

The mall's lights buzzed faintly overhead as Liam gathered his shopping bags, carefully placing them together on the polished floor. The sheer number—skirts, heels, makeup—made the bags feel heavier than they should have, a quiet weight of unease settling in his chest. Just looking at them was overwhelming, each item a silent reminder of how far things had gone.



"You can head home now,"
Britney said, checking her phone with
a distracted air.
"Unless you want to stay and pick out
a few more heels?"

Liam shot her a look.
"I'm leaving."



Britney smirked,
"Good girl."

He clenched his jaw but said nothing. Gathering all his shopping bags, he turned on his heel—carefully, thanks to the damn shoes Britney had insisted he wear for “practice,” still as unstable as ever—and walked away.

She watched him vanish into the escalator stream with a cool, contemplative gaze. Only when he disappeared from view did she pull out her phone.

The second Liam was out of sight, Britney's fingers flew across her phone screen. *Chloe*. The line rang twice before picking up.





"Actually..."
Britney's tone shifted to something conspiratorial, playful.
"Can you meet me at the mall?
There's something I want to talk to you about."

"Hey, Britney!" Chloe said, adjusting her wireless Bluetooth earpiece. Her voice was warm, slightly breathless. "I'm on my way home. What's up?"

Chloe stepped into the mall with a confident stride. She spotted Britney near a bench outside the feminine apparel boutique.

Ten minutes later.



Britney stood,
"Yeah, I'm good.
Actually... I'm really
proud of your girl."

"You okay?"
Chloe asked, concerned,
noticing the subtle tension
in Britney's jawline.

Chloe blinked.
"Lila?"

"Mhmm,"

Britney said with a fond smile that barely masked the gleam of manipulation behind her eyes. "She's sharper than I thought. I had her help out with a few pushy customers last days, and guess what? She handled it like a pro. Smooth pitch, gentle tone, and upsold like a seasoned associate."

"Chloe, I have to tell you—Lila is *really* good at sales."

Chloe chuckled, a little surprised.
"Seriously? That doesn't sound like the Lila I know."





"Better than good," Britney said, leaning in slightly. "Claudia—my boss—already thinks she's a natural. With the right push, she could be making *serious* money."

Chloe blinked.
"She is?"

Chloe's expression flickered—surprise, then something softer. *Pride. He's actually good at this.* The thought was strange. Liam had always been the type to coast, to avoid responsibility until it was unavoidable. But now, hearing that he was excelling—even in this absurd, forced role—stirred something in her. "That's... great," Chloe said, smiling faintly.

Britney nodded, her eyes
gleaming.

"But there's a problem."

"She's a *tomboy*, Chloe." Britney
sighed dramatically. "And in sales,
image is everything. So today, I
took her shopping."

"What kind of
problem?"





"Skirts.
Blouses. *Makeup.*
"

Chloe's brow furrowed.
"Shopping for what?"

Chloe's mouth fell open.
"You made her buy *what?*"



Britney laughed,
"Oh, don't look so shocked! If she's going to succeed, she needs to *look* the part. And trust me, she's going to make *bank*."

Chloe's mind raced. *Liam. In skirts. At work.* The image should have been absurd. But instead, she felt—*If it gets us the money faster...* The sooner they had enough, the sooner this charade could end.



Britney's smile widened.
"Good. Because
there's *one* more thing."

"I... guess that makes
sense," Chloe
admitted slowly.

"What now?"



"Lila's chest is *painfully* flat," Britney said bluntly. "And those cheap inserts she's using? Not fooling anyone."

Chloe's face heated.
"Oh my God—"

"Relax," Britney interjected smoothly. "I know a place that sells realistic breast forms. Discounted, too. You should definitely get her a pair."



Chloe opened her mouth, closed it. This was *Liam* they were talking about. Her *boyfriend*. The idea of him wearing—*No. Don't think about it.* But Britney was watching her, waiting.
"...Yeah. Sure," Chloe muttered.



Britney beamed.
"Perfect."

As they walked out of the mall, Chloe's thoughts churned. *This is temporary. Just until we have enough money.* But the way Britney spoke—like this was just the beginning—sent a prickle of unease down her spine. And worse, she couldn't shake the image now stuck in her head: Liam. In a skirt. Heels. Makeup. How far is this going to go?