

47. The Stalker

I began this third series of stories with the case of the snakes because it demonstrated just how far Colmes would go in order to bring a case to its conclusion. He planned in quite some detail to construct a situation in which the Provost, bless her frozen heart, had no way out. The death of Colmes would have been easily pinned on her. And of course, the publicity of the snake worship would have destroyed her career. Police use this technique often, especially to catch sex offenders. It is part of the tricks of the law enforcement trade: install a red light camera at the bottom of a hill, catch speedsters by hiding in wait in a police car just around the corner and dart out to catch the once innocent driver. Install speed cameras in so many places, especially in areas that appear to be deserted, set up a ‘sting’ operation in which you advertise stolen goods for sale, or a very popular sting, engage anyone on social media pretending you are an underage girl, then set up a meeting for sex. One could go on.

One of the reasons stings are so popular with law enforcement is that (according to what I learned in my criminal law class) they have a very high conviction rate, especially if you have video to back up the evidence. Mind you, lawyers, especially defense lawyers, call these operations “entrapment.” Their argument would seem to be insurmountable: police entrap an otherwise innocent suspect. By doing so, they create crime (they are supposed to prevent it, right?), because the innocent perpetrator would not have committed the crime had they not been offered the opportunity (or even enticement) to do so. Generally, so my law professor taught me, juries don’t buy the entrapment defense, especially if there is video evidence.

There was no jury present in the case of Doctor Dolittle. But there was the threat of one. Colmes had risked his life by getting himself bitten by a rattle snake during a snake-worshiping charismatic meeting overseen by the University’s Provost, arguably the person with the most authority and power in the whole university—in many cases and instances more than the president himself, whose policy was to delegate authority anyway so as to shield himself from responsibility in case of a scandal or something worse. That, no doubt, was why (and still is so I am told by the ex-convicts who now attend the university School of Justice as part of the out-reach program of the state of New York) trustees were so popular in prisons as an enforcement arm of the prison administration.

But it is also why an individual like Colmes existed on campus. He was an enforcer of sorts, though he would be most offended if I said this to him. He insisted that he simply responded to cries for help. He worked for no one. He was his own man. He was driven by a very strong sense — I would go so far as to say moral sense— of justice. If, when a case came before him, he perceived an injustice, or a situation that he thought would inevitably lead to injustice, he would take the case, and would not rest until it had been settled to his own satisfaction—not that of the justice system, I might add, to which he rarely forwarded a case.

I entreat my good readers to keep this fact about Colmes in mind. He and I had many heated debates over this matter. What (not who) gave him the right to decide on matters of what were fair and just and what were not? And so on. You get the point.

But now on to the present case that occurred well before the snake case. One in which there was no entrapment in the classic sense. There was no need of it, since we already knew who the alleged offender was.

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I should begin by saying that the stalker was not the first and no doubt would not be the last stalker on campus. For it is a wonderful place for stalkers, so many people banded together in close proximity to each

other, many young and beautiful people of all genders. And of the young, the vast majority of them wondering who they are and what will become of them? They are, thusly, ripe for the picking by someone who is, one might say more “mature” than they. (Though, the stereotype of stalkers is that they are immature, a judgment usually made after the stalker has been caught). But such predators, in our experience, are usually professors or those who are older and have established themselves or have given up on that life endeavor and simply live for the present. Indeed, the latter have unquenchable desires to consume as much of the present as they can. Given that outlook, they are, to some, if not many, the object of envy, for their crazed impossible quests for conquests return many more failures than successes, as Kierkegaard observed many years ago. He thought (or maybe not) that the small returns were worth the many failures.

But Colmes reckoned that our stalker fitted none of these categories. “Our stalker has tried,” says Colmes, “these peripatetic endeavors. But unlike those he envies, he mortally fears failure. It takes only one, and that is enough to force him to climb back into his shell, a cloaked figure who sneaks around as though he were the hunchback of Notre Dame.”

Perhaps I overstated it when I said we already knew who the stalker was. We did not, in fact. That is, we had no name, or any indication of who exactly they were. What I meant before was that we knew the kind of person that the stalker was. You may have noticed and it will become evident as I recount our most sustainable cases, that I do fall into a bit of exaggeration from time to time. It is all the result of my enthusiasm, which, as Colmes enjoys pointing out, spoils my otherwise ability to almost match him in rational thinking. It’s getting it down on paper where I fall short. You might think that this must be a severe disappointment to Colmes who hired me to “keep intellectual house”, as he called it, with the clear intention of utilizing my writing skills to make up for his dyslexia. However, as you have already gained an inkling, my writing is perfectly matched for recounting in an interesting manner the sustainable cases of Professor Colmes. It’s just that it is not a proper style for writing a dissertation, which must be flat and boring, certainly with no climaxes, though, there are certain techniques, especially in the realm of statistics where exaggeration can be indulged in without penalty.

But now to our case.

Rose the elder had just brought us our afternoon tea of scones with jam and cream and a pot of hot tea, made with fast boiling water, left to sit and draw. And, of course, delivered on an ornate tray, teapot in a cozy, a tiny jug of milk (we both liked our tea strong with a small dash of milk). It was quite early in my new job as Colmes’s assistant. I therefore found the English practice of afternoon teas and morning coffees, the whole ritual an amusing, silly after-birth of British Imperialism. But I kept all that to myself. After all, my relatives back in Australia indulged in this tea fetish, though without the fancy rituals.

This case explains a lot about Colmes, and maybe a little about me. You may have wondered how Colmes came to have a housekeeper, in typical Victorian style, I might add. Perhaps I exaggerate a little (I have warned you!). But Rose, when she was an “older” graduate student (in her fifties, one never really knew) was well known around the university for her forthright manner, her often biting and raw criticisms of anything she observed around the campus and beyond. These observations and views she poured forth into the Student Newspaper, *The Flotsam*. And she never held back in class as I can attest, when she took the constitutional law class that I also took that same year (what year does not matter). In that class, the professor (that’s right, Ted the Red, a man with an eye for any woman who would present herself) picked on individual students in the classic tradition. But Rose never waited to be picked upon, and, even though she did her knitting constantly, she thought nothing of butting into an interrogation between the professor and an intimidated student. Every time Rose intervened a titter flowed across the class like a swarm of locusts. As if that were not enough, though, she was always the student who approached the podium at the end of the class and peppered the professor with questions. Some students even remained after class to

watch her in action. Knitting in hand, doing pearl stitch as she went, she would in her gruff Russian accented voice, point out to the professor (a most liberal one of course) that he had no idea what free speech was all about. The professor, a tall, heavily sun-tanned figure, an ex-basketball player one guessed, and a deep rolling voice would step up to her, looking down from his great height, she small and dumpy not looking up though. She had, after all, to watch her knitting. Instead, she prattled on as she knitted. The professor, nicknamed Ted the Red (as I have noted elsewhere, thought to be a communist because he led student protests downtown in front of the capitol building).

Colmes knew a lot of what went on in that professor's class because many students came to him to complain about the professor's bullying style. This, even when they knew that there was little Colmes could do, and besides he had no wish to cross this law professor. Why did the professor act in this way? The simple answer was that he was a bully. The complicated answer was that he considered it his responsibility to scare the hell out of students because that was what practicing the law was all about. Besides understanding the law required a lot of study and a lot of reading, something that many of the students in this (then) Criminal Justice Program were not used to doing. So, according to the professor, it was his duty to make them read the material. He was not there to entertain them. The students sniggered behind his back though. They knew of his failed and successful attempts with particular students of his fancy. And his quarries were not spurned by other students. Not at all. They were looked on in awe, especially by the male students who no doubt felt inferior because they were unable to conquer (a carefully chosen word) women the way the professor did.

It would come as no surprise then, that he and Colmes got along quite well. After all, Colmes was, as I have intimated, a bit of a bully himself. As I have noted, his interrogations were carefully targeted. So when students came to him to complain, he politely explained to them that he was not in a position to intervene in a professor's teaching style. It all had to do with the First Amendment in respect to free speech, did it not? And besides, he was not a school counsellor, he was the University Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies.

I was tapping away on my little Olivetti portable typewriter, trying once more to write an outline for my dissertation. The title was going to be "Time and Place as a Life Course." And I was about to rip the sheet out of the typewriter in frustration, when I heard voices next door and Colmes banging on the wall between our offices to tell me my services were needed.

"Hobson!" came the shrill voice.

I grabbed my legal pad and pen and quickly ran in. Unfortunately, my wicker chair that was always drawn up to the front corner of Colmes's desk was already occupied by none other than Rose and her knitting. I stood uncomfortably next to her, as there was no other chair in the office except the overstuffed leather chair in the far corner, just behind the door through which I had just entered.

"Now what can I do for you, Rose?" Colmes asked warmly.

"I am being stalked," she growled in her gruff monotone, male-sounding Russian accent.

"Stalked?" asked Colmes trying to hide his surprise. "Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't come to you if I wasn't," snapped Rose.

"Tell me more," responded Colmes, almost smiling.

"Here. Look at this." Rose reached into her knitting bag and pulled out a handful of pieces of paper of varying sizes, that had clearly been screwed up and thrown away, then retrieved out of the waste bin.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Colmes with some exaggeration, "you have quite an admirer!"

Rose did not take kindly to this flippant remark, but continued in her monotone. "Also, I thought tfirst. But they kept coming. So I think something wrong."

"And rightly so," said Colmes trying to make up for his flippancy.

He took the papers and looked them over as he flattened each one then placed them carefully on his desk to examine them all together. "This is the lot, or are there more?" asked Colmes. "And when was the first one and where were they deposited?"

"In my student mailbox, ever since the beginning classes, which four weeks ago," said Rose, knitting away.

"Hmm. And on any particular days?" asked Colmes, leaning forward and scanning the notes."

"I think yes. Monday, Wednesday Friday. That is when I have my constitutional law class. I always check my mail box after class."

"Then we may deduce, perhaps that it is someone who is taking the same class?"

"Or maybe the stalker follows Rose to class but does not go in?" I offered.

"Do other students of that class also check their mailboxes at that time?" asked Colmes.

"Some do," said Rose, looking up from her knitting.

"I see that all the notes are handwritten. Do you recognize the writing by any chance?" continued Colmes.

"No," answered Rose. "And he's following me too. I feel like he's everywhere I go."

"Even now?" asked Colmes.

"Well, I don't know about now," said Rose, in the middle of a stitch.

I stepped up to look at the notes. Colmes sat back out of the way while I leaned forward. One thing immediately struck me, and Colmes noticed.

"What is it Hobson?"

"It's written by a left handed person with their right hand to try to cover it up. See how wobbly it is and the excessive slope?" I observed with satisfaction.

"Yes, I believe you are right, Hobson. Well done!"

"That not get us very far, does it?" put in Rose, looking up from her knitting.

"And we can hardly go over all the students in that class and ask who is left-handed. A violation of privacy or whatever." I observed sagely.

"And what else have you observed Hobson?" asked Colmes.

"The bits of paper. They are from a legal pad, I think." I said.

"Don't know how you figure that. Besides lots of people use them in the university. Pretty impossible to track it down, I'd say," observed Colmes.

"What I do?" asked Rose. "Dr. Colmes. Other student tell me you best person for this job."

"Indeed. Indeed," agreed Colmes. "I would suggest that one simple step be taken, and we will see what happens."

"Shouldn't we look over the notes and analyze what the Stalker has written? They are all pretty adoring of you, Rose, I must say," I said a little condescendingly, unconsciously emulating my master.

"Is rubbish!" she growled.

"Rose, could you perhaps place them in order of when they appeared in your mail box?" asked Colmes. "Each one is different, you know."

This was a lot to ask of Rose. She would have to put down her knitting. But the fact that she did says a lot about the depths of her concern. She stood up, placed her knitting on my wicker chair, then stood beside Colmes and leaned over the notes. She juggled them around a bit, and finally ended up with an order that satisfied her. One could easily see the progression. They began with long, flowery expressions of love, affection, and adoration, laced with some lines of poetry of some English romantic poet. But they quickly degenerated into crass sexually explicit comments, then finally with lurid details as to what he would do once he had her in his arms, an all-encompassing embrace that she would never forget in a lifetime. The notes were written in such a way that the actual gender of the stalker was not clear. The immediate

presumption was male, of course. What was clear was that the unknown stalker wanted Rose, and once he had her, she would be his slave. No wonder Rose was frightened.

“Yes, now. Indeed,” muttered Colmes, “The notes have not told us much, except that we need to get you out of danger immediately,” announced Colmes seriously. “There is a very simple first step, as I mentioned before.”

“What that, Doctor?” asked Rose as she finished a line of knitting and switched over.

“Remove your name from the mailboxes. The stalker will then be unable to deliver the notes and will have to try something else.”

“But what if he keeps following me?” cried Rose. “If all he’s going to do is leave me notes, I can put up with that. But I’m certain he’s stalking me!”

“I doubt it,” said Colmes. “But don’t worry, Rose. I have a spare bedroom here in my apartment. You can stay there until we solve this problem.”

I tried not to show any surprise. Colmes, with a house mate? Hard to imagine. My having an office next to him is enough for me. Poor Rose!

Colmes looked at Rose expectantly. She looked directly at him and put down her knitting. “Oh! Dr. Colmes. I couldn’t impose like that,” she said almost smiling, sounding a bit Victorian if you ask me.

“I consider it my duty and an honor to have you as my guest until we are sure you are safe,” pronounced Colmes. “Either I or my excellent colleague Hobson here, will accompany you everywhere you go, twenty four hours a day. Won’t we Hobson?”

I shifted uncomfortably. “Absolutely!” I said with a big smile.

And so the trap was set.

Rose’s mailbox was removed from the student mailboxes. The administration of the school had agreed that she should call in at their office and collect her mail. It was left mostly to me to stay at her elbow, and when possible out of sight but watching closely, to see if there was anyone stalking her. I saw nothing.

Colmes happily took the night shift, and watched over her, presumably as she was sleeping in his spare bedroom. This went on for well over a week, after which time I was getting a little restless. I did attend the constitutional law classes with Rose and looked carefully at all the other students. None seemed to show any special interest in her, except for the obvious, her constantly interrupting the professor. Ted the Red, the law professor, seemingly did not notice my presence, since my name was not on his class list — I had taken his class a few years ago. Of course I had made sure I was seated away from Rose, somewhere near the back of the class so that I could spy anyone who might be paying her too much attention. And besides, the professor would have noticed me if I sat beside Rose, because she constantly peppered him with questions.

Then on the tenth night, I had been out drinking with some friends and had staggered back to my apartment, or thought I had, and by mistake I entered Colmes’s apartment, to which of course I had a key in case of emergency (which this was not!). Realizing that I was in the wrong place I foolishly called out “Colmes! Never mind. It’s just me!”

But there was no answer. I should have turned and left. But I did not. My eye caught the overstuffed chair in the corner, which beckoned my drunken body.

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The relationship between Rose the elder and Colmes was rather complicated. She was I suppose 15 years or more older than Colmes, whose age anyway was a mystery. But I was guessing somewhere in his forties. I could see from the beginning that Colmes enjoyed her abrupt manner, her refusal to put up with small talk, and persistence when demanding answers. This is what drove her professors mad in class, not just confined to Ted the Red. She was someone to be feared, that’s what she was. And Colmes loved her

for it. I don't mean "true love" or whatever. I mean that he approved of her behavior very much, so much so that he really, really liked her as a person. And at the time of the stalker case, that was about as far as it went, I thought.

However, when he suddenly announced that she could move in with him until this stalker problem was solved surprised me, for he was also a man who greatly valued his privacy, mixed very little socially with others beside myself, though I am not sure how much of our relationship was social in contrast to collegial. In any case, I am proud to state that we were and are very good friends as well as colleagues.

You may have noticed that I am avoiding getting to the point, beating about the bush as it is commonly called in Aussie talk. That is because I am embarrassed to describe what happened next.

Curling up like a ball I snuggled into a corner of the overstuffed chair and let the alcohol take me into a deep slumber, or so I thought. Perhaps that is what happened. But from my viewpoint, I was just dropping into a deep slumber when I felt as though someone was stabbing me all over with some kind of sharp instrument. I tried to open my eyes but they would not open. This was a drunken nightmare of the likes I never had. Usually I went off like a light and knew nothing until morning when I woke up.

Then I felt two hands grab me by the ears and shake me. I cried in pain.

"I knew it!" growled Rose. "Can't hold your liquor, like all men!"

Barely conscious, I slid off the chair and on to the floor on my knees.

"Now I see why you not do the night shift to protect me," she said gruffly.

I shook my head and raised my arm hoping she would take it and help me stand. And she did, which, had I been sober, I would have noticed. All I could think of was to ask, "where's Colmes?"

"He come later. Say had important matter to attend to," answered Rose, looking back to the office door which was still open.

"Better close it," I mumbled and managed to stagger over and slam it shut. "Wasn't Colmes worried about leaving you alone?" I asked.

"Didn't seem like. But we only just in nearby faculty bar," replied Rose as she walked towards her bedroom. "I go to bed."

It didn't sound like Colmes to me. Surely he would not be that casual. Had I done the same he would no doubt have castigated me no end. It meant that Rose was alone for the five or so minutes it would take for her to walk from the faculty bar to Colmes' apartment. The overstuffed chair beckoned me again. It was too late to go to my own place. I settled down to another deep sleep, or so I thought. I was just dozing off when I thought I heard the light scratching of a key in Colmes's door. "That must be Colmes," I thought in my sleep or was I awake?

The door opened slowly and a dark, squat figure, its face only just visible inside a deep dark hood, the light bending its way from Rose's room through the various passages and into the eyes of the hooded creature. And creature it was. Pig-like flattened nose, one that surely snorted all the time. Eyes, placed wide apart on the face, each one almost touching its ear. As the dark figure turned to close the door quietly the light of the outside hallway revealed the big red rimmed pig-like eyes with thick, curly white eyelashes, above high piggy cheeks. In the gloom, I shook my head, straining to smother a gasp. The dark figure threw back the hood and for a moment, flashed open its cape, a witch's cape if you ask me, and I swear the figure was naked beneath, except for...

I remained breathless curled up in the black leather chair. I dared not move, for I had recognized who it was. The fright of its entry had sobered me up. I watched as the figure almost pranced forward out of Colmes's office and through door number 1, that led to both Colmes's and Rose's bedrooms. To this day, I wonder whether I should have done something then. For now I knew what was happening. This was all Colmes's doing. Or at least, he had set it up that way. This was the stalker! And how he knew it I still do not completely understand. But my recognition of who it was put me in an impossible position. No doubt

Colmes had engineered this so that he could catch the stalker *in flagrante delicto*. But delaying would place Rose in danger of a dreadful attack by the obviously insane stalker. If I intervened right now, it would mess the sting up completely. The ungendered stalker would simply invent an excuse for having entered Colmes's apartment.

But perhaps Rose knew what Colmes was up to? In which case she would be ready for the stalker's momentous entry.

I need not have worried. The door to Colmes's office suddenly flew open. In walked Colmes, flicking on the light as he rushed past me. "Follow me Hobson!" he muttered. I staggered up and ran to catch up with Colmes who was already well down the passage. We both heard a deep guttural scream, Rose's voice to be sure.

"Get out! You filthy beast!" she cried.

But we heard nothing of the beast.

"Come Hobson, you are in for a treat!" yelled Colmes over his shoulder.

We then heard a faint voice, or kind of snivel. "I want you!" it cried. "Can you not want me? Look what I have to offer!"

Colmes and I arrived at the bedroom, both trying comically to fit through the doorway together. I stepped back of course to let my master through.

"So now! Tochiarty. Cease and desist!" Colmes ordered, "and cover that disgusting body."

It was only just dawning on me what was disgusting. I still had etched in my alcohol-poisoned mind the picture of the beast's entrance, the cape thrown open. I had not quite comprehended what it was I saw that frightened me. It was, ready for it, a huge red dildo attached to its body in exactly the place where ordinarily the appropriate piece of anatomy would be.

And now comes the cruel part. The whole scene looked to me like an 18th century Hogarth print. The lumpy unattractive figures of Rose hunched up at the head of the bed, reaching for her knitting, and Tochiarty standing over the bed, poised to fulfill the role of the Rake's progress, and Holmes and I representing the upright figures of morality. Colmes's usually tight lipped mouth opened just enough to allow a superior smile. But yours truly, lacking any sense of decency or decorum, let out a huge epithet, "Holy Shit!" and laughed until Colmes grabbed me tightly by the arm as if to say, "that's enough!"

Dear reader. Please understand. This occurred long before there was anything like LGBTQ.

Tochiarty sank to her knees, wrapping the cape around her disfigured body, pulling the hood back over her head. "All right. I am yours. Do as you wish," she sobbed. Tears streamed from her red-rimmed eyes, sticking to the piggy white lashes, then falling to the gray carpeted floor.

"You disgusting pervert!" snarled Rose the elder.

"There, there!" announced Colmes in his most steady, superior voice, the moral man in control. "This incident is very unfortunate," said Colmes, as though the whole incident was a kind of accident, even though I am sure he had engineered it all.

And then he said, as if it were not the 1990s but the 2020s, "all have the right to be who they are or want to be, so long as they do not trespass on the other."

And I wanted to add facetiously, "...so help me God!". But I did not of course.

Rose the elder had now recovered from her fright and returned to her abrupt manner, and to her knitting.

"Doctor Colmes. This filth must be removed from our sight," she demanded as only a Russian could.

"Indeed, indeed," agreed Colmes, but it was clear that he was thinking of other matters already. "Rose, my dear, you may pack up your things and Hobson here, my most dependable colleague, will accompany you to your apartment. It is off campus, I presume?"

"Yes professor, but what about it," she pointed at Tochiarty with her knitting needle,

“You can leave all that to me. Be assured that you will never be bothered again by this stalker,” answered Colmes with authority. He then turned to me. “Hobson, young man, please conduct Rose to her apartment.”

“Certainly, Sir. Come Rose, let me take your things,” I replied reluctantly. All I wanted was to get to bed and sleep off the booze. “It’s not too far I hope?”

Rose did not answer. She slid off the bed, gathered up her few overnight things and crammed them into an old leather bag. She was already dressed as she had not had time to change into her sleeping attire by the time Tochiarty showed up.

The next morning I arrived at Colmes’s office as usual, carrying a tray of eggs on toast and tea that I collected from the cafeteria on my way. I was naturally curious to find out what Colmes did with Tochiarty, who would in years ahead become his nemesis, and how he had solved the case. The answer to the latter partially explained the former.

When I arrived Colmes was in good humor. He sat at his desk doing the NYT crossword puzzle, and avidly grabbed the tea when I arrived, poured it out of the paper cup into his little teapot, then into his decorative English tea cup.

“Come, Hobson,” he smiled, that thin smile of his that projected both mystery and satisfaction.

“Colmes,” I asked as I took up my place on the wicker chair, “do tell me what happened after I left!”

“You don’t want to know how I solved the case?” asked Colmes, toying with me.

“Of course. That is most important, and I would have appreciated it if you had kept me informed from the beginning. But you always do this. Keep it all to yourself, and make me look foolish at the end by making the case look simple that any fool could have solved it.”

“My goodness, Hobson. This is your hangover talking, no doubt,” teased Colmes.

“Maybe. Sorry. Do tell,” I replied sighing deeply.

“The solution was very simple,” said Colmes leaning back in his chair, tapping his extended fingertips to each other. “It was in the fake handwriting on the notes. I recognized it immediately, the color of the ink, the thickness of the strokes, written with a cheap Bic ballpoint pen, and many more indications.”

I remained silent. I was not going to give him the pleasure of my constantly having to ask him to explain and give more detail. So he continued:

“I have received many such notes on regular matters, usually containing threats — you have seen her threaten me on a regular basis in my office to which she has acquired a key — with the usual accusations, I am not qualified, I am an imposter and so on.”

I continued my petulant silence.

“Though I had my suspicions, I was not entirely sure why she would have directed her repeated attack on Rose the elder. At first I thought it was because it was her way of getting at me, through someone she knew I considered a friend, and who, as you know, I have used as my housekeeper from time to time.”

Silence again. I looked him right in the eye.

“Indeed. Indeed, Hobson. You are in a bad mood this morning,” observed my master as he continued. “But then I asked myself to consider the, well, unlikely, possibility that Tochiarty was truly attracted to Rose, to her gruff, down to earth manner. And maybe, just maybe, behind all that knitting, the knitted clothing and so on, there lay a warm and inviting body. You get my drift, Hobson?”

This insight did catch my attention. I changed positions on my wicker chair and crossed my legs. “Ah, now I see...”

“Indeed. Indeed Hobson. Now I have your attention. We now have a solution that goes beyond the stereotype of the stalker being a ravishing male ready to pounce at any moment on his prey.”

“So the ‘he’ of the stalker was a ‘she’ who was really a ‘he,’” I interrupted with grand enthusiasm.

“Or a he want-to-be,” responded Colmes, avoiding the common abbreviated expression..

I shifted in my chair again. “You could have shared this with me, Colmes, it’s not fair that you purposely keep me in the dark. You had information that I did not have, and would have reached similar conclusions as you did, had I known the details.”

“Evidence, Hobson, evidence elucidated by deduction. You know me well, I think. I am always reticent to come out with a solution until I am absolutely sure that I am right. Sharing only half the truth is worse than sharing none,” recounted Colmes. I of course, did— still do — know him well. And yes, this little lecture was his way of apologizing, but at the same time informing me that he was not likely to change his ways.

Thus, I remained silent.

Then, unusually for him, Colmes leaned across his desk and for a moment I thought he was going to reach out and clasp my hand. Oh, what an event that would be! All in my imagination, of course. Rather, he tapped on the desktop with his three middle fingers as though he were playing a trill on the piano. “Are you following me, Hobson my friend?”

Again, he would usually have said “boy” or “young man.” He was going to open up at last.

“The fact is, Hobson, that Tochiarty is my nemesis. She has badgered me and those above me incessantly since she came here four years ago. She is convinced that I am CIA or FBI or whatever else, and that I am not qualified in any way to be a university Professor. I am, you might say, a malignant obsessive object to her. Her constant harassment of me is a form of stalking. She has been through all my files and investigated my past (with no success I might add). And I have no doubt that she will continue to do so. But now, I have turned the tables on her. I have information that would destroy her career if it were made public.”

“But there’s only you, Rose and me to attest to it all,” I countered.

“True. But you forget my cameras installed everywhere in here and all over campus as well. Believe me, I do have photographic evidence.”

I looked at his fingers as he once again lightly drummed them on the desk, this time with a flourish.

“So are you going to tell me what you did with your nemesis after I left last night?”

“There’s not a lot to tell,” answered Colmes nonchalantly.

“Sure. Do tell,” I said, implying that he was trying to hide information from me yet again.

“First of all, I could not allow her to remain with me dressed, or should I say undressed, the way she was. I went to my closet and found some trousers, a shirt and jacket. And told her to get dressed. I confiscated the dildo, which I will keep with her finger prints all over it, as evidence. She lived off campus so I phoned for a taxi to collect her from outside the cafeteria and accompanied her to that place. And as we waited for the cab, she began to compose herself muttering to me as the cab rolled up that nobody would believe me if I revealed all that had happened, especially about the dildo. I pointed out that I also had her stalker notes, and there would be Rose’s testimony if needed. But I knew as she climbed into the cab that this was not the end of her dedication to my destruction. It had bought me time, that was all, and I would use the incident to force her into silence for as long as I could.”

This explanation seemed to be enough for my report to end the case, though I had a nervous feeling that Tochiarty was here to stay and would not let up on Colmes. She was, if not anything else, an individual whose obsession would one day cause her to act in a way that would destroy herself, and possibly others that were within her range. This explains why she recklessly continued to harass Colmes about his past and lack of credentials long after this incident.

I asked Colmes why didn’t he expose Tochiarty for what she was, a raving mad Lesbian, who stalked suitable targets and exposed herself at will. He looked at me, almost glaring.

“And who would replace her? You have not heard of the saying ‘better the devil you know...’”

I nodded, yes I understood. Colmes was a master of social control. To make all public would be to lose control of both the narrative and all people involved, especially Tochiarty. The latter was a nuisance and would continue to snap at his heels, but for the foreseeable future (which one could never foresee anyway, according to Colmes) there was no point our making anything more of the incident. And what a field day the media would have if the story were made public.

I also learned a lesson from this incident. Don't get drunk on campus.