

Reconciliation

The January early morning air was crisp, Bill noted. He was well packaged in the new suit purchased for his appearance in divorce court. Climbing cautiously into his frozen truck, he slammed the vehicle's icy door shut with a pounding thud.

The truck's engine churned as Bill forced it to life, shrugging away the overbearing remorse slowly overtaking him. He desperately needed to get to the county courthouse. Accused of such cruelty towards his spouse, Bill needed to face it directly and do away with this damning order of protection. Once clear of that, he could pursue the divorce with relentless vengeance.

The frigid roads were empty and clear. This was a good sign. Would Linda even make it to court? He hoped she would not show. The kids had to get to school first. Only then could she come argue her case.

The long snaking line of harried court attendees at the security station streamed through endless lanes, just as the lawyer had predicted. This delay did not alarm Bill, having made his arrival a good forty-five minutes before he was due. Everything was going just as he had planned.

"Step down, please." At last, he made it to the front of the security line. *He needed to hold himself together*, he thought as he passed through the metal detector, aware that his oversized trousers loosened when he removed his belt.

Countless suited warriors grudgingly approached their battles on the winding series of escalators. On their way to bargain in last efforts at self-preservation, the nameless souls gathered to punish for the final time those once sharing passionate nights with them. Here were the gladiators of broken matrimony, staving off the hungry lions of lost marital assets, material, emotional, and physical.

Bill finally tracked down the courtroom and located his case number. Too tired to be afraid, he approached the showdown, possibly about to lose his own wretched soul.

"So did we behave for New Year's?"

His lawyer at last arrived in his usual harried state, fifteen minutes after the court call. It was not critical though, for the judge's backlog of cases had moved them well past the ten o'clock mark.

For Bill, the definition of trouble was relative. "I don't see my wife around yet. Maybe they did not get the notice?"

"No," the attorney answered. "Our petitions went directly to her attorney."

"So when do I need to testify?" Bill demanded, again eager for the moment.

His lawyer just shook his head. "I don't think that will even be necessary. I'm going to call a counsel with the judge, and when I'm done, I doubt you'll need to say anything."

Bill nodded slowly, confident that this counselor would absolve him of the claims made against him. Still, a huge part of him wanted to address it himself, as he was frantically struggling to retain his diminishing sense of self-respect and overcome the awkward feeling of cowardice that comes from hiding behind an attorney.

He watched nervously in the back of the courtroom as Linda arrived, her new dark suit matching his attire. She appeared to be just as exhausted as he was. She took a seat in a different bench row, avoiding his presence completely.

He had taken away her court appearance originally scheduled later that week, bringing it full

circle earlier than she wanted it to be. Despite the abruptness of this direct response, she could not allow him to create any doubt in her purpose, a talent he exercised with such unhampered dexterity.

The case finally came up before the judge. Bill's lawyer took the upper hand, requesting counsel immediately. Once again, the errant couple would have to wait.

Bill's lawyer quickly came forward with claims of malicious prosecution, arguing that Linda was a chronic alcoholic, who mentally abused her husband and children. Linda's attorney insisted that Bill was a rampant danger, using the documented physical incident and the choice of unemployment as his evidence.