

"She adds that you no longer talk with her beyond discussing the things the two of you must, like paying your monthly bills. 'Mr. Salle,' I quote, 'does not talk about his doings in the day nor his acquaintance, addresses me tersely, has little interest in me, and refuses to draw out topics I raise in conversation.' She claims this makes her feel you limit her. She thinks currently she cannot be 'a fully realized person' because of it."

Nathan furrowed his brow. How could Jan be offended for his keeping from her after all she had said and done to him?, he thought. How could she go claim she cared when she had disliked him so long?

"She has been held back careerwise, she believes," the judge continued, "because of the upset the marriage has caused her. When she sought your emotional backing for her job endeavors this past year, she states you did not provide it. Mrs. Salle found your responses to her discouraging. She believes you owed her the courtesy of listening..."

The problem seemed more like I had listened too much, Nathan thought.

"Mr. Salle in his statement," the judge pursued, "cites the major problem with the marriage lies with you, Mrs. Salle, namely your character. He finds you have become pushier and more demanding than he can tolerate."

Jan turned scowling to Nathan. "I am hardly pushy with you."

Since the judge had begun proceedings, Nathan had held quiet through all the unflattering remarks in his wife's statement. To hear Jan deny his words as soon as they were read upset him worse than he expected. He had asserted what was true in his statement; even if she disliked hearing it, he felt he had the right to say it. After all that

had happened he thought it *more* than right. He answered her therefore, "But you are." He said it that quietly the judge did not hear, in fact, had read on in the casework. Jan made no reply, but Nathan knew she had heard.

"Due to the long standing problems faced in your marriage," the judge said, "both of you have agreed to divorce. In discussions prior to today, the two of you outlined how you would divide the assets shared between you, which you have rather evenly as I think. Your agreement stipulates further that, as there were no children in the marriage and each of you is employed self-sufficiently, Mr. Salle will not pay any alimony. The court has reviewed your case and consents to the divorce and its terms without reservation. You are both dismissed." The judge handed the case paperwork to the clerk who approached the bench.

Jan turned to Nathan. "So that's that. Well then, we haven't much left to say."

"No it doesn't seem."

"Right then...Goodbye."

Nathan made no reply. Lifting her head, Jan walked up the aisle from the courtroom. Nathan lingered, studying the floor by his feet, before he went slowly up the aisle too.

He left the courthouse and took the subway downtown. At Union Square he got out and went to the park there. Jan had brought him here many times as it was one of her favorite places to go, so he knew it well. By one of the park's many statues he sat on a bench. Before him was the brown brick of a path and across it an oak with wide spread arms, black in the bark. A young couple walked a distance away, their toddler inspecting

the grass. Two solitary adults bundled for the cold appeared close together chatting, farther down. He opened the large side pocket of his blazer and pulled out several odd scraps that had collected there: a used, crumpled napkin, a coat button, some lint. Amid the junk was a small paper card. It was a reminder to fetch pictures at the Photo Hut two blocks from his old apartment.

Nathan remembered that months ago Jan had him submit the pictures online to be developed, but that he never had gotten them. The photos were from the vacation they had taken not long before they descended to bickering. He recalled that in one of the shots he had photographed Jan by a canyon side, a broken red mesa in the background. They had gone to the canyon with a group of other travelers and several of them had been taking photos nearby. Nathan had squatted to take his of Jan. He was not very good with a camera, especially that new one, and had taken a long time to get the perspective right. He still was trying when Jan had called from the ridge side, "Are you stuck squatting? Why don't you take my picture?!" A number of their fellow travelers had heard this and turned. Nathan, red in the face, had snapped the photo no longer thinking if it would turn out well or not. How embarrassed he had been, he realized now.

Really she had been angry with me for no serious reason the whole trip, he decided as he studied the reminder card. He told himself, frowning, that since he was not obliged to her anymore, she could get the pictures herself if she even remembered them. He dropped the reminder and the junk from his pocket into the trash beside him.