

# CLAIMED RIDER

LOST SAXONS MC

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is technically number 3.5 in the Lost Saxons series. I recommend you read at least up to #2 Safe Rider in the Lost Saxons series before you embark on this adventure, as the main characters and events are featured here.

Time wise, it takes place around part way through #3 Secret Rider , but there are no spoilers for this book.



## CHAPTER ONE

**M**orning sickness is a misleading term. They should call it all the frigging time sickness. Since I found out I'm pregnant I have not stopped throwing up—at least that's how it feels. The doctor said it would ease down at the end of the first trimester, but that didn't happen. She muttered something about being 'unlucky' and said I might be one of those unfortunate women who just puke their way right to the end. Yippee, yay me. So for the fourth time today, my head is down the toilet and my dinner is making its grand re-entrance.

I'm tired, so tired. I'm supposed to glow, but I'm washed out in a way that no makeup can fix, and dead on my feet. I have no idea how Dean still finds me attractive. I look terrible. With four months still to go, I don't know how I'm going to drag myself to the end of this pregnancy.

I rub a hand over my growing bump, willing my stomach to settle enough for me to get back to the living room and finish our meal. I'm getting fed up of having to duck off all the time to vomit, or pee. Everyone is used to it, but it's annoying. Tears threaten to spill. Oh, God, I don't

need to cry either. If I'm not vomiting or peeing, I'm sobbing. I let out a shaky breath.

"You better appreciate this, kid," I murmur to my belly.

"Darlin', you okay in there?" Dean's voice sounds outside the bathroom.

Great. Like he needs to see me looking any more unattractive than he already has over the past few months. Daily bouts of projectile vomiting are not sexy.

"I'll just be a second," I tell him, as my stomach contracts and I retch.

He tries the door, and I'm grateful I locked it. "Liv, let me in."

"I'll be out in a moment." I heave again.

"Open the door."

*A little busy here, babe...*

The door rattles and for a moment, I'm worried he's going to put his foot to it, so I slide the bolt back behind me and he's instantly pushing into the room. This is not the best idea, given how big he is, but somehow he manages to get down onto the balls of his feet next to me, one hand going to the edge of the bath to balance himself. The concern in his face both cuts through me and warms me. I hate worrying him, but I also don't know how to stop what's happening to my body. I give him a smile I hope is reassuring.

"Your kid doesn't like anything I feed it." I sound a little wry.

He doesn't laugh. His lips stay pulled into a tight line. "Maybe we need to go back to the doctor. I don't like that you're chucking up like this all the time."

"I'm not enamoured with the idea much myself," I admit. "But what can the doctor do anyway? I'm pretty sure this is part of the gig."

His fingers wrap around my neck, stroking the skin gently and I relax into his touch. “Do you think you can get up? Or do you still need to puke?”

I assess what my stomach is doing. It seems to have settled out of critical levels into a safer area since that last round of heaving. “I think I’m done.”

Dean, my handsome man, holds his hands out to me, and helps me to my feet. He’s so gentle, so careful getting me up off the tiles. “Don’t lock the door when you’re being sick. I don’t like you being in here on your own.”

“Throwing up isn’t really a team game, Dean.”

He scowls at me, and boy, can he scowl. “Darlin’, I can be with you while you’re doing it, holding your hair, rubbing your back, getting you what you need. I can’t do that if you lock the fucking door. What if you pass out or something? Beautiful, I need to be able to reach you.”

He’s so sweet, he makes my heart ache. I stroke his face, his beard scratchy beneath my fingers. “How’d I get so lucky?”

“It’s me who’s lucky. I’ll take care of you, darlin’, always.”

“I know, but I’m okay. Me and your spawn are both okay.”

This makes him laugh a little, and his tattooed hand strokes over my stomach. “You need to give your mum a break, kid.”

My heart swells hearing him talking to our baby—a baby that was one hundred percent not planned. I had no idea I was pregnant when Simon came into my house and hurt me. If I had known, I would have fought harder than I did to protect us both. As it was, I hit him over the head and managed to escape the house while he was out cold, but I didn’t know I had a little life nestled deep in my womb.

When the doctor told me about the pregnancy while I was in the hospital, I panicked. Dean and I hadn't been together that long. I had no clue if he wanted kids, if he wanted kids with me. I was terrified he would leave me. I should have known better. He's been the best partner I could have hoped for, better than I could have dreamed of. Sometimes, I have to pinch myself to believe Dean is real, but I figure he's the universe's way of making up for the hell it put me through with Simon. Years and years of abuse, of pain, of fear. I was owed a break. I didn't expect to find love again. I certainly didn't expect to find it with a man like Dean.

My thoughts scatter as he leans forward and kisses my forehead. "I'd kiss your mouth, but you have vomit breath."

I blink at him, then I laugh. "Is this the end of the honeymoon period?"

But he's not wrong. My mouth tastes disgusting. I reach in the cabinet for my toothbrush and the toothpaste.

He leans against the opposite wall while I clean my teeth, wash my face and redo my hair, watching me in the mirror over the sink as I work. He's so gorgeous, and I can't help the desire pooling between my legs as I study his reflection. I never thought I would find tattoos and a beard attractive, but Dean is so hot, he makes me squirm. I love everything about him, right down to the copper flecks in his dark facial hair and the ring through his nose.

When I'm done, he comes up behind me, his hands sliding around my waist to rest under my belly, his nose going to the crook of my neck as his mouth presses to the side of my throat.

"I'm sorry you're having such a shitty time."

My hands meet his on my stomach.

“It’s not that bad. And the end result is a baby,” I tell him. “It’ll be worth it.”

He splays his hand over my bump. “It’ll be worth it,” he repeats. “Thank you, for giving me this gift, Liv.”

Tears well in my eyes.

“You can’t say shit like this to a hormonal woman.” My voice sounds choked.

He kisses my neck. “I love you.”

“Even though I’m a puking whale who causes you endless problems?” I whisper.

His body stiffens behind me. “Darlin’... what the fuck? Are you nuts? You’re none of those things.”

I glance down. “Today kind of suggests otherwise.”

It was hell. For two hours we were forced to sit in our solicitor’s office listening to our hack brief tell us that six months is not considered a ‘reasonable attempt’ to find Simon so we can serve divorce papers to him. Considering Kingsley Police Force hasn’t been able to locate him either since he disappeared after abducting Beth and Dean, I have no idea how we’re expected to find him. And they have far more resources than we do.

His hand moves to my chin, forcing my head up, and his eyes meet mine in the mirror. I see the censure there. “Don’t ever say that shit again.”

The bathroom suddenly feels too small. I need space, I need air, I need to be away from his scrutiny. I release a shaky breath as I try to pull away from him, but he doesn’t let me go.

“No. Don’t you do that. Don’t you push me away.”

“I’m not.”

I am. Guilt claws at me. Every mess that has existed in the Club in the last six months, longer in fact, is because of me. And still the pain continues because of me.

“Liv.” The warning cracks in his voice, but I pull free of his grip. He lets me go, but I suspect it’s only so I don’t hurt myself trying to get away from him. I make it as far as the door before I stop. I can’t look at him, but I hold the door frame, gripping it like a lifeline as I say, “There’s still time, Dean.”

“For what?” he demands. “Liv, for what?”

I glance up at the ceiling in the landing, wondering if I can escape this conversation, but I know my man. He won’t let this go.

He doesn’t. He grabs my arm, his touch firm enough to get my attention but not hurt me. He’d never hurt me. Dean is nothing like Simon. For all his tattoos and his swagger and his overbearing alpha maleness, Dean would never use violence against a woman. Against men... yeah, I have no doubt he has inflicted pain, but he has a code. The whole Club does.

“Liv, look at me.”

I follow his command without protest and when I turn back to him, he steps back, dropping his hands to his hips. He looks so good standing there, his narrow waist encased in his perfectly fitted jeans, his eyes hard but imploring me to talk to him, his mouth so kissable beneath the scruff of hair covering his face. My feet itch to move to him, but I stay rooted to the floor.

“Time for what?” he repeats.

I swallow hard. “For you to run, to leave me.” I smile as I say it, but I’m only half-joking. I want to give him an out. I’ve brought him so many problems, most of which stem from my stupid ex-husband.

His body goes wired tight and his eyebrows draw together. “I’m not going anywhere. Darlin’, I can’t breathe without you.”

He's completely serious. It both scares me and warms me that he feels this depth of love for me. I'm not sure I'm worthy of it.

I sag against the wall near the door. "I wish you could leave me, Dean. It would make your life so much easier, and I wish I was the kind of selfless person who could give you up, but I'm not. I'm selfish. I need you too much."

The space between us is closed as he steps into it and draws me into his arms, pulling me against him like I'm his lifeline. "Then quit talking like that. You scare me half to death when you say about me leaving you. You're mine, darlin'. Mine. And I don't give a shit what a piece of paper says. Liv Wilson, Liv Lawler—fuck, it doesn't matter. You are mine."

I close my eyes and my stomach roils, and this time not from morning sickness, but from a different kind of sickness. Technically, I'm still married to Simon. After I fled Bedford and our marriage, I was so scared he'd try to find me, I just disappeared. I didn't file for divorce because that would mean telling him where I was. Safe Shelter, the domestic violence charity that helped me escape and that I now work at alongside my friend and boss Holly, didn't think it would be a good idea to broadcast my location by filing to terminate our marriage. At the time, I didn't think I would ever get near another man again, so I didn't care about a piece of paper saying I was married. Now, I have Dean and I know it weighs on him that I don't have his name, no matter what he says. He's put his property patch on my back, but I know he wants that divorce, too. He wants to put his ring on my finger and make me his in every way that matters, but until we can get the paperwork finalised it can't happen.

And that is proving difficult.

We have to jump through the legal hoops before we can

get it done. I have no idea how long it will take, but I'm eager to close that chapter of my life as well.

His hand collars the back of my neck and I lean into his touch. "I'm yours," I agree. "But you do so much for me, Dean. I wish I could give you this. I know how much it means to you."

"You having our kid," he says as his hand presses against my stomach, "that means more. A name is just a name. You're a Lawler no matter what a shitty piece of paper says." He swipes at the tears working down my cheeks. "I love you, do you hear me?"

I nod. "I hear you."

And I do. I hear it because he says it to me daily and unlike everyone else in my life who has said they love me, Dean means it when he says it.

## CHAPTER TWO

**A** week later I'm nervously sitting in the waiting room of the maternity unit at Kingsley General Hospital, my heart galloping in my chest as I wait for my name to be called. Dean is holding my hand, squeezing my fingers every now and again, offering me reassurance he knows I need.

He looks good today. Then again, he always does. His hair is growing out and long enough to rake my fingers through. I have to sit on the hand he's not holding onto to keep from doing so. I'm not sure jumping his bones in the middle of the hospital is likely to lead to good things. It will definitely mean we miss our appointment.

Today, he's wearing his kutte, as always, and his dark blue riding jeans. There's a thick chain spanning his hip, and a heavy belt at his waist. He's coupled this with my favourite dark blue shirt that fits him just perfectly, accentuating the muscles across his chest. He always rolls the sleeves up to show his tattoos on his forearms and it looks hot as hell. Beneath this he's wearing a black tee. His legs

are crossed at the ankles, his boots scuffed and mud splattered.

He and I are polar opposite. I'm wearing a soft white empire-style top that cinches above my small baby bump and flares down to mid-thigh. It has little yellow flowers on it with hints of green leaves and with my blonde hair loosely braided down one side I look like I was thrown up at a boho magazine shoot. I've coupled this with cute pale green leggings that are so comfortable, I'm keeping them after I've had the baby. On my feet, I have flip-flops and my toenails are painted pale pink. Beth did them for me last week so I didn't have to bend down. I'm not at the stage where I can't do that yet, but she was insistent and I wasn't going to argue with her.

We don't look like we fit, but Dean is the other half of my whole. I'm complete with him. It makes my guilt over my stupid name situation feel even worse. I want to be his in every way that counts, but getting my divorce is proving impossible. Simon is a missing person and he's part of an active criminal investigation, which makes the whole process even more complicated. The solicitor's advice is to let things die down a little and see where the chips land with that first, then try again, but I want this thing done. I'm tired of being tethered to a man who made my life a nightmare and I want to commit fully to the man sitting next to me who has shown me it is possible to love once more.

As if sensing my turmoiling thoughts, Dean lifts my hand without a word and brushes his lips over my knuckles.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," I lie.

"Darlin', I can feel the tension coming off you from here. What's going on?"

I shrug, going for nonchalance, and failing. Then, I sigh.

Lying to Dean is pointless. “I don’t know. I’m kind of freaking out a little.”

“Why? This is a good day.”

“I know.”

“So why are you freaking out?”

“I didn’t say it was rational.”

We’re here for my twenty-week scan and I’m scared out of my mind. I have no idea why. Nothing is wrong or going to be wrong. The baby is healthy, or so my GP keeps telling me at the multiple visits Dean keeps forcing me to make every time I so much as hiccup wrong. I’ve become a frequent visitor at my local surgery, no thanks to Lawler junior making me throw up constantly. My doctor assures me the vomiting is fine, and is in fact quite normal. Dean doesn’t agree. I’m not sure I do either. I’ve looked up exorcists on Google at least twice in the past fortnight. At least I know the kid is okay, which doesn’t explain my sudden anxiety about this appointment.

“You nervous about finding out the sex?” He rubs his thumb over my hand, back and forth, his tattoos a stark contrast to my unmarked skin.

I bite my bottom lip, trying to work out why my belly is filled with unease and come up empty. “No. Yes.” I wince, realising how crazy I sound. “Maybe a little.”

He turns to face me fully, and I see the concern marring his beautiful face. “Babe, talk to me.”

I pause, digging deep, really trying to understand why I’m on edge. I let my thoughts clear and say the first thing that comes to my mind. “This is all happening so fast, Dean. I mean... we barely got together and then we’re having a baby and now we’re finding out whether it’s a boy or a girl... I guess... I guess I don’t want you to be disappointed.”

*Where did that come from?*

I'm not sure who is more surprised by my words: him or me. He blinks at me.

"What? Why in the fuck would I be disappointed?" His voice drops low as he sits forward, bringing his head closer to mine so we're not overheard. The waiting room isn't packed, but it's not exactly empty either.

I bring my free hand, the one he's not squeezing the life out of right now, to the top of my small bump. "What if it's not what you want?"

*What if I'm not what he wants?*

What if he's just staying out of obligation?

Dean is all about family. Would he stay with me for the sake of a baby?

He stares at me as if I've lost my mind. Maybe I have. Everything feels so muddled in my brain lately, so muddled. Since Simon swept through town like a whirlwind and decided to carve a path of destruction, I've been struggling with the guilt and making sense of things, seeing things as they really are and not as I perceive them. For a while afterwards, I was convinced everyone blamed me for my ex's actions, and why wouldn't they? Wade was shot, Beth was abducted, Logan was hurt, and Dean... he was hospitalised. All those things happened because of my decisions. Dean, and Holly, put those events into perspective for me, but I still have moments where I wonder how he can stand to look at me, given all the shit I've brought to his doorstep. I sometimes feel like I should be the better person and let him go. I know it's crazy, and I know he'd never let it happen. I know he'd find me and he'd bring me back if I tried to go, but those doubts, those thoughts, they still linger.

"Liv," he cups my face, "the only thing I care about is that our kid is healthy. I don't give a shit whether it's a boy or a girl."

“You say that now...”

“Woman, I mean it. I really don’t give a shit. All I want is for you to deliver our baby safely.”

He touches his forehead to mine then releases my face, so he can place his hands either side of my belly. I close my eyes, letting his heat, his love, infuse me, letting his reassurance wash over me. It has the desired effect. I feel calm stir through me.

“I love you, and I love this kid. I don’t give a fuck if it’s a boy or a girl. I don’t give a fuck if we have all boys or all girls or a mix of both.”

I open my eyes and stare at him. “All boys or girls? You want more?”

This does not suggest a man who is with me out of obligation. This suggests a man who is building a future.

He gives me a lopsided smile. “Babe, I was an only child, and while my life was good, I want our kid to have siblings. I mean, I created my own family out of the Club. I had Beth and Lo and Jem, but I want our baby to have family. Although seeing how sick you’ve been... not sure I can do another nine months of this.”

“Every pregnancy is different,” I say slowly. “I might not have any sickness in the next one.”

He leans into me and kisses me. “I’m fucking beside myself that you’re having my kid, and I’m here because I want to be. No other reason.”

I open my mouth to protest, to tell him I never said that—even though I thought it (how did he know that)—but he puts a finger to my lip. “I know you, Liv. I know where your mind is going, and I know what you’re thinking. You’re wrong, though. I’m here because I want you, and I want this.” His hand runs over my stomach again. So, please stop with the doubts, okay?”

*Freaky mind reader...*

“Okay,” I agree.

By the time the nurse calls us through, my anxiety has nearly retreated entirely and I’m just keen to get another peek at our baby. The sonographer is a dark-haired woman in her forties who asks me to wait for her in the room while she disappears through the door, leaving me and Dean alone. She doesn’t seem overly happy to see Dean, judging by the cursory glance she gives his kutte, and I want to slap her for that.

“You need me to help you up onto the bed?” he asks, as his hands slide over my bum.

“If that’s the kind of help you’re going to give me, I’m not sure you’re going to be much assistance,” I say, batting his hands away, the rude doctor forgotten temporarily.

“You’re hard to resist.”

He slides the strap of my top down on my left shoulder before pressing a kiss to the bare flesh.

“This really isn’t the place to get frisky, honey.”

But I tilt my head to the side as he kisses the crook of my neck, trying not to moan.

“I can’t help it. You get me frisky everywhere.”

“Well, save it for later, Dean. We need to meet our baby right now.” That thought makes butterflies dance in my stomach.

Carefully, he helps me settle onto the narrow bed lined with tissue paper and comes to stand at my head, taking my hand. The love in his eyes makes my heart pound fast. Our relationship is like nothing I’ve ever experienced before. I thought Simon loved me, before the abuse started anyway, but he never looked at me the way Dean does. Dean looks at me like the sun rises and sets with me. I know I’m his world, his everything and suddenly I feel stupid for doubting

anything. How could I ever doubt this man wants me? In the short time I've known him, he's never let me down. And it has only been a short time. I've known Dean eight months, but officially we've only been together around six. It feels longer.

My nerves resume immediately when the doctor re-enters the room.

"Ah, good, we're ready. Let's have a look at your baby, shall we?"

I lift my top over my bump and pull my leggings down so she can squirt the jelly on my stomach to perform the ultrasound. It's cold and I can't stop the intake of breath as it touches my skin.

It takes her a moment to find the heartbeat but the loud and clear whomp-whomp of our baby's pulse pounding deep in my womb is unmistakable. Tears fall unbidden as I stare at the grainy image on the screen. Dean squeezes my hand tighter as we both look at the life we created together. He or she wasn't planned, but our baby is so wanted by us both. I can't wait to meet the little one in just a few short months' time. I wonder if our kid will be fair like me, or dark like Dean. I'm tallish, at five-eight, but Dean is a behemoth at six-two. Given both our heights, I'm hoping the baby is not going to be a ten-pounder. The thought makes between my legs hurt.

*Please, be a nice six pound baby. I'll take seven at a push.*

"Okay, let's see if we can see the sex," the doctor says, breaking me out of my thoughts.

I glance up at my man and see the unshed tears in his eyes.

"That's our baby," I tell him, looking at the small alien looking baby-shaped thing on the screen. We've seen it before at the twelve-week scan, but it's more defined now,

bigger, more human looking. So many emotions hit me at once that I can't compute which ones to feel first, but an overwhelming sense of love and joy settles in my soul. I was never wanted by my parents. I will never make my child feel anything but loved.

"That's our baby," he repeats, sounding choked up. He strokes over my hair before pressing a kiss there. "Thank you."

"Hmm," the doctor breaks us out of our moment and my heart turns to ice.

Hmm does not sound good. Hmm sounds decidedly bad, in fact.

"Is something wrong?" I clutch Dean's hand so hard, I'm sure I'm breaking his fingers.

*Don't let there be. Please don't let there be.*

"Oh, no. I'm sorry." The doctor looks apologetic. "Everything looks perfect, but your little blighter is hiding its bits from us. I'm afraid I can't see if you're having a boy or a girl. It happens sometimes, unfortunately."

I let out the breath I was holding and glance up at Dean. After all the worry, all the concern, we're not even going to find out if we're having a boy or a girl. We're doing this pregnancy blind.

Then I burst out laughing.

## CHAPTER THREE

“**H**ol? I’m leaving now, unless you need me to do anything else.”

I duck my head around her office door when my hollering gets no response. Her platinum blond head comes up from under a stack of paperwork as soon as I step into the doorway. Then again, Holly is always buried under paperwork. The woman is a workaholic. I understand it, I do, but I wish she would take a break now and again, maybe make some time for a certain Detective Sergeant Nate James who is undoubtedly in love with her, despite how clueless she is to the fact.

“Oh, yeah, see you tomorrow, sweetie.” She waves her pen at me before going back to her paperwork.

I frown. “Do you need me to stay?”

“No, I need the pregnant lady to go home and sleep so her biker boyfriend doesn’t come down here and kick my arse for keeping her overtime. You’ve already stayed an hour and a half longer than you should have,” she says, looking up at the clock. “Dean’s going to kill me.”

Things have been busy at the shelter lately, crazy busy.

We took three women from out of town this morning, which put the shelter over capacity, so we have camping beds up in the second living room. June and Reba, the two other women who work here, have been working flat out with us today to keep things ticking over.

Hope House is a domestic violence shelter in Kingsley and is the place that gave me my life back when I ran from Simon. When I started to heal and rebuild, I volunteered here and started helping other women rebuild their lives. Now, I'm the deputy manager, helping Holly to run the centre—at least until I go on maternity leave in a few months' time. I feel all sorts of guilt about leaving my friend in the lurch when she's so busy, but getting pregnant was not exactly planned when I took the job. Not that Holly cares. I swear she's as excited about this baby as I am.

"I already called Dean, and he won't kill you or anyone. He's running late himself."

Dean knows late nights come with the territory. As long as I'm not tiring myself, he's fine, and I'm okay. The all-the-time sickness hasn't been too bad today. Only two vomit sessions and they actually were this morning. Progress.

"Okay, honey. Go home. Drive safe. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Don't stay all night, Hol," I tell her, knowing it's pointless. Holly practically lives at this place.

I grab my coat and bag from the staffroom and head through the security doors to get out of the building. Security is a big thing at Hope House; we take it seriously. These women are the most vulnerable when they first leave their partners. We have to make sure they can't be reached during that time. To keep them safe, we have a two-door entry system, meaning it can take a couple of minutes to exit the building.

I make sure the doors are properly secured behind me before I head to my car in case. Paranoid? Maybe, but it pays to be vigilant. I'm parked under the security lights, but I get my keys out while I'm walking, so I don't have to fumble around. Not that it matters. My car is behind the centre's gates and perimeter fence. It won't keep out a determined attacker, but it will slow them enough for us to call the police. Minutes count out here.

Driving home in the dark always makes me tired, so I crack my window open an inch to get some fresh air. The shelter is out on the north side of Kingsley, down a narrow lane, surrounded by farmland. It's remote, which is both a blessing and a curse. It keeps us off the grid, but it also means we're a little out of the way of civilisation.

I navigate the country lanes that will take me back into town carefully, even though I know the route blindfolded.

My headlights cut through the inky blackness as I cling to the edge of the road, ensuring any oncoming traffic has room to pass me. It's only a ten-minute drive before hitting urban sprawl again, but I've come across the occasional badger out here once the sun sets, so I'm cautious when driving.

I'm about two minutes from reaching town, right on the edge of the country lanes, when the battery light suddenly flashes on the dashboard. Then the car cuts out.

*What the hell?*

Everything powers down and I'm dead in the water. I have no control.

Shit.

I quickly pull up the handbrake and try to restart the engine, but I get nothing. It doesn't tick over. It doesn't do anything. The lights start to dim and it's really dark out here. I lean forward and flick the hazard lights on, which do

seem to be weakly working still, thankfully. Then I grab my phone.

I dial Dean.

He picks up after a few rings.

*"Hey, darlin'. You home already?"*

"Uh, not quite." I peer through the windscreen at my dark surroundings that are like something out of a horror film.

I bite my lip, knowing he's going to be pissed when I tell him what's happened. The car has been a source of argument between us. Mainly, because he wants to get me a new one, while I think it's crazy to spend money on a car when I have one that works perfectly fine. Or at least I thought worked fine. Maybe I should have listened to my mechanic boyfriend.

"Are you busy?"

"*What's wrong?*" He doesn't sound worried, but he does seem a little more alert now.

I hate bothering him because I know he probably is busy, and also because I know I'm in for a tongue lashing. I wince. "It's okay if you are."

*"Babe, what's wrong?"* Now, he sounds impatient.

"I broke down. The car just crapped out on me."

He lets out a breath is laced with irritation. "*That fucking car,*" he mutters to himself and I wince again. "*Are you safe?*"

"Well, I'm in the car, so yeah." I leave out the part where I'm in the middle of nowhere in the dark. He'll freak.

*"Are you hurt?"*

"Other than my pride? No."

*"Is it completely dead or can I drive it out of there?"*

"It's not even turning over."

*"I'll call Weed, ask him to come down with the van so we can tow you down to the garage."*

Great. More people's evenings ruined.

I close my eyes, and lean against the steering wheel. "I'm so sorry, Dean."

*"It's okay, darlin'. As long as you're not hurt. Where are you?"*

This man has infinite patience.

"Just at the end of the road that leads to the shelter. You can't really miss me. I'm stuck in the middle of the road."

*"Okay, I'll be there in five. Sit tight."* He's silent for a moment, then he says, *"And darlin'?"*

"Yeah?"

*"No more arguments about the car, yeah?"*

He hangs up. I grimace to myself as I slip my phone back in my bag and sit for a couple of minutes in the silence. It really is creepy as hell out here.

I see lights coming down the road further up and wonder if it's Dean. That hope fades when I realise it's two lights, not one. Although, he may have brought a car, rather than his bike. He won't put me on the back of his motorcycle since my baby bump made its appearance. He won't let me lift a cup since my baby bump made its appearance.

Shit, whoever it is, I hope they see my weak hazards. I've broken down on a really awkward part of the road. It's a nearly blind corner, where the hedgerow occludes a lot of the visibility. I'm just hoping the driver can see my failing hazards, which are getting weaker as my car battery fails more and more.

I brace as the car approaches and breathe a sigh of relief as it starts to slow on the bend. My relief turns to a tendril of anxiety as the car slows to a stop at the side of my vehicle

and the window rolls down and I realise it's not Dean or Weed or anyone from the Club.

I crack my window a little.

There's two men in the car, both maybe in their forties, both fairly good-looking and not at all dangerous looking—not compared to the men I'm used to being around who are completely and utterly dangerous—but all my nerves stand on edge.

"You having trouble, sweetheart?" the driver asks.

"My car broke down." I give him a weak smile.

"We can take a look. I don't know much about cars, but I might be able to get you moving."

"My old man's on his way. He's a mechanic, but thanks."

The guy in the passenger seat suddenly gets out and every synapse in my body snaps to alert. *What is he doing?* I glance at the lock on my door, checking it's still secured.

"Pop the bonnet," he orders.

"Really, it's fine. Like I said, my boyfriend's a mechanic. He's coming out with his tow truck. He should be here any second."

*If he can teleport...* even Dean can't travel that fast. If he's at the clubhouse, it's at least a ten-minute ride—despite his assertion of five. I wrap my hands around my belly, feeling suddenly very vulnerable.

"Where were you coming from?" the driver asks suddenly.

And that makes me go on alert. There isn't much out here other than Hope House and a few farmsteads. There's a handful of houses, but that's it. It's probably an innocuous question, innocent, but working where I work, I can't help but be a little paranoid, a little wary—particularly of two men travelling at night in the direction of the shelter.

*Are these guys looking for a resident?*

I stiffen. Hope House is off the grid. You have to be referred to the place from our satellite office, which has a number that women in crisis can call. We don't give out the address, for obvious reasons, but we're not exactly hidden. People do know we exist. In a town as small as Kingsley, we're hard to hide.

"Where are you guys headed?" I ask instead.

"I live in one of the cottages on Rockland Lane," the passenger says. "This bozos just dropping me off."

I know the road, and I know there's a few farms and cottages down that way, so I relax at that. "Oh. Well, thank you for your help, but like I said, I've got help coming," I tell them.

"I'm not real comfortable leaving a woman out here in the boonies in the dark," the driver says.

Before I can respond, I hear the most beautiful sound in the world. The roar of Harley pipes. "This'll be my boyfriend," I tell them.

I watch the single headlight as it gets closer and then finally rounds the corner. I recognise Dean's bike even in the glare of the lights and relief fills me. Not that I think these guys are bad, but I finally feel safe now.

I climb out of the car and wait for him to cut the engine, which he does quickly. His helmet is off, his face bandana pulled down before the last growls of the engine have fully subsided. The two men go on alert instantly. I can see their fear, their anxiety. I don't blame them. Dean is wearing his kutte, his Club affiliation clear on his back. Everyone in town knows the Lost Saxons, knows their reputation. I watch as he takes in the scene with a sweeping glance, not sure what to make of what he's seeing, but he comes straight to me.

When he reaches me, he scans my face, his fingers splaying over my cheeks. "You okay?"

I nod tightly. "They stopped to see if I needed help," I say.

I don't want these guys, who were after all just good Samaritans, to get their faces rearranged.

He turns to the two men, and gives them a chin lift. "Thanks for seeing to my old lady. I've got it from here."

"Yeah, no worries, pal," the passenger says, and gets back in the car in double time.

I give them a small wave, which isn't returned.

Hmm.

Dean doesn't speak until the car disappears up the road.

"Fuck, babe, I do not like you being out here on your own."

"I didn't like it much either, but it's just one of those things. Cars break down."

He stares at me.

"Cars don't break down when you get rid of heap of shit cars when I tell you to." He leans into me. "New car, woman. No fucking arguments this time. You're getting one."

I don't argue. Mostly because I have a baby in my belly and tonight freaked me out. "Okay."

His fingers graze over my hip. "Weed'll be here with the tow any time, but let's have a look at the car, see what the problem is. It'll be easier if we can drive it out."

I climb into the passenger seat while he gets into the driver's side and tries to start it up. Nothing happens.

"Battery's fucked," he says.

"Well, I gathered that," I fire back with a small smile.

He growls under his breath. "I'm pissed off that you didn't let me do what I needed to look after you."

Okay, he's still mad. Maybe now is not the time for joking.

"I know."

"I get that you want to be independent, Liv. I do, but cars are my wheelhouse. I know this thing is a fucking heap of shit motor. You just keep sticking plasters over the problems month after month, and it'll keep running but it's always going to need a new plaster. You need something reliable. I don't like that you broke down in the middle of fucking nowhere tonight. What if I hadn't been around?"

"Town's two minutes down the road. It's hardly the middle of nowhere." I try to blow it off, but I have to admit, that does freak me out a little.

I could always call one of the other brothers, they would come in an instant, but he's right. Dean, like all the men in the Club, often goes away on Club business. I can't have him worrying if I'm broken down at the side of the road.

"Liv, look around. It's pitch-black out here. Those guys seemed friendly enough, but what if they weren't?"

A chill races up my spine at the candour in his words. I let out a breath. "Honey, you can't protect me from everything."

"No, but I'm sure as fuck going to protect you from the things I can."

I open my mouth to argue, but lights coming up the road stop me.

"It's Weed." Dean climbs back out and I follow him.

We both stand and watch as Weed guides the van to the side of the road in front of the car and gets out. It's a small transit van, which surprises me. I was expecting a big tow truck. On the side of the van, Moor Street Garage is written, the telephone number and email address beneath it.

Weed is dressed similar to Dean—I'm sure these guys

all shop in the same place—in jeans, a tee and his kutte. Like most of the Saxons men, he's sinfully attractive, but painfully aware of the fact. He grins at me when he sees me.

“Damn, sunshine, what happened?”

I smile at his nickname for me. “Car crapped out.”

“We'll get you sorted in no time, gorgeous.”

Dean thumps him in the gut. I shake my head. He never learns. Flirting will get him into serious trouble one day.

They get the car hooked up pretty quickly, but it's a late night by the time we get home and I'm exhausted. Dean has to leave his bike at the garage and take a pool car to get us home, which he doesn't complain about, but I feel terrible about it. I feel guilty as hell for dragging him and Weed out, although Weed seemed cheerful about the whole thing. No doubt this isn't even late for him. Do bikers have a bedtime?

Two days later, I wake up to a brand-new lime green Volkswagen Beetle on the driveway. I don't say a word in protest. I just take the keys and thank Dean profusely for the car.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“I kind of have a crazy idea,” I tell Beth.

She glances up from organising her desk. “Hell’s bells. Am I going to need bail money?”

We’re sitting in her new office space above Mim’s Bakery in town. I’m really proud of her, getting her new business set up, especially in the light of all the crap she’s been dealing with—namely the aftermath of my ex-husband’s shit. The space is clean, modern, totally Beth. It took some getting there, though. The guys spent a week and a half painting and cleaning to get it remotely habitable.

“No. I just need some help to organise it. I don’t know where to go.”

She puts down the papers she’s holding. “Is this going to piss Dean off?”

“No.”

She arches a brow. “Really?”

“No. He’ll like it. I think.” I tell her my idea and she grins.

“He’ll love it. Well, he might freak out at first if he sees

it from a distance. You'll have to get in there fast with the explaining."

That's true. When he sees it, he's definitely going to hit the roof. "I can tell him quickly."

She blows out a breath. "Okay then, well, I think I know somewhere we can go."

I knew she would.

It takes a week to get organised and while I hate sneaking around, I know it'll be worth it. I know my body isn't what Dean is used to anymore, but I put on a black lace babydoll that Beth helped me pick from the maternity section at one of the clothes stores in town and a pair of my high heels. I do my makeup, pile my hair in thick curls on my head and I wait on our bed for him to come home. I'm nervous. I swear I wasn't this nervous the first time we slept together, and when I hear the rumble of his Harley through the bedroom window, my stomach flips so violently, I think I might throw up.

I reposition myself on the bed, trying to find the best pose where I look sexy, but not like my belly is spilling all over the place. In the end I give up because I'm just all belly at the moment and no amount of positioning is going to change that.

The key in the front door has me freezing. I hear the door open and close, followed by movement downstairs, and then a confused, "Darlin'? You home?"

"Uh, upstairs!"

I re-fluff my hair, fix my oversized breasts in my lingerie, and try to look as alluring as I can when he opens the bedroom door.

He stops in his tracks, his eyes flaring then turning heated as he takes me in. Oh, he likes what he sees, even my

little poochy baby belly. I lean back on my elbows, and give him a sultry smile.

“Hi, honey. Did you have a good day?”

“Hmm,” he makes a sound of appreciation in the back of his throat as his eyes rove over my body and fire flares between my legs. “It’s getting better,” he admits.

He doesn’t waste any time. He stalks towards the bed, dropping over me, his palms pressing to the mattress either side of me, forcing me onto my back. My legs automatically wrap around his jean-clad hips.

“Is this all for me, darlin’?” he asks, as a hand runs up my thighs.

“Everything I am is for you, Dean,” I tell him honestly.

He searches my face. “You’re too good for me.”

Does he really believe that? If anything, it’s the other way around. The shit I’m dragging behind me, he must be crazy to get involved with me. There are times when I wonder why he’s still here, why he puts up with it. He nearly died for me. He nearly saw his friends die for me. Yet, he’s still here, loving me, promising to keep loving me. I hit the jackpot when I met Dean. He’s the man I dreamed of when I married Simon. He’s the man I thought Simon was, but he was a lie. Dean isn’t perfect, I know this. I know he’s not an angel, but he’s never been anything but good to me.

“You have that the wrong way around, babe.”

He shakes his head. “You’re perfect. I love coming home to you like this.” His hands rove over the lace of the baby-doll, trying to find the skin beneath. He finally uncovers my breasts, thumbing the nipples until I writhe, my back arching, pushing my stomach against him. It’s a mix of pleasure and pain, one that I want to stop even as much as I want it to continue.

“I’ll do it more often then,” I gasp out as he pinches hard enough to send a jolt of pleasure racing to my core.

*Fuck.*

He unlocks my legs from his hips, stopping long enough to pepper kisses up my calves and to admire my heels. “I like these.”

“Dean, I need you,” I complain, rubbing my fingers over my clit to ease the pressure there.

He just chuckles. “Patience, darlin’.”

But I don’t have patience. Between my legs is throbbing. I need him to touch me. Now.

He kisses my ankles, then undoes the straps on my shoes, taking them off. Then he works up my legs, trailing kisses all the way until he’s at the apex of my thighs. With a finger, he hooks my thong aside and runs the tip through my wetness. I nearly jolt off the bed at his touch and when he slides two fingers either side of my underwear and drags the material down my legs, I’m squirming.

Dean doesn’t make me wait. As soon as the thong is free of my feet, he goes straight between my legs, sucking on my clit. My back arches and my hands fist in his hair as everything starts to pulse and ripple down there, and when his tongue swirls around my sensitive nub, I have to squeeze my eyes shut as my climax starts to gather pace.

He works me without hesitation, knowing exactly what I like and what gets me off. When he slips a finger inside me, my thighs twitch viciously and I let out a moan that sounds so desperate, it doesn’t sound human.

A second finger enters me and I feel deliciously full when he adds the third. He licks even as he fucks me with his fingers. As always, he pushes deep inside and I roll my hips to push him further.

My orgasm hits like a rolling wave, starting deep in my

pelvis and clenching my insides tightly around his fingers. He pulls out while I'm still riding the end of it, and I whimper at the loss of him.

He shucks his kutte off and his shirt and tee end up on the floor in a heap. I go up on my elbows to watch, my pussy still pulsing with the aftershocks of my orgasm, as he unbuckles his belt and pushes his jeans and underwear down his legs. Sexy as hell.

His cock is erect, thick, and beautiful. My mouth waters instantly and I slide my thighs wider in invitation. He takes the hint and comes back between my legs, his hardness trying to find entrance as he plunders my mouth. He's careful to keep his weight off me, but I love the feel of him on top of me. I'm almost disappointed when he rolls us over so he's beneath me.

At least until I'm seated on his thighs and able to run my hands up his abs. I watch the muscles quiver beneath my touch. His body is a mass of ink, a beautiful canvas of art and I love finding new things in his tattoos, but right now, I'm not focused on this. I'm more interested in the hard length between us. I lift the hem of my babydoll and with my other hand I take his cock and wrap my fingers around his shaft. I pull up and then down softly, twisting as I know he likes. He twitches and sucks in a breath, meeting my gaze as he does.

“Darlin’, I need to be in you. Now.”

My bossy man.

I oblige and lift slightly off him, keeping one hand on his stomach to steady myself. His hands go to my hips to hold me as I rub the tip of his cock through my wet folds, once, twice, then I push him inside. He groans, as do I. Then I lower myself onto him.

He keeps hold of my hips as I let my pussy stretch around him.

“You’re fucking beautiful, Liv.”

I stroke a hand over his abs. “So are you.”

I start to move up and down his shaft. Slow at first then picking up my pace. My pelvis circles as I ride him, and I feel my climax start to climb again. I throw my head back, breathing his name as I let go. This time, I see stars as I go over the edge, and I fall forward onto his chest. He steadies me, still fucking me through the aftershocks.

When I’m able to breathe again, he rolls me onto my back and pulls my bum to the edge of the bed. He sets the rhythm this time and I lie bonelessly while he has his way with me. I’m exhausted, and sated. He keeps his pace, pushing harder, faster inside me, his hands alternating between holding my hips and playing with my tits.

My pussy is sore, used, and deliciously tingling as he drags his cock in and out of me over and over. He’s so beautiful, a word that shouldn’t fit a man as hard as Dean, but he is. I stare up at him, taking in every inch of his face, unable to believe he’s mine, unable to believe he wants me. Sometimes, I feel as if I wandered into someone else’s dream. After living in a nightmare for so long, it doesn’t feel real.

He leans over me and captures my mouth. I slide my tongue into his, tasting myself on him. His hand roves down my chest, over my stomach and between my legs and the moment he touches my clit, I nearly lift off the bed. He circles his hips as he does this and the dual sensation of having his cock in me while having that bundle of nerves played with is my undoing. I cling to him, trying to force him deeper inside me as I come hard.

He takes longer to find his release, but when he does, he squeezes his eyes shut and spills inside me with a groan,

squeezing my hip as he does. I'm so lost in the tremors firing through my pelvis that I don't register he's stopped touching me.

"Liv? Baby..."

"Why'd you stop?" I come up on my elbows and see he's looking at my exposed hip where the babydoll has ridden up. My exposed hip which has a swirling infinity symbol with rose thorns and the word 'Dean' in the middle of it that was not there this morning.

*Crap.*

"You weren't supposed to see it yet."

His brow cocks. "I wasn't supposed to see it yet?"

"It's not a tattoo," I quickly assure him, scrambling to sit up. He moves to help me, taking both my hands in his and pulling me to a seated position on the bed.

"I know it's not a tattoo, darlin'. I know every inch of you and I know it wasn't there this morning. Tattoos don't heal in an afternoon."

He reaches out and runs his fingers over the design. It tickles a little, but I'm aware now is not the time to laugh, so I bite my lip to keep from doing so.

"They won't tattoo you if you're pregnant anyway."

He glances up at me, consternation in his expression. "You asked?"

"No, Beth told me."

He closes his eyes for a moment. "Okay, you want to tell me what it is?"

Suddenly, I'm wondering if this was a bad idea. Is he mad? Is he going to throw a wobbler that I did this? Maybe it was stupid. And I really didn't think through the whole sitting here nearly stark naked (he is completely naked) talking about tattoos. Talk about awkward.

"It's a transfer design of the tattoo I'm going to get once

I've had the baby. I had a tattooist make it for me." I grab his hand. "I don't know how long it's going to take me to sort this stupid divorce shit out, Dean, but I want you to know, I'm yours in every way that matters. This was just a way of showing that."

"Darlin', I already know that."

"Yeah, I'm sure you do, but I wanted to show you that. Dean, you've given up so much for me and you've sacrificed so much to keep me safe. I can't ever repay that."

He brushes my hair out of my face, which I'm sure looks like I've been dragged through a hedge backwards after the sexathon we've just had. "I don't want you to repay it. I didn't do it for that reason."

I study his face for a moment, letting all my feelings, all the love I have for him shine through. "I want to show you how much I love you, and that I'm in this for the long run, too. I want to show you my commitment."

He glances at my growing stomach before bringing his eyes back to me. "I think you already did that, Liv."

I roll my eyes at him. "A baby doesn't show my commitment to you, Dean. People co-parent without being together. But putting your name on me does. It's permanent." I feel heat infuse my cheeks. "It was a stupid idea."

A look I can't read crosses his face before he touches his forehead to mine. "You're mine. Don't need a tattoo or a property kutte or some fucking piece of paper to say it. It's truth because it just is. I don't give a fuck if that divorce never comes through. I don't need you to legally be my wife. I don't give a fuck about the legal shit. In Club terms you're mine. In my eyes, you're mine. That's all I give a fuck about. You're in my bed, you've got my kid in your belly. Nothing more to say about it. You want to put my name on you?"

Fine, but do it because you want it there, not because you think it'll make me happy.”

He kisses me, and it's warm, wet and delicious. His tongue swipes inside my mouth, and I move mine to meet it as his hand wraps around the back of my neck. I have to admit, I swoon a little.

“I want to do it. I want to show you what you mean to me, I want you to see it when we're together and know I'm yours. Because you've claimed me, well and truly Dean Lawler. I'm hopelessly and absolutely besotted with you.”

He pulls me into his arms and we fall back onto the bed.

“I love you. I'll never stop loving you, Liv. You think I claimed you, but it was the other way round. The moment I met you, I was claimed by you.”

His lips descend again and he slides his cock into me as we lie together.

Four months later, I get my first tattoo—Dean's name on my hip.

**The End**




## ABOUT THE AUTHOR


Jessica Ames is a dark romance author who lives in a small market town in the Midlands, England. She lives with her dog and when she's not writing, she's thinking about writing or reading other people's writing.


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