

Becomes 19

Chapter 0019

Serena's POV

I never realized just how much I'd drifted from my old life after marrying Bill, until bumping into Stevie between the cereal and coffee at the grocery store.

I'm halfway down the coffee aisle when I spot her. Stevie, looking just like she did back in our college days, is checking her phone and laughing. *www.NoVeilWorm.com*

I hesitate for a second, then decide to approach her. "Stevie?" I call out. "It's been a while."

Stevie turns, surprised to see me. We're both quiet for a second but then she says, "Serena! I can't believe it's you."

Stevie hugs me, sounding really happy to see me. It makes me wonder, though. "Aren't you mad?" I blurt out, unable to hide my confusion. We haven't talked since I married Bill.

Stevie shakes her head, smiling slightly. "Nah, I get it. Guys like that can be tough," she says, her tone light but sincere. "You know, with my stepdad and all. But man, I really missed you. A text or a call would've meant a lot." *www.NoVeil@rM.com*

I feel a mix of happy and guilty when Stevie says that. "I've missed your too," I say quietly. "I'm sorry I didn't reach out. Life just... got in the way."

Stevie glances around the store before turning back to me. "So, what are you up to after this?"

I shrug, placing a box of cereal in my cart. "Nothing much, really. Why?"

She brightens up a bit. "There's this cozy cafe just around the corner. How about we catch up over coffee?"

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As we step into the cafe, the aroma of freshly ground coffee beans and the soft hum of a jazz playlist greets us. We find a small table near the window, the afternoon light casting patterns through the hanging plants.

"So, what are you doing in this part of town?" she asks.

I take a moment, feeling the weight of my words before they even leave my lips. "Actually, I've moved back to my old apartment," I finally say. "Bill and I... we just got divorced."

Stevie's face lights up, her words quick and sharp. "Well, it's about damn time." I know she's never been a fan of Bill, mainly because of his short fuse, something she never shied away from pointing out.

Trying to lighten the mood, I quickly shift gears. "Enough about me," I say, offering a small, hopeful smile. "What's been going on with you?"

Stevie leans back, her face lighting up. "Oh, it's been crazy busy, but in a good way," she says. "I've had a couple of shows and some magazine work. It's pretty awesome to see things finally coming together, you know?" *WW(w.NoVeil@rM.com)*

"I'm really happy for you, Stevie!" I can't help but smile, truly thrilled for her. "I heard about your exhibits. Everyone's saying they were amazing."

As Stevie talks about her photography, trying to sound like it's no big deal, I can't help but feel proud of her. She's doing amazing work, even

if she won't admit it.

I haven't felt this happy in a long time. It's like being with Bill and living his way of life drained all the joy from me.

"Well, at least one of us is following her dreams," I say with a smile.

Stevie furrows her brow, puzzled. "What do you mean?" she probes

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gently. "I thought you had a plan in place, especially after divorcing your ex."

"I'm still figuring it out," I admit. Going back to my old job isn't an option. – not after everything that's happened with Bill.

The barista calls our name, snapping me out of my daze. "Wait a *www.NoVeilWorm.com*

moment," Stevie says and gets up to get our order.

Stevie places our order on the table. It consists of two steaming cups of coffee, a chocolate muffin, and a freshly baked croissant. "I'm just thinking... What if I help you figure this out?" she asks.

I smile at her. "That would be awesome. I really appreciate it, Stevie."

She responds, "No problem at all. That's what friends are for, right? Have you considered getting a job similar to your old one?"

I'm worried about going back to work in a corporate setting, especially with a baby on the way. "Well, I've been feeling the need for change and a fresh start, actually," I reply.

"I get that," Stevie says. "Hmm...Let's see. How about starting your own business? You could be your own boss that way, you know."

My eyes light up with interest as I consider the idea. "I like the idea," I say. "But there are a lot of things to consider like capital. Right now, I don't have any."

"You're divorced, right?" Stevie asks. "How about using part of the settlement for your business?"

I look down and admit, "I didn't ask Bill for any compensation. I didn't want him and his family to think I was after their money."

We both fall into silence for a moment. Stevie gives me a sympathetic look and decides not to push the matter any further.

She then suggests, "Okay, never mind. How about asking your folks for

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financial help?"

"Well, my parents and I aren't exactly on speaking terms, I'm not sure they want to see me," I say, sighing. I slump in my chair, and I just feel really lost. "I don't know what to do with my life anymore," I confess.

The bracelet catches my eye, and I fondly remember crafting it back in college. It's adorned with delicate silver links, and its centerpiece glimmers with a sparkling sapphire, which happens to be Stevie's birthstone.

I recall how Stevie was anxious about our final exams, and I suggested she wear this bracelet for good luck. Surprisingly, it seemed to work like a charm as she aced nearly all of her exams.

"Oh, you still have this? Wow, I'm touched," I say, feeling genuinely moved.

"Yeah," Stevie replies with a smile. "I guess my career's been taking off because of it."

I shake my head and say, "Nonsense. You're a great photographer."

"Well, one thing I've always admired about you is your keen eye for beauty and design," Stevie says with a warm smile. "Oh! What do you think about the idea of starting your own handcrafted jewelry business?"

My eyes widen with excitement, and anticipation tingles down my spine. I've never felt this eager to get started on something in my life." Stevie, you're a genius! Thank you so much."

"I know," Stevie says with a cheeky grin. "So, are you going to ask your parents for help now?"

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"I have to. I really want to make this happen," I reply, but suddenly, I feel queasy and nauseous. I really want to puke right now.

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"You alright, Serena?" Stevie asks, furrowing her brows. "What's happening?"

"It's alright. This is normal," I say, trying to reassure her. "I just need to go to the bathroom."

"How is this normal?" Stevie says, but then she drops the croissant she's eating, and her eyes widen in shock.

"Oh my God, Serena! When were you planning to tell me that you're pregnant?" Stevie exclaims in surprise.