

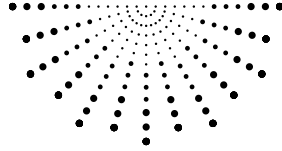


SAVAGE SAINTS
MC

AAXEEL

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
CAMERON HART

AXEL
SAVAGE SAINTS
BOOK FOUR



CAMERON HART

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AXEL

Gemma is the strangest woman I've ever met. She spends her free time in graveyards and knows more about serial killers than any one person should. I can't afford a distraction right now, however.

I'm the newest member of Savage Saints MC and I need to prove the Prez made the right choice in letting me pledge and then initiating me. Despite my best efforts, my mind keeps wandering to the red-headed goddess who picnics in the graveyard.

The quirky yet enchanting woman is connected to the Savage Saints in a completely unexpected way. She's afraid I'll judge her for her family, but she has no idea how much I can relate to her past.

Now I have two things to prove; my loyalty to the club and my dedication to Gemma. I hope she's ready for a biker like me.

CHAPTER ONE



AXEL

The rev of the motorcycle engine beneath me is music to my ears. I take the next turn a little faster than the last one, leaning in and feeling my adrenaline spike as I'm held in place by centripetal force alone.

Back on the straightaway, I correct my posture and breathe deeply, drinking in the cool air as it hits me in the face. Nothing feels like being on a motorcycle. Some people say it's the freedom of a bike on the open road, while others seek danger to fill a void in their lives. Not me.

Motorcycles were my way out of the hellscape I grew up in.

I learned to make myself useful at an early age, and something about engines and bikes clicked. Even more so when mods and digital upgrades became available on newer models. Working on computers, electronics, and kick-ass bike upgrades and repairs became my business plan from the time I left home at thirteen.

Last year, I fulfilled the only goal I've ever had—patching in as an official member of the Savage Saints MC. Since then, I've been working my goddamn ass off to prove to my brothers I'm an asset to the club.

I slow down slightly as the highway meets the small California town where the Savage Saints are headquartered. Never would've guessed the outlaw biker gang would be straighter than the cops, but Sheriff Darren has a strong hold over the people here. His lackeys are as power-hungry and

dirty as he is, and we've had enough of their oppressive control.

I take another breath and follow the curve of the road, letting the hum of the tires on asphalt calm me. As I take the next corner, I come upon the massive graveyard that's been around since this was a mining town during the gold rush back in the 1850s.

Elaborate headstones and monuments are scattered among more humble graves, the rows of plots going up one hill and disappearing down another. Something red catches my eye, and I slow even further as I get closer.

It's not blood-red, more of a fiery hue, like orange leaves in the fall. I realize it's *hair*, and it's attached to a body. The person is lying on the ground, not moving.

Without a second thought, I tear my bike off to the right and park it in a rush on the side of the road. Hopping off, I sprint up the slight embankment and come to a halt in front of the strangest sight.

A woman is flat on her back, resting on an old plaid blanket between two graves. Her bright red hair is spread around her, a shining, coppery beacon in the otherwise gray sea of headstones. Her eyes are closed, but she's still very much alive and breathing. For some odd reason, I note that her rosy lips are the same color as her flushed cheeks, no doubt red from the slight chill in the air.

My gaze travels lower, down her shoulders, over her generous breasts that I'm not allowing myself to stare at, and finally resting on her hands folded over her stomach. Her delicate fingers are wrapped around a bouquet of wildflowers, the tips painted neon pink and lime green. Something about that detail makes me grin.

I take in her black dress. It looks like a cross between a corset and a lacy fairy skirt, paired with fishnet tights and black combat boots at least two sizes too big for her. The napping punk rock princess suddenly opens her eyes, and I nearly fall on my ass and roll down the hill into oncoming traffic.

Green. Clear, twinkling, terrified green eyes stare back at me, knocking the air out of my lungs.

The woman sits straight up, her wide eyes darting around to assess for threats. “What’s going on? Who are you? How long—”

“Gemma?” I ask, recognizing her as the one who helped the Prez’s woman, Sonya, when she was hurt a few weeks ago. The wariness in her gaze turns into panic. What has her so frightened? “I’m a member of the Savage Saints.”

As soon as the words leave my mouth, she relaxes. *Interesting.* That’s not the typical response when someone hears I’m part of an outlaw biker gang.

“I do recognize you,” she says softly, peering into my eyes as she clambers to her feet.

Gemma tilts her head to the side, and some of her long hair falls over her left shoulder. I notice a few twigs and leaves tangled in the strands and reach toward her automatically, picking out the debris.

Realizing I’m violating her space, I immediately drop my hand and step back. The red-headed rebel princess sways toward me but then catches herself. She stands with her shoulders straight and her hands behind her back. Those damn green eyes are filled with curiosity, and I get the sense she’s about to explode with questions.

“How long have you been a member? What do your patches mean? Do you have to bring your own bike to join the club, or do they provide one for you?”

Gemma has another question on the tip of her tongue, but she seems to reel her excitement in a bit. Not too much. Not at all, really. She bounces slightly on the balls of her feet as if gearing up for something. It’s kind of... adorable. I don’t think anyone has ever been this excited to talk to me. Her energy is contagious, and I find myself grinning at the amusing woman.

“I’m the newest member of the MC.”

Gemma nods and smiles, eating up every word. It’s almost like no one talks to her, but I can’t imagine anyone not

instantly being friends with her.

“Really? What was that process like? Did you have to kill anyone?” Her eyes widen at her last question, and she looks over her shoulder to ensure no one else is around to hear. Fuckin’ adorable. “You don’t have to tell me. That’s probably club business, right?”

I chuckle and run a hand through my hair. This woman is unlike anyone I’ve ever met, and I’ve only known her for two minutes. *What other surprises will I discover?*

“It was nothing as dramatic as murder,” I tell her with a wink.

Her cheeks turn from dusky pink to berry red, and a wicked thought crosses my mind before I can stop it. *I wonder if I could get her to blush everywhere...*

“Just a good, old-fashioned maiming, then?” Gemma asks in all seriousness. Her cute little eyebrows furrow in concentration, and her jaw tenses as if bracing herself for the harsh truth.

“Sorry to disappoint, but no maiming, either.”

Those green eyes sparkle with mischief, and fuck if my dick isn’t twitching to life for the first time in God knows how long. What is it about Gemma that’s pushing all the right buttons?

“Got it. No violence whatsoever,” Gemma says, giving me an overdramatic wink. She bursts out laughing, which makes my chest feel funny. “But for real, what about the bike? I’ve always wondered. Does the club give you a bike?”

“No, you gotta bring your own,” I say with a smile. She’s kind of ridiculous with her questions and enthusiasm, but it’s charming, and I find myself wanting to stretch this conversation on as long as possible.

“Shoot. So I’ll need a bike first,” she responds, nodding once.

“You want to join the Savage Saints?”

Gemma shrugs. “Just keeping my options open.” She hits me with another brilliant smile, but something is off in her tone. It takes a second for me to realize what it is.

She’s looking for options, aka, an escape. *What are you running from, princess?*

Before I can ask, her phone beeps. Gemma digs it out of a pocket hidden in her layers of lace and fabric, and the color drains from her face when she looks at the screen.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and a long-dormant protective streak pushes to the surface. I want to wrap Gemma up in my arms and demand she tell me who put that fear in her eyes.

“I have to go,” she rushes to say. “I-I didn’t realize how late it was. I lost track of time and... I need to go.”

Gemma gathers up her blanket and shoves it into her backpack, along with a book, a notebook, and what looks like a recording device and lapel mic I didn’t notice earlier.

“Wait, what’s wrong? Who was that?”

Gemma doesn’t answer at first, too focused on securing the snaps on her bag. “No one,” she finally replies.

My look says it all. *Yeah, fucking right.*

Gemma dips her head, breaking eye contact with me. My heart drops to my stomach as I watch her fold in on herself. Where is the energetic, lively woman who wanted to know every detail of the MC? What is she hiding?

“It’s a long story, but... thanks for, um, for this.” She still won’t look at me, and I hate it.

“Gemma,” I say softly, taking a few steps closer to her.

She holds her backpack in front of her like a shield, and while I know it’s not directed at me, her automatic response to protect herself kills me.

“I’m sorry. I have to go,” she repeats.

“You’re free to go. I’m not stopping you,” I assure her. “I just want to make sure you’re safe.”

This gets her attention. Gemma blinks a few times, and her expressive eyes tear me apart like she can't quite believe her safety would be important to me. "I..." Green irises dart between mine as she struggles to find an answer. Anything other than an automatic yes is a red flag in my book. "I'm late. I have to go."

With that, she spins on her heel and weaves in and out of rows of headstones before disappearing down the hill. I'm left staring after her, holding the tiny bouquet of wildflowers she had wrapped in her hands.

What the hell was that? And when can I see her again?

CHAPTER TWO



GEMMA

“*Y*ou can do this,” I whisper to myself. “Just open the door, walk inside, and...”

Letting out a frustrated sigh, I cross my arms over my chest and resume my pacing in front of the Savage Saints Clubhouse. I’ve been here for ten minutes, trying to work up the courage to go inside and ask to speak to Blade.

Truthfully, this is the third time I’ve been here this week. I chicken out every time. I get all worked up, psych myself out, and then sprint the three blocks back to the graveyard—the only place I feel safe.

“Nothing changes if nothing changes,” I say under my breath. Cliche words, I know, but they’re what I need to hear right now.

I try again, gathering all my strength and wrapping my fingers around the door handle. I can’t hear anything other than my heart pounding and blood pumping. This is it. If I do this, there’s no going back.

Just open the door...

I drop my hand and spin around on my heel, continuing my pacing a few feet further from the clubhouse than before. I can’t seem to bring myself to go through with it. Grunting in frustration, I grab my long braid and begin twisting it around my fingers in a familiar, soothing gesture.

I thought maybe seeing Axel yesterday was a sign that I was ready to try again, ready to walk inside the clubhouse this

time. Apparently not.

“Gemma?”

I let out a squeak and crouch, my automatic response to an unexpected intruder. Hide, stay quiet, don't ask for anything. If they don't notice me, I can't get into trouble for “not pulling my weight.”

“Hey, it's okay,” comes the voice I now recognize as Axel. “I'm not going to hurt you.”

Embarrassment floods my system, and I know my face is bright red. There's no hiding my emotions with my light complexion. I pop up from where I'm cowering like a baby and attempt to give Axel a reassuring smile. From the concerned look in his deep blue eyes, I don't think I quite pull it off.

God, he's as gorgeous and chiseled as I remember from yesterday. More so, in fact. With black hair and ocean-blue eyes framed in long, dark lashes, his gaze is almost hypnotizing. And then there's his broad chest and strong arms, corded with muscles and decorated with tattoos.

I want to curl up in his embrace and ask him to keep me safe, but that's a ridiculous thought. He doesn't know me or my family. If he did, he might not be so friendly.

“Hey, there,” I say with a little too much enthusiasm. My heart is still racing, though I don't know if it's from my earlier scare or being in Axel's presence. “I, um, was just...” I trail off, unsure what to say. Can I trust him with this? Am I naive for thinking Axel and his club can do anything about my situation?

Axel doesn't miss a beat. He sees how uncomfortable I am and gives me a charming smile, putting me at ease. “Stalking me already, huh?” He grins, running a hand through his dark hair. He did the same thing at the graveyard, and like then, I stare at the movement of his arm, mesmerized by the flex of his muscles.

“Awfully conceited of you to assume I'm here just to ogle you,” I counter.

“Aha, I didn’t say ogle, I said stalk. But yeah, you can ogle me too, princess.” Another wink and wicked smirk has me blushing and my stomach swirling.

What is it about this man that makes me want to trust him? I feel... safe around him. I think that’s what this is. Safety.

“Princess?” I ask, raising my eyebrow as I question his nickname for me.

“Short for punk-rock princess. Or goth princess. Oh, and princess of the graveyard. Take your pick.”

I look down at my black A-line dress with dark purple polka dots that hits right above my knees. My dark purple tights match, and I’ve paired them with my favorite pair of Converse shoes I found while dumpster diving. I cleaned them up and drew little skulls and crossbones with neon fabric markers that pop against the black canvas.

Yeah, I’m guessing this look isn’t exactly what he typically goes for in a woman. Not that Axel thinks about me that way. Obviously. I have too many curves, a messed-up family, and nothing of value to offer anyone. There’s no way this sexy biker beast has anything other than a passing curiosity about me. Or maybe he’s being nice because he knows I helped Sonya when she needed it last month.

“Hey, where did you just go?” Axel whispers.

I finally stop staring at my feet and look up, meeting his gaze. “I’m right here,” I reply in the same soft tone.

Axel steps in my direction, wrapping his hand around mine and tugging me closer so we’re nearly chest-to-chest. “You went somewhere in your head. I get the sense you were saying mean things about yourself.”

“I...” *How the hell did he know?*

“I wasn’t making fun of you, I promise. I like your style. It’s unique and very... you.”

I furrow my brow, but Axel gives me the biggest grin. He looks down at me like I’m... amusing. No, that’s not quite

right. He looks at me like I'm adorable, and maybe, just maybe, I'm more than a curiosity to him.

"Uh, thanks. I think," I murmur awkwardly.

Axel untangles his hand from mine, sliding it up my arm and cupping my face. I can't help but lean into his touch, getting lost in those ocean-blue eyes. "One day, you won't doubt my compliments," he says softly. I blink, not sure I heard him correctly. "One day, you'll believe me when I tell you how beautiful you are."

Me? Beautiful? It's too much. Too good to be true. Too sweet, especially knowing what I'm going back to after this.

I step back, and a shiver runs down my spine as soon as his hand drops from my face. I like his touch. Far more than I should. I can't get used to gentle touches and kind words. They'll only make coming back to reality that much harsher.

"Now who's the one ogling?" I tease, giving Axel my best smirk. I'm still a little breathless from being so close to him, so I'm not sure I pull it off.

He smiles and wags his eyebrows, which makes me giggle. "So, are you going to tell me the real reason you're here?"

I rub my lips together nervously, deciding if I can tell him. Maybe I'll test the waters. Talking with Axel might be easier than going straight to Blade. I guess there's only one way to find out. "Well, uh, I was wondering..." I pause, breaking eye contact to look up to the sky. "What did Blade mean about me having the protection of the Savage Saints?" I ask in a rush.

I'm met with silence, so I peer back at Axel. His features have grown intense, his brow furrowed, his jaw tight with tension, and his blue eyes nearly black. "Who do you need protection from?" he asks, his tone serious.

"N-no one," I say in an unconvincing voice. He's not buying it, so I try again. "It was hypothetical. No big deal." I wave my hand in the air, dismissing the thought altogether.

Axel's face never changes. He scrutinizes me, and I don't know if I'll hold up under the pressure. I might break and

confess everything, but I don't think I'm ready for that. Not yet. Axel won't look at me the same once he knows the truth.

"Anyway," I continue, taking a few steps backward. I look at my wrist as if checking my watch, only I don't have one. "Better get going. I forgot to... uh, forgot to turn off the oven," I ramble, groaning internally over the lamest excuse to leave in the history of the world.

"Gemma, wait," Axel calls as I turn. "You can't keep leaving—"

"Seems like that's exactly what I'm doing!" I joke as I break into a run. My only focus is getting the hell out of here before I give in to the urge to turn and run right back into Axel's arms.

"Gemma!"

I half expect him to chase after me. Lord knows he could catch me easily on his bike or on foot. One last look over my shoulder reveals he's debating letting me go. In the end, he stands at the end of the Savage Saints Clubhouse parking lot, watching me sprint away.

I run past the graveyard and down the next block, only stopping when I can no longer ignore the cramp in my side. Doubling over, I clutch my side while catching my breath. *Shit*. This isn't how I wanted today to end, and now I'm late.

My parents don't like it when I'm not home by dinner. It's not because we have a family meal planned or anything, although there's a lot of cooking—just not food.

Straightening, I walk the few blocks to the trailer park on the other side of the graveyard. I hear my mother and father screaming at each other before reaching the mostly broken door of our trailer.

My shoulders tense, and my heart rate spikes. Everything in me is on high alert. Instead of walking through the front door, I creep along the side of the trailer to my bedroom window. I usually leave it open a crack in case I need to sneak in. Suffice it to say, this isn't the first time I've come home to screaming matches. I've walked in on physical fights between

my parents or three older brothers, drug use, and other questionable behavior.

I grip the window pane and shove it upward, opening it enough to wedge myself inside. Wrapping my fingers around the window ledge, I step on the cement cinder block I keep underneath the window and hoist myself up.

My bedroom door bursts open as I get my top half through the opening. My eldest brother, Randall, stomps inside, a sinister grin twisting his lips as he lunges toward me. I scramble away, but he grabs my arms and tugs hard, pulling me through the window and letting me fall to the ground with a thud. My left hip takes the brunt of the impact. Pain shoots down my back and leg as I try to catch my breath.

“Trying to sneak in and avoid your family, Gemma?” Randall spits out as he wraps his fingers around my forearm. He yanks me off the floor and tugs me forward, his grip tight enough to bruise.

“No, I—”

“Save it,” he snaps, dragging me to my parents in the main room.

The two stop fighting and look at me, disgust and annoyance in their eyes. I should be used to it, but I’d be lying if I said their disdain for me didn’t hurt every damn time. I know I was unplanned. Randall is almost thirty-nine, Carl is thirty-seven, and Nathan just turned thirty-six. I’m fifteen years younger than Nathan and nothing short of a total outcast in my family.

“Where the fuck were you?” my mother asks, making her way toward me. “You know your shift starts at six. We have orders to keep up. Product to push.”

“I know, I just—”

“Unless you’d like to sell, instead?” my father grunts, approaching me.

I brace myself for whatever mood he’s in. None of them are good. “N-no, I don’t want—”

I hear the slap before I feel it. The sting follows a second later, quickly joined by a throbbing pain in my left cheek and temple.

“I don’t give a fuck about what you want. You need to start pulling your weight around here. This is the family business. Got it?”

“Yes, I understand. I just thought maybe tonight I could—”

“No,” comes the automatic response. “No more excuses. No more nights off. No more headaches or whatever other bullshit you say to get out of your responsibilities.”

I nod, too scared to say anything else. My father’s eyes are crazy tonight. He’s been sampling his product again, and meth is a hell of a drug.

“Fuckin’ useless waste,” he mutters before stepping away from me.

I release the breath I was holding, hoping the worst is over. Before I have a chance to take another breath, something cracks against my face. Sharp pain almost blinds me as I stumble backward, unsure what just happened.

“Shut up and follow your brother to the kitchen. You’re ruining my buzz.”

It takes a second to register the voice as my mother’s. The left side of my face throbs, sending agonizing bursts of pain ricocheting around my skull. It’s not the first time I’ve had a black eye, but it’s the first time I’ve been sucker-punched out of nowhere. Then again, when drugs and aggression are involved, I suppose I should expect violence at all times.

My mother turns and flops down on the broken, stained couch, grabbing a pipe and a lighter before getting settled. I peel myself off the wall, only to sway on my feet and catch myself with one hand on the opposite wall.

“Get yourself cleaned up and meet me in the kitchen,” Randall grunts. He grips the back of my neck and pushes me toward the bathroom.

Once inside, I shut the door and brace myself on the small, rusted-out sink. Staring at my reflection in the cracked mirror, I gape at my swollen eye and cheek. It's going to be purple by tomorrow. I hope I'll still be able to see out of my left eye, but it wouldn't surprise me if it swells shut by morning.

"This is the last time," I whisper to myself. "I can't take this anymore. I *won't*."

Even as I say the words, my resolve is already fading. Where would I go? What would I do? This is all I know. All I'm good for. This is my life.

CHAPTER THREE



AXEL

“*T*hey’ve found another source,” Officer Jake announces.

I straighten in my chair, as do my MC brothers. We’ve been in church for damn near an hour. I don’t usually mind the long meetings, but I’m filled with restless, anxious energy today.

I can’t stop thinking about Gemma. She’s run away from me twice now, leaving me more unsettled each time. I tossed and turned all night, thinking about her wide, green eyes filled with terror when her phone went off that first day. Images of my princess wringing her hands as she stood in front of the clubhouse flash through my mind, and I clench my fists at my sides when I remember her rushed words.

What did Blade mean about me having the protection of the Savage Saints?

“...thanks to Axel setting up the recording device, we know the new meth lab is in the Orchard Grove trailer park,” Officer Jake continues.

I attempt to shove my thoughts about Gemma and why she needs protection to the back of my mind and focus on my club. The worry is still there, and I have a feeling that part of me will always be concerned about Gemma’s well-being and happiness.

I nod at Jake to show him I’m paying attention. Mostly.

“Anything more specific?” Blade asks from his position next to Officer Jake at the front of the room.

“Not at this time. I’ve asked the interim sheriff to let me know about any special projects coming up. I think I’m getting close to being accepted into the inner circle.”

The Prez nods and uncrosses his arms, clapping his big hand over Jake’s shoulder. “Never thought I’d be saying this to a cop, but good work.”

Officer Jake still looks a little rattled to be in a room filled with armed bikers who have a bad history with law enforcement, but he’s come a long way in the last few weeks. A lot of my MC brothers were wary of working with the police after being betrayed by them again and again, but Jake has proven himself to be loyal so far. That’s not to say I haven’t been keeping tabs on him, too, however.

Blade says a few more words in closing, then dismisses us. Looking at my phone, I see it’s almost four in the afternoon. Like every spare moment of my time over the last several days, my mind wanders to Gemma.

What’s she up to? Is she safe? Where does she live? What is she so afraid of?

I don’t even realize I’m on my bike until I exit the clubhouse parking lot. I didn’t plan on going to the graveyard, but that’s where I’m headed. Hopefully, I’ll find the object of my obsession before I lose my damn mind altogether.

A few minutes later, I pull up at the bottom of the hill where I found Gemma resting. I see her bending to place something on a headstone, and it takes a second to realize it’s a little bundle of wildflowers like she was holding the first day I found her.

So damn sweet.

When Gemma stands and continues walking down the row, I notice her limping slightly on her left side. Every protective urge rises in me, and I scramble up the side of the embankment to get to her.

“Gemma,” I call out, hating myself when she tenses and crouches on the ground. *What has happened in her life to give her that instinct?* “Sorry, it’s just me. Didn’t mean to startle you.”

“Oh, hey,” comes her response. She’s trying to play it off like no big deal, but I see her. I see how she holds herself as if everything is a threat.

Gemma stands slowly. I’m unsure if it’s because she’s a little shaken or hurting. God fucking help me if it’s the latter.

“Everything okay?” I ask, taking a few steps closer.

She wobbles when she puts weight on her left side. I reach out, placing my hand on her hip to steady her. Gemma hisses at the contact and inhales sharply, turning away from me.

What the fuck?

“Did I hurt you?” I murmur, not wanting to scare her more than she already is.

“No, sorry, just, uh...” Gemma looks down, her fiery red hair hanging over the left side of her face like a curtain. “Just a little sore today,” she finishes, wrapping her arms around her torso in a protective hold.

She looks so small, so heartbreakingly vulnerable. I wish I knew what to say to get her to trust me, but I’m at a loss for words.

Moving on instinct, I raise my hands in front of me, palms out, so she knows I’m not a threat. “You’re okay, Gemma,” I say softly. “You’re safe here. You’re safe with me. Do you know that?”

Still not lifting her head, Gemma whispers, “I... don’t know what it means to be safe. But whatever I feel around you is safer than I’ve been in a long time.”

Jesus, this woman is killing me. Would it send her into a panic attack if I scooped her up in my arms and carried her off to my apartment behind the clubhouse?

“You can talk to me,” I encourage. “I can help. The Savage Saints can help. You don’t have to go through this alone.”

Please, please trust me. Let me in. Let me help, I silently beg.

When I hear her quiet sniffles, I can't stand not seeing her face anymore. Slowly, so slowly, I reach out and brush her silky red hair out of her face. My gaze immediately lands on the fucking black and blue bruise swelling up her left eye and cheekbone.

I want to curse and scream and hunt down whoever hurt my precious girl, but I swallow my rage and focus on taking care of Gemma.

“Sweetheart,” I murmur, gently cupping her chin and tilting her head so I can examine the damage. Her poor skin is swollen and tender, with purple, blue, and black splashes of color pooling around her eye socket and cheekbone. Gemma's eyes are filled with tears, but she doesn't let them fall. “What happened?”

Gemma blinks a few times, the eyelid of her left eye almost swollen shut. She nibbles on her bottom lip nervously, breaking eye contact once more.

“You don't have to tell me right now,” I whisper, dropping my hand from her chin and holding it out for her to take.

She rests her hand in mine, and I notice a set of angry, finger-sized bruises on her forearm as if someone yanked her or dragged her somewhere. The more I learn about Gemma's homelife, the less I like.

“Gemma—”

Before I can say anything else, she collapses into a pile of tears. I wrap my arms around her, holding her against me and soaking up a river of sadness as she pours out all her pain.

I'm not sure where else she's hurt, but I gently, so damn gently, cup the back of her neck and tuck her head under my chin. She fits perfectly in my embrace. She's right where she belongs, here in my arms, where I can protect her from the whole fucking world.

“I've got you,” I whisper, trailing my fingertips down her spine. “Let it out, sweetheart.”

Gut-wrenching sobs are pulled from the very depths of whatever trauma she's had to endure. They wrack her curvy little body, sending her into shaking fits. I hold her through it all, wishing I could take her pain away.

"I-I-I'm s-sorry," she cries, her voice muffled from where her face is buried in my chest.

"Shh, there's nothing to apologize for," I soothe. Never thought I was capable of saying tender things, but Gemma is pulling out all sorts of surprises from me. Fuck if I'm not going to keep her and cherish her forever. But first, I need her to trust me.

"I'm a mess," she says with a snuffle. Gemma peels herself off my chest and steps back. I bite back a grunt at the sudden separation. I don't like it. She should always be in my arms. "I'm... I'm just... I'm no good."

"No good? What do you mean?"

Her damn phone goes off, and she tenses and shuts down like last time. Not that she was very talkative before, but now I know I won't get an explanation.

"I have to go," she says, her voice barely above a whisper.

"You can stay. I can help. I can protect—"

Her phone chimes again, and Gemma winces like she knows she's in trouble before even reading the text message.

I know she's going to run away from me, but I'm not letting her go this time. No way in hell am I walking away after discovering she's in danger.

Fuck, I never should have let her leave the clubhouse yesterday. I knew something was wrong but didn't want to press her for more information or scare her off. Guilt sits like a lead weight in my stomach. If I'd asked her a few more questions and been more aware, I could've saved her from the abuse she suffered last night.

"I have to go," Gemma whispers. "I'm sorry. I'm... I have to go."

“Please stay,” I beg. “Let me help.” I’m helping no matter what, but I want to give her a chance to choose it for herself.

Her green eyes meet mine, and her swollen face makes my stomach churn angrily. I see a storm of conflict raging inside her, but after a few moments, she shakes her head and gives me one last look.

She doesn't think she's worth saving.

I’m unsure how I know that, but something about her eyes, her fucking *soul*, reaches out to me.

Gemma takes off a little slower than usual with her limp but still clearly walking away from me. Again. I’m not letting her go this time.

Waiting until she’s almost to the other side of the graveyard, I break into a jog down the main row leading to the exit. I watch as she turns left out of the exit, then take the same turn, following her from a distance.

A few minutes later, Gemma turns left again, veering off the sidewalk and heading down a well-worn footpath toward the old trailer park. The hairs on my neck stand up as pieces of the last few days fall into place.

Orchard Grove trailer park.

Keeping an eye on Gemma, I see her head for the plot of land in the back, facing the woods. She doesn’t go through the front door but opts to go around to the side and hoists herself through a window.

I get closer, crouching to remain unseen. Is she breaking in? No, that doesn’t sound like my Gemma. Not that I would judge her, but I can’t see her committing a crime.

When I’m about ten feet from the side of the trailer, I smell it. There’s no mistaking the chemical ammonia scent emanating from inside. *Meth*.

I hesitate momentarily, then take off into the woods, looking for a good hiding spot before pulling out my phone. Blade picks up on the first ring.

“Prez, you’re never going to believe what I just found.”

CHAPTER FOUR



GEMMA

“*T*hat’s all I have for this week’s episode of Grave Secrets, your favorite true crime podcast bringing you stories from beyond the grave! Make sure to join me next week when we’ll discuss the possible demon possession of Anneliese Michel... or was it a hoax? Find out—”

My voice cracks, and I curse under my breath, knowing I messed up another take. I already recorded the intro for this episode yesterday. I just need the outro, and I can edit the audio file and put my new episode of Grave Secrets up.

I can’t seem to get this outro right, however. This is my eighth time recording it. The first two times, I couldn’t stop my voice from shaking. The third time, I spaced the entire second half of the script. Five takes later, my mind is still scrambled from seeing Axel in the graveyard today.

Closing my eyes, I remember how he touched me so gently, his blue gaze mapping out my features as if cataloging my injuries so he could heal every single one. He can’t, though. Not really. The bruises fade, but the fear grows stronger.

I allow myself one more moment to remember Axel’s warm embrace and the beat of his heart as I lay my head on his solid chest. *Safe. Home.* That’s what it felt like.

A loud banging on the trailer’s screen door jars me out of my happy place. The damn door rattles on its hinges and squeaks obnoxiously as whoever is outside pulls it open.

Everything in me is on high alert. It could be a dealer coming for more product, a junkie looking for a fix, one of the women my father sleeps around with, or a neighbor wanting to get in on the business side of things.

I carefully and silently unfold myself from where I was sitting on my bed with my laptop and tiptoe the five and a half feet across my room to the door. Like every other door in this trailer, it doesn't fit the frame and hasn't been able to close all the way for the entire six years we've lived here.

Honestly, it served as a good lookout spot during that time. Not that there was ever much I could do about the bad, scary, and illegal things happening on the other side, but at least I knew to stay put. Stay quiet.

Peering through the splintered wood, I'm shocked at the three men standing in the living room. Of all the people who come and go in our trailer, I never would have guessed tonight's visitors would be cops.

Are they finally shutting us down?

My family has been cooking and selling meth since before I was born, but this is the longest we've ever stayed in one place. Six months couch surfing with a family friend, a few weeks renting out the cheapest hotel available, then off again to a new location when we got run out of town by the law or a competitor. We've somehow managed to fly under the radar of the local police for years in this small California town.

“How much?” one of the officers grunts.

I furrow my brow as I look at my dad, who has his arms crossed over his chest. “And why should I trust you? Y'all are cops. You could be settin' me up. This ain't my first rodeo with the law,” my father spits out at them.

The policeman in the middle of the trio looks to the officer on his left, then on his right. The sick smiles twisting their faces make my stomach churn. Nothing good will come from this.

“You think this is the first we've heard of your operation?” the middle officer, apparently their leader, asks. “We've

known about you since the day you stepped foot into this town five, six years ago. Sheriff Darren knows about every shitty meth den in this town. We *let* you carry on your business because it's good for our business.”

I blink a few times, not quite believing what I'm hearing.

“And now you're done *letting* me conduct my business?”

“No. Now we're changing the terms. You're our hookup. You sell exclusively to us at a wholesale price, we keep and push the product, pocketing the difference.”

“Now why would I shoot my own business in the foot like that? Just to be shackled to the law? Why wouldn't I simply close up shop and move on to the next town?”

The men stare at one another, sizing up each other and calculating their next move. Finally, the officer breaks the silence.

“This isn't a courtesy call. This isn't us asking permission. This is the goddamn law coming to your door and telling you how it's going to be.”

“You gonna shoot me if I refuse?”

The officer laughs, though it's hollow and haunted. Sinister.

“No. If you refuse, if you run, if you get some big idea to narc on us, I guarantee you'll be begging me for a bullet. Death would be too easy, though. For someone like you, a special fucker with an ego as big as his addiction, I'll pull out all the stops. You'll be in a straitjacket, rocking back and forth in a padded cell, unable to get your next fix. I'll ensure you have good enough healthcare to keep you in your new home for a long, long time.”

This resonates with my dad. I know the threat hit home when he shifts on his feet and uncrosses and recrosses his arms. My father is never anxious because he's either high or punches whatever perceived threat comes his way. But right now? He looks like he might pee his pants.

“Well, hold on, now. No need to get graphic,” my father says, changing his stance. He’s softer this time, his shoulders curling in, his arms dropping to his sides. I’ve never seen him like this. “Now that I’ve had time to think about your offer, I agree that the terms are favorable.”

What have you just gotten us into?

I can’t stand to listen anymore. My heart can only take so much. Is there no justice in this world? No cosmic scale of right and wrong? How can so much evil exist without some sort of consequence?

Backing away from the crack in my door, I turn and plop down on my bed. It’s just a mattress on the floor, but it’s better than what I used to sleep on. As crazy as it may seem to others, my time in this shitty trailer is the most stable I’ve ever been.

I got to go to the same high school all four years, though that didn’t help me make friends. It was difficult earning trust when I couldn’t invite people over or tell them what my parents did for a living. When I showed up to class wearing long sleeves and long pants to cover my bruises, I was made fun of for being allergic to the sun.

Still, I knew I had someplace to come home to after school. That wasn’t a luxury I was afforded in the past. On more than one occasion, the school bus dropped me off, and I walked to the motel we were holed up in, only to find it empty. My mom always came to get me... eventually.

I shake my head of those thoughts and concentrate on the task at hand. My podcast. It’s not much, but I make some money from my true crime blog and the podcast. I would love to start a YouTube channel, but there’s no way I could record video footage here.

As I begin edits on my laptop, my bedroom door opens with a crash. I startle from my spot on the bed, scrambling away from the commotion on instinct.

“Come on, Gem. Time to cook. Got a big order, and they’re gonna keep on coming.” Randall takes two long strides

to reach me and yanks me up by my arm. My laptop, headphones, and notebook fall from my lap as Randall half drags, half carries me into the living room.

I must be going crazy from all the stress, but I swear I hear the distant rumble of a motorcycle engine. Maybe I'm hallucinating about Axel and his bike as a way to comfort myself. Or, more accurately, as a way to mentally escape from what my family is forcing me to do.

The noise grows louder, closer, and then seemingly erupts all at once as if hundreds of bikes are revving their motors outside our trailer.

"What the fuck?" Randall mutters, releasing my arm so I stumble to the floor.

I remain crouched for a few moments, listening with the rest of my family.

"Who is that?" my mother asks no one in particular. She's been passed out in her recliner in nothing but a tank top and dirty underwear. Sometimes, she doesn't wake up for a whole day when she crashes. I'm surprised the noise got to her.

"Don't fuckin' know, but I'm about to find out," my father grunts. He grabs his shotgun, slinging it over his shoulder as he opens the front door. "What the—"

Chaos breaks out on the front lawn, and the trailer windows shatter. A shot rings out, and I hit the floor, covering my head with my hands. More shots are fired, some outside, some inside, while my brothers race around the trailer in search of more weapons.

I crawl on my stomach to my bedroom, making it inside as a scream rends the air and an explosion detonates in the kitchen. *Shit, something must have caught fire in the lab...*

I don't have time to think or rationalize, moving on survival instinct. I can't go back to the living room with the fire raging and gunshots being exchanged. I toss the only things that matter to me, my laptop, recording mic, and headphones, into my backpack and shove my window open.

I peek outside. It seems to be quiet on this side of the trailer. Most of the action is happening in the front and other side of the trailer, giving me the perfect distraction to get the fuck out.

I carefully lower my backpack as far as possible, letting it drop the last foot and a half to the ground. Even though the mic and laptop are in padded cases, I still wince at the sound of the bag hitting gravel. I worked my ass off babysitting, cleaning houses, washing cars, and other odd jobs every spare moment until I earned enough to purchase all the equipment to start my blog and podcast.

None of that matters now, though. I need to survive tonight and figure out my next steps.

I take one last look around my bedroom, knowing I'll never be back here again. It was never comforting or safe, but it was familiar. In a life wrought with anarchy and turmoil, familiarity is the best you can hope for.

I'll need to find something else familiar. Maybe this will be my chance to find my true home.

I grip the window ledge and use the nightstand as leverage to hoist myself through. I've only used the window to sneak into the house, not out of it. When coming inside, I crash land on my bed. Out here, however, there's only dirt and gravel. Still better than meth and fire.

Closing my eyes, I shove myself the rest of the way out the window, bracing myself for impact. My back hits the ground, and I exhale sharply as the breath is stolen from my lungs. Bits of gravel bite into my skin, but I ignore the pain, rolling to my side and forcing myself to stand on shaky legs.

I throw my backpack on, take a deep breath, and peer around the corner to see the progress of whatever takedown is happening. My jaw drops open when I see Blade with his hand around my dad's neck. The rest of the Savage Saints appear to be raiding and dismantling anything that isn't on fire.

I can't wrap my head around everything that's happened this evening. First, the cops show up and want to make a deal

with my family to buy meth. Then, the outlaw biker gang comes in swinging, wanting to shut down the operation for good, I assume.

My eyes land on Axel, and everything in me stills, aside from my racing heart. He's not looking at me, but just knowing he's here, seeing him pry apart my deepest secret and greatest shame...

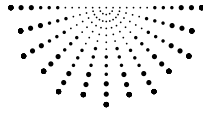
I can't take it. What if he sees me? He'll know I'm trash. I'm no good. Not worth the help he and his club have so graciously offered me.

As if sensing me, Axel turns, and his far too perceptive blue gaze hones in on mine. I gasp and spin on my heel, sprinting in the opposite direction. My hip is still swollen and bruised from yesterday, and screams at me with each heavy step. My head throbs, and the pain in my left eye and cheek worsens with my increasing heartbeat.

I ignore all of it. The excruciating pain, the sting of the gravel still embedded in my skin, the stitch in my side that makes it hard to breathe. The only way I'll get through this is to focus on escaping. Axel will forget all about me in the excitement. I'm sure of it.

Too bad I'll never forget him or how I felt wrapped in his arms.

CHAPTER FIVE



AXEL

Gemma. Thank fuck.

I lost my damn mind when her dumbass brothers lit a firework and shot it off in the wrong direction. I assume they were aiming for us and trying to scare us off, but instead, they shot their own fucking trailer.

And then her father opened fire, escalating the situation. One of my brothers, still not sure who, shot back, right into the trailer. Blade explicitly instructed everyone not to shoot at the trailer until I got Gemma to safety.

Then the fire broke out, and everything went to shit.

I see my girl take off toward the tree line, her red hair catching the light of the flickering flames. As I sprint after her, I'm more determined than ever to protect Gemma and ensure she never runs from me again.

"Gemma!" I call out when I'm about a dozen feet from her.

She looks over her shoulder, a heart-shattering look in her green eyes. She wants to be saved, but she's so convinced she's not worth it.

"I can't," she says breathlessly, holding back tears. "I'm—"

Gemma stumbles on a rough patch of grass and pitches forward. I reach her as she falls, sliding my arm around her waist and pulling her into my chest.

“I’ve got you,” I whisper, holding her loosely against me. I don’t know where she’s hurt, and it would kill me if I caused her more pain.

It was hard enough leaving her in that filthy trailer once I figured out her family was the new hookup. I couldn’t exactly walk up to the front door and demand Gemma come out. As someone who grew up with plenty of abusive people, I know firsthand that it doesn’t take much to set them off, especially if drugs are involved. I needed the club’s backing, but gathering the resources took too damn long.

“No,” Gemma chokes, trying so hard not to cry. She pushes against me, though her protests are half-hearted at best. “I’m no good,” she tries again, her voice a little stronger this time.

“I’ve got you,” I whisper again, my hands spreading over her back and stroking gently. She doesn’t want me to leave. She wants me to show her she’s worth fighting for. “I’m not letting go.”

“You d-don’t understand,” Gemma continues. “My family... they’re not good people.”

She tries pushing me away again, and I gently loop my fingers around her right wrist, bringing her hand to my lips to kiss her palm. Then, I place her hand over my heart and cover it with mine, letting her feel my steady heartbeat.

“Mine aren’t either. Not my biological family, anyway.”

“I’ve... I’ve done things. Things I’m not proud of.” Gemma attempts to twist away as if looking at me is too much.

It hurts seeing her in so much anguish, but I’ll stay here all damn night long, fighting her demons with her if that’s what it takes. “Me too.”

“I’m trailer trash, don’t you get that?” she yells, her voice becoming scratchy. “And now I’m not even that. I’m homeless.”

Gemma makes one last weak attempt to slip out of my arms, but I hold her steady, cupping the back of her neck and tucking her head under my chin. Like last time, I have an

overwhelming sense of completeness. She fits perfectly right here. This is where my princess belongs.

“I’ve got you,” I repeat softly. This time, my bruised and broken princess surrenders to my care, collapsing in my arms and letting me support her weight. “I’m never letting go.”

Our hearts break and mend together as I cradle Gemma in my arms. She sobs silently, her curvy body shaking with the effort of holding everything in.

“Are you okay to ride with me?” I ask after a few moments.

Gemma unburies herself from my chest and peers up at me, her green eyes puffy and rimmed in red from her tears.

I reluctantly let her take a step away but keep her hand secured in mine. Can’t take any risks with her running off again. “I’m taking you back to my place,” I tell her. “Where you’ll be safe. We can figure out what comes next, but first, you need a hot shower and a good night’s sleep.”

“But...”

“Do you trust me, princess?”

Her brow furrows, and she gives me an odd look. “You’re still calling me princess? After all of this?”

Jesus, this woman. She has no idea how precious she is.

“Gemma,” I murmur, cupping her chin and tilting her face toward mine. “This doesn’t define you. Your family doesn’t have to be your identity. You get to decide to be whoever you want to be.” She doesn’t quite believe me yet, but she wants to. That’s a start. “You’re my princess because you looked like Sleeping Beauty when I first saw you in the graveyard with your eyes closed and your hands clutching a bouquet of wildflowers. Every moment since then has only shown me more of your sweetness and light.”

My girl smiles, and her eyes well up with tears, but I don’t think she’s sad. Gemma hasn’t had much love in her life, but that shit ends here. I vow to remind her every day how valued and worthy she is.

“So, do you trust me?” I ask her once again.

Gemma nods, and I pull her toward me, wrapping my arm around her waist and tucking her into my side. I lean over and kiss her temple before leading her to my bike, parked beyond the tree line. I camped out there while waiting for my brothers to get here, keeping an eye on Gemma, and ensuring nothing happened to her before I could get her out.

I throw my leg over my bike and direct Gemma to climb on behind me. She’s wearing ripped black skinny jeans tonight and a black lacy top that flows around her generous curves, making her look like a breathtaking gothic angel. I like Gemma in everything she wears, but I’m thankful she’s wearing jeans for this bike ride. I’ll need to get her some proper riding gear soon.

That thought brings a smile to my face despite the heart-wrenching last few minutes. I like the idea of Gemma being around long enough to need riding gear.

She scoots up behind me, her inner thighs pressing against the outsides of mine. I grit my teeth, trying to get my damn libido under control. Tonight isn’t about that. I shouldn’t be thinking about our bodies tangled up in other ways, but it’s hard not to when Gemma’s curves are right here, pressed against my back. When she wraps her arms around my torso, my dick twitches.

Not happening tonight, I silently tell the fucker. Gemma needs to be taken care of in other ways first. Then, hopefully, when she trusts me enough, we can share everything.

“Hold on tight, princess,” I call over my shoulder. She squeezes my abs and clenches her thighs together, and fuck me, I’m going to have to give my hardening cock another talking to when I get Gemma tucked into bed.

I take off into the night, rescuing my princess from the evil villains and bringing her back to my castle. And by castle, I mean my apartment behind the clubhouse. We have rooms for those who need a temporary place to stay, but there is a row of legit three-bedroom apartments in the back lot.

It's not long before we're pulling into the clubhouse parking lot. I pull my bike around back, holding my hand out to help Gemma dismount before doing the same.

"How was your first ride?" I ask. Gemma is shaking slightly, and I worry it was too much.

"Amazing," she says breathlessly. My girl hits me with the brightest smile, mending a little piece of my heart after the chaos and pain of the evening.

I grin and take Gemma's backpack before gathering her delicate hand in my much larger one. "I'll take you on a longer ride once you're all healed up," I promise, lifting her hand to kiss her knuckles. I can't help it. I always want to be touching her in some way.

Unlocking the door, I lead Gemma inside and set her bag down. She looks up at me, those green eyes shining with trust but also a bone-deep weariness.

"Let's get you cleaned up, yeah?" I ask softly. I can tell the excitement and adrenaline of the night are wearing off, and she's going to crash soon.

Gemma nods, and I lead her to the main bathroom in the hallway. I also have one in the main bedroom, but I don't want to freak her out or make her uncomfortable. Guiding her to sit on the edge of the tub, I grab a washcloth and the first aid kit from my medicine cabinet and get to work setting out the bandages, a cleansing wipe, and antibiotic cream.

I kneel in front of Gemma and take her hands in mine. She swallows thickly, and tears form in her emerald eyes. Without her saying a single word, I know what she's thinking. I can feel it with every cell in my body. Nobody has ever taken care of her like this. No one has ever been kind or gentle with her.

It kills me to know that, but it hardens my resolve to fill her life with enough love to drown out the darkness she's experienced.

Taking the damp washcloth, I wipe away the dirt and grime on her face in gentle circles. When she's cleaned up, I get a better look at her black eye. There's a slight cut on her

cheek, and I get to work disinfecting the wound. I finish with a soothing ointment, then cover the cut with a small bandage.

“I’m so sorry, Gemma,” I whisper, ghosting my fingers around the edges of her bruise.

“For what?” she asks, matching my soft tone.

“I knew something was wrong that day you showed up at the clubhouse, but I just... I let you leave. If I had any idea you were being abused...” I close my eyes and inhale sharply, the guilt twisting up my stomach.

Gemma places her hand on my chest, right over my heart. “It’s not your fault,” she murmurs.

I open my eyes and rest my hand on top of hers. “It’s not yours either.”

Gemma nods and nibbles her bottom lip as the first tear falls.

“Sweetheart,” I whisper, careful to avoid her swollen bruise as I wipe her tears.

I stand, taking Gemma with me and wrapping her in my arms. I hold her for long moments, but eventually, we break apart. She needs a warm shower followed by sleep. I’m happy I can provide both for her.

After showing Gemma how to work the shower, I drop off towels and some of my clothes for her to change into. Black sweatpants and a black T-shirt, of course. Gemma wouldn’t have it any other way.

I make a note to place an ice pack on her nightstand as well as vaseline to rub over the skin for discoloration. It’s been a long time since I’ve had to tend to bruises, but I know the drill.

Ten minutes later, I’ve nearly worn a path in my hardwood floor from pacing around the living room. I stop when I hear the bathroom door open, holding my breath until Gemma tiptoes into the living room.

She’s gorgeous with her red hair braided and slung over her right shoulder. I love seeing her in my clothes, and I grin

when I notice she's rolled up the sweatpants to make them fit. She's adorable in my too-big shirt and pants, and it makes me want to curl up with her in my lap.

Soon.

"Feel a little better?"

"Yes, thank you," Gemma says quietly. She looks down at her feet, wringing her hands in front of her. I hate seeing her nervous like this.

"No need to thank me," I tell her, closing the distance between us. She looks up at me again, and I reach out, running my fingers over her neatly done braid. "Knowing you're safe is enough." Gemma tilts her head to the side and furrows her brow. I smile and kiss her temple. "Ready for bed?"

"Yes, please," she says with a yawn.

I chuckle and take her hand, showing her to the guest room. I've never had anyone else over, but the place was already furnished with the basics when I moved in, and I never had another use for that room.

"I'll be right next door if you need anything," I tell her once we're standing next to the bed. I'm finding it hard to let go of her hand.

She looks down at where our fingers are laced together, then up at me. Gemma sways forward, her gaze locked on my lips.

Fuck, I know what she wants. I want it, too, but I don't want to overwhelm her.

When I see a slight hint of doubt and rejection in her eyes, I can't hold back. I'd never reject Gemma, and it's about time I show her exactly what it means to be mine.

Gently, so damn gently, I cup her uninjured cheek and tilt her head up a little more. Her breaths grow shallow as I lean down, brushing the tip of her nose with mine. "I'm going to kiss you now," I murmur against her slightly parted lips.

"Please," she begs so sweetly.

I press my lips to hers, sipping from her, teasing her top lip, then her bottom lip, before licking inside her mouth. Gemma gasps softly, her tongue tentatively sliding against mine. It shouldn't make me nearly feral that she's so inexperienced, but I won't lie; I love it. I love that I'm her first kiss. Her first everything. I'm sure as hell going to be her last.

Gemma moans, rolling her body against mine. I feel the kiss leading to something more, something deeper, but I pull away. Barely. My girl follows me as if our lips are connected by magnets. I smile and press a quick kiss to her lips and forehead.

"Can't wait to do that again," I whisper into the shell of her ear. "But right now, you need rest."

Gemma sighs, making me chuckle.

I pull back the covers for her, watching as she crawls under them. I want to be in there with her so badly, but I don't want to move too fast.

"Goodnight, princess." I lean down to give her one last kiss on the forehead.

"Night," she whispers, her eyes already closed.

Good. I'm sure she's exhausted, and not just from tonight. Her whole life has been a battle, but I'm here now. Gemma will never be alone again.

CHAPTER SIX



GEMMA

“No. No, please. I can’t...”

I jerk awake, not sure what happened or where I am. My throat feels raw, like I’ve been crying or screaming. My heart pounds so fast that it’s hard to catch my breath. Fear grips my muscles, each one tense to the point of shaking.

The door bursts open, and I scream, but all that comes out is a broken sob.

“Gemma,” someone says, their voice laced with worry. “Gemma, what’s wrong? I heard screaming.”

It takes me a second to realize it’s Axel. I’m in his guest room.

“N-nightm-mare,” I stutter between heaving sobs. I can hardly remember what it was about, only that it ripped me from my sleep and left terror behind.

Axel climbs onto the bed, slowly reaching toward me and giving me plenty of time to pull away. I don’t want to. All I want is to curl up with Axel and have him hold me and tell me everything will be okay.

Thankfully, he seems to want the same thing.

“You’re safe,” he whispers, cradling me in his arms. I tuck my head under his chin, loving how protected I feel when he holds me like this. “I’ve got you. I’ll never let them touch you again.”

I believe him.

Once my breathing has returned to normal and my tears have dried, I uncurl myself from Axel's embrace. He seems reluctant to let me go, which warms me. Is he as drawn to me as I am to him? It doesn't make sense. Then again, the way he kissed me like I was precious and irresistible...

"Can you stay here with me?" I blurt.

Axel doesn't say anything for a beat, and I'm about to pull the blankets over my head and never come out again. "I'll stay with you as long as you want. As long as you'll let me."

I smile at his sweet and sincere answer. Who knew a tatted-up biker could say such comforting things? Axel is kind of perfect.

I get settled back down in bed, and Axel crawls under the covers, scooting up behind me and spooning himself around me from behind.

"Is this okay?" he asks, his lips right next to my ear. "I'm not hurting you?" His breath tickles my skin, and I swear I can feel the sensation all the way down in my core.

"It's perfect," I whisper.

We stay like that for a while, but I can't seem to fall back asleep. Every time I start to doze off, the remnants of my nightmare jerk me awake.

"It's okay, Gemma," Axel murmurs, stroking my side in a soothing gesture.

"Sorry. I can't seem to relax. You can go back to your bed if I'm keeping you awake."

"Never leaving," he says, burying his face in the top of my head before kissing me there.

I smile at his ridiculousness, though I love how obsessed with me he seems.

"But I can help relax you," he whispers.

Like last time, the tickling of his breath against my ear is mirrored between my thighs. I squeeze my legs together to

find some relief from the pressure, but it's not enough. "Oh, yeah?" I breathe out.

"If you want. I don't want to move too fast—" Axel breaks off into a groan as I press my ass against his growing erection.

"Please," I beg. "I want it."

Axel spreads his hand over my stomach, softly caressing my skin. That simple touch makes my pussy throb and my skin break out into goosebumps. I should be embarrassed about having a nightmare, but I can't think about anything except how Axel is touching me.

"You're so soft," Axel murmurs as he pulls me closer.

Every inch of his body is rock hard, from the defined muscles on his chest and abs to his thick cock digging into my ass. It feels so good being pressed against him while he continues to explore my body with gentle yet scorching touches.

I arch my back when he cups my breast and glides his thumb over my pebbled nipple. Axel growls softly and grinds his erection against me. He kisses the back of my neck and nips the sensitive spot below my ear. I whimper when he scrapes his teeth along the same spot like he wants to devour me. I want him to.

Axel tugs at my shirt, lifting it up and over my head with little to no help from me. He squeezes my breasts and pinches one nipple, then the other. He grunts something about perfect tits, but I hardly hear him over the overwhelming sensations he's causing in my body.

Axel slides his hand down my torso, his fingers dancing along the edge of the pants of his I'm wearing. The featherlight touch drives me crazy. He's teasing me, making me squirm and want so much more. I've never been this needy, this desperate, this... wet. God, I'm so, so incredibly turned on right now. I *ache* for him.

He slips the tips of his fingers beneath the elastic waistband, making me gasp at the sudden rush of arousal

shooting through me. Every nerve ending spikes with pleasure, causing more wetness to drip from my throbbing pussy.

“This okay, princess?” Axel asks softly, his voice tinged with the same desperate need I feel.

“Yes,” I whimper. “Please.”

He groans and wastes no time shoving the pants down my thighs. I wiggle and help him remove them completely as needy little whimpers fall from my lips, my desire growing with each second his fingers aren't inside me.

The aches and pains from my injuries melt away, and all I feel is anticipation for what's to come.

Once I'm completely naked, Axel runs his hand across my bare skin, leaving a trail of fire in its wake. Finally, *finally*, he dips one finger into my slit and strokes me. I cry out when he circles my clit with his calloused fingers. My cunt throbs and clenches, and I swear I'm already right at the edge of total bliss.

“Jesus, Gemma. So wet for me,” he grunts, circling my opening with the pad of his finger.

I buck my hips and grind down on his hand, unable to control my movements. Axel teases my pulsing little hole, not quite entering me. How does that feel so good? I wiggle my hips, trying to get him to do... something. I don't know. I just need more.

He runs his fingers up and down my slit, gathering up my juices and rubbing my clit until I'm moaning uncontrollably. I'm right there. So close, I shake. So close, I squeeze my eyes shut and hold my breath. So close, I reach my arm behind me and fist his hair, needing something to hold onto.

And then his hand is gone. I gasp and grunt in frustration, my orgasm clawing to the surface but unable to break free. The pressure in my lower belly is almost painful with my pent-up release.

Axel chuckles and slides his hand down my thigh, gently lifting my top leg and guiding it to rest over his. This way, I'm

open to him, giving him more access. “That’s it, beautiful. *Goddamn*, you need to come, don’t you?”

“So bad,” I respond, my voice nothing but a breathy whimper.

Axel slowly eases his finger into my entrance, stretching me deliciously. “So tight,” he grunts, sliding another inch inside me.

I clench around him, coating his hand in my juices as he fingerfucks me in a steady rhythm. He grinds the palm of his hand down on my little bundle of nerves, keeping me right on the edge, the pure bliss amplified by the slight sting of being stretched. *What’s it going to feel like when he fucks me for real?* The thought has me thrusting my hips forward, trying to get him deeper.

An intense pressure builds low in my belly, throbbing outward with each steady stroke. I tighten my grip on his hair, pulling him toward me, letting him know I’m here with him and want this so, so bad.

He groans and sinks his teeth into my exposed shoulder, just enough to sting and cause a jolt of lightning to flash through my body. It weaves in and out of my cells, electrifying every inch of me, inside and out.

Axel adds a second finger, making me cry out with overwhelming pleasure. When he curls his fingers up, hitting some super sensitive spot, my entire body spasms, sending more electricity flowing through my veins.

“Axel,” I moan. “Axel, fuck...”

Every muscle draws up tight as my joints lock, preparing for the onslaught of my release. My orgasm tears through my body, and pleasure cracks me open, vibrating through me. I cry out as I pulse, thrash, and claw at Axel’s scalp, digging my fingers into his skin to anchor myself.

He doesn’t stop, not for a second. My orgasm continues to devastate me to the point I see black dots clouding my vision. I gasp for air, nearly coming again as oxygen fills my lungs.

With a final, shuddering breath, the last of my release drains from me.

“Holy shit,” I barely whisper as I gulp down air. I’m still trembling, my muscles weak and worn out from how hard I came.

“Are you okay? Was that too much? Did I hurt—”

“That was incredible,” I manage to say between breaths. “I don’t feel anything except sleepy and...” I break off into a yawn, making Axel chuckle softly.

Axel kisses my temple, brushing his lips against mine so tenderly that I almost tear up. He rolls onto his back, lifting his arm in invitation. I smile and scoot closer, resting my head on his chest over his heart. Snuggling as close as possible, I relax even more when Axel runs the tips of his fingers along my spine like he’s trying to memorize the sensation of my skin.

As I drift off to sleep, Axel whispers, “What else do you feel?”

“Hmm?” I reply, not bothering to open my eyes.

“Earlier, you said you feel sleepy and...?”

“Loved,” I murmur, though it might have been too soft for him to hear.

“You are.”

For the first time in my whole life, I go to sleep feeling safe.

CHAPTER SEVEN



AXEL

Gemma tightens her grip on my hand as we walk across the parking lot toward the clubhouse. She woke up about forty-five minutes ago after sleeping for nearly ten hours. My girl needed it after everything she's been through.

I meant every word I said last night while holding Gemma after her nightmare. I'll never let anyone lay their hands on my princess again. I think she's starting to trust me, thank God. She surrendered her body and her pleasure to me. Fuck, she's perfect. I hope she can trust me with her heart the same way.

My lungs expand and fill with fresh air as I take a deep breath. Everything feels lighter today. Warmer. I know it's because of Gemma. Last night, she told me she felt loved before she went to sleep. I don't know if she heard me, but I told her she was.

I've never meant anything more in my life. I love this beautifully broken princess and her kind heart. I love every inch of her, from her bright red hair to her lime green toenail polish. When she's ready, I'll tell her exactly how I feel. Until then, I'll have to be content to take care of her and show her I'll always be here.

I rub my thumb against Gemma's, hoping to calm her nerves. We talked this morning about telling Blade and the Savage Saints about her family's involvement in the meth business. I promised her that nobody would judge her and that everyone in the club has faced impossible choices. Most of us also came from fucked up families, and we know what it takes to survive day to day.

“You’re not in danger,” I remind her. “And you’re not in trouble. The Prez already knows you were there, and now we’re just filling in the details. We have to know how to protect you. That’s all.” I don’t want to minimize her anxiety, but I hate that she’s trembling the closer we get to the clubhouse.

“I know you’re right,” Gemma whispers.

She sighs and leans into me. I let go of her hand and wrap my arm around her waist, tucking her into my side. I’ll be her strength when she’s too tired to stand. I’ll be her everything.

We stand in front of the back door, but before I open it, I turn to Gemma. “Do you trust me, princess?” I love how her cheeks turn the lightest shade of pink when I call her *princess*.

“I do,” she says, her green eyes filled with sincerity. I’ll ensure she never regrets it.

I open the door and guide her inside, keeping a hand on the small of her back to let her know I’m right here. Blade is already sitting in the back booth, waiting for us.

He’s every bit as intense and scrutinizing as before he met his woman, Sonya, but she’s softened him a little bit over the last month or so. Other people might not notice it, but the Prez has a little more empathy, thanks to Sonya. That’s why I know he’ll handle this in a sensitive way. It wasn’t all that long ago his woman was in danger, and Gemma was the one to bring her back to safety.

“Axel,” the Prez says as we approach. “Gemma...” he trails off when he sees her black eye, instant anger rising to the surface. His nostrils flare, and his teeth grind together, realizing the serious nature of our conversation. It’s not only to fill him in on what she knows about the drug operation; it’s to reaffirm our promise of protection. “...good to see you,” he finishes.

Gemma nods, giving him a little smile.

We sit across from Blade, who immediately gets down to business. Resting his elbows on the table, the fearsome

President of the Savage Saints focuses on Gemma. I gently lay my hand on her thigh and give her a reassuring squeeze.

“I promised you the protection of the club, and I’m a man of my word. Can’t thank you enough for how you helped my Sonya. I just wish you’d come to us sooner.”

Gemma’s shoulders curl in, and she dips her head, breaking eye contact with Blade. “I know. I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were going after my parents. I would have helped—”

Blade raises his hand, effectively cutting her off. “I only meant that I wish you felt comfortable enough to ask for help before things got so bad.”

Gemma lifts her head, tilting it to the side as she stares at Blade. I can tell she doesn’t know how to respond, and it kills me to know my woman has never been afforded kindness like this.

“This isn’t even that bad,” she murmurs, one hand gently touching her swollen eye. It’s healing surprisingly well after we iced it again this morning and put on another layer of vaseline.

I tighten my hold around her thigh, then lean over and press a kiss to the side of her head. I loathe her family for doing this to her, for hurting this precious woman and taking advantage of her sweet nature.

“Still,” Blade continues, “I don’t like seeing battered women, no matter the context. I’m sorry you had to grow up like that.”

“I promised I’d always protect her,” I say, unable to stay quiet any longer.

Blade nods. “As will the club.”

Gemma relaxes slightly, leaning against my side. I move my hand from her thigh to her back, holding her close while Blade launches into questions about her family and the operation.

My brave girl calmly answers everything, letting us know the ring leader is her father and the main organizers of

distribution are her three older brothers. She tears up a bit when she admits to cooking for them on occasion, but Blade doesn't blink an eye. I hate that she was put in that position, but like I told her, every Savage Saint has shit in their past.

Gemma gives her version of events from last night, which we didn't get to. Between cleaning her up, the nightmare, and the orgasm, we didn't have a ton of time to go over the details. Plus, I didn't want her to relive it all so soon.

Blade grunts and nods as she tells us about the cops showing up earlier. *Dammit*, I must have missed that when I was hiding out in the woods. I left for ten minutes to meet with Blade and the guys before coming up with a plan to raid the place.

The Prez finishes up his questions and thanks Gemma for her honesty. He tells her again that she's safe and the Savage Saints have her back. I appreciate the gesture. Blade stands and tips his chin toward the back room, and I know he's about to call church.

"Be right there," I tell him.

I turn to Gemma once Blade is gone, cupping her chin and guiding her to look at me. "I'm so proud of you," I tell her, gently rubbing my thumb along her jawline. "And I'm so sorry for everything you've been through. Not just last night, but your whole life."

"Don't apologize. You're saving me from all of that."

I take her lips in a gentle kiss, savoring her sweet flavor and the slide of her tongue against mine.

"We can finish that later," I whisper onto her lips. "I have to go to church."

Gemma pouts, which is the most damn adorable thing I've ever seen. I can't help but kiss her again, with a little more passion this time.

When I pull away, she follows me, just like last night. I love that she can't get enough. Lord knows I'll always crave Gemma and her curves.

“Sonya is up at the bar,” I tell her, standing from the booth and offering my hand to help her up. “She has some clothes she said you could borrow until we can go shopping.”

“What? No, that’s totally not necessary.”

“We like helping people who deserve it,” I tell Gemma, making sure her eyes are fixed on mine. “And you, princess, deserve the whole world.” My girl can’t hide her smile. She’s absolutely enchanting with the mid-morning sun streaming through the front window, making her emerald eyes twinkle with gold. “Sonya can introduce you to Rider’s old lady, Sutton, and Hawk’s old lady, Tessa.”

Gemma raises an eyebrow at me, making me grin. “Old lady? Hawks are involved?”

“I’ll explain everything when we get home,” I answer with a chuckle.

“Home,” she murmurs, her eyes going soft.

“Yeah, princess. You have a home now.”

She nods and leans against me, wrapping her arms around my waist. I hug her back, hoping to infuse her with all the love and peace I’m going to provide for her in the future.

I reluctantly step back, pointing Gemma in the direction of the other girls. I know Sonya already loves my Gemma, and Tessa and Sutton are also sweet and friendly. I’m thankful she’ll have friends built into her support system, along with me and the Savage Saints family.

Thirty excruciating minutes later, the guys are updated on the latest between the police and the drug operation. Officer Jake, our man on the inside, informed us that the cops are taking credit for busting the meth lab and arresting all five of Gemma’s family members. Of course they are. No one would believe it was us anyway. That’s fine; we don’t do it for recognition. Giving the real monsters credit for doing good, however, is straight fucking bullshit.

We each get our missions. Mine is to use tracking software, recording devices, and my less-than-legitimate connections to underground resources to gather as much

information as possible. Officer Jake is going to find out what their next plan is if they have one. The rest of the men will search for other drug dens and report what they find.

Usually, I stick around after church to shoot the shit with my brothers, but I have other things on my mind today. As soon as I step into the bar area of the clubhouse, my eyes land on Gemma. She's leaning against the bar top, laughing at something Tessa said.

God, she's gorgeous. Even after her horrible family tried to break her mentally and physically, Gemma still has warmth and light inside. She's too bright to be snuffed out, too strong to give up and follow in their footsteps.

I walk toward her in long strides, my eyes locked on her. As if sensing me, my woman turns and smiles when she sees me coming. Goddamn, I don't think anyone has ever been this happy to see me. It's addicting like the rest of her.

When I reach Gemma, the overwhelming urge to kiss her, claim her right here and now takes over. I weave my fingers into her hair, tilt her head up gently, and lean down to press my lips to hers.

My girl gasps, not expecting the public display. Her shock wears off, giving way to need. Gemma moans softly, spurring me on. I pry her lips open, tangling my tongue with hers. Her hands slide up my chest, fisting my shirt and pulling me closer.

Fuck, I can't hold back, even though I know everyone is watching. Screw it. I want them to see. I want them to know this woman is mine and mine alone.

I slide my hands down her body, careful to avoid her sore hip. Gripping her juicy ass, I lift her and set her on the nearest barstool, stepping between her legs and continuing to swallow her desperate whimpers. Gemma grinds her hot little core against me, and I grunt, ready to rip her shirt off and suck on her nipples to see if I can get her to come from that alone.

We're rudely interrupted by whistles and cat-calls, and Gemma buries her face into the side of my neck.

I chuckle and comb my fingers through her hair. “I’m glad they saw,” I whisper. “Everyone needs to know you’re mine.”

She peels herself off my chest, hitting me with those sparkling green eyes. “Yours?”

“Yes, princess,” I say with a nod. “Need me to show you what that means?”

“Yes, please,” she murmurs, nibbling on her bottom lip.

“*Fuck me,*” I groan, barely resisting the urge to kiss her breathless again.

Instead, I help Gemma off the stool and scoop her up in my arms. She giggles while Tessa and Sutton laugh good-naturedly.

“You’re kind of ridiculous,” she says as I burst through the back door and stride across the parking lot toward my apartment.

“You love it,” I respond, grinning down at her.

She nods as I reach the front door. Reluctantly setting her down, I fumble for my keys, nearly ripping the door off its hinges to get inside. I turn as soon as I shut the door, setting my sights on Gemma.

I close the distance between us and cup the back of her neck, drawing her in for a kiss. How is it possible to already be addicted to everything about her?

She moans into my mouth as my hands trace the curve of her hips and grip her thighs. I easily lift her onto the nearest flat surface, my kitchen table, and step between her legs. Gemma wraps her thighs around me and rocks her hips against my aching cock. Fuck, I can feel her heat, her need. I need it too. Need to taste her.

I break the kiss to nip and kiss her jaw, neck, and down her shoulder. I can’t explain the need to sink my teeth into her soft flesh, to suck and mark her as mine. My dick grows impossibly harder when I picture her creamy skin red from how I’ve loved her.

“Axel... Axel...” She moans my name as I growl into her skin. My hands slip under the hem of her shirt and grip her soft curves before dipping below the waistband of her pants. “I need you.”

“I’ve got you, beautiful. I’ll always give you what you need.”

I take her mouth again in a searing kiss as I tug down the sweatpants I gave her to wear. I pat her ass a few times and tell her to lift up for me.

“Good girl,” I growl, the beast inside me clawing to get out and devour every inch of her. In one swift move, I have her pants pulled off her legs and thrown somewhere behind me. Her shoes must have come off at some point, which only makes it easier for me.

“Lie back, princess. Let me see what’s mine.”

She nods and leans back on the table, her trust in me as much of a turn-on as her curvy little body and sweet kisses. I gently pry her legs apart, placing her feet on the table. Gemma is spread out before me like a delicious meal. She’s soft and pink and dripping for me. My thumbs part her folds, and I see her little clit, fucking throbbing for me, begging for my attention.

Before she has a chance to say anything, I dive into her sweet perfection.

Jesus, fuck.

Gemma gasps and moans for me as I lick her up and down. I suck on her folds, dipping my tongue into every crease, memorizing everything about her. Her legs twitch and snap around my head, but I place my hands on the insides of her thighs and spread her wide open for me again.

I dip my tongue into her tight hole, pulling out more of her sweet juices. My woman is fucking gushing for me.

“Axel, ohmygod, I-I... oh, *God...*”

Her voice is breathy and sexy as fuck. I love knowing I’m licking her senseless. I want to taste every inch of her. I force

my tongue out of her entrance and pull her juices up, up, up to her clit, flicking my tongue over her tight bundle of nerves just once.

“Oh, shit!” she yells as her hips buck against my mouth.

“Fucking delicious, Gemma,” I tell her when I come up for air.

“Mmhmm...” is all she can say.

I dive back in, sucking on her clit while she trembles at the tip of my tongue. Slowly, I slip a finger into her tight little hole. Her pussy squeezes me, and I’m barely inside her. My balls draw up tight, imagining how her silk walls will feel around my thick cock.

Gemma grips the edge of the table as she hangs on for dear life. I curl my finger up, finding her G-spot while working my tongue over her clit, licking and sucking and bringing her higher and higher. I feel her tense, her body strung so fucking tight. I want to feel her snap.

“Come for me, sweet girl. Come all over my face,” I growl.

When I add a second finger, Gemma screams my name and bows her back off the table, writhing and crying out her orgasm. Her pussy pulses, gripping my fingers and sucking them further inside. I continue to thrust my fingers in and out of her, and she keeps coming, her release filling my hand.

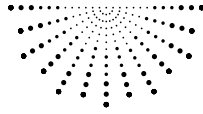
Gemma’s mouth is open in a silent scream as her body trembles out the last of her orgasm. She gasps for air, flushed, sweating, and so goddamn gorgeous.

I remove my fingers, and she whimpers. I chuckle before licking my fingers clean, savoring the taste of her on my tongue. I stand and lean over to kiss Gemma, letting her taste herself. Her arms wrap around my neck as she tries to pull me closer.

Breaking the kiss, I rest my forehead on hers. We’re both panting, sharing the same air.

“More,” she whispers. “I want to feel you everywhere. I want to feel all of you.”

CHAPTER EIGHT



GEMMA

Axel stands with me in his arms, practically running down the hall. I giggle and kick my legs out, gasping when he sets me down in front of his bed. He strips the rest of my clothes off, then tears his clothes off in two seconds, his need matching mine.

Cupping my cheek, he slides his hand down my neck and over my chest until it rests over my heart. Our eyes meet, and his deep blue irises are filled with so many emotions.

He leans down, his lips brushing against mine in the softest kiss. “Are you ready for us, princess?”

“Ready when you are,” I tell him with a playful grin.

He nips at my bottom lip, then gently pushes me backward so I’m spread out on the bed, completely naked. Axel groans, and his massive frame falls on top of me. He catches himself with a hand on either side of my head, and I automatically wrap my legs around his hips, moaning when I feel his thick, heavy cock across my slit.

“I need you, Axel,” I murmur, leaning up for a kiss. He opens up for me, letting me take control. This one kiss says it all. Axel wants to take care of me, yes, but he also wants to give me confidence and space to grow.

“Fuck, I need you too, Gemma. Need you with every cell in my goddamn body.”

I whimper and nod, spreading my legs wider. I brace for his monster cock, but Axel surprises me by flipping our

positions. He grips my sides in his large hands, steadying me and getting me into position.

I look down into his stormy blue eyes, so deep and full of emotions that are new to both of us. I can't believe he wants me. The look of awe on his face lets me know he thinks the same about me. I think he loves me. I think I love him, too.

"Axel..." I whisper, unsure of how to voice my thoughts.

"I know, princess. I feel it. I feel you."

He lifts me, guiding me over his hard length. I sink down a little, gasping when the head of his cock spreads me wide open. My pussy spasms at that small contact, and a wave of wetness coats his dick, which helps me slide down a little more. Axel hisses and groans in pleasure, giving me the confidence to take all of him. I gasp as he fills me, stretches me, and breaks through the last barrier separating us.

"God, Gemma," he half whispers and half groans. "You feel so damn good, baby. Take it slow."

Axel cups the back of my neck and draws me down for a kiss. It starts sweetly, almost reverently. I rock against him, making him growl into my mouth and pull my bottom lip through his teeth. His hands slide up my bare back, his fingertips leaving a burning trail as they roam back down. He grips my ass, spreading me wider and helping me circle my hips.

"Fuck," I moan when the base of his shaft rubs against my clit. My pussy contracts as pleasure rockets through my body. Sitting up, I steady myself with two hands on his chest, clawing down his chiseled muscles as I lift on my knees. I circle my hips again and rub the head of his dick through my folds, using it to massage my clit.

"Gemma..." Axel grunts, tipping his head back as he slides his hands up my torso, cupping my breasts.

I cry out when he pinches my nipples, my entire pussy throbbing and gushing at the slight pain. I drop back down, needing more of him, more of this connection. Axel kneads one breast with his hand while the other leaves teasing little

touches along my ribcage and tummy until he reaches my center. He slips one finger into my folds, rubbing my clit as I grind against him.

“Oh, God,” I gasp, throwing my head back.

Axel grunts and pinches my clit, sending sharp currents of electricity throughout my body. “That’s it. Jesus, that’s so fucking it.”

His words pull a moan from my lips as I lift my hands from his chest to tangle in my hair. Axel grunts in approval, rubbing furious circles around my clit while I ride him, taking him as deep as possible. Each time he hits the end of me, the breath is stolen from my lungs. I pant and writhe, so, so fucking close to falling apart.

My thighs tremble, and my muscles lock, bracing myself for what’s to come. My entire body is strung tight, teetering on the sharp edge of ecstasy. Axel senses my need and wraps his hands around my upper thighs, keeping me pinned to him. He anchors me in place and fucks up into me in powerful strokes, taking control. I gladly let him.

Desperate, wanton whimpers fall from my lips as he tears me open with each rough stroke. I inhale sharply and hold my breath, the intense pressure in my core throbbing and consuming me, nearly choking me as my orgasm slams into me all at once.

I freeze and then spasm violently, collapsing on top of Axel as my climax tears through me. He growls and cups my ass, holding me in place while he fucks up into me, shoving his cock so damn deep, forcing me to feel every ounce of pleasure he’s offering.

I’m a sweaty, shaky mess by the time I come back down, but Axel gives me no reprieve. He flips me onto my back and sinks into me, hooking his hand under my right knee and spreading me wide open.

It’s impossible, but an orgasm fights to the surface, threatening to swallow me whole. I cry out, twisting the sheets

in my fists and bowing my back. “I-I can’t... can’t come again...” I moan breathlessly.

“You can, princess. You can take it. Do you trust me?”

“Yes,” I answer without hesitation.

Axel’s eyes grow dark and determined at that one word. “Then take what I give you.”

With that, he picks up his speed, stroking into me as I whimper and writhe beneath him. He’s keeping me right there, so close, each thrust bringing more blissful agony than I thought possible.

Axel takes my lips in a searing kiss, licking into my mouth and taking control. I’m completely at his mercy as he fucks me with his tongue and huge cock. I love being taken by him, filled by him, ruined by him.

He growls into my mouth, the sound almost painful. “I’m gonna come. I’m gonna come so damn hard. Come with me. Come with—”

I cut him off with a scream as I splinter. I wrap my legs around his torso, locking my ankles behind his back. I cling to him as every nerve ending vibrates with deliciously sharp pleasure. Ecstasy courses through my veins and drips out of me as my pussy snaps around his cock.

He swells inside me, stretching me impossibly wider. He roars his release, his bulging muscles tensing and releasing as he fills me with his cum. Our combined orgasm stretches on for long moments as we hold each other close.

Axel holds himself deep inside me after we’re completely spent. He buries his face in my neck, kissing me there and letting out a huge breath. I comb my fingers through his hair, loving this tender, almost fragile moment. He sighs and relaxes even more. I love the weight of his body on top of mine.

He lifts his head, resting his forehead against mine. I didn’t think it was possible, but his cock is still hard. I whimper as he starts rolling his hips slowly. Aftershocks of my intense orgasms spark through me.

Axel cups the side of my face, gently stroking my cheek. He's making love to me. That's what this is. Slowly, so slowly, he enters me and pulls back out. I feel every ridge and vein of his thickness as he pushes inside me once more.

He rocks into me, his forehead never leaving mine, his hand never leaving my cheek. We come together silently, holding each other's gaze. I swear I see tears in his eyes, but Axel leans down to kiss me before they fall.

I feel so precious at this moment. Surrounded by his strength as my limp body melts into the mattress makes me feel so thoroughly loved and protected.

Axel gently rolls us over, draping me across his body. I drift in and out of sleep, each time waking up to Axel stroking my back or massaging my neck and shoulders. I'm unsure how long we've been lying here, but eventually, Axel breaks the silence.

"Can you tell me about your family?" he whispers.

I don't know what I thought he was going to say, but that wasn't it. "Um, well... I pretty much told you and Blade everything already."

"That was about the operation and drugs. I want to know your story, Gemma. I want to know everything about you."

I take a deep breath, letting it out as I rest my head over Axel's heart. The strong, steady beat tethers me to him, and I know Axel will be my anchor in the storm of emotions.

"My parents weren't planning on having another kid. They were happy with the three boys they already had. My mom thought she couldn't get pregnant anymore, but then, *surprise*," I say sarcastically. "There's fifteen years between me and the next sibling, so it often felt like I had five parents. Well, five angry, violent, often strung-out parents."

"That sounds rough," Axel whispers.

I shrug. "I've never known anything else. We moved around a lot, some places better than others."

Axel hums and I get the feeling he knows exactly what I mean. The “nice” places were grimy and smelled stale, while the not-so-nice places had infestations and smelled of feces.

“When my family set up shop here, we ended up staying. Like I told Blade earlier, we didn’t get run out of town by the cops or even questioned by them in all five years we’ve been here. Now I know why.”

I grow quiet, both of us resting in silence as we absorb everything I told him.

Axel nudges the top of my head with his nose, which makes me smile despite the sad memories. “Tell me about your podcast,” he says with a big smile.

He looks so excited and sincerely interested, and I don’t know what to do with it.

I surprise both of us by bursting into tears.

Axel’s eyes widen with panic, but I wave him off and put my hand over his heart.

“Sorry, I don’t know what came over me,” I say once I’ve had a chance to calm down and take a few breaths. “I just... no one has ever asked me about it before. My parents didn’t understand what a podcast was, and my brothers made fun of me all the time, saying it was stupid and a waste of time.”

I look away from him, the vulnerability of this moment almost too much to bear. Axel cups my cheek, turning my head so we’re facing each other. His blue eyes shine with something close to love. Or maybe I’m just projecting.

“I’m so sorry no one ever encouraged you or supported your dreams. I’m so fucking sorry you know what it’s like to live with junkies. I...”

This time, it’s Axel who breaks eye contact. I’m not letting him get away with that, though. I prop myself up on his chest, place my hand on his cheek, and turn him back toward me. He closes his eyes and leans into my touch.

“Do you trust me?” I ask softly. He’s asked me that several times over the last few days, and now I want to know if he

feels the same.

“Always,” comes his automatic response.

“Then tell me your story. I want to support you, too.”

Axel leans forward, capturing my lips in the most tender, reverent kiss. “You’re too good to me, princess,” he whispers as he guides me to rest my head on his shoulder while he wraps his arms around me and keeps me pressed close to his naked body. “My mom was an addict as well. Never knew my dad, but part of me doesn’t hold it against him for ditching us. She never let me forget what a nuisance I was or that she could have gotten an abortion but didn’t.”

“What?” I gasp, lifting my head slightly.

Axel tilts his head down so our eyes meet. He shrugs. “She tried to sell me once for a fix. Ended up getting enough heroin to put her in a coma for three days. By the time she woke up, the dealer’s girlfriend she pawned me off on had had enough of playing house. I was returned to my mother, who wasn’t happy to see me. The only thing that calmed her down was that she didn’t have to pay for the drugs retroactively.”

I don’t realize I’m crying until Axel stops talking and asks if I’m okay.

“Yeah,” I say with a sniffle. “I’m just... I’m so glad you survived.”

His eyes soften as he tucks a few strands of hair behind my ear. “Me, too, sweetheart. I didn’t know it at the time, but I survived so I could meet you.”

His words are everything to me. This incredible man is somehow gruff and tender, silly and sweet, and perfect in every way.

“Same,” I whisper, leaning in to rest my forehead on his. It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell him I love him, but I don’t want to ruin what we already have by taking it too far or asking too much of our relationship so early on.

After a few moments, I break away to stifle a yawn.

Axel chuckles and kisses my temple. “I’ll be right back,” he says, kissing me again.

Before I can ask where he’s going, Axel is already returning from the ensuite bathroom. He’s holding a damp washcloth and surprises me by gently wiping between my legs, cleaning up the remnants of our first time together.

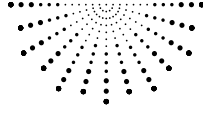
“Thank you,” I murmur when he finishes and pulls the blankets over me.

“I love taking care of you, princess,” he whispers.

God. *Swoon*.

The bed dips with his weight, and he curls up behind me, cocooning me in his warm embrace. For the second night in a row, I fall asleep feeling safer than I ever have.

CHAPTER NINE



AXEL

*M*y phone rings right as I'm drying the last dish from breakfast. I can't cook worth shit, but Gemma is an incredible chef. She somehow made bacon, egg, and cheese breakfast sandwiches with homemade spicy aioli. I said I'd clean up while she got started on editing her latest podcast.

I dry my hands as my phone rings again. "All right, all right, I hear you," I mutter to myself. Reaching into my pocket, I'm surprised when I see who is calling. "Kingsley?" I ask once I've answered.

"Axel," comes his ever-professional voice. "Are you available for a job?"

I pull the phone away from my ear and check the number again. I haven't heard from Kingsley Bowman in... five years? Six? He was a client of mine back in the day when I was still working my way up and off the streets. Kingsley went to a prestigious college and hired me to work on his cars from time to time. He loves American muscle cars, which is the only reason I agreed. Well, that, and he paid a ridiculous amount of money for my services, claiming he'd rather have one mechanic he knows well than fifty he doesn't trust.

Didn't matter to me why, as long as he kept paying me.

When Kingsley discovered I also had a knack for computers and sleuthing, he hired me for different jobs. Less legit, but a bigger paycheck. The last job I did for him was when he was about to close a billion-dollar real estate deal

with a large company that was merging with an even larger company.

I did some digging into the CEOs, CFOs, and other corporate alphabet job titles. Pulled some info on several civil suits against each company for shady practices. I ended up helping Kingsley raise the offer by twenty percent. He ensured it was reflected in my paycheck.

“Hello? Are you still there?”

“Yeah,” I reply, his sharp tone pulling me from my thoughts.

“I need some info on an employee. Well, technically, she’s a contract worker.”

“I’m your guy.”

Kingsley grunts something that sounds like “good,” which is about all the confirmation I’ll get from him. The successful real estate mogul might give Blade a run for his money when it comes to one-word responses and a general grouchy disposition. Then again, the Prez has gotten better since Sonya.

“Her name is Clementine Clarkson.”

Down to business, as per usual. Kingsley Bowman doesn’t have time for chit-chat.

I grab a pad of paper and a pen, jotting down the name as he spells it out for me. “Need a basic profile, or am I looking for something specific?”

“Basic profile to start. Well, maybe... Do you have access to medical records?”

“Uh, is someone sick?” I’m confident in my skills, but hacking into a medical database is a bit much.

“Yes. Maybe. I mean, there’s no other reason for it,” he mutters, more to himself than to me.

“It?”

“She’s so damn... *happy*,” he says, the disgust evident in his voice.

“And that’s a medical condition?” I hold back my laughter, but only because Kingsley has the money and power to send someone down here to punch me in the face for making fun of him.

“She has no reason to be so cheery. It’s unsettling.”

“Okay...” I grin from ear to ear, loving how uncomfortable he seems with this woman’s happiness.

“So, can you do it?”

“Look, I’ll find out what I can, but I’m not breaking into a medical facility’s mainframe.”

Kingsley grunts and takes a deep breath. “Fine. Half up front, half after the information is delivered.”

“I know the gig,” I reassure him.

The billionaire doesn’t bother with a thank you or a goodbye, which I’m used to with him.

I shake my head. What the hell was that about? I’ll have to look up this Clementine later. I have a feeling this is personal for him. Interesting.

Setting my phone on the kitchen counter, I make my way to the living room, where Gemma is set up with her laptop, headphones, and mic. I stand in the doorway, leaning against the wall and watching my adorable woman work on her podcast. I love seeing her eyes light up when she gets something right and how she nibbles her bottom lip and squints her eyes when she’s concentrating.

My girl senses my presence and peers up at me with green eyes and a bright smile.

I sit beside her on the couch, scooping her up and placing her in my lap. “That’s better,” I murmur as I bury my face into her and breathe deeply. I love her strawberries and cream scent mixed with something uniquely Gemma.

“You’re ridiculous,” she says, even as she melts against me.

“You love it.”

Gemma nods, sighing so sweetly.

“How’s the editing going?”

“So *slow*,” she answers. “I’ve been trying to upload the audio from the outro I recorded, but it’s taking forever.”

“That’s weird. How long is the clip?” I mentally go through all the reasons for a slow upload process or file expansion.

“That’s the thing. It should be no more than thirty seconds. Maybe forty-five.”

“Huh. Can I see it?”

Gemma leans over and grabs her laptop from its spot on the coffee table. I rearrange Gemma on my lap so she’s holding the computer in front of us. I right-click on the file in question, surprised to see it’s nearly twelve hundred megabytes instead of the ten I would expect from a clip that short.

She sees it, too, and her eyebrows furrow as she leans forward to examine the screen.

“Do you know why that file is so huge? Like, a hundred and twenty times larger than it should be?”

“I mean... the only thing I can think of is that I must have forgotten to shut the recording off after the last outro take?” Gemma chews on her bottom lip, concentrating on the timeline of events. Her narrowed gaze widens, and her green eyes pop out as she realizes something. “Oh my god,” she whispers. “I think I recorded everything that happened during the raid.”

It’s so soft I almost don’t hear her. “What?”

“I was recording my outro that night but kept messing it up. I thought I finally got a good one at the end, but now I remember it was still messed up. I was interrupted by something before getting the chance to record again.”

“Okay, I’m tracking,” I tell her, brushing some of her wild red hair behind her ear.

“I was interrupted by the cops banging on the door and demanding my father cook for them exclusively.”

It takes me a second to realize what that means. “Holy shit,” I whisper.

“Yeah,” Gemma says, equally as hushed.

“You have proof. Everything you told Blade yesterday, all the incriminating evidence... you have a tape of it. Holy shit,” I say again.

“So, that will help take the dirty cops down? For good?”

“I’d say it certainly doesn’t help their case. I can export the audio file to a thumb drive and have Officer Jake listen. Maybe he can identify the voices.”

“Good idea!”

Gemma sets the computer down and hops off my lap, making me irrationally upset. I don’t like being in the same room as her without touching her in some way. I growl when I see her bend over and shuffle through her bag, presumably looking for a thumb drive.

That will have to wait.

I’m out of my seat and standing behind her before I’m even aware of what I’m doing. My dick is rock-hard, but the desire is deeper, the ache greater than needing to get off. I need to be inside her, to be connected to her, to prove to her and myself that we’re still here despite the shit we’ve been through.

I smooth my hands over her round, juicy ass, and grip her hips, pulling her back into me so she can feel how hard I am for her. Gemma gasps and stands, leaning into me. I groan and kiss up and down her neck while she grinds against me, teasing me, driving me fucking crazy with her curvy body.

My hands slide underneath the hem of her shirt, spreading over her soft stomach and down to the waistband of the leggings she’s wearing. She moans and lifts one arm behind her head, her hand fisting my hair and drawing me closer to

her while her other hand rests on top of mine, guiding me down past the waistline of her panties.

“This what you need, princess?” I murmur, nipping at her pulse point and licking away the sting.

“Mmm... please,” she moans.

I stroke her soaking wet slit, dragging our hands through her folds. Together, we rub her clit and thrust our fingers into her tight little opening. A warm wave of her cream pools in my hand, making me growl.

“Fuck, you’re my dirty fucking princess, aren’t you?”

“Yes...” she whimpers, rocking her hips into our joined hands, fucking herself with our fingers.

“Jesus,” I grunt. I withdraw our hands and peel her pants and panties halfway down her thighs before unzipping my pants and pulling myself out. “Hands on the desk, Gemma. Need inside this pussy right fucking now.”

She does as I say, bracing herself for my thickness. I grip her hips and slowly slide into her, feeling every inch of her silky heat squeeze around my cock. I pause when I’m fully seated inside her, taking a moment to be with her like this, buried in her dripping cunt, connected to her in the most intimate way. I nuzzle into her shoulder, pressing light kisses there and breathing her in.

Then I pull out and slam back into her, fucking the air out of her lungs with deep, steady strokes. I slide my hands underneath her shirt, gripping her large tits and using them as leverage to thrust into her deeper, pull her closer, grind against her harder.

Moans fall from her lips as I fill her over and over. She pushes against me, giving as good as she’s getting. I love that about her.

I knead her breast with one hand and slide the other up her back. Wrapping her hair around my fist, I pull her head to the side. I crash my lips down on hers, prying her lips open for me so I can taste her while I fuck her.

She kisses me back with a wild frenzy that almost outmatches mine. I open my mouth wider, needing more, needing to get deeper, taste more of her, consume her completely. I swear to fucking God I could drown in her, fall right into her cleansing waters and never come up for air.

Gemma breaks our kiss, a jagged moan ripped from her core as she struggles to fill her lungs with oxygen. Her pussy tightens and flutters around me, letting me know she's close. I back off, thrusting into her slowly, keeping her on the edge without pushing her over.

She whines and wiggles her ass, but I laugh darkly and kiss her neck.

“Axel, please...”

“Please, what? Tell me what you want.”

“I want you.”

“You have me. All of me.”

“Prove it.”

God fucking damn. I love this woman.

I smack her ass and ram my fat cock into her, slicing into her juicy little cunt. I scrape my shaft against her front wall until she cries out, letting me know I found her most sensitive spot. I pound into it again and again, gripping her ass cheeks and spreading her apart so I can watch her pussy swallow all of me. I growl at the sight of us. A perfect fucking fit.

Gemma gasps for air and shakes in my arms. Her pussy throbs around me, coating my cock with more of her cream. Her entire body freezes as she sucks in a huge breath of air and screams as her pussy snaps around me.

I'm sure everyone on the whole damn Savage Saints compound can hear her, but I don't care. I love that everyone will know how much pleasure I can bring my woman.

“Oh god, oh god, oh god,” she repeats. “I-I can't, ohmygod, I can't... take... it...”

“You can, Gemma. You can take it.”

I slap her ass again, making her squirt all over me.

“Axel! It hurts so good. Don’t stop. Don’t ever stop.”

“Jesus Christ,” I grit out, riding her ass hard with everything I am.

Sloppy, wet, smacking sounds fill the apartment, adding to the soundtrack of Gemma’s breathy moans and my feral grunts. I wrap my arms around her hips right as her knees give out. Holding her up, I rut into her like a man possessed, driving us higher and higher, my muscles burning as I tense and flex and fuck her savagely.

The desk shakes, pens, books, and papers falling and scattering around us, but I can’t stop. Sweat drips down my forehead, and my balls draw up tight, the sharp sting of ecstasy shooting through my body just as Gemma comes again. Her orgasm ignites mine. White-hot flames travel down my spine and shoot out of me into Gemma’s ripe pussy. I come so hard my balls ache and my cock feels raw.

We collapse onto the floor. Gemma lands on my chest, and I wrap my arms around her, gently rolling us onto our sides so I’m spooning her. I bury my face in her hair, letting her familiar scent ground me.

We stay cuddled in silence for long moments before Gemma giggles. I feel the sound deep in my chest, making my heart lighter than it’s ever been.

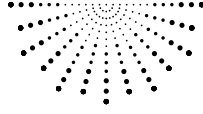
“What’s so funny?” I murmur.

“That was... hot.” Her cheeks turn from flushed pink to bright red.

I groan at her innocence mixed with the sex goddess I know she keeps hidden. I love that I’m the one to bring that out in her. “Hell, yeah, it was,” I rasp, brushing my lips against her ear.

Gemma giggles again and relaxes into my embrace. My heart is full, and I know I need to tell her how I feel. I need her to know she’s mine, and I love her more than I thought I was capable of. I’ll love her better than anyone if she’ll give me the chance.

CHAPTER TEN



GEMMA

“Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for Grave Secrets!” I tell Ari, my special guest. She’s on the other side of the country, but thanks to Zoom, I can interview anyone, anywhere, any time. “Your insights about traveling and ghost hunting were amazing and added a lot of context to some of the stories I tell. I think I have everything I need. It usually takes me about a week to edit. Then I’ll send the file your way for final approval.”

“That sounds great. This was so much fun! We should do more collaborations in the future after my next trip in a few months.”

“I would love that. Maybe you can take me to one of your favorite haunted places, and we can do some paranormal experiments!”

“Yes!” Ari exclaims. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and my cheeks are sore from smiling and laughing so much. I can’t wait to meet her in real life. “I’m gearing up for a hike in the Smoky Mountains. There’s an old, abandoned town in a long-forgotten valley. Rumor has it, there’s evidence of someone living there again, even though no one has been seen in the flesh.”

“Are you going by yourself? That sounds a little scary and dangerous.”

Ari waves her hand in front of the screen, dismissing my concerns. “I’ll be fine. I’ve spent the night in the haunted Missouri State Penitentiary *and* the Winchester mansion.”

“Don’t your parents worry about you?”

The usually bright and bubbly Ari, aka Arizona, loses a bit of her light at the mention of her parents. When she looks at me again, her eyes are dim and subdued. “They passed away when I was a kid. The aunt who raised me doesn’t talk to me much these days. She thinks I’m silly and stupid for being a travel blog writer, especially a paranormal one.”

My heart goes out to her. “I’m sorry about your mom and dad,” I say in a hushed tone. “And I’m sorry your aunt never believed in you. My family wasn’t supportive of my podcast either, but screw ‘em!”

This makes Ari smile. “Agreed. We’re better off without the negativity.”

“Exactly,” I say with a nod. “But now that you have me, you officially have someone who’s worried about you. So please check in with me on your travels and let me know you’re safe.”

Ari looks surprised, then a little teary. I get it. I didn’t believe people cared just because they cared. Not until Axel swooped in and reminded me I’m worthy of good things and kindness.

“I will,” she whispers before clearing her throat. “I promise,” she says a little more clearly.

We say our goodbyes, and I lean back against the couch. I’ve been staying with Axel for a few days now, and I must admit, I could get used to life here. Especially when Axel walks around shirtless and gives me dark looks like he’s doing right now.

“All done with work for the day?” he asks, stalking toward me.

“Not even close,” I tell him, though I’m not so much looking at his eyes as I am his chest and sculpted abs.

Axel chuckles, though the sound is rough. “Maybe I can distract you for a bit?”

I squeeze my thighs together automatically, the ache blooming there already almost unbearable.

The sexy beast of a biker stands in front of me, then leans down, placing his hands on the backrest of the couch, one on each side of my head.

I look up at him, practically purring when I see the lust in his deep blue eyes. “Yes, please,” I breathe, my gaze fixed on his lips. I’ve never needed anything or anyone the way I need Axel. One look and I’m a wet, whimpering mess.

“I know what you need,” he murmurs. Before I can ask, he lifts me in his arms and carries me toward the bathroom, kissing me the whole way there.

He turns on the water and then faces me, gently peeling off my clothes. Axel guides me into the warm shower, stripping out of the rest of his clothes before joining me.

His fingertips follow the streams of water as they pour over my shoulders, breasts, torso, hips, and finally my throbbing pussy. I moan as his knuckles barely graze my mound before continuing down my inner thighs.

Axel’s other hand wraps around the back of my neck, pulling me in for a punishing kiss. I open up for him, needing to taste and touch and feel him everywhere. He tugs my hair, pulling my head back to deepen the kiss. Two fingers dip into my slit and start circling my little bundle of nerves in slow, steady strokes.

I grip his biceps, digging my nails in as one finger pushes into my entrance, then two. Axel thrusts his large digits in and out of me, slowly at first, and then faster, faster, faster, grinding the heel of his hand on my clit while devouring my lips.

Breaking the kiss, I bury my face between his neck and shoulders as I cry out. I’m *right* there, so close to my much-needed release. He keeps pumping his fingers, twisting and curling them to rub against my G-spot. Again, again, one more time...

Suddenly, his hand is gone. I nearly fall over at the loss of him, but I regain my composure and glare at his stupidly handsome face. Axel grins, which makes my pussy clench. God, this man. Frustrating, sweet, and sexy as hell.

“Not yet, princess. Patience.”

With that, he spins me so my back is to his front and massages me everywhere. His large, calloused hands squeeze my breasts, my hips, and my soft, round belly that I’ve always been a little self-conscious of. Axel has made it clear that he loves every inch of me.

His hands trail lower, once again teasing my pussy lips. My clit throbs in time with my heartbeat, begging him to do something about the unbearable ache he’s created.

“Axel...” I moan, wiggling my hips to get him to touch me where I need him most.

“Not yet,” he murmurs again, licking the shell of my ear before trailing kisses down my neck and shoulder.

His hard cock digs into my ass, so I wiggle a bit more until his length nestles between my cheeks. Axel groans and rotates his hips, grinding his thick shaft against my ass.

“God, please, Axel,” I beg. My legs shake, and I lean forward and brace myself against the wall.

A low growl rises from deep in Axel’s chest. The sound vibrates through me, nearly making me come on the spot. He grips my left leg under my knee and lifts it so my foot rests on a bench in the corner of the shower.

“That’s it. Fuck. Love it when you’re spread out for me, Gemma.” He touches every inch of me, caressing my thighs and widening my stance.

Axel gives me a satisfied grunt, which makes me giggle. My laughter is cut off when his cock slides along my slit. He taps my clit, nearly sending me over the edge. I’m so damn sensitive and ready to come that I think I might die if he doesn’t get inside me this second.

“I’ve got you, Gemma,” he murmurs, lining himself up with my entrance.

I expect him to thrust inside me and fuck me hard. I know he’s as desperate for me as I am for him. But Axel slowly inches inside me, prolonging the sweet pain deep in my core. He grips my hips, holding me in place as he stretches me open. I hold my breath as he slides home, hitting the very end of me.

“Fucking Christ,” he whispers.

Axel pulls out just as slowly, making me whine. I open my mouth to tell him to fuck me already, but then he slams his thick dick all the way inside, making me come instantly.

He wraps his arms around me, holding me up as I spasm around his cock. He fucks me through it, hammering into me over and over as I continue to convulse and cry out his name. He grips my inner thigh, spreading me wider and angling my hips so he hits my G-spot with every thrust.

“Y-y-yesss...” I hiss as I pound my fist against the wall and throw my head back against his shoulder.

Axel wraps his hand around my throat, tilting my head back as he splits me open with his dick. “So fucking tight for me, love,” he grits.

I whimper in response as another orgasm rushes to the surface. Axel senses it, gripping my neck, which is hot as fuck, and trailing his other hand down my body to circle and pinch my clit.

My orgasm slams into me, hard and fast, ripping a scream from my lips. Axel growls and ruts into me, rubbing furious circles over my swollen, pulsing clit. A painful, delicious pleasure takes over every part of my body as I come again for him, sobbing his name.

Axel pulls out and spins me around, crashing his lips down on mine as he lifts and spears me with his cock. I wrap my legs around his hips and hang on for dear life as he pins me to the wall and fucks me like a man possessed.

“Mine, mine, fucking *mine*. Say it, Gemma. Tell me.”

“Y-yours,” I whisper, my voice scratchy from screaming his name.

“Louder,” he growls.

“I’m yours!” I cry out, writhing in his arms.

Axel roars as he comes, burying his face in my neck to muffle the sound. I open my mouth in a silent scream as my entire body pulses, tenses, stretches... and collapses in on itself while my orgasm ravishes me from the inside out.

I swear I feel Axel come again, shooting his cum deep inside me in forceful bursts.

I drag air into my lungs in short breaths, trembling in his arms as he keeps me pinned to the wall. I comb my fingers through his hair while he nuzzles into my shoulder.

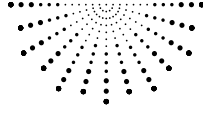
“You were right,” I finally say once I’ve caught my breath.

“Oh?”

“I needed that.”

Axel grins and kisses me again, wrapping me in his arms. Standing under the warm water with the steam curling around us and the remnants of my orgasm slowly fading, I know for certain that I love this man. Now, I need to figure out a way to tell him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



AXEL

Once we cleaned up from our time in the shower, Gemma headed over to the clubhouse to hang out with Tessa, Sonya, and Sutton. I love that she's become close with them. My woman hasn't had many friends, and it warms me to know she now has friends and a family with the Savage Saints.

I told her I'd be right over after uploading the audio file to the thumb drive. Officer Jake agreed the recording was excellent and was enough to launch a full internal affairs investigation and take several cases to federal court.

Checking the progress bar, I nod when I see the estimated time is less than a minute. I throw on my Savage Saints cut and comb my fingers through my hair, which is as much of a morning routine as I've always had.

I grab the thumb drive after the file is complete, shoving it in my pocket as I head out the door. As soon as I step outside, I sense something is off. I scan the parking lot, but nothing is out of place. Still, I didn't get this far without listening to that gut feeling I get when I know things are about to go to shit.

My first thought is about Gemma. Did something happen to her? Tessa was kidnapped by her father, the former sheriff of this town and Sonya was almost stolen from Blade by the police for blackmail. Traditionally, our women are badassess, but that doesn't mean we like putting them in dangerous situations.

With that in mind, I startle out of my haze and focus on getting to the clubhouse to ensure Gemma is okay. What starts

as a fast walk turns into an all-out sprint the more my brain comes up with worst-case scenarios.

Did the cops get her? Did they come back for retribution for the raid of their new meth hookup? Did her dad send someone after her?

My heart pounds against my ribcage, and panic courses through my veins. I pump my legs, pushing myself the last two hundred feet to the back door.

One minute, I'm running, and the next, I'm flat on my face in the gravel.

What the fuck? Did I trip?

And then a boot wedges in my side, and pain explodes across my torso. Rolling onto my back, I squint to see two officers leaning over me. Shit.

"We know you have something," one of them says.

I recognize his voice from the recording, but there's no way in hell he knows about that. Gemma didn't even know about it until a few days ago.

I don't say anything, opting to reel back and smash my head against the closest cop's face. Blood pours from his nose and mouth, and he stumbles back, clutching his ugly mug.

"Fuckin' degenerate," the man spits out. "We know about the daughter. The one shacking up with you."

"Where is she? What did you do to her? I swear to God—"

"God's got nothing to do with this," the second cop says. "It's not her we're after. Not yet, at least. Word on the street is the little goth freak has some recording equipment. It would be a shame if she picked up a certain conversation. Wouldn't want to hurt her unnecessarily."

I snarl at him, becoming more unhinged with each word from his mouth.

"We can avoid that, though, can't we? Just give us the laptop, and no one gets hurt."

“That’s the biggest lie I’ve ever heard from the police, and that’s saying something in this town. When was the last time no one was hurt on your watch? Every second your corrupt department is in charge hurts people.”

The second cop fists my shirt and attempts to pull me from the ground. He only lifts me a few inches before dropping me. I’m sure the move would’ve been more effective if he had muscles instead of a beer belly.

I hop up, shoving him aside and settling into a fighting stance. I don’t know their endgame, but I don’t have time to call for backup. Injured Cop runs at me from the side. I move out of the way, only to back into Fat Cop. He grips my arms, pinning them behind my back while holding me still.

I jerk in his arms, almost breaking his hold on me. Injured Cop stomp-kicks my foot and knees me in the stomach. My steel-toed boots protect my feet from the feeble stomp, but the knee to the gut did some damage.

Doubling over, I cough and spit on the gravel before jerking my head back to smash Fat Cop’s face. No such luck. He kicks the back of my right knee, sending me falling to the ground with a thud.

Injured Cop stands over me, his fist cocked back as rage fills his eyes. Fat Cop keeps me on the ground by pressing his boot to my throat and applying pressure. I can hardly get a breath in, but I’m determined to beat these fuckers to a pulp for threatening my woman.

Right as I’m about to be sucker punched, Injured Cop’s eyes widen, and he topples to the side. Fat Cop is momentarily shocked, and while I have no idea what just happened, I’m happy to take advantage of the distraction. I wrap my hands around his ankle and rip it to the side, causing him to lose balance and fall, twisting his ankle.

Jumping to my feet, I whip my head around to see what made Injured Cop pass out. I don’t know what I expected, but I’m speechless when I see Gemma with the old metal toaster from the clubhouse kitchen.

A grin spreads over my face, and my woman returns it. “The American serial killer, Belle Gunness, killed her second husband by hitting him in the head with a ten-pound meat grinder. I figured a toaster could do some damage as well.”

“God, I love you,” I tell her, closing the distance between us and scooping her up in my arms. My lips find hers, and I infuse all of my love and passion for this woman into the kiss.

We’re interrupted when Fat Cop attempts to stand, shouting out a curse as his likely broken ankle gives out. Injured Cop was knocked out cold, thanks to my amazingly brave princess.

“Are you fuckin’ kidding me?” I growl at the cop. “You’re not going anywhere. In fact, I have a few friends at the FBI who want to talk to you and your friend here. The sheriff won’t be too far behind, I imagine.”

The back door of the clubhouse bursts open, and Rider and Hawk come sprinting toward the scene.

“What the hell happened?” Hawk asks.

“Dirty fucking cops playing dirty fucking games,” I reply. Gemma squeezes me, and I hug her back, not wanting her to ever leave my arms.

“You okay?” Rider asks.

“Thanks to Gemma,” I say, looking down at her with a grin.

“You still have the recording?” she asks.

I nod, kissing the top of her head. “Of course. They didn’t get anything other than the ass-kicking they deserved.”

She smiles, but I feel a slight tremor run down her spine. I’m sure she’s still pumped full of adrenaline, and I know she’ll crash soon. I want to get her home, take care of her, and thank her for coming to my rescue. She’s kind of perfect, and she needs to hear it.

Turning to Hawk and Rider, I nod at the passed-out cop and Fat Cop, writhing on the ground and half-heartedly attempting to crawl away.

“We’ll clean up,” Rider says, understanding what I’m silently asking. “Officer Jake is on the way with some agents.”

“Thanks,” I tell them sincerely. Digging around in my pocket, I grab the thumb drive and hand it to Hawk. “Make sure he gets this. I’m taking the rest of the day to be with Gemma.”

“Got it,” Hawk confirms. “I’ll let Blade know.”

I shake his hand and nod at Rider, dragging Injured Cop’s limp body to the side. I won’t lie; I’m insanely proud that Gemma took him out. And insanely turned on.

“Ready to get back home?” I ask softly.

She nods. “Yeah, I think that’s enough people-ing for the day,” comes her sweet response. “Besides, we need to talk about the whole confessing-your-love-to-me thing.”

“Whatever you want, princess. I’ll tell you every damn day how much I love you.”

I lean down to scoop her up, but Gemma spins out of my reach, giving me a playful look. “You can’t carry me everywhere. I have two working legs and two feet.”

“And ten adorable toes.” I grab her hand and pull her into my arms. “Princesses often get carried to their next destination.”

This time, Gemma doesn’t fight me. She lets me pick her up and carry her, bridal style, through the door to our apartment.

CHAPTER TWELVE



GEMMA

We barely get inside the apartment before Axel sets me down and presses my back against the closed door. His lips are on mine in the next second, and I fall under his spell once more.

He breathes me in and swallows me down, possessing me, body and soul. I tear my mouth away from his and gulp down air, but Axel isn't finished with me yet.

His lips and tongue tease up and down my neck, and he nibbles at my pulse point, making me gasp softly. "Need to be inside you now, Gemma. Need to feel the woman I love from the inside out," he whispers, diving in for another kiss.

"Love," I repeat, my eyes finding his.

"I love you, sweetheart. Everything about you. Your kind heart, strong spirit, and sassy little mouth. I love how you pursue your creative passions and how brave you are in the face of pain and betrayal. I love your sense of humor and your adorable button nose. Your red hair, green eyes, neon-colored nails... there's nothing I don't love."

I blink back tears, trying to put my thoughts together in a coherent sentence. All that comes out is, "I love you so much. I don't know what I did to deserve someone like you in my life."

"Gemma, you never have to earn my love. You have it just by existing."

"Same."

“Say it again,” he rasps, closing his eyes.

“Same?”

“The other thing.”

“I love you?”

“Now say it like you mean it instead of a question.” He opens one eye and grins at me.

“I love you. I love you. I love you,” I repeat.

“Marry me.”

My eyes widen, but I’m not overwhelmed or shocked by his statement. It makes sense. Of course, we’re going to get married. Still, I need to draw this out a little more. Make him work for it a tiny bit. Especially if he’s going to do what I think he’s going to do...

“Marry you?”

He nods.

“Is that a question or a demand?” I inquire with a raised eyebrow.

“Will you marry me?” he grunts, making me laugh.

“Hmm...” I tap my chin and look up as if trying to decide.

When I look down at Axel, his beautiful blue eyes flash with lust. The next thing I know, he throws me over his shoulder and carries me to the bedroom.

Axel claps his big, rough hand over my ass, making me squirm in his arms. “You took too long to answer,” he says matter-of-factly. “Now you’re mine.”

We burst into the bedroom, and Axel tosses me onto the bed, making me giggle.

“I don’t think that’s how it works,” I tease him, sitting up on the bed and quirking an eyebrow in challenge.

Axel stares at me and starts stripping. I watch his every move as I remove my clothes. Soon, we’re both naked and gazing at each other. I’ll never get used to this man’s perfect body. The muscles in his arms tense and tighten as he squeezes

his hands into fists. My man is gloriously naked, with his massive cock growing right in front of my eyes. I lick my lips as a bead of precum forms and drip down the head of his cock.

“Fine,” Axel says with a grin, stroking his huge dick. “I’ll have to see if there are a few other ways I can get you to say yes.”

I tuck my legs underneath me and get on all fours, crawling toward him. “Maybe you just need to ask the right question,” I murmur before sticking my tongue out and licking up his arousal. I never take my eyes off of his. I love seeing him get lost in his lust. Our lust.

Axel tips his head back and hisses out a breath. When he looks back down at me, I see a wild, feral glint behind his usually calm, tender gaze. Good. I love it when he loses control like this.

“What question is that?” he grits, reaching down and tucking my hair behind my ear.

“I think you know,” I whisper, licking the head of his cock again and dipping my tongue in the little slit on top, just the way he likes. I moan when he fists my hair and tugs my head back.

“Do you want to suck my fat fucking cock, princess?”

“God, yes,” I moan, licking my lips. He’s still holding me tightly, my lips mere inches from what I want most at this moment.

“Then open up, baby. I’m gonna fuck your pretty mouth now,” Axel growls.

I obey his command, opening my mouth wide for him as he holds my head in place and slides his dick past my lips, stretching me wide to accommodate his girth. I moan at his salty, earthy taste and eagerly suck more of him down until he hits the back of my throat. Axel pulls back and then enters me again, fucking my mouth nice and slowly.

But I don’t want nice and slow. I want his passion, his dominance. Reaching out, I cup his balls in one hand and

gently massage them, loving the shiver that runs through his huge, muscular body.

“Fuck,” he grunts, bucking his hips more forcefully and shoving his big dick deeper into my mouth.

I breathe in through my nose, relax my throat, and dig my nails into his ass, pulling him closer to me.

“Jesus Christ,” he growls, pumping in and out of me.

I moan around him and lick the sensitive vein on the underside of his cock with each thrust. My juices drip down my legs as my pussy throbs and aches for attention. Keeping one hand on Axel’s sculpted ass, I move the other down my body until my fingers sink into my soaking slit.

“Fuck, baby. I feel you trembling. Does giving your man pleasure make you wet?”

I answer him by moaning and bobbing my head faster, taking him deeper and digging my nails further into his skin. I’m so close. My fingers rub furious circles around my clit while I work Axel over until we’re in a frenzy of lust and ecstasy.

My muscles tighten. Axel’s dick swells and twitches in my mouth. I know we’re about to come together.

But then Axel swears and pulls me off his dick, pushing me back on the bed. An animalistic growl rises from deep in his chest as he crawls on top of me and slams his cock so deep, so fast, so roughly I come instantly.

“Axel!” I shriek, clawing at his back and hanging on for dear life as he fucks me through my orgasm and sucks on my neck. “Ohmygod, so good, so...” I scream again when his teeth sink into my shoulder, and another orgasm slams into me violently, rocking me to my very core. My pussy pulses and grips him, never wanting to be separated.

“God damn, so tight,” Axel grunts before taking my lips in a wild, vicious kiss. He bites my bottom lip and sucks my tongue into his mouth, devouring every inch of me. “Give me another one. Need to watch you come again.”

I shake my head no, even as my hips buck and my back bows off the bed. “I... can’t...” I whimper.

“Yes, you can, and you will. Again and again. Swear to Christ, Gemma, I’m going to fuck this little pussy till we’re too exhausted to move. So come for me like the good girl you are.”

I shiver at his dirty words and dirtier promises. Axel grins wickedly. Sitting back on his heels, he grabs my hips and uses my body to jerk himself off. He picks up his pace, hammering into my G-spot at this new angle. My whole body convulses each time he hits the end of me.

It doesn’t take much to send me flying over the edge again. My orgasm burns through me rapidly, stealing the air from my lungs as I thrash on the bed. Axel holds my body tightly against his, feeling me come around his dick.

My pussy is still throbbing when he pulls out and flips me over on my stomach. I get up on all fours, still trembling from my orgasm, and look at him over my shoulder. Axel slaps my ass as his big cock slams into me. I move back along him, bucking my ass and panting as his powerful strokes rattle me to my very bones.

He smirks, his ripped body tense. Sweat rolls down my skin as he works me, and pleasure floods me from every direction. I’m totally mindless, absolutely devastated by his cock, but loving every single inch of it.

He slides out, making me gasp, and rolls me back over. He spreads my legs wide and pushes himself inside me. I lean forward, kissing him as he grinds his cock into my pussy. He fucks me like that, legs spread wide, mouth against mine. It feels so good to have him deep between my legs. He grinds into me, fucking me hard, making me moan, making me say his name as I cream all over his thick dick.

My pussy feels raw and so, so sensitive. I feel every ridge and vein in his cock as he pounds into me again and again. Liquid fire shoots through my body, singeing my nerves and burning me up from the inside out.

I cling to Axel, locking my ankles behind his back and clutching and clawing at his shoulders. I bury my face in the side of his neck as I brace for the raging inferno he calls forth from deep within my core.

“Axel,” I gasp, almost afraid of what will happen when I finally climax.

“I’ve got you, sweetheart,” he assures me. “Just trust me and let go, Gemma. Let go for me.”

All my muscles squeeze up tightly as I curl into Axel, and my whole world burns to the ground as I scream my orgasm. Axel roars and sinks so fucking deep inside me as his release ravages his massive, muscled body. We cry out and hold onto each other as we fall into the very depths of pleasure.

After an eternity of intense, sharp ecstasy, I finally open my eyes. Axel is lying on his side next to me, drawing a line with his fingertips from my sternum to my belly button and back again.

“There you are,” he whispers, nuzzling into my neck and kissing me there. “How do you feel, baby? Are you okay?”

I inhale a shaky breath and try to get my heart to stop thrashing around in my chest. Axel drifts his fingers over my skin, bringing me back to reality with his touch.

“Breathe for me, love,” he says gently, pressing his lips to my temple. “That’s it. Good girl.”

With my breathing and heart rate finally under control, I turn my head toward Axel and take in his warm blue eyes, strong jaw with the perfect amount of sexy stubble, and soft lips pulling up into a gentle smile.

I return his smile and bite my bottom lip. Axel grasps my chin in between his thumb and forefinger, gently tugging my lip from the grasp of my teeth so he can kiss me. It’s slow and tender, as if we have a lifetime of moments like this.

As if reading my thoughts, Axel pulls back and rubs his nose up and down mine. “What do you say, princess? Are you ready to spend forever with me?”

Tears immediately spring into my eyes as I smile with all the love and gratitude I have in my heart. I nod vigorously, my smile growing bigger by the second.

Axel grins. "I'm gonna need to hear you say it, love."

"Yes! Yes, I'll marry you!" The words are barely out of my mouth before Axel crashes his lips down on mine.

When we break apart, he chuckles and rolls onto his back, tucking me into his side. "Good to know I can get you to say yes to pretty much anything after giving you four orgasms."

I roll my eyes playfully, which makes Axel bend and kiss my eyelids. I sigh and snuggle closer to him, letting my fingers roam over the hard muscles in his chest and abs.

This princess can't wait for the happily ever after her prince has promised.

EPILOGUE



Axel

“Three, two, one... Here I come, ready or not!” I shout across the yard.

It takes less than ten seconds for me to spot every single one of the kids currently hiding in my backyard. Between Hawk and Rider’s rugrats, Blade’s three little hellions, and my two trouble makers, there are nine kids here who absolutely suck at hide-and-seek.

I’m a good sport though, taking a few steps toward the slide, where two little girls are huddled up. Gemma informed me several years ago that when kids play hide-and-seek, they don’t want to be found right away. I told her they should find better spots, but she wasn’t having any of that. Apparently, I’m supposed to be a mature adult and play the game so the kids can have fun. She then promised that we’d always play a fun game after where we both win.

God, I love her.

I didn’t think it was possible, but I somehow love my princess more today than I did that first day we met in the graveyard nearly ten years ago. Gemma has refined her punk-rock style slightly, but her wardrobe is still mostly black and neon. She gets her nails professionally done these days, thanks to her hugely successful true crime YouTube channel, Grave Secrets.

She confided in me shortly after we got married that she always wanted to try a video format of her podcast, but she

never wanted to film in her trailer. As soon as I heard that, I took her shopping for a camera and a new computer with enough RAM to run video editing software.

My gorgeous, talented, brilliant wife hit one million subscribers in less than a year, and she's expanded her brand into a whole network of true crime podcasts and shows. I couldn't be prouder of her and everything she's accomplished.

The girls hiding under the slide start to giggle, pulling me back into the moment. I feign looking everywhere but under the slide, scratching my chin and then shrugging before moving on to the bushes, where my son is fidgeting.

Brandon just turned five last month, and I swear the little man has enough energy to power a super computer. He can't sit still to save his life, thus making him one of the worst hide-and-seekers in the world. Love the kid.

Taking a few steps up and down the row of bushes, I notice Patricia, our eight-year-old, lying on her back on top of a dirt mound from a yard project I have yet to finish. I grin and shake my head, loving that my daughter is as unique as her mother.

I take the search party farther into the backyard, walking around the perimeter of my toolshed. When I get to the open door, I'm caught off-guard when a hand snakes out and grabs mine.

“What—”

Gemma's sweet strawberries and cream scent fills my lungs, and I pull my wife into my arms as I walk us backward into the darkened shed.

“Found you,” I whisper onto her lips before taking them as my own. Gemma sinks into my embrace, her hands sliding up my chest and wrapping around my neck.

“What are you going to do with me now that you have me?” she practically purrs.

Instead of telling her, I show her exactly what I want to do to her delectable, curvy little body. Lifting my woman up in my arms, I place her on the workbench and step between her

thighs. My lips ghost up and down her neck, pausing to nip her pulse point before licking away the sting.

“Axel,” she breathes out, her legs tightening around my hips.

“Yes, princess?”

She doesn't answer, instead opening her mouth in a silent moan as I palm her breast and grind my thick cock into her center. Her mouth crashes down on mine, and she totally owns this kiss, prying my lips open and drinking me down with untamed need.

I'm about to rip our clothes off and lay my woman out on the bench so I can devour every inch of her, but then she pulls away from me. I grunt, not liking the distance between us.

Gemma grins, leaning closer, closer, closer, her lips barely an inch from mine. “It's not time for us to play our game yet,” she whispers.

I groan while Gemma giggles and wraps her arms around me in a hug. I hug her back and help her off of the workbench, setting her down on her feet.

“I believe there are still some children who need finding?” Gemma says, lifting an eyebrow at me.

“It's too hard. I need help finding them all,” I say with a pout.

“Uh-huh, sure,” Gemma responds, rolling her eyes. I smack her ass, making her shriek and glare at me, though she's smiling the whole time. “Rider and will be here soon with Blade and Hawk to pick up the kids. Think you can wait until after bath time for our fun?”

“No,” I grumble. Gemma laughs as she heads out through the door, but I'm not quite done with her yet. Sliding my arm around her waist, I pull my princess back into me, her back pressed against my chest. “Love you, princess,” I whisper into the shell of her ear.

“Love you more,” she replies, resting her head on my shoulder.

Each and every moment with my Gemma is better than the last. She's made me happier than I ever knew possible, given me two kids I'm crazy about, and continues to amaze and surprise me with her creativity and strength.

Just like the first day I met Gemma, I vow to provide her with safety and happiness. I'd like to think I've made good on that promise so far. When my beautiful princess sighs sweetly and snuggles into my embrace, I know I must have done something right to have her right here with me after all these years.

I can't wait for a hundred more.

* * *

THE END

Curious about Kingsley and his too-happy assistant? [Check out their story here!](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cameron Hart is a USA Today bestselling author of contemporary romance. She writes books with lots of heat, plenty of sweet, and just enough drama to keep things interesting.

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