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Serena's POV

With just a week until the fashion show, things are getting really busy in my studio. I've been deep in my work, creating a variety of unique jewelry pieces designed to stand out on the runway. My workspace is covered with gemstones, wires, and tools, as I bring each design to life.

Stevie is taking care of everything else. She's been busy getting supplies so we don't run short of anything important, like display stands or clasps. She has also been taking pictures of each piece of jewelry! Her photos look amazing, capturing the fine details that make each item unique. These photos will be used for our plan to market the jewelry after the show.

It feels like everything is starting to come together. But we've still got a

lot to do.

Each piece of jewelry needs a final fitting with the outfits they'll be showcased with, requiring precise adjustments here and there to make sure they look just right. Meanwhile, Stevie handles all the logistics, packing each piece carefully to ensure they arrive at the venue in perfect condition.

For the final preparations, I have to head over to De Luca Couture headquarters. They've called a last-minute meeting to go over how my jewelry will match their couture outfits. We need to make sure

everything looks cohesive, and they're considering adding some of my pieces to the show's finale. *w w w . n o v e l w o r m . c o m*

It's afternoon when I arrive at De Luca Couture headquarters. As I'm about to enter the building, I'm surprised to see Bill on his way out of the conference room. Our eyes meet, and for a moment, there's an awkward pause.

"Bill," I reply, trying to keep my voice neutral. "What are you doing here?"

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+25 BONUS

Bill suddenly turns pale and stammers a bit. "Oh, I, uh, just had a meeting with Timothy Munger about some business stuff," he manages to say. "What about you? What are you doing here?"

I nod, not pressing him further on the details. "I'm here for a final fitting. As you know, my jewelry line will be featured in the upcoming De Luca fashion show," I explain. "It's all quite exciting."

"Yeah. I heard the fashion show's in a week," Bill says, trying to keep the conversation alive.

"Uh-huh," I respond, feeling the awkwardness between us. I quickly glance at my watch and say, "Oh, I need to get going. Don't want to be late for the meeting." I offer him a quick smile as I turn and head to the conference room. *w w w . n o v e l w o r m . c o m*

Just as I start to walk away, Bill calls out, "Serena!"

I turn back. "Yes?"

He gives me a warm, sincere smile. "Good luck out there," he says. His smile catches me off guard. For a moment, my heart melts a little at the kindness in his eyes, stirring up emotions I thought I'd managed to keep in check.

"Thanks, Bill," I manage to say, my heart racing a bit as I turn back toward the conference room.

I find myself thinking about how Bill's smile still gets to me. Even though we're not together anymore, he can make my heart skip just like the old times. It's surprising how some feelings hang on, no matter the circumstances. *w w w . n o v e l w o r m . c o m*

In the conference room, Marjorie greets me with a warm smile. "Serena, glad you're here," she says. She then introduces me to two designers who will also be featured in the fashion show.

+25 BONUS

"This is Josephine Adelberg, who specializes in sustainable fashion, and Max Laurent, known for his innovative use of futuristic materials." Then, turning to Max and Josephine, she continues, "Josephine, Max, meet Serena Nixon, the up-and-coming jewelry designer I've been telling you about."

Josephine stands up and extends her hand to me with a warm smile. "Ms. Nixon, I'm really glad to be working with you," she says as we shake hands.

"Please, call me Serena," I respond with a smile, extending my hand warmly. "I'm thrilled to meet both of you. I've heard so much about work."

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I turn to face Max, extending my hand, but his reception isn't as warm as Josephine's. In fact, he's giving me a once-over, his eyes sweeping from head to toe in a way that makes me slightly uncomfortable.

Max just stares at my extended hand and doesn't take it. Instead, he asks bluntly, "Are you the girl who makes jewelry and posts it on TikTok?" *w w w . n o v e l w o r m . c o m*

I force a tight smile, feeling my patience thin. "Yes, that's me," I say, my tone edged with sarcasm. "I'm the one on TikTok, making jewelry accessible to everyone, not just the elite."

I'm really tired of assholes thinking they can look down on me. This time, I'm not backing down.