

The Man at My Farm Stand

A 10-Part Strawberry Springs Story

Part 1 — Specialty Orders

My life in Strawberry Springs was predictable: feed the chickens at sunrise, weed the garden before the heat, and set fresh sourdough on my farm stand by eight.

Then Caleb Thorne started showing up.

He was tall, unfairly handsome, and far too polished for our dusty little town.

Every morning, he bought bread, eggs, and something he didn't need—jam, herbs, even zucchini.

After two weeks, I asked if he was feeding an army.

He smiled. "Just finding reasons to come back."

Then he leaned closer.

"Could I get your number? For specialty orders."

Before I answered, my neighbor grabbed my arm.

"Nora... that man didn't move here by accident."

Part 2 — The Mysterious Millionaire

I gave Caleb my number anyway.

Ten minutes later, my phone buzzed.

"Specialty order: rosemary sourdough, six eggs, and dinner with the woman who made them?"

I replied, "Dinner isn't on the menu."

His answer came instantly.

"Then I'll keep ordering until it is."

I should have rolled my eyes. Instead, I smiled like an idiot.

That night, curiosity won.

I searched his name and found dozens of articles.

Caleb wasn't just a remote worker. He had founded a software company worth millions—then vanished after a major deal collapsed.

Before I could open the newest article, my power died.

Headlights swept across the kitchen.

Caleb stumbled onto my porch, blood running down his hand.

Part 3 — Parcel 14B

Caleb claimed the blood came from a broken window at the old Hawthorne house he'd bought.

But while I wrapped his hand, he kept watching the road.

"Did someone follow you?" I asked.

"No."

He answered too quickly.

Then a black SUV rolled slowly past my farm and disappeared.

Caleb stood.

"Lock your doors tonight."

As he reached for his jacket, a folder slipped onto my floor.

Across the front were the words:

STRAWBERRY SPRINGS LAND ASSEMBLY.

Inside were maps, purchase offers, and one parcel circled in red.

Parcel 14B.

My farm.

Caleb snatched the folder away.

“Nora, I can explain.”

Then my phone rang.

It was the bank.

Part 4 — He Bought My Farm

The bank manager said the remaining note on Bellflower Farm had been purchased that morning.

I asked by whom, even though I already knew.

“Caleb Thorne,” he said.

I hung up and stared at Caleb.

“You bought my debt?”

He swore he was protecting me.

A development company had been quietly buying farms around Strawberry Springs, and mine was the final piece they needed.

“So you came here to save me?” I asked. “You didn’t even know me.”

Caleb’s face changed.

“That’s not true.”

The next morning, I drove to his house demanding answers.

He opened the door holding an old photograph.

In it, Caleb stood beside my father—ten years before we supposedly met.

Part 5 — My Father’s Secret

My father had been dead for six years.

Yet there he was in Caleb's photograph, one arm around a much younger man.

Caleb said they met when his car broke down outside town.

Dad fed him, gave him a place to sleep, and later loaned him the first \$5,000 for his company.

"He believed in me before anyone did," Caleb said.

After selling the business, Caleb wanted a quieter life—but learned the deal included my farm.

That was why he came back.

Then he handed me a sealed envelope with my name in Dad's handwriting.

"He said to give you this if anyone tried to buy Bellflower."

I opened it.

The first line read:

Nora, the farm is hiding something.

Part 6 — The Fire

Dad's letter said Bellflower Farm sat above the oldest spring in the county—the water source that gave Strawberry Springs its name.

Whoever controlled it could control every future home, farm, and business in town.

Dad had placed the water rights inside a trust, but the final page naming its trustees was missing.

Caleb swore the envelope had been sealed.

Then my chickens began screaming.

We ran outside and found my farm stand engulfed in flames.

Caleb grabbed a hose while I moved the animals.

When the fire was finally out, everything I'd built was blackened.

Under a stone sat a note untouched by the flames:

Sell Parcel 14B by Friday...

Or next time, we burn the barn.

Part 7 — The Man in My Barn

The sheriff called the fire an electrical accident, even after I showed him the threat.

Caleb found tire tracks behind the orchard and a gas can near my compost bins.

“You knew they might come after me,” I said.

He admitted the developers played dirty, but thought buying my loan would stop them.

Furious, I told him to leave.

That night, I slept with the porch light on and a shovel beside my bed.

Just after midnight, the barn door creaked open.

I saw a man slip inside wearing Caleb’s dark jacket.

I followed him between the stalls and raised the shovel.

Then the stranger turned around—

And I realized it wasn’t Caleb.

Part 8 — Celeste

The stranger lunged for the feed room, but Caleb appeared behind him and tackled him into a stack of hay.

Together, we pinned him down.

It was Owen Pike, a town councilman who had spent months claiming a new resort would save Strawberry Springs.

In his pocket was a lighter and a list of farms marked SOLD.

Owen swore he hadn’t started the fire.

“I only came for the trust papers,” he said. “Celeste said she’d ruin me if I didn’t.”

Caleb went pale.

Celeste Voss was his former business partner—the woman behind the development company.

Before we could call the sheriff, headlights flooded the barn.

A black SUV stopped outside.

And a woman stepped out, clapping slowly.

Part 9 — Caleb's Betrayal

Celeste walked into my barn like she owned it.

She offered me one million dollars for Bellflower Farm and promised the threats would stop once I signed.

I refused.

She smiled at Caleb.

“Did you tell her you signed the original acquisition deal?”

His silence felt like betrayal.

Caleb admitted he had approved it months earlier, before realizing Parcel 14B belonged to my father's daughter.

He came to Strawberry Springs to undo his mistake—but Celeste had already filed the contracts.

“At midnight, the water rights transfer,” she said.

Then she held up the missing page from Dad's letter.

“According to this trust, Nora isn't the only person who can stop it.”

Someone stepped out of the SUV behind her.

Part 10 — One Final Order

The person behind Celeste was my mother, who had disappeared from Strawberry Springs when I was twelve.

She looked older, frightened, and furious.

"I'm the co-trustee," she said.

Celeste had found her and tried to force her signature—but Mom had recorded every threat and bribe.

By sunrise, state investigators were at Bellflower Farm.

The deal collapsed, Owen confessed, and Celeste was arrested.

Weeks later, Caleb helped rebuild my farm stand.

On opening morning, he set rosemary sourdough, six eggs, and jam on the counter.

"One final specialty order," he said. "Dinner with you."

I kissed him before he finished.

Then Mom handed me another letter from Dad.

On the front, he had written:

Tell Nora the truth about Caleb.