

SAVENA'S SECRET



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PROLOGUE



He was a three. That was the way she always thought of them—one through ten, one being ideal, ten high risk. At three, he was within her threshold. A fortyish, out-of-shape pen pusher with pleasant, but nondescript features. No one in the bar would remember him. Not that the staff or patrons would be asked to recall the man with the hot blonde. Her meticulous planning always ensured her safety.

She waited patiently while Number Three's eyes took their fill of her cleavage. A breast man, but then, most of them were.

"So, do you come here often?" he asked, dragging his gaze back to her face with obvious effort.

Light brown eyes. His best feature.

"I come when I need to," she answered, feeding him a smile that had him all but licking his lips. She could practically taste his thoughts. He'd found a fox and couldn't believe that in a bar full of circling wolves, he had her attention.

"Are you expecting someone?"

"Not anymore," she smiled, waiting again as his gaze greedily sought the swell of boob spilling from the low-cut bodice of her cocktail dress.

“My lucky night,” he said. He set his bourbon on the bar, ran a hand along his jaw and she noticed the tan line where his wedding ring would have been ten minutes ago. A drone. Hitched, mated and now redundant, this one was out of the hive for the evening, ready to play. Going by the clichéd pick-up line and lack of finesse, it had to be his first foray into the cheating scene. She liked the late starters. They made a welcome change to the cocky Millennials cruising the Upper East Side bars during happy hour.

She knew every bar intimately—each hit carefully noted in her diary—date, time, mark and profit. The Dolphin Bar—this bar—was one of her favorites. Reliably populated with the top five percent income earners, all hoping to score. The ideal hunting ground.

“Do you have a name?” he asked, giving her a lopsided grin.

An attempt at roguishness, she supposed. “Not on me,” she answered with a shrug. “I must have left in it my apartment.”

His grin widened. “Mine’s Victor. Is your apartment close?”

“Very.”

His eyes read her invitation. “You have a British accent. Have you been in the States long?”

“A while.”

He nodded proudly. “I can always spot an English accent. Been there on vacation.”

“How nice,” she murmured, already bored with him.

She swiveled on her stool, crossing her legs to press a knee into his crotch. Already he was hard. His face reddened. Lust or embarrassment? Probably both. Definitely a late starter.

“What do you do when you’re not taking time out?” she asked, holding her knee steady. “Something on Wall Street?”

“Oh, yeah. I’m a chief...”

“Financial officer,” she finished for him. “I’m impressed. All that responsibility. You could help me with my taxes.” She fingered a button on his white business shirt. “I’ve no head for figures.”

“Sure.”

"You know," she said, swaying her knee—pulling a sharp breath from him. "I'd like another margarita. If you're buying."

He gestured to the bartender. "Another for the lady."

"Thank you, Victor."

His cell rang with an old jazz tune. "I'll have to get this," he said, reading the text message. Frowning, he looked at his watch. A Rolex. One of the six-figure models. This drone was more than a designer suit. He was close to the top of the Wall Street money tree. She hadn't had one of those in a while. Nice.

She trailed a finger down his shirt to his belt, circling the buckle. "You on a curfew, Victor?"

"Oh, no of course not."

He was. There was no point in dragging things out. He could cut and run at any moment, which would mean she'd wasted twenty minutes of her time. Hooking the finger beneath his belt to secure him, she worked her knee deeper. "You know, Victor, I don't need a drink after all. If you're finished with that bourbon..."

He looked at her, confused. He really was a novice.

"I only mention it," she continued, dipping her lashes seductively, "because we could find somewhere more private."

His eyes turned suspicious. "Are you a...Well, you know what I mean?"

She feigned offence. "No, but thanks for asking."

"Sorry."

His contrition made him immediately unattractive. If it wasn't for the Rolex, she might have walked away.

"No problem," she said, gazing sweetly up at him. "It's those big brown eyes of yours that have me in a romantic mood, Victor."

He gave a nervous grin. She returned the smile, content in the knowledge that this was going to work out very well. "So, are you ready to leave?"

"Your place?"

"I was thinking of somewhere closer." She angled her head

toward the fire exit at the far end of the bar. It was generally left open during the hotter months.

When his mouth slipped open in surprise, she opened her own mouth to trace her tongue along her top lip, knowing precisely the effect it would have. It always got the older ones—made them more prone to foolishness. The promise of a satisfaction their wives had lost the taste for.

“It’s more convenient, don’t you think?”

Relief washed his eyes. Drones could never resist ‘convenient.’ This one would be the type who never stayed late at the office or went to a bar without an explanatory call home first. It meant she would be finished earlier than usual, but she could do with an early night.

“I’ll be outside at the back. Wait ten minutes before you join me.” She smiled and cupped his crotch to stoke the fire. “Don’t be late.”

He looked around the crowded bar as if checking for prying eyes before downing the last of his bourbon and buttoning his jacket to cover himself.

“You’ll be home in no time, Victor,” she said, and before he could answer, she was already threading her way through the crowd to the fire exit. He’d be watching her, wondering what the hell had happened and why he’d been given the chance of a lifetime to have the hottest woman in the bar. There could even be second thoughts, but he’d keep the appointment. They always did.

She paused at the fire exit to see where he was. He was still at the bar, thumbing through his wallet, so she quickly made her way back through the crowd and left by the front door, slipping along the side of the building to the small parking lot at the rear. The asphalted area had a security light and camera positioned over the fire exit and, as always, the proprietor’s black Mercedes was the only vehicle in the lot.

Staying close to the perimeter and out of camera range, she

found the darkest corner and leaned against the brick wall of the adjacent building to wait.

He arrived on time, standing by the Mercedes, shifting from one foot to the other, peering into the darkness. This one was desperate for it, worried he'd been stood up. She stepped forward to meet him.

His relieved grin stretched wide as he came to her. "I saw you leave by the front door. Thought you'd changed your mind."

Not so foolish, after all. She pressed back against the wall. "Shall we do this, Victor?"

He worked an eager hand into her top, squeezing her breasts as though testing melons for ripeness. "You have amazing tits."

"Let's not talk," she sighed, pulling away from his hand. Hiking up her tight black mini to waist level, she gave him the full view of black thigh highs and no panties.

He stood there gaping at the sight. "Jesus."

"Do it now."

Without the slightest hesitation, he yanked his zipper down, fingers fumbling with his boxers. He stilled, looked panicked. "Are you covered?"

"Try this," she said, taking a condom from under the band of a thigh high. Handing it to him, she watched him rip the wrapper, then clumsily fit himself.

He laughed self-consciously. "It's been a while since I've used one of these."

Shoving himself at her like a starving man, he pinned her to the wall, grunting as he worked his hand down between them, seeking her entrance. "I'm gonna fuck you hard."

They all thought they were studs.

"Has the sex dried up at home, Victor?" she enquired, sliding her own hand into her shoulder bag, feeling for the syringe. "Is that why you want me so bad?"

He stopped. "What?"

“Or is it that your life is so empty, you need the danger? The thing is, Victor, this is a very unsafe situation for you.”

He pulled back, his eyes puzzled. “I don’t understand.”

“Don’t worry, Mr. CFO,” she said, smiling as she drew the syringe from her bag. “You won’t feel a thing.”

Plunging the syringe into his neck, she sent him reeling back, his eyes wide with terror as he clawed feebly at the spent cylinder dangling over his shirt collar.

Her Special Blend dropped him in less than three seconds. His body paralyzed, he lay on the asphalt, still wearing his condom and staring wide-eyed at the sky, his mouth hanging open like an aquarium fish lost for air.

Kneeling, she pulled the needle from his neck and placed it, along with the condom wrapper, in her bag. Then, donning gloves, she searched him. Taking his wallet from the inside pocket of his suit jacket, she pulled out his driver’s license. Victor J. Everett, address Chelsea. Next to the license was a photo of his wife and two children. The drones might be boring, but they were safe, easy pickings. Mr. Everett wouldn’t risk his marriage by reporting this.

She took all six of his credit cards and the cash—around fifteen hundred dollars. The cards would be sold online within the hour and by morning he’d be maxed out, cursing her all to hell.

Directing her attention to the main prize, she slipped the Rolex from his wrist, tossed it in her bag and then on the spur of the moment, searched for the wedding ring, finding it in a trouser pocket. She usually left the rings, but Brown Eyes had pushed a button by assuming she was for hire. She added the ring to her haul.

Standing, she took a step toward the alley, but a movement in the darkness brought her up short. A man stood by the Mercedes, watching her. Of average height but from the outline of his clothing, solidly built. His face was in shadow, but she could see the glow of a cigarette as he drew deeply. His stance was casual but not entirely so. If he was security, he’d have been all over her by now

and if he wasn't, he had to have a reason for not intervening, which made him even more suspect. She'd pushed her luck returning to The Dolphin Bar within three months of her last hit. It was time to leave. And fast.

Melting back into the shadows, she edged along the wall to put distance between herself and the man, reassured when he didn't move. She only ever carried one syringe and besides this guy was no easy drone.

Speaking of drones, her CFO was coming around. In another minute, he'd be on his feet, stumbling around the parking lot, making a noise to attract attention.

She had no option but to exit via the laneway that connected to the street a block back from the Dolphin. As she stole through the shadows, she turned every few seconds to see where the cigarette man was. He was still watching her, but by the time she was on the sidewalk, he'd gone.

Breathing a sigh of relief, she got into a cab, directed the driver and sat back to relax. It had been a good night. At least fifty thousand for all the credit cards, around ninety for the watch.

She told the driver to pull over two blocks from her rented studio apartment on East 79th. Once safely inside, she shed her wig, blue-colored contact lenses, and small face prosthetic that disguised the curve of her nose. Scrubbing her face clean of make-up, she changed into street clothes and flats. Then she went online. Within minutes, the cards and watch were sold to her usual contact. Tomorrow morning, he would send someone to collect the Rolex at her drop-off point, and by tomorrow night, a hundred and forty thousand dollars would be in her Swiss account.

Fifteen minutes later, she left for her other home, the exclusive Bexford Apartments on Fifth Avenue. She was so elated by her evening's work, she even took time to window shop her favorite boutique.

The Bexford's uniformed doorman swung open the massive, gold-trimmed, glass front door for her. As she strolled across the

gleaming marble foyer, the security guard looked up from behind his row of CCTV monitors. "You're early," he grinned. "Lousy night?"

"Not entirely, Sam," she said coolly. "Any news?"

"Some billionaire moved into the penthouse today."

"Yes, I know. It's Lucas Caen."

"Causing quite a stir with the ladies." Sam went on, still grinning, "Now's your chance to snare a billionaire."

She didn't need a man to keep her in designer handbags and shoes. "Goodnight, Sam."

"Night."

By the time she was in the elevator, she'd dismissed the billionaire from her mind. She had other, happier thoughts to occupy her time. Two more lucrative hits like tonight and she might even retire.

CHAPTER 1



“*I*’d give anything to be in that man’s bed.”

Savena followed the waitress’s gaze to the man sitting at table eight of the Bexford restaurant.

“You’re an employee,” she reminded Jodi. “And he’s a resident.”

Jodi sighed. “I wonder why he’s here so late.”

Savena had wondered the same thing. The lunch sitting had finished several hours ago, and the tables hadn’t been laid for dinner, all because of Mr. Caen’s inconvenient presence.

“Perhaps he wants to ask me out,” Jodi went on with a giggle. “Or I could ask him out.”

“You are not to engage Mr. Caen in conversation,” Savena scolded. When Jodi frowned rebelliously, Savena added sharply, “That’s an order.”

Jodie still looked defiant. “But he’s swoontastic!”

Despite herself, Savena felt the corners of her lips lifting in a smile. “Go and take his order, Ms. Harris, and don’t linger at his table.”

Jodie sighed. “Yes, Ms. Paige.” Adjusting the band holding up her blonde ponytail, she sashayed off to table eight. Jodi needed a formal warning about her constant flirting with the male diners. It

was inappropriate, not to say crass, for a member of staff to be throwing herself at the Bexford's wealthy residents, although, in this case, Savena understood the attraction. His photos didn't begin to do him justice. Tall, dark-haired and built like a professional boxer, it was no wonder he was the talk of the town. His special brand of alpha dominance in the bedroom had every New York socialite lining up for one of his all-night marathons. According to the rumors, he gave the best orgasms in the city. Still, sex God or not, it wasn't acceptable for Jodi to be flirting and it would need to be dealt with.

Savena waited until the waitress had taken the order and disappeared into the kitchen before following. As always, she was met with a dazzle of stainless steel and the aroma of fine cuisine. A spotless kitchen staffed by three professional cooks and four helpers, all working in harmony on the evening's menu. The Bexford was unique in that the residents owned their apartments but received the services of a seven-star hotel, which included the restaurant. While it accepted reservations from the public, the wait was so long—up to six months—that most only ever came at the invitation of residents.

The two-Michelin-starred head chef greeted her. "Mademoiselle Paige," he said in his lyrical French accent. "Comment allez vous?"

Savena inclined her head. "Je vais bien, Pierre. But you must practice your English now that you are in New York."

"I will try," he said with a pained smile.

"I see you have everything in hand as usual."

"Of course."

As the manager and resident wine expert, it was part of Savena's duties to meet with Pierre at least once a day. Indeed, she visited every floor of the Bexford each afternoon, accompanied by the maintenance supervisor, head cleaner, and the concierge.

"Tonight's menu?" Savena asked. "Were you able to get the venison?"

"Naturellement," Pierre announced, making a chef's kiss with his fingertips. "Magnifique!"

"I'm sure you will create a masterpiece."

"Oui," Pierre agreed. "And ze wine?"

"I think a Left Bank Bordeaux would go well. The one from our Chateau Beaumont collection."

"Parfait," Pierre said clasping his hands together. "As always you make the ideal choice, mademoiselle."

"Merci beaucoup," Savena said with a small nod of acknowledgement, then asked, "What did Monsieur Caen order?"

Pierre's lips puckered in disapproval. "Homard."

Savena understood Chef's crossness at a request for lobster. It was a time consuming, difficult dish to prepare, and a late order wasted precious time that could be spent on the evening's preparations.

"Hopefully, he will not make this a habit, Pierre." Turning smoothly on a stiletto, Savena put her attention to Jodi who had her diner's lunch on a tray, ready to serve. "Remember what I said, Jodi. No loitering."

Positioning herself at the window in the kitchen door, Savena watched Jodi serve her customer. As much as she liked the twenty-year-old waitress, she wouldn't hesitate to fire the girl if it became necessary. There was no shortage of prospective staff wanting work at the most exclusive apartment complex in New York.

Satisfied that things were in hand, Savena swung open the door and walked through the restaurant, nodding her approval to Jodi who was now on her way back to the kitchen.

"Excuse me," came a deep rumble as Savena reached the entrance to the lobby.

She turned.

"I'd like to talk to you."

She stayed on the spot. "If it's to do with the server..."

"It's not. Come here please."

Reluctantly, Savena obliged. She was as curious as the next woman about Lucas Caen, but she disliked his manner.

"Is there something wrong with your meal?" she asked, trying not to be obvious as she assessed him. Close up, he looked younger than his thirty-three years, but even so, there was a layer of tough self-discipline beneath the handsome exterior that indicated the experience of an older man. His dark hair was cut close, which displayed the good shape of his head and strong neck. A slate-gray gaze beneath a straight brow and a heavy dusting of dark stubble over a chiseled jaw. Even casually dressed in sport jacket, T-shirt and chinos, he still projected the kind of self-assurance and superiority that comes with extreme wealth. Savena could pick it a mile off.

When she looked up, his eyes briefly met hers before returning the favor, working slowly over her black business suit, white shirt and gray pumps before finding her face again. She felt her cheeks heat at the blatant appraisal. She never blushed, yet this man had achieved it with only a look. He ghosted a smile, perhaps in recognition of the fact.

"I understand you are the manager," he said.

"Yes, I'm Savena Paige," she answered, trying to will her burning cheeks into submission. "Is there a problem?"

"Sit down."

She was used to the super-rich expecting people to be at their beck and call, but this man was worse than most.

Seating herself opposite him, she eyed him steadily through her glasses. "How can I help you?"

"I'm giving a housewarming on Friday evening," he said, leaning back in his chair. Savena's eyes disobediently dropped to take in the view below his open jacket. The man was seriously ripped. An expanse of hard chest and the outline of washboard abs that even his T-shirt couldn't conceal.

Raising her gaze, she found him waiting for her to pay attention.

"Yes," she said, annoyed with herself for acting like Jodi.

"I'd like to meet my neighbors, plus I'll invite a few colleagues and friends. I trust the Bexford can cater?"

"It can. For how many?"

"Eighty or so."

"I'll organize it with Chef, plus serving staff. Anything else?"

His eyes drifted over her. "You can issue the invitations to the residents. Make it around thirty."

"Your social secretary can do that."

"I'd like you to do it."

Savena shook her head. "I'll arrange for..."

He leaned forward, dismissing her words. "You'll also act as host."

"I don't provide host services," she said stiffly.

His eyes drilled into hers. "Make an exception."

"Mr. Caen," she said, struggling to maintain her cool under his intense stare that seemed to know every thought in her head. "I will see to your invitations, but I cannot attend your... your party. Now, if you will excuse me."

As she rose, his voice hardened. "I haven't finished talking to you, Ms. Paige."

Ignoring him, Savena was barely five feet from his table, when in one fluid movement, he was upright and invading her personal space. His aftershave pierced her defenses—the expensive *Straight to Heaven*. It seemed apt, considering heaven was probably where he'd put some lucky woman tonight. Why on earth did that thought drop into her head?

Tossing the distracting notion aside, she glared at him with as much contempt as she could muster. This was a man who routinely assumed control of situations and people. A classic Type A made more arrogant than most by wealth. Well, she'd handled plenty of Type As in her life. This alpha might be better looking, but he was no different in every other sense.

"Mr. Caen," she repeated, edging her voice with scorn. "I'm not

one of your staff, nor do I like your manners. Now, you will have to excuse me. I have more important duties than discussing parties.”

As she made swiftly for the exit, she knew he'd want the last word and on cue, his voice carried loudly across the room.

“Ms. Paige!”

The power in his voice pulled her up short. Hands rigidly at her sides, she turned, his order generating more heat in her face. “Yes, Mr. Caen.”

“Be there by eight.”

Savena put her nose in the air and stalked off to the lobby.

Like hell she'd be there.