for a few minutes while everyone grabbed some pizza and sat around eating in the living room.

"So, Mase, what's going on? It's obviously something to have us meet here and ask us not to tell anyone." Leave it to Jake to get right to it. He and I were on the same mission team and had been for years.

I nodded, wiping my hands off and setting my plate on the coffee table. "I need you all to walk me through what happened after I walked into the alley with Eva."

They exchanged glances. "Well," Amelia started, "we were just sitting around talking and drinking like we were before you went out back with her."

Connor, Amelia's husband, also on my mission team, picked up the thread. "You came in, said good bye and left. We figured Eva did something that pissed you off since you weren't out there long and then you took off. I mean, we know now what happened..."

"Yeah, the biggest mistake of my life," I grumbled. "What about after I left?"

Elena, Charlie's wife, started to recount the rest of the night. "You left and we were all kind of wondering what went down with you and Eva because you came in and said good bye, but she didn't come back in. We thought maybe you finally killed her," she said grimly.

"But Nate seemed worried about her, so he went out back to check and see if she was still there."

Charlie made a face. "When he didn't come back after fifteen minutes, we were all worried that something had happened, so I went to check on him. Man, I need eye bleach after seeing him nailing her by the dumpster. I can't fucking unsee that shit."

Bingo!

"Did they see you?" I asked Charlie.

"Oh, hell to the no," he said. "He and Eva were making so much noise that they didn't hear me, so I just went back inside and tried to forget that shit." He gave a shudder of disgust.

"Have any of you seen Eva lately?"

They all shook their heads no.

"Talked to her? Been in touch with her in any way?"

"What's going on, Mase?" Natalie asked me after they all said no to both my questions. Nat was married to Adam, who had served with Drake and me for a time.

"Eva is claiming to be pregnant with my baby." I let the gasps and exclamations settle before I went on. "She sent Sage a picture of her ultrasound, which put conception right around that night in the alley. I know I didn't fuck her, but now I know who did and who is probably the actual father. Has anyone talked with Nate?"

"He's been gone about four months now. Haven't heard from him, but I'm friends with the brother of a man on his team, and they're coming back next week."

Good. That would be helpful when he returned. I had a mission of my own in mind.

Amelia looked at me, a question in her eyes. "Couldn't you just do a paternity test to prove you're not the father?"

"Did one. Results came back saying I was the father, when I know there's no way in hell I could be since I haven't fucked that bitch since before I met Sage. I'm trying to figure out how she tampered with the results."

"Let us know if we can help in any way," Charlie said. "Fucking with test results is a whole new level of crazy."

Elena, sitting closest to me, patted my hand. "Sage knows about the results, doesn't she?"

"Yeah, and given the alley kiss, she believed the results. Thinks I'm lying."

"Oh, Mase," she said and there was such sympathy in her voice that it washed over me, giving me hope that if they could believe in me, maybe Sage could, too, someday.

But then again, these people weren't the ones who I'd fucked over by kissing an ex in an alley.

We talked through some theories about how Eva could have pulled off her deceit, and we agreed that she had to have misused her CIA connections. Being the assistant to a deputy director gave her access to all kinds of information and people and data.

After promising they wouldn't say a word to anyone, my friends called it a night, and I got busy planning my trip to the lab that had performed the paternity test blood analysis. I needed to consider the most likely ways Eva would have tampered with the results and work from there.

After that research mission to the lab, I could only wait for Nate to return, and then I'd be sitting that fucker down and having a real discussion about safe sex.

That stupid fuck was going to be a dad, and if I had my way, he'd be a single father while mommy dearest was contemplating her sins from inside a jail cell.