

Becomes 21

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Dad's eyes light up with the question. "Well, your mom's really turned the garden into something special, and her cooking, as you know, is better than ever," he says with a proud glance at Mom.

"And believe it or not," Mom chimes in with a chuckle, "your dad's been joining me in aerobics classes every week. Keeps us young."

Dad nods, adding, "And I've picked up a few consultant gigs here and there, just to keep busy. But we're taking it easy, enjoying retirement."

"How about you, dear? What have you been doing?" Mom asks.

"Oh,

you know... I just moved back to my old apartment," I manage to say, trying to sound nonchalant.

Mom and Dad share a knowing look, a silent conversation passing. between them. Dad sighs deeply. "Serena, did something happen. between you and your husband?" he asks, his voice laced with worry.

"Actually, Bill's not my husband anymore," I admit. "We just got divorced,

Mom and Dad freeze. "Oh, sweetie. I'm so sorry to hear that," Mom says. [©Ww.Novel\(w\)©rM.com](#)

I muster a small smile. "It's okay. I think this is for the best."

Dad's utensils clatter onto his plate. "Okay, what did that son of a bitch. do? You weren't able to call us for three years, and this is the news you bring us?" [www.NôVêlWorm.CôM](#)

"Dad, calm down," I urge, reaching across the table to gently touch his hand. "I'm okay now, really. There's no need for anger."

"But you had us worried, honey," he confesses.

"I know, and I'm really sorry," I say. "But I promise, he never hurt me or anything... We just came to see how different we are from each other."

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My dad has always been the protective type, with a strict sense of justice. Knowing him, he'd be furious if he thought Bill had abandoned us, especially now. But revealing my pregnancy might lead him to that conclusion.

"Mom, Dad," I start, eager to steer the conversation to safer waters. "I could really use your help with something."

Mom looks intrigued. "What is it, dear?"

"You know how I used to spend hours making jewelry as a kid? I've been thinking... why not turn that passion into something real? I want to start my own handcrafted jewelry business."

Mom's eyes light up at the idea. "That's wonderful!" she exclaims. "I remember buying you all those beads, and how you'd sit for hours making those beautiful friendship bracelets for your school friends."

Dad, with a cautious tone, asks, "So, how could we help you with that?"

"I was hoping you might lend me some money to get started," I say, a bit unsure. "I didn't ask for any financial settlement from the divorce, so I'm short on funds."

"I don't know, honey. There's too much competition in the jewelry business," Dad says. "Don't get your hopes too high."

My dad's great at business, but he hit a rough patch when his partner took off with the company's money, leaving Dad to deal with the mess. He could've been very successful if that hadn't happened. I really value. his advice on business matters.

"I'm ready for any questions you might have," I tell Dad, handing him a folder. "This has all my research and how I plan to make the business profitable."

"This is quite thorough, Serena," he finally says. "You've really thought

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this through. Still, I'm not so sure this might work. I just don't want to see you get disappointed."

"Please, Dad. Give me a chance to prove I can do this. I won't let you down," I plead.

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Dad sets the folder aside. "Fine," he concedes, his voice softened by affection. "Your mom and I will help you with your business. I'd do anything for you, honey."

"Thanks, Mom and Dad," I express. "I knew I could count on you."

Dad's expression hardens. "But I wouldn't forgive your ex-husband," he states firmly. "I swear, if I ever see that motherfucker again, he's gonna get it." [wWw.novElWOrM.©0©](#)

I hasten to soothe him, "Relax, Dad. You're never gonna see him again."

Ironically, just as those words leave my lips, my phone breaks the brief calm with its insistent ring. I glance at the screen, and a jolt of surprise runs through me. It's Bill calling.