

Chapter 82 Motive

Ethan

"It's all taken care of?" I ask, staring down the desk sergeant at the police headquarters.

She nods, averting her eyes from my dominant gaze.

"Yes Alpha, Ms. Mechant will be held at the sanitorium until her trial."

"Good." I answer briskly. "I want to be notified the moment a date is set, or if any new developments arise."

"Yes sir." She replies obediently. I'm about to walk away when the detective on my Mother's case catches my attention.

"Excuse me, Alpha, do you have a moment to talk?" He asks, looking far too pleased with himself.

"Assuming you have something of consequence to share."

I grumble, closing the distance between us.

"Of course, sir." The man agrees, leading me towards his desk, "I would never waste your time."

I follow him at a distance, muttering under my breath and trying to guess what fresh hell he might be preparing to thrust me into. Taking the guest chair as he settles in front of his computer, I mentally count to ten, urging

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"Well?" I press when he doesn't explain why he pulled me aside, "What's going on? Have you found something?"

"As a matter of fact, we have." He shares with a smug smile. "As you know we collected a few boxes of evidence from your apartment on the night of the murder, including a number of items from your mother's room."

"And?" I prompt him, wishing he would get to the point.

"Well my team has been going through that evidence all week, and yesterday one of my rookies came across a document we previously missed – one which could explain your ex wife's motive for the crime."

My wolf's hackles raise. If the obnoxious investigator doesn't stop insisting Jane is responsible for my mother's murder despite my repeated orders to investigate Eve, I'm going to lose my temper. "And what document is that?" I hiss.

His smile widens, and he slides a piece of paper in a clear evidence bag across the table, and I snatch it up, scanning the contents of the form. The logo of an out of territory laboratory is stamped at the top, and beneath the address and clinicians names, are the words: DNA Test Results; For Personal Knowledge only. Below this is a table full of obscure biological markers and alleles, with each of the quadruplets' names and my own in the column headers.

I don't really understand the specifics, but I know how to read a percentage easily enough, and at the bottom of each column are the words, probability of paternity: 100%.

It takes my brain a moment to catch up with what I'm seeing. I always felt confident that Jane was lying when she told me the pups were Eric's, but I think I held off having the tests run myself because deep down I was afraid she was telling the truth. Apparently my mother had no such reservations. She had the tests run without telling anyone, and now I have all the proof I need. The pups are mine – definitely, unequivocally mine.

"Where did you find this?" I ask hoarsely, feeling more emotional than I would ever admit to this man.

I suspect he takes the thick emotion clogging my throat as belief in Jane's guilt, rather than the joy of my paternity's confirmation, because he's grinning more

broadly than ever. "It was in your mother's desk. We mistook it for a bill at first, it wasn't until someone went through all her financials that we found it."

"She must have been waiting to tell me." I muse, wondering how soon after she received the results she met her untimely end.

"Or maybe she didn't plan on telling you at all." The investigator theorizes. "Maybe she was going to use the test results to force Jane to give you custody. Maybe she tried to confront her with it, and lost her life as a result."

"That's quite a leap." I grouse, still staring at the page with utter reverence. They're mine. They're really mine.

"I don't see it that way." The investigator argues, "You've been telling me Jane didn't have a motive to kill Petra all along, but I've seen people killed for far weaker reasons than this."

"You really believe that Jane killed her because of this?" I demand, waving the report in the air. "If that were the case, why did she leave the report for you to find? If she knew this existed and was willing to kill to hide it, why didn't she destroy it?"

"Maybe she couldn't find it. Maybe she panicked and ran before she could look for it." He ponders.

"But she made the call reporting my mother's death. If she ran out, she had to run back in – and she would have

had ample time to search before you arrived." I counter, feeling more frustrated by the minute.

"You're biased Alpha." The detective tells me, shaking his head. "You're infatuated with her and you don't want to believe she'd do this, but all the evidence points to her. You're going to have to accept it sooner or later."

"Have you even begun looking into Eve?" I question. "Have you given a single thought to anything I've told you about her."

"With all do respect, Alpha, you run the pack, not my department. I reserve the right to run my investigations as I see fit." He grumbles defiantly.

"You only have that right as long as you remain on the force." I remind him. "If I were you, I'd think long and hard about how badly you're willing to risk your job."

He puffs up his chest, rife with indignation, "Are you threatening me?" He exclaims in outrage.

"I'm sorry," I chuckle, though it sounds closer to a growl than a true laugh. "Was that not clear?" Standing up and towering over the insolent wolf, I continue, "if you want to keep your job, I suggest you start doing it a hell of a lot better than you have been. I might not run your department, but I am your boss's, boss's boss."

Ruffling his feathers, he tries to glower up at me before chickening out, "I'll look into Eve." He begrudgingly

mutters.

"Good boy." I taunt, patting his head.

I feel like I'm walking on air as I leave the headquarters building. I'm sure that's not what the detective intended, and maybe I'm being overly optimistic about the investigation, but I can't help being thrilled about the DNA results. The entire walk to my car, all I can think is that they're mine, I don't even have enough animosity remaining in my heart to bark at the reporters lurking outside the apartment when I get home.

When I get up to the apartment I can't wait to see the pups – my pups. I want to squeeze them tight and celebrate, and while I haven't decided how I'm going to break the news to Jane, I know I'm going to have fun doing it. I'm not sure if she believed she got away with her lie, but she's certainly going to pay for it.

"Jane?" I call when I enter, gently closing the door behind me. "Kids?"

All four pups appear at once, almost as if they were waiting for me. I open my arms to them expecting the usual abundance of hugs, but to my surprise, they all hang back – even Paisley.

"What's wrong?" I ask, searching their sweet faces.

They exchange a few nervous glances, and eventually Paisley steps up to the plate, taking a deep breath and

stepping forward, though she still hangs just out of reach.

"Daddy, did you put Mommy in time out forever?" Paisley asks me, her green eyes wide.

I blink, her words not really clicking in my head, "What do you mean, angel?"

Paisley sighs heavily, her lips condensing into a pout.

"When you were married, did you lock Mommy up? IS that why she left?"

All of my elation from a few minutes ago evaporates. My heart sinks into my stomach. How do they know? I think frantically, wondering how on earth they learned this detail about our past. In the end I have to assume they overheard one of our arguments, or some other conversation not meant for their young ears.

However the truth is that it doesn't matter how they found out. They know now, and they expect an answer. They're all looking up at me expectantly, and I know the moment I share my story the DNA test won't matter anymore. They're all going to hate me, even sweet Paisley. Still, I refuse to lie to them. I have to take responsibility for my actions, and I owe it to Jane to acknowledge what I put her through – no matter the cost to me.

Part of me wants to ask the kids for one last hug before everything changes, before I share what they'll never be

able to forgive. Instead I take a deep breath, and prepare to lose everything I hold dearest.



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