

**Secret Rider**  
*A Lost Saxons Novel*

**Chapter Four**

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“What’s your name?”

“What’s yours?” she fires back as she slides onto the stool next to me, her glass of neat vodka in front of her.

“I asked first.”

She stares at me a beat and I think she’s not going to tell me, but she surprises the hell out of me by saying, “It’s Paige.”

“Is that your real name?” I twist my pint glass in my hands, studying her.

I can’t stop staring at her. This woman is interesting, and the chemistry... it’s definitely there. I’ve never had such an instant attraction to anyone before.

“Would it matter if it wasn’t?”

Probably not, so I shrug.

She lifts her glass and I expect her to sip it, but she throws her head back and drains both shots in one gulp.

“Fuck,” I mutter.

Her eyes slide to the side to look at me. “I wasn’t lying when I said I was having a bad day, handsome.”

My stomach does a weird flip at her calling me that.

I arch a brow. “Handsome?”

Her gaze snaps towards me. “Well, you are. You have this whole broody male model thing going on. Is that a conscious thing? Or do you just exude the brood?” She snorts. “Exude the brood!”

I have no idea what that means, and I don’t care. For the first time in a long time, I’m interested in a woman. I’m not big on one-night stands but I’m not a monk either. If opportunity presents, I’ll take it for sure, but I like a woman with a bit of attitude, a bit of confidence, and this woman has both.

“Is this your first drink of the day?”

She nods. “Unfortunately. There is not enough booze to deal with my day—or my life for that matter.” She flags down the bartender. “Can I get another?”

“Same again, love?”

“God no. My insides are burning. Uh, I’ll have a diet coke.”

When the bartender moves off to make it, I turn my head to her. “That’s sensible.”

“I only have another fiver on me,” she admits. “Unless you have a money tree or a distillery at home, then soft drinks it is.”

Yeah, I like this woman. She is quirky and, okay, bucket of frogs crazy, but I kind of like that too.

“I can get you a drink if you want one,” I offer and she stares at me for a beat as if she’s considering whether to take me up on it.

Finally, she shakes her head. “That’s kind of you, random stranger, but no. My life is pathetic enough without getting some man I’ve just met to drown my sorrows for me.”

I take a sip of my pint. “Who said shit about drowning?”

She sighs. "Believe me, I would love to disappear into a vat of booze tonight, but it wouldn't solve anything. My problems will still be there in the morning with the added bonus of a hangover."

"What are your problems?"

The bartender returns, sliding her soft drink on the bar. Before she can hand over the money, I toss a tenner to him.

"I don't need charity, handsome," she tells me, but there's no edge to her voice which tells me she's not going to argue about it. Good.

"Never said you did, sweetheart."

She confirms my suspicions by raising her glass in a mock-toast. "Well, thank you, whoever you are."

"You're welcome, and my name's Wade."

She takes a long sip before sliding the glass back on the bar. "Is that a first name or surname?"

"Surname."

"What's your first name?"

"Not important."

She sighs, brushing her fingers through her hair. "Well, Mr Wade who-has-no-first-name, why is a good-looking man like you drinking alone?"

I like that she thinks I'm good-looking. Don't get me wrong, I'm not that lacking in confidence that I don't know I'm an attractive man, but I like that she's attracted to me because I'm definitely into her. Big time. In fact, my brain is going all kinds of places it really shouldn't be right now and thinking about doing things to her that I really shouldn't.

"Why do most people drink alone?"

She shifts one shoulder. "Crushing sadness?"

She's funny, witty, quick, but I'm pretty sure her words reflect why she's drinking alone, which makes any humour I might have felt at the joke fall flat.

"I'm not sad," I tell her, because I'm not.

I'm alive after staring death in the face and while I haven't suddenly 'found myself' or decided to go on some post-death rite of passage, I'm definitely looking at things differently. Life is fleeting.

"Then why are you drinking alone?"

I lean towards her conspiratorially and stage whisper, "I'm avoiding."

She makes a noise in the back of her throat. "Right. Crushing sadness and avoidance—two reasons to drink alone. Technically, I'm doing both. What are you avoiding?"

"A welcome home party."

That makes her brows arch nearly into her hairline, and I don't blame her. I sound like a first-class arse saying that.

She leans forward onto the bar, her hands clasping together. "You're avoiding a welcome home party? Don't you think you should be grateful someone cares enough to welcome you home?"

The way she says this makes me think she doesn't have anyone who gives a shit about her at all. I don't know why but that makes my stomach twist.

"Oh, I am. I'm just not good at being in crowds for long."

"Ah, now that I can understand." She takes a sip of her coke. "Where were you being welcomed home from? Overseas? The forces? Jail?" Her eyes twinkle in jest at the last one.

I keep my face straight as I say, "I just did a six week stretch."

She almost physically recoils but manages to keep a loose hold on her surprise.

“Oh?”

“Yeah.”

“Where?”

I smile at her. “Kingsley General.”

Paige blinks and then frowns before realisation dawns. “That’s the local hospital, isn’t it?”

I laugh. “Yeah, that’s the hospital.”

“I thought you meant prison.”

“Do I look like someone who has done prison time?” I ask, even though I have. I’m interested to hear her thoughts and for some reason, her answer matters to me.

I watch as her eyes scan over me. With my jacket on she can’t see the tattoos on my arms. I don’t have as many as my brothers, but I have a few—the largest being the Club’s name and emblem on my back. We all have that, it’s done the moment we get our full colours.

“I don’t know.” She taps a finger against her plump bottom lip, a lip I really want to kiss. “I think you have a hidden bad boy inside you.”

Cute.

I lean into her and say, “He’s not hidden.”

She snorts, an adorable little sound that makes my dick twitch. Fuck, this girl is hot and interesting. I want her.

“No, he’s probably not. So, what do you do, Mr Wade?”

“I manage a bar.”

All the patched members—including the prospects—work across a raft of legal businesses to bring money into the Club’s coffers. We also do a raft of things to keep our illegal enterprises, mainly drug distribution, moving too. We don’t have our own county lines set up—it’s too risky and too much work—but we do supply the McVays, three Irish brothers from Blackwood, with whatever they need. We also keep several other clubs including the Devil’s Dogs and Dylan’s old club, the Reapers, supplied.

“Presumably, the bar you manage is not this one.”

“No, not this one. What about you, what do you?”

Her gaze goes to her drink. “Oh, a little of this and that.”

“That sounds vague.”

“Yes, I suppose it does. I haven’t been in the area long. I’m still trying to find my feet. There aren’t a lot of job opportunities for someone like me.”

I tilt my head. “Someone like you?”

“Unemployable.”

I have no idea what she means by that. “Everyone has some skills.”

“Not me.”

“Well, what did you do before?”

“I looked after an overbearing, middle-aged dickhead.” At my confused look she says, “I was married.”

I stiffen at her words. I’m many things—not all of them good—but I’m not the guy to break up a marriage. I saw my father do enough of that shit when I was younger and swore I’d never be the bastard on the other side, the homewrecker.

“You’re married?”

“God no. Was married, Wade. Past tense.” She feigns a shudder. “Good God, don’t even say things like that.”

Relief fills me and I let my shoulders relax again as I roll the glass between my hands.

“Divorced?”

“In the process, yes.”

“This is why you’re drinking?”

“One of many reasons.”

“What are the others?”

She stares at me a beat before she says, “You’re all kinds of nosey, aren’t you?”

I grin. “Not usually.”

Her eyes lock on my mouth and I watch as her throat works. Then she seems to come out of it, shaking herself. “Just with random strangers you meet in bars?”

“You’re not a stranger.”

Her brow pulls down. “You met me two downed vodkas ago.”

“Life’s short. I learnt that the hard way.”

This makes her face soften, and I like this too. “Was your hospital stay that serious?”

“I was there for six weeks,” I remind her.

“That’s true.” She takes a long sip of her drink. “What happened?”

I’m not sure how much I should tell her, but given my shooting made local and national news six weeks ago, it’s not exactly a secret. Divulging won’t harm the Club anyway.

“I was shot.”

Her eyes flare and she glances around the bar, as if expecting someone to jump out and tell her I’m joking. When that doesn’t happen, her gaze comes back to me.

“Shot? Like, with a gun?”

I resist the sarcastic retort that sits on the tip of my tongue. “Yeah, like with a gun.”

“Wow.”

I track her fingers as they brush through her hair. It shimmers in the pub lights and I want my fingers to be brushing through it.

“Who shot you?”

“The ex-husband of a friend.”

This makes her snort. “See! Ex-husbands are all arses.”

She’s not wrong there, although Wilson had been another level of arse. The man was completely and utterly unhinged.

“This guy was.”

Her eyes narrow then widen again like saucers. “Hang on a moment... I remember you... You were in the papers. I remember reading it now. There was a whole thing a few weeks back about a man who got shot in the hospital grounds. Was that you?”

As usual, my fame precedes me, but not for the right reasons.

“Yeah, it was me.”

“The reporter said the guy who shot you abducted two people.”

“Yeah,” I repeat.

He also mentioned my Club affiliation, so I expect her to high-tail it out of here. I’m astounded when she doesn’t move. Instead, she leans her elbows on the

bar top, and stares into her glass as if it holds the answers to the universe. Finally, she gives a dramatic shiver.

“God, that’s creepy. Especially considering he’s still out there, free to do that again.”

Well, he’s currently fertilising the hills outside of Kingsley in a not-so-shallow grave, but I don’t tell her that. Instead, I say, “Yeah, hopefully the plod’ll find him soon.”

She casts a sidelong glance at me, her smile knowing. “I doubt it. The police don’t seem very smart here.”

“How long have you been in town and you’ve already figured that out?”

“Long enough to know they couldn’t find their way out of a paper bag.” She waves a hand at me. “Anyway, sod all that. We’re here to drown our sorrows, not relive them.”

This is true, and to be honest, I don’t really want to talk about her ex either. Not when we’re getting on so well.

Across the bar, I catch sight of the pool table. It looks old, the green felt faded even from here, but it might be a good laugh, and it’s been a while since I had any fun. From the sound of things, that’s the case for her too.

“Do you play pool?” I ask.

Paige glances over her shoulder to the pool table behind us. “Not really”

“Do you want to play it?”

“With you?”

“Yes.”

Her mouth twitches. “Absolutely.”

I grin at her before I get off the stool, waiting as she slides off hers. Then I hold my hand out to her. She takes it, and I’m surprised by how small her hand feels in my big paw. Everything about this woman is small and delicate—other than her tongue. She’s got a sharp wit and a sharper tongue. I kind of like that about her. I like that she doesn’t hold back, that she gives me shit and spars with me.

I lead her over to the pool table and only release her once we’re at the side of it. It takes me a moment to find a pound coin in my wallet and she watches as the balls release from the side of the table.

Once the table is set up, I shrug out of my leather jacket, draping it over a stool near to where we’re playing. This leaves me just in my short-sleeved tee. I watch her eyes as they slide up my tattooed biceps and I have to admit I like the heated look in her eyes. *Does she like ink?* I have to admit, that surprises me. I wouldn’t have thought it would be her thing.

She glances down at the table, her palms pressed into the side of the cushion. “So, how do you play?”

I go through the rules as I grab two pool cues from the rack on the wall behind the table. They’re older than dirt and have clearly seen a lot of action—and abuse—but we’re not exactly playing in a tournament, although I would like to up the ante of this game.

“Are we playing for anything?” I lean against the cue, adopting a cocky as fuck grin. I have no clue where it comes from because I’m not cocky full stop.

Paige glances up from the table to look at me.

“Aside from for fun?”

I shrug. “Fun is implied.”

Her smile is flirty and a little curious. “Well, what do you want to play for?”

I hesitate only a second before I speak again. "If I win, I get to kiss you." I'm not usually so forward. Actually, truth be told, I'm kind of shy, which is bizarre to say, given my lifestyle, but it's true nevertheless. I'm an introvert, but I'm also a guy who knows what he wants, and right now, I want Paige.

She blinks but recovers quickly. I love that I'm able to knock her off her trajectory. "Is this part of the rules of pool?"

"No."

Her brows knit together. "You want to kiss me?"

I grin at her. "I've wanted to kiss you all night, Paige."

Her mouth opens and then closes. "You have?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"Because I like you. You're funny, smart, interesting, and I don't know whether you've looked in the mirror lately, sweetheart, but you're also beautiful."

She flushes a delicate shade of pink, and I'm starting to enjoy that I can elicit this response from her. "Well, you're not exactly a bad catch yourself, handsome."

"Compared to you, I am." She's definitely the most interesting person I've met in a long time.

She clears her throat as she grips the pool cue between her hands. "You're a smooth operator."

I move around the table, coming to stand in front of her. This close, I can smell the floral scent of her perfume, a heady smell that I really like. I have to dip my head to look at her and she tips hers to look up at me. I can't help but reach out to run a hand up her arm, the need to touch her overwhelming. She doesn't pull away or seem uncomfortable, so I continue to ghost my fingers up and down her soft skin.

"So, do you accept the terms?"

"Well, I hardly think it's a fair game," she tells me, leaning into me and my hands go to her hips to steady her. "You've played this before."

"I have."

Many times, in fact. I'm actually good at it. We play it a fair amount in the common room of the clubhouse.

"I haven't, Wade. Meaning you have me at a disadvantage."

"I wouldn't bank on that, Paige. You have many advantages in this game." I take a risk and move my hand from her hip up her side and brush lightly over her breast, applying just enough pressure through her top and bra to make her gasp.

Her cheeks pink up again as her eyes slide around the pub to see if anyone has noticed.

I don't look. I don't care if we're being watched. Instead, I push my pelvis against hers, letting her feel what she's doing to me, how aroused she has me. The colour in her cheeks darkens even further.

*Yeah, I really like that.* I vow to make her flush like that as much as possible.

"You need to stop that." Her voice is a little breathy and her chest rises and falls.

"Why?"

"Because... because I can't think straight when you touch me."

Triumph soars through me at her words and I pull away a little, relishing the groan she makes when I do.

I don't give her too much space though. My hands go to the side of her head, threading through her hair and she peers up at me, her lips parting slightly.

"Wade..."

“What do you want if you win, Paige?”

She swallows hard and I watch her tongue as it peeks out between plump lips to moisten her bottom lip.

“I want to kiss you too.”

That’s all the invitation I need. I duck my head and brush my mouth over hers. She stiffens slightly under my touch and I start to pull back, thinking I misread the situation, despite her words, but then she grabs my biceps and tugs me towards her.

The kiss is exactly how I envisioned: hot, wet, and divine. Her tongue moves over mine as we duel against each other. I push her bottom against the pool table and use the edge of it to brace myself as I deepen the kiss. When I finally pull back, it’s only because I’m breathless and need air.

But Paige doesn’t relent. She’s not done with me yet. She comes back with a vengeance, her teeth tugging at my bottom lip as she nips and then licks inside my mouth. I was right; she is fire.

I press her back against the edge of the pool table as my fingers move into her hair at the nape of her neck, guiding her head back to deepen our kiss. She melts beneath my touch, something that has me internally grinning, and I really want to be inside her right now, but that might cause a stir, given the pub is busy.

With a heavy reluctance, I force myself to part from her, although I still keep my hand buried in her hair. The other settles on her hip, rubbing circles on the skin I can reach above the line of her waistband.

She gazes up at me through needy eyes.

“Why did you stop?” Her voice is breathy and annoyed.

I chuckle.

“If I keep kissing you, I’m not going to stop at just that. And I’m pretty sure neither of us wants to get arrested for public indecency.”

“You got me all worked up.” She definitely sounds irritated.

“That cuts both ways, love,” I tell her as I lean my groin into hers, letting her feel just how hard she has me. “Do you want to get out of here?”

It’s a risk, throwing that down so early. A kiss doesn’t necessarily mean she wants more than that, but I think I’m reading her right. I hope I’m reading her right because I really want to fuck this woman and I really hope she wants to let me fuck her.

She hesitates for a brief moment and my disappointment flares for a second. I don’t let it show externally though.

“We don’t have to, Paige,” I tell her softly, giving her an out if she wants it.

“We can just play pool.”

I see her brain working overtime before she raises her eyes to me. “You know what, handsome? Yes. I do want to get out of here.”

Thank fuck for that.