

Becomes 36

Chapter 0036

Serena's POV

"Oh, shut up." I snap at Stevie, pleading for her to quit the teasing. "Calvin and I are just friends."

Thinking about Calvin and me as more than friends sends a flurry of butterflies through my stomach. Yet, he's told me he cares in a way that feels more like an uncle. I have to shake off these feelings before I fall too deeply.

"Come on, you obviously like him," Stevie says. "Why not show it? Is it because he's Bill's family?"

"Actually, Bill's family hates me. They believe I only married Bill

because he's a billionaire," I admit. Even thinking about it leaves a sour taste in my mouth.

"What a bunch of pricks," Stevie mutters, her once jolly expression darkening into a scowl. "Weren't you and Bill together for three years? How did you tolerate their awful attitudes? And why are you still on friendly terms with any of them?"

I'm touched by how Stevie's always been the one to watch out for us, ever since college. It's just who she is always defending her friends. Now, realizing I haven't talked to her in three years makes me feel really bad.

"Calvin's different," I defend him. "He's always there when I need support. And he never looked down on me."

Stevie stares at me harder, looking kind of weird. "You know what I'm going to say?"

Confused, I raise my eyebrows. "What?"

Jumping up, she strikes a pose like she's back in her cheerleading days,

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All bright and sewing "Serena and Calvin, sitting in a tree, KISSING

My face heats up. Stevie really knows how to go over the top Haha. Very mature, Stevie," I reply, my voice flat

She nudges my arm, grinning. 'Hey! You know me. I'm just happy for you, finally finding a good man."

Calvin pulls up in front of my apartment two hours later. As he steps out of the car, he's dressed in a onisp, white button-down shirt that hugs his frame, paired with dark jeans that accentuate his lean build.

Stevie shifts beside me and whispers, "Wow, Calvin really is handsome"

Stevie and Calvin exchange greetings Calvin, with a warm smile, says, "After you," gesturing for us to enter first.

"I've been swamped lately," Calvin mentions, holding the door open for us "Luckily, a client canceled, so I've got time to show you around the shop I told you about now "

"I really appreciate your help, Calvin. Thank you," I respond. Is it far from here?"

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Calvin shakes his head, a reassuring smile on his face. "Nah, just a 20- minute drive to Van Nuys Shall we?" W(w)W.novElw0RM.c0mm

On our way to Van Nuys, I'm filled with a mix of excitement and nerves. It feels unreal that my dream of starting a business is so close to becoming true. Sitting next to Calvin, watching the streets zip by, my heart races with the thought of finally seeing the place.

When we arrived, we were greeted by a man with neatly trimmed gray hair and a full beard, wearing a relaxed ensemble of a soft, worn-in blue shirt paired with dark khaki pants and comfortable-looking leather

shoes. Ww.w.nOvEl(w)0r.m.C0m

Calvin, with a friendly nod towards the man, says, "This is Peter, a good

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friend of mine who owns the mall." He then turns to us, "Peter, meet Stevie and Serena. They're business partners interested in renting at space here for their jewelry business)

Peter greets us with a warm smile, extending his hand for a firm handshake. "Welcome! It's a pleasure to meet both of you," he says.

"Nice to meet you, Peter. We're excited about the chance to start our business here," I say with a smile.

"That's awesome!" Peter exclaims. "Come on in, and I'll give you a tour."

As we step inside, it's immediately apparent that the mall is brand new. The pristine floors shine under the bright, welcoming lights, and the wide, open spaces are filled with an air of potential.

The mall isn't crowded, but the few shoppers here move around leisurely, looking wealthy. The shops, though few, look upscale and fancy, clearly aiming for high-end customers. Calvin had said this mall was close to a rich area, and it shows in both the place and the people.

"This is a beautiful mall, Peter. You've done an incredible job with it," I compliment.

Peter beams with pride. "Thank you, Serena. We've put a lot of work into it, hoping to create something special. I'm glad you like it."

"So, here we are," Peter announces, gesturing towards the store.

Peter stops us in front of a small, empty store. It's not as big as the one we saw in Melrose, but it has a luxurious feel. The storefront has clean lines and big windows that let in lots of light, making everything inside look elegant.

I catch Stevie's eye and can immediately tell she's impressed, which says a lot. Given her keen eye for aesthetics in her photography work, it's not often something that meets her high standards so easily.

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"Wow, it looks great," I say, feeling a bit nervous. "How much is the rent. for this space each month?"

I really hope it's something we can afford. We want to start small, selling just a few pieces of jewelry, and then grow from there. The dream is big, but our budget... not so much.

Peter gives a reassuring smile, likely noticing my nervousness about the price. "You know what? I want to offer you a great discount. How does \$2000 per month sound?"

My jaw practically hits the floor. Although it's still a significant amount, it's much lower compared to other commercial spaces I've looked at online. "Are you sure, Peter? This is such a nice space."

"I'm sure," Peter confirms. "You can thank my very good friend here for vouching for you." He nods towards Calvin. I turn to Calvin with a grateful smile and mouth "Thank you."

"Do we have a deal then?" Peter asks.

Stevie and I look at each other, and I can tell she's thinking the same thing I am.

"Yes," I say, feeling a surge of excitement. "We'll take it."

"Great. I'll go grab the paperwork so we can get things started," Peter says, then heads off to prepare everything.

"What do you guys think of your new place?" Calvin asks, looking between us.

"We love it," I reply, unable to hide my excitement. Stevie and I share a giggle. "Thanks for finding this for us, Calvin. We couldn't have started the business without your help."

"I just know a lot of people," Calvin says with a modest shrug. "But remember, your business is a result of your hard work." wWw.fl0v@I@0rm.c0@

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Calvin falls silent for a moment, then his eyes light up as he remembers something. "Oh! I forgot to mention, there's a small studio in the back you can rent for overnight stays. I know driving back and forth to Van Nuys might get tiring for you."

"Thank goodness," Stevie exclaims. "I was worried Serena would be running around too much. It's not really good for her, especially with the baby on the way."

I quickly tap Stevie's arm and make a 'shh' gesture, but I can tell it's already too late.