

## Becomes 42

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"Sorry, I'm late for the opening," Calvin says, his breath slightly hurried from the rush. "Got caught up with lots of work stuff. Are you mad?"

I smile at Calvin, shaking my head gently. "Nah, I know you were busy. And this is just sparkling cider," I say, lifting my glass in reassurance.

Calvin approaches Stevie and me at the counter. "Stevie, this is for you," he says, extending a bouquet of vibrant flowers towards my best friend.

"Oh my goodness, Calvin, these are beautiful!" Stevie exclaims.

Calvin turns his attention to me. "And Serena," he says, his eyes softening with warmth. He pauses. "These are for you," he finally says, extending the bouquet of flowers towards me.

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"Thank you, Calvin," I say, accepting the flowers with a grateful smile. "They're lovely. What's the occasion?"

Calvin returns my smile, his eyes gleaming with pride. "I just wanted to congratulate Stevie and you for a successful opening of your shop," he says warmly. "I know you both put a lot of effort into making this happen."

"Well, we couldn't have done it without all your help," I say gratefully. "So, thanks."

I can feel the tension between Calvin and me as if the room has shrunk

to just the two of us.

"Oh, I completely forgot!" Stevie exclaims. "I need to go. I have a blind date in an hour."

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"Really?" I ask, surprised. "I thought we were having dinner together."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Serena," Stevie says, hurriedly gathering her [www.Ñ\(©\)VëLW0rM.\(c\)0M](#)

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belongings. "Maybe we can have it another time?"

"Sure, no problem. Have fun on your date," I reply.

"Bye. And always great to see you, Calvin," Stevie bids goodbye.

On her way to the door, she gives me a wink. Right then, I figure she doesn't have a date. She only wants me and Calvin to have some alone time. Uh—oh, she's going to tease me again the next time we see each

other.

"Hey, so, are you free tonight?" Calvin asks. "Maybe I can join you for dinner since Stevie couldn't make it."

"Sure," I reply with a smile. "But on two conditions: I need to change. first, and dinner's on me tonight."

"Sounds like a plan," Calvin agrees with a grin.

I quickly change into a fitted black blouse adorned with lace detailing, paired with high-waisted jeans. A touch of light makeup enhances my features, giving me a fresh and radiant look.

"Ready?" he asks, offering his arm.

I smile, nodding. "Absolutely. Let's head to Olive Garden."

As Calvin and I drive to Olive Garden, there's an undeniable tension in the air. The music softly playing in the background adds to the atmosphere, its soulful tunes stirring something within me.

In an attempt to adjust the volume of the radio, I reach out, my hand accidentally brushing against Calvin's arm.

For a fleeting moment, our skin makes contact, sending a jolt of electricity through me. I quickly retract my hand, my cheeks flushing. Calvin glances at me, a subtle smile playing on his lips.

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"Sorry about that," I mumble, my voice slightly shaky.

"No worries," Calvin replies, his tone reassuring. "It's all good."

As we arrive at Olive Garden, Calvin courteously holds the door open for me, and I step out of the car. I can already smell the aroma of Italian

cuisine and realize I'm starving. Crap, I just remember I didn't have lunch today.

Calvin gently guides me towards the entrance, his hand hovering protectively at my lower back.

"Careful, watch your step," he murmurs.

Calvin's words catch me off guard, and I glance down instinctively. It's a stark contrast to the last family dinner with Bill, where I sprained my ankle and my ex-husband didn't even offer to help.

I realize how different Calvin is from his nephew in the way he cares for me, even in the little things.

"Thanks. I'll be careful," I say.

We're seated in a cozy corner booth, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the restaurant. Soft music plays in the background as Calvin and I settle into our seats, ready to enjoy a quiet evening together.

Looking over the menu, I decide on a classic favorite, spaghetti carbonara, while Calvin opts for the lasagna. We both agree to start with the endless salad and breadsticks, a quintessential Olive Garden experience.

"How was your grand opening?" Calvin asks as we wait for our order. "I bet it turned out well. You and Stevie looked so happy when I saw you."

"It was fantastic," I reply. "We already made this month's rent. I never expected this at all. And I enjoy being busy with work."

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Calvin grins. "That's awesome!" he says with his eyes sparkling. "I'm really proud of you, Serena."

As Calvin speaks, his eyes lock onto mine with warmth and sincerity. I can't help but feel a rush of happiness as his words sink in.

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Feeling flustered, I glance away for a moment, overwhelmed by the flood of emotions welling up inside me. It's not just what he says the way he looks at me like I'm the most amazing person he's ever seen.

I wipe the tears from my eyes, feeling embarrassed by my sudden show of emotion.

Calvin's expression shifts to one of concern. "Oh no, don't cry," he says, his voice filled with worry. "Did I say something wrong? I'm sorry."

I smile and shake my head. "No, it's all good," I reassure him. "I'm just happy. Thank you for telling me that."

Calvin exhales deeply, a look of relief crossing his face. "Oh... Of course, I'm proud of you for having the courage to start something you're passionate about," he says earnestly. "Not everybody can do what you did."

"You're a big help, Calvin. I'll be forever grateful for your support and help. You're a great friend," I say, my words genuine and heartfelt.

As soon as I say this, Calvin's smile fades, and for a fleeting moment, I detect a hint of disappointment in his eyes.

It's as if my words didn't quite match what he was hoping to hear.