

Hiding the Enemy

As she opened her eyes to the warm morning light invading the bedroom, Linda scoffed at the bright red digital display on her alarm clock. Sighing and dreary, she was glad the restless night was finally over.

She raised herself slowly to sit at the edge of their large bed, the misery of the prior day's confrontation with her son, which had turned violent, invading her thoughts. As she brushed back the tears, she assured herself that she really did not care if anybody loved her. *This was what Bill had driven her to all these years. She could not have her own son screaming at her! When she was growing up, if she or her brothers got out of line like that, they caught holy hell from their parents! Were her actions that atrociously different?*

She gathered herself as she slipped into her long gray Minnie Mouse nightshirt and then gradually opened the bedroom door, yearning to prevent squeaky hinges from announcing her departure from the sheltering bedroom. Bill was not on the couch, she observed; he must be downstairs or at their kitchen table, sulking in his own discontent, as usual.

She said nothing to her husband as she slipped past him, dragging her cold feet across the worn, scratched linoleum floor. He watched her with impatient apprehension as she claimed a glass cup from the kitchen cabinets. Turning then to the refrigerator, she filled her cup with ice and chilled berry juice.

Bill's coffee now ready, he turned his attention to the hot brew, pulling the pot of black caffeinated liquid over to his side of the table to pour into an old mug decorated with nineteenth-century London market scenes. As the cup filled, he peered up at his harried wife with a cold steely gaze.

He never saw Linda use force against the children before, not as she had with Billy. This could not continue in his home. He had protected these children all these years, making sure that extreme violent aggression was something seen only in video games and television, observed from afar and never experienced first hand. He needed to confront his wife, now, while panic was at bay and he could still be rational.

"You were a bit rough last night, weren't you?" Bill asked her calmly, his tone deep and serious, his concentration unyielding.

Linda turned towards her emphatic husband, silently capturing his piercing gaze for a brief moment. She turned away, closing the refrigerator and moving out of the kitchen, having read what she wanted to.

It appeared that Bill was not looking for a fight, so she would not address it. Instead, she hobbled back to the bedroom to seek shelter, spending the Sunday morning sorting aimlessly through boxes of her past financial and medical records in an attempt to salvage some semblance of normalcy from this disastrous weekend.

Having heard his mother shuffle past his room again, Billy stirred. As he listened for her to settle into her bed, he lifted himself from his rest, departing the room that used to provide him peaceful shelter from his parent's haggling with each other—which, last night, had become the scene of a punishing physical encounter for him—and escaped to the other end of the house.

He approached his pondering father, who by now had started into his steaming morning beverage. "How are we feeling today?" Bill asked, lowering the coffee cup, careful not to spill on the hardened golden stain finish of the table.

“I’m okay,” Billy confirmed, an angry scowl briefly moving through his expression and then receding. “I finally got to sleep last night; I was so mad at what Mom did ...”