

Return of the Serpent

Bill drove anxiously to his attorney's office, having remained with him throughout, since all the history of the divorce lay with him.

His lawyer's paralegal awaited him there. She hoped to never fall into such dismal circumstances as those described in the legal documents her boss asked her to draw up that day. These papers were more damaging than any of the hundreds of other court petitions she had seen through the years. As his paralegal assistant, however, she could not express any opinions about it, for her training dictated strict adherence to the words produced on the pages and not to the implications that they made.

Her long, bony fingers polished an industrious shine into the diamond-studded watch adorning her pallid left wrist. Bill entered the large conference room, guided by the erudite secretary from the front of the office. Seating himself at a round, dark cherry table with the paralegal, he issued her a good afternoon in his solemn tone, and she smiled to begin her meticulous presentation.

"Would you like some water?" she offered, and he just shook his head gently to reject the polite proposal.

She saw that he just wanted to get to the signing of the petitions and move on with his day. "Okay then," she continued, placing the first of the documents in front of him, "I'll need your John Hancock on these."

The words *Motion to return case to active status* stood scrawled in bold letters across the document, just below the legal header referencing the *Marriage of plaintiff Linda and defendant Bill*. The numbered items through the remainder of the document described *the previous filings, by both parties, for a petition for dissolution of marriage; the setting of the case to inactive status; their reconciliation failure; and the defendant's desire to proceed again with the cause*.

Bill eagerly read the motion, signing the last page without hesitation and handing it back to the helpful paralegal. She took it into a separate paper stack without expression, obliging him with the next document.

The heading read *Motion to refer parties to evaluation*. This document described how *Bill and Linda attended mediation for matters of custody, visitation, and related issues regarding their children, and it had failed. Now the defendant was moving the court to entry of an Order to Evaluation on the issues of custody, visitation, and removal, and whatever other relief the court saw fit*.

"Interesting the way this lawyer works," Bill commented to the paralegal.

She looked up at him with a curious glance. "What do you mean?" she asked.

When they first placed the divorce on hold, Bill's attorney told them to go to mediation and use the visit as counseling. The lawyers in mediation laughed them out of the office. Nobody knew why they were there in the first place, since Bill and Linda were in reconciliation. Now it was becoming clear to Bill that this was a clever legal tactic on his lawyer's part to claim the failure of their mediation.

"No reason," Bill declined to explain his curious comment. "Just a lot of things will happen because of this petition."

The lawyer said that they had to force Linda into psychiatric evaluation. Bill suspected that they would look into him also.

This was a bit harder to swallow, but Bill knew that it was the only way to move his volatile situation towards any hope of stability.

What he had done for Jamie was the best for her, Bill reassured his self as he signed the Petition for Evaluation, *sharing with Jamie the dilemma and acting without interest in the end, persuading her to make the choice of backing away*. Although relieved that she had no part in this wretched journey unfolding before him, it hurt like hell that he had to push her away.

Bill welcomed the next document, titled *Motion to set hearing on defendant's petition for contribution to family expenses*. Finally, they could address the issue of the money Linda had disallowed the family, possibly setting her up to perjure herself in front of the court.

The paralegal almost smiled as she received this petition back from Bill.

The next document was much more serious: *Petition for temporary restraining order, preliminary injunction, and other relief*. The words screamed at Bill. Ah, but this was the one that could restore his home.

The document listed *Billy and Lou as the two minor children in their home, of whom Linda consumed alcohol to excess on a regular and frequent basis in their presence*. It also stated that *she had been intoxicated in their presence on the same regular and frequent basis*. The petition went on to describe *Linda's mistreatment, verbal and physical, of the family when intoxicated, how Bill had repeatedly requested she not consume alcohol, and how she refused to cease her excessive consumption of alcohol*.

The case was then made for a *temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction prohibiting Linda from consuming alcohol and/or being intoxicated in the presence of the children*. It also *disallowed her possession or keeping any alcoholic beverage in the marital residence and/or in the children's presence*.

Reference to the next document for Bill to sign, Affidavit, appeared, the contents of which stated that he was to testify to these conditions.

Bill hesitated. He needed to testify to physical mistreatment.

He turned to the paralegal, who was anxiously awaiting his response. "I'm not sure I can prove physical abuse," Bill lamented. "I think these last two may have to be redone."

"I was just told to have you sign these!" she attested, suddenly defensive. "It's up to you, really."

"I'm not saying it's your problem," Bill assured her. "Have the lawyer call me on these last two," he instructed, coyly handing back the unsigned restraining order and affidavit.

"I'll have him do that," the paralegal concluded, showing little concern, collecting the papers and rising promptly from her leather-cushioned seat.

"You have a good day," she wished Bill as he gathered himself for departure.