

Chapter 1.1 ~ Mason

As part of an elite, covert operations team in the Marines, I was used to missions that required patience and stealth. You had to gather intelligence, track your target's movements, set the trap and then spring it, neutralizing the target, all without tipping off your prey ahead of time. To get to mission accomplished there were hours and hours of legwork required. The key to a successful mission, though, was patience above all else.

Today, my patience was about to pay off. After weeks of effort, the target had been acquired and all of the pieces were in place; there were dots over every i and a cross through every t. The target was tied up tight and didn't even realize it yet.

"Eva, could you come into my office, please?" Robert Manning, the Deputy Director of the CIA and Eva's boss, gave a grim nod to all of us gathered in his office as he hung up the phone. Go time.

She walked into his office, having no clue of the shit storm she was about to walk into.

"Shut the door, please," he said to her. As she pushed the door shut, she was able to take in the room's occupants all at once, and she froze, unable to contain the brief flash of fear before she schooled her features.

"Have a seat. We'll try to make this as stress-free as possible, given your condition," Robert said.

She took a seat, her eyes looking to me, but I looked at her steadily with all the hatred I felt for her and she couldn't hold my gaze for long. Bitch, you really think I'll help you after what you cost me?

"Eva, there have been some serious allegations made against you -- allegations that involve using my name and position to falsify a paternity test under the pretense of national security."

"Sir, I can explain --"

"Eva, the paternity test shows that Major Mason Pierce is the father of your unborn child, correct?"

"Yes." She straightened in her chair, trying to brazen this out, knowing she was trapped.

"I'll ask you this once. Is that true?"

A brief hesitation, then, "Yes."

"Excellent. Now the Major claims there is no way your child is his because he has not had sexual relations with you in almost two years. Is that true?"

"No, when we met at a restaurant with friends several months ago, he... we had sex in the alley behind the restaurant that evening."

"The Major alleges that this man, Captain Nathan James, is most likely the possible father of your child because he was the one who actually engaged in sexual relations with you behind that alley that night. However, Major Pierce is not ruling out that there were other men who could be the father. He is just stating that there is no way the child is his."

"No, that's not true -- it was Mason!" But her voice sounded less and less sure with every lie she uttered.

"Then the paternity test we're going to do right now will show that. You'll be detained until the results come back, without access to any electronic devices, just to make sure there's no question of tampering with the results."

"You can't --"

"Oh, I not only can I am," he shot at her.

Robert decided to quit playing with his mouse and stood up, leaning over his desk. "Let's get something straight, Eva. I do not like my name -- my very position and reputation -- taken advantage of the way you did. There are witnesses at the lab that have corroborated what you did in my name. That means more than one person knows how you abused your position of trust, forged my signature and did so to falsify a paternity test that didn't have the first thing to do with national fucking security. We have two highly decorated Marines agreeing on the events that happened in the alley that night. This is never going to get to lawyers because you've already fucked this up enough and if this were to get out, it would hurt the organization, it would hurt my boss and it would hurt me, and that is something I am not going to let happen."

I was enjoying the way Eva's bravado was leaching out of her, draining her of every last bit of color in her face. She just realized she had made an enemy of a man who could unleash all sorts of hell on her.

"You already know the Major will be proven not to be the father of your baby and you'll be going to jail. You're facing several serious crimes here. Abusing my name and position is one that will not go unchallenged. We have sworn affidavits from several key players at the DNA lab attesting to the fact that you came into the laboratory and showed letters saying the DNA test needed to show that Major Pierce was the father -- and all of this was done in my name and in the director's name. You made a grave mistake, Eva. I don't take lightly anything you've done. Now, first thing, we're going to get the damn blood samples."

The nurse came forward, the doctor watching, as he drew all of our blood. Eva allowed it, subdued, no doubt wondering how she could possibly get out of this, perpetuate the lie... knowing she was fucked and about to pay for her sins. The vials were checked, double checked and triple checked by all of us, locked into a special courier bag and then two men in black suits came in to accompany the vials to an undisclosed lab where the results would be determined.

"You aren't really going to send me to jail -- right?" Eva weakly demanded when the two men left with the blood samples, her hand rubbing her belly. "You're not seriously going to take my baby away from me?"

"Captain James, if he is proven to be the father, is ready to assume full custody of the child. When you have served your sentence, you will have to work out visitation with the Captain -- or whoever turns out to be the father."

When I'd cornered Nate practically the minute he'd stepped onto the base, he'd been shocked -- horrified at what Eva had done -- and ashamed of what he'd done in the alley.

"Broke bro code, Mase," he'd said to me. "Don't know why I did that night except she was all sad in the alley and went after me hard. Now I'm fucked and I'm going to be paying for it the rest of my life in a way I don't really want to."

"You might want to get tested to make sure she didn't pass on any unwanted diseases."

"I'll definitely be doing that, but that's the funny thing. I think she was trying to set you up, trap you, man. I used a condom that night -- one she provided."

After I'd confronted Nate, I'd made a trip to the lab where the results were processed, and when I flashed my credentials to the receptionist, she'd shaken her head and said, "What on earth is going on? Two high-level visits in the same month?"

It was easy as hell after that. The director confirmed that Eva had visited the lab, flashing her CIA credentials, representing a Deputy Director and the Director, emphasizing the necessity, as a matter of national security, of ensuring the results showed Mason Pierce to be the father to protect a high-level ally from a country we were involved in delicate negotiations with. She had letter trails all the way up the ladder to the head of the CIA. All of them forged.

I'd taken copies of the letters Eva had used, approached her boss, who I had met years ago when Eva and I had been dating, and explained the situation. We gathered more information, developed a plan and that brought us to today.

Next, Robert brought in a federal court judge who sentenced Eva to six years in a minimum security prison for her indiscretions and signed the orders for her incarceration.

"That's not fair," she protested weakly. "What I did doesn't merit this kind of reaction. You can't possibly want to separate a mother from her child!"

"I have no problem separating a child from its mother when she's someone like you," Robert told her coldly. "Falsifying a paternity test leads to contempt charges, which lead to fines and criminal charges. Then on top of that, using my name and the director's name to commit a crime? No. If you think I'm pissed about you using my name to falsify the test results, the Director will burn you to the ground if he were to find out you misrepresented him for personal gain. You really want to push this?"

She shut up.

"Once you give birth, your child will go to the father -- assuming it's Captain James -- and you'll go back to prison, to serve out your sentence. Once you get out of prison, I'm going to make it my personal mission to see that you have a hard time getting hired for anything but the most menial of jobs."

"You'll be held in detention at a safe house until the results of the paternity test come back. From there, we'll take you to your new home for the next six years."

"Do I get time off for good behavior?" she asked the judge. This was a much more subdued woman than the Eva I'd known. She'd always been brash and bold, but all of that was gone as she faced, maybe for the first time ever, the consequences of her actions. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't enjoying every second of the show.

"Yes," he said, "but the reverse is also true. You can get time added to your sentence if you cause problems -- cause enough, you can even get moved to a more secure facility."

That made me sit up and smile. From the years I spent with Eva, if I knew one thing, it was how to trigger her temper.

As two more men in black suits came in to take her away, I called out to her.

"I'll write to you, Eva."

She looked startled, then confused and then grateful, and flashed me a smile I didn't return.

She would come to regret my letters. A six-year sentence wasn't enough of a punishment for what she'd done to Sage, to me, so I'd have to see how much time I could get her to add to her sentence for bad behavior.

Three days later, the test results proved I was not the father of Eva's baby and Nate was.

"Guess I have to get ready to be a dad," he told me on the phone. He didn't sound happy about it, and I felt sorry for this baby about to come into the world with a viper for a mother and a reluctant father as its only parent.

"Good luck," I told him, figuring he'd need it.

And with the proof of my innocence in hand, it was finally time to talk with Sage.