

The calm to my storm, my sun when it rains

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The calm to my storm, my sun when it rains

by [robliz](#)

Summary

Serena's chocolate business has gone from strength to strength and now she is opening up her own chocolate shop. But with Bernie being called away for the week and a series of disasters befalling the shop, will Serena ever get it opened in time?

Notes

Life happened and so this will have to come in a chapter at a time. Should be a new one each day!

- Inspired by [Sweeter Than Chocolate, Hotter Than Fire](#) by [ProfessorFlimflam](#)

Friday

Serena swore as the lights once again flickered and went out. It was typical that she was having trouble with the electrics the one time Bernie was on the other side of the country and unable to help. She regretted now persuading Bernie to go help her son rewire his new house. Bernie had been reluctant, knowing that the opening was drawing near, but Serena had reminded her that it was only recently that Cam had started speaking to her again and that she wasn't to do anything to jeopardise that relationship again. And anyway, Bernie had already sorted out all the electrics in the new shop so she would mainly be getting under Serena's feet while she dealt with the last-minute things.

Groping round in the semi-darkness, Serena found her phone and pulled up the number of her second-choice electrician. Xavier Duval was competent but hideously arrogant. But beggars couldn't be choosers, so it was him or no one. She was mainly just grateful that all her stock was safely in the fridge at home. She didn't want a repeat of the panic she'd had two Christmas's ago. Her cheeks coloured as she remembered. That hadn't been all bad in the end, the fire in the workshop. It had brought Bernie into her life. She'd have put up with a lot more in order to have Bernie as her partner.

Luckily, Xav had a gap that afternoon. The job he was doing in the morning had been finished quicker than he thought.

"I'm just that good," he told Serena on the phone while she rolled her eyes. "I'll be round about 2."

Her fingers hovered over Bernie's number in her address book once Xav had hung up. Should she call her and let her know? Bernie had asked to be kept in the loop, and wasn't it her duty as a girlfriend to tell her what was going on? But then again, she'd known Bernie for long enough to understand the depths of the Bernie Wolfe Saviour Complex. There was no way she was going to allow Bernie to drive for six hours straight across the country just to deal with a problem that would be sorted by this afternoon. No, she decided. She wouldn't tell Bernie. Not until it was all sorted out.

Saturday

Serena walked into the shop on Saturday morning and looked around despondently. Despite Xav's claims of brilliance, he was unable to fix the electricity on Friday afternoon and promised to return after lunch on Saturday. Whether he would manage to fix it then was anyone's guess.

Still, Serena figured she might as well get on with something while she waited. The main shop floor had enough light coming in through the gaps in the paper covering the windows that she thought she could finally finish painting the last wall. Groping around in the cupboard, she pulled out a tin of paint and some brushes and started work. It was relaxing in a way, those smooth motions up and down the wall, and it wasn't long until she had completed the first coat and left it to dry before starting on the next coat.

She nipped out to the sandwich shop down the road for some lunch and returned to find Xav sat outside in his van.

"I'll crack it today for sure," he said as she unlocked the door and held it open for him. Behind his back she raised her eyebrows. There was no "for sure" when it came to Xav.

She left him to it and spent the rest of the day on the phone to the marketing firm she had employed with last minute questions about the campaign. She wanted as many people in the shop on opening day as possible and so that meant posters, leaflets and a huge banner to go outside the shop.

There was a cry of triumph from the other room and the lights came on. Xav sauntered into the room.

"Told you I could do it," he announced.

"I had no doubts," Serena replied. She pulled her cheque book out of her handbag. "How much do I owe you?"

It was just as Serena was handing over the cheque to Xav for a horribly large amount due to his weekend rates, that he looked over at the wall she had painted that morning and pulled a face.

"Did you know that wall is a different shade to the one next to it?" he asked.

Serena turned slowly, not wanting to discover whether he was correct or not. At first glance, she decided he wasn't. Yes the wall looked a little different but that was only because she hadn't added the next coat of paint yet. In time, it would be fine.

But then she looked closer. And it began to become very clear. With the lights now on in the shop, Serena saw what she hadn't seen during the painting stage. The two walls in front of her were two different shades of green.

She let out a strangled cry and Xav backed away from her.

“Erm, I’ll just be going now, let you get on with sorting that out,” he said, backing towards the door.

She ignored him, her head in her hands, once again wishing that Bernie was here with her. Why even was there two shades of green paint in the cupboard? And why didn’t she check before starting? It looked like another late night at the shop.

Sunday

The walls looked much better that morning, although the bags under Serena's eyes had got a lot worse. It was with great reluctance that she had dragged herself out of bed that morning, loathed to work on Sundays under normal circumstances but needs must. With less than a week until opening, she really needed to get everything sorted.

There had been a delivery from the marketing company yesterday while she was painting. She hadn't had a chance to open it yet. She ripped open the brown paper packaging and unfurled a large banner proclaiming the opening day of the shop. It looked perfect, exactly as she asked. The name of the shop, Serenity Chocolates, was written in a smooth font swirling across the banner. And the opening date of the following Saturday was large underneath. With the past couple of days having brought more than its fair share of disasters, Serena went over the banner carefully a number of times before proclaiming it disaster free.

She gave her friend Ric a call to ask if he could give her a hand putting it up. It was large and unwieldy. The last thing she needed was to drop it in a muddy puddle or something. Ric, an ex-colleague from her teaching days, came round quickly armed with a step ladder.

"Where do you want it?" he asked as he looked at the banner spread out on the floor.

"Right over the window I think," Serena said.

She helped Ric manoeuvre the ladder into the correct place and she passed him the tools as he set about getting the banner in position.

"Shouldn't your ever so macho girlfriend be doing this?" he asked.

Serena blushed, regretting ever having mentioned to Ric about how good Bernie looked when she did DIY around the house.

"Rewiring her son's house, just my luck."

Ric hummed in sympathy. "She back for the opening?"

"So she claims. But I've not had an update recently so maybe not."

They sat inside sipping mugs of coffee once the banner was up. It was nice to have a catch up with Ric. They didn't get much chance anymore, Serena being busy with her business and Ric overwhelmed with the relentless pressures of his teaching job.

The rest of the day was spent walking round town delivering the leaflets. She'd managed to persuade Ric to stick around to help and had promised Fleur a home-cooked meal and some rather expensive wine to get her onside. Truth be told, Fleur coming for dinner was really more about Serena not having to eat on her own again. She'd spent years eating on her own but since meeting Bernie, she'd found these enforced solitary meal very lonely.

The wind picked up when she was still a good mile from the shop and the rain soon followed. Tucking the remaining leaflets into her bag, she hurried back towards the shop as the wind tugged some of them free. She watched as the paper flapped away from her and then fell to the ground in a soggy heap. There was little point in retrieving them so she slunk away, her hair sticking to her head as the rain soaked her through.

She turned the corner onto main street, her shop at the other end, when she noticed something large coming towards her. She had just enough time to step out of the way when it blew past her. There was a shout and Ric barrelled past her. She turned in shock to watch where he was going and registered for the first time what it was that had blown past her. It was her banner. She let out a wail and then gave chase.

When she reached them the banner was wrapped around a tree and Ric was already busy trying to detangle it. Blinking back tears, she helped him and they managed to drag the sodden banner back to the shop. Spread out on the floor, it was clear that, while the ink hadn't run, there were multiple large tears in it.

She put her head in her hands in despair. Ric put an arm around her shoulders in comfort just as Fleur walked in the door.

"What's going on here then?" she asked in a bright voice, "Just because Bernie's away, doesn't mean you can play the field Serena!"

Ric turned and glared at her, indicating the ripped banner.

"Oh. Is that all?"

Fleur knelt down next to it and inspected the tears.

"Look, I think this is perfectly fixable. Let it dry out and then get some good, strong gaffer tape on the reverse. Do it carefully enough and no one will notice."

Serena wiped her eyes. "You really think so?"

"I really do."

Serena smiled weakly. "Thanks Fleur. What would I do without you? And you, Ric."

"Had a nervous breakdown years ago!" Ric joked.

Fleur smiled. "Let's leave it for the day. You owe me a very nice bottle of red."

"Wait, you're paying Fleur in wine?"

Fleur snorted. "Come join us Ric. Serena'll even throw in a meal. Lobster thermidor was it?"

Serena's grin widened. "You're getting shepherd's pie and you'll be grateful!"

She turned to Ric. "And you are very welcome to join us."

Monday

Chapter Notes

Inspired by Wonko's experience

Serena felt much brighter when she unlocked the shop on Monday morning. She'd had a good evening with Fleur and Ric and she had a plan for the day. The first job was to sort out the banner. Fleur had been right about that, a bit of gaffer tape on the reverse and it was, while not as good as new, perfectly serviceable. She left it on the side hoping that she might be able to rope in some help to get it back up soon.

She looked around her workspace. Most of the shop was ready to start creating wonderful chocolates now with just one more door to be delivered that morning. In anticipation, Serena cleared a path to the door between the shop floor and the kitchen. Her phone beeped with a message from Bernie.

Cam says I must tell you that I am still alive. I love you. Looking forward to seeing the shop (and you) when I get back. xxxxx

Serena smiled at the message. She'd told Cameron that he must make sure his mother communicated with her while she was away, knowing all about Bernie's tendency for radio silence from her last visit to Charlotte. Serena had been on the verge of calling the police after a string of missed calls and ignored text messages.

I love you too Bernie. Hope Cam isn't working you too hard. Had a few problems over the last few days (don't ask!) but all is sorted now. Ring me tonight and I'll tell you all about it. xx

There was a knock on the door and she opened it to find the carpenter, Guy, she had employed to put in new doors.

"Here's the last one," he said, indicating the door currently resting against the wall. "I'll just fit it for you and then I'll be on my way."

"Thanks," Serena said, "I'll just be in the back if you need anything."

"Well a cup of tea wouldn't go amiss now," he said, looking at her expectantly.

She sighed and went into the kitchen to fill the kettle with water. When she returned with the steaming mug, Guy was routing through his toolbox looking confused.

"Anything wrong?" she asked, placing the mug on the countertop.

“No, no. Everything is fine. You just get on with your cleaning or whatever and leave me to sort out the difficult stuff.”

She spun on her heels and quickly exited the room before she did something she would regret. She’d known Guy was sexist from the moment she’d hired him but he was so much cheaper than the others. Next time though, she wanted to go with Bernie’s suggestion of only hiring women. It would save on the eventual costs of a lawyer for when she inevitably thumped Guy.

What really grated on her was the fact that she did indeed have some cleaning to do. The stock room shelves were dusty from all the building work and they needed to be cleaned ready for the stock delivery. All the ingredients she needed were arriving over the next few days and having a space to put them in that was clean and tidy was important.

Armed with a bucket of soapy water and a cloth, she began wiping down the surfaces, removing all the dust. Partway through the work, there was a shout from the other room.

“I’ve done the door so I’ll be off then,” Guy shouted through.

Serena pulled off her rubber gloves and walked out to see him off but he’d vanished before she got there, the newly fitted door standing open. She shrugged her shoulders, glad to see the back of him, before deciding to test the door. She shut it and then looked at it, her eyes growing wide. Because it was now obvious why Guy had shot off so quickly. And that reason was a six-inch gap at the bottom of the door.

She ran out onto the pavement and found Guy still loading up the van. He tried to jump into the cab and drive away but Serena blocked his way.

“Care to explain yourself?” she asked, hands on her hips.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said.

Serena just raised an eyebrow.

“Thought you wanted some ventilation in the kitchen?” he tried.

She tapped her foot and he visibly shrivelled under her gaze.

“Look, I asked my friend to help me and his tape measure must be wrong or something. Tell you what, I’ll give you twenty percent off a new door.”

“No,” Serena said, “No. I’m going to tell you exactly what you are going to do. You are going to get straight back into that little van of yours and find me a new door. A new, matching door mind. And then you are going to drive back here and fit it correctly. And you will rip up any invoice you were planning on sending me. And if you do all that before 5 this afternoon, I might consider not reporting you to trading standards.”

Guy gaped at her and then nodded. She stepped aside to let him into the driver’s seat.

“I’ll see you back here this afternoon,” she stated as he went to close the door, “I’ve got a lawyer friend who might be very interested in what is going on here if you don’t return.”

Guy drove off looking like a kicked puppy.

Tuesday

Some of the deliveries were due today so Serena was in the shop early in the morning switching on the fridges and freezers to let them get to temperature. The door was now correctly fitted without the gap at the bottom and, as extra penance, Serena had made Guy put the banner up again. Things were looking up once more.

Once everything was switched on, she headed home. Her outhouse kitchen was still the best place to work until everything was sorted out in the shop. She spent a pleasant morning making up some chocolates for the opening with the radio blaring out hits of the 70s and 80s. It was only interrupted once with a text message from Bernie.

So sorry I didn't ring last night. Cam forced me out for a drink. Would much rather have been talking to you. Xxx

She smiled and sent a quick message back. It wasn't like she wasn't familiar with Bernie's lack of communicative ability so she hadn't worried last night when there was no call. If anything had been seriously wrong, she trusted Cameron to contact her and she knew that Bernie Wolfe liked to deal with small annoyances by herself without bothering her. Still, it was nice to hear from her.

After lunch she headed back to the shop with a car full of ingredients ready to go into the new kitchen. She fumbled with the key in the lock and eventually managed to let herself in, a box resting on her hip. There was a slightly odd noise coming from the kitchen but she thought nothing of it. One of the fridges must be making it. She dumped the box on the counter and went back to the car to collect the other boxes. It took her a few trips to bring everything inside.

Once everything was in, she pushed open the door to the kitchen and stepped in. It was immediately obvious what the strange noise was as water filled her shoes. Serena made a strangled noise before stepping back into the shop, suddenly very glad that there was a step there preventing the flooding from getting any worse.

She dropped the last box onto the counter and put her head in her hands. Was this going to be a job for a plumber? She didn't know. Where was the water coming from? Was it from one of the new fridges or was there another leak? The last thing she wanted was to have to call someone else out. It was getting expensive, having to ring all these contractors on a nearly daily basis at the moment.

Just as Serena was about to head back into the kitchen to find the source of the problem, there was a sudden bang and the lights went out. Her limited understanding of electricity led her to believe that the water had just shorted out the fuses.

Since the last time the electricity went out, Serena had bought herself a heavy duty torch which she pulled out from behind the counter. She had a brief debate with herself about whether to remove her sodden shoes and socks before going back into the kitchen before deciding that they were wet already and couldn't get any worse.

The water was about an inch deep across the kitchen floor. It was a huge amount of water in total but as soon as Serena shone the torch around the room, she spotted the problem. Her nice new kitchen sink with the hose attachment, was leaking from underneath. This wasn't just the steady dripping of a worn out washer, this was a stream of water pouring out of what looked like a gap in the pipework.

The week before Bernie, diligent as ever, had shown her where the stopcock was so she soon put pay to the leak. But she had a bunch of ingredients sat in the shop, and no electricity to refrigerate them. There was no option but to load everything back into the van and take it back home where she could at least rely on the electricity.

She was exhausted by the time she got back to the shop, and annoyed at being so far behind schedule. She rang Xav right away, finding that luckily he had another free afternoon and could be there in a matter of hours. Serena briefly wondered whether Xav actually even had any other clients. Maybe he'd scared them all off with his attitude. Then she rang the plumber who had fitted the sink and gave him a piece of her mind. He also agreed to come round later that day. Then she set to work, initially with a bucket to remove the worst, and then with a mop, to try and get the floor dry. The last thing she needed was for one of the contractors to slip on the wet floor and blame her.

Wednesday

There was still no electricity the next day. Xav had promised to bring round a generator to power up the fridges since the fuses that had blown turned out to be ones that could only be bought from France or something. Serena had stopped listening by the time he tried to explain. What with the plumber insisting that she must have done something to cause the flood, that he had never in his entire career fitted a sink so that it leaked that badly and then Xav coming round with his usual arrogance and then spending hours not getting the electricity back on, she couldn't bring herself to care. All she wanted was to head home to a nice warm bath. Bernie sharing the bath with her would have been preferable but you couldn't have everything in life.

There was a delivery due that morning. Some of it would be ingredients that would need to be packed up and taken home to go into the fridge, but a lot of it was shelf stable ingredients. Without electricity, there wasn't a whole lot she could do. In her plans, she had thought she'd be busy making up the chocolates ready for opening day so she hadn't thought twice about agreeing to a delivery window of 8am until 4pm. Right now, with a whole day to sit in the shop and do nothing while her chocolates remained unmade and sat in the fridge at home, she was angry with her past self.

She pulled out her phone in the dim light and pulled up Bernie's number. She wondered if she was busy. Deciding it was worth a try, since there was literally nothing else to do, she pressed call. But Bernie didn't answer. She left a quick voicemail asking Bernie to call back when she could, before settling in and hoping that the delivery would arrive sooner rather than later.

By lunchtime, Serena was getting impatient. She was bored. She'd cleaned the whole shop and kitchen so thoroughly it gleamed. She'd organised the cupboards for the umpteenth time. She tried calling Bernie more than once, still with no answer, and now she was getting hungry.

She debated with herself about whether to risk running out to the shops to grab some lunch before deciding that with her current run of luck, the delivery would arrive while she was out and she'd miss it. She was grateful for the fact that Fleur had introduced her to the joys of Deliveroo recently. If nothing else, she could order herself a lovely meal to sit and eat in her clean, dark shop.

The minutes ticked away, closer and closer to 4pm and still the delivery didn't appear. Serena felt like she was going mad, watching the clock. Then 4pm came and went and still there was no delivery.

Aggravated, Serena pulled up the number of the delivery company, only to find that their helpline closed at 4pm. Screaming out loud, Serena slammed the phone down. What was she supposed to do now? She'd just wasted an entire day that she could have been making her chocolates and now she didn't even have the missing ingredients. If she wanted to have anything to sell on Saturday, she couldn't afford another day waiting around for more ingredients.

She was just about to head home and try to calm herself down with a rather large glass of Shiraz when there was a knocking at the door. Her heart leapt, had the delivery arrived at last? But when she went to answer the door she found Xav with the emergency generator. Better than nothing, she supposed. At least there would be electricity tomorrow, and she could actually get on with something productive while spending another day waiting for the delivery to arrive. That was if it was going to turn up tomorrow. She'd phone them first thing in the morning tomorrow and find out.

Thursday

Serena was at the shop early the next morning. She'd brought the contents of her fridges at home back to go into the fridges in the kitchen now that there was power. She carried everything in and dumped it on the counter for the time being. As soon as the clock ticked round to 8 o'clock, she rang up the delivery company and found that her delivery was scheduled for that afternoon. She tried to express her disappointment in the late delivery to the woman on the end of the phone but she couldn't get her point across without the woman taking it as a personal insult. But at least the delivery was finally coming. Hopefully.

She turned to go back into the kitchen, figuring she'd better check that the emergency generator had kicked in and was powering the fridges, but forgot that she had left a box of display cases behind the counter. With a clatter, Serena tripped and fell over the box, landing heavily on her left arm. She swore as she pulled herself into a seated position, cradling her arm against her body. Prodding at it nervously, she let out a cry of pain. Well it looked like she'd done something serious to it. She thudded her head back against the cabinet in annoyance and in the process jolted a rather precariously balanced bag of icing sugar which tipped over and showered her with fine, white powder.

Before she even realised what was happening, Serena was crying. Tears cut through the sticky powder on her face as she wailed. It wasn't just the pain in her arm, substantial though it was, it was everything that had happened over the past week. Ever since Bernie had gone away, nothing seemed to be going her way. Disaster after disaster and now she was sat on the floor of her shop without mains electricity, without a delivery of key ingredients and with a potentially broken arm. It was too much.

It took her several long minutes to calm down and phone for help. Fleur was with her within minutes.

"Oh Serena, what have you done to yourself?" she said as she picked Serena up and dusted her down.

"I think I need to go to the hospital," Serena said.

Fleur took one look at her arm, cradled carefully against her body, and nodded. "Come on, let's get you to A and E."

At least when they arrived at Holby City Hospital, the A and E department wasn't too busy. They were checked in quickly by the receptionist and settled down on the chairs for what looked to be a short wait. Serena took the opportunity to close her eyes for a moment. With everything that had happened, she hadn't been sleeping well. If she was honest, the lack of Bernie in her bed was not helping in that respect either.

She couldn't really fall asleep, not with the pain in her arm, but she must have at least drifted as when she opened her eyes, she found that Fleur had gone. Confused, she looked around only to spot Fleur just outside the automatic doors, chatting on the phone. Fleur was back at her side in minutes.

“Important call?” Serena asked, slightly put out that Fleur hadn’t stayed with her.

“For you,” Fleur replied, “Ric is on his way over to the shop now to take receipt of the delivery.”

“Thank you,” Serena said, letting her head fall onto Fleur’s shoulder. “You didn’t need to do that. Not that I can do anything with those ingredients. It’s not like I can open the shop on Saturday now, not in this state.”

“Oh don’t be too sure about that!” Fleur said, patting Serena’s leg, “I’ve got plans!”

Serena tried to get more out of her but Fleur was not more forthcoming. They were soon interrupted by a nurse coming to fetch Serena anyway. She was rapidly triaged and sent on to x-ray, Fleur trailing after her.

“You don’t need to stay you know,” Serena said as they settled onto chairs outside x-ray.

“I think your girlfriend might have something to say if I left you alone at the hospital!”

“Don’t tell me you’re scared of Bernie!”

Fleur raised one eyebrow. “Not scared, just have a healthy regard for my own mortality.”

By the time Serena had received her x-ray, and the doctor had confirmed it was indeed a break, it was already lunchtime. Fleur grabbed a couple of sandwiches from the hospital canteen and they sat eating them in the waiting room of the fracture clinic. A nurse had given her some paracetamol and the pain in her arm was beginning to recede. She hoped it wouldn’t be long before she had her arm put in a cast and was sent home. She really needed to curl up in her own bed and just ignore the world for a little while.

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