

## 64. Hostage Crisis

Words matter. The pen is mightier than the sword. Words, words, words. Even in sport, many argue that the final arbiter is the psychological state of the those engaged in it, especially team sports, and it is words that determine that psychological state. That words are valued so highly is abundantly clear by the outlawing of drugs that alter the mind and body, thus undermining the power of words that matter. And, with the very large exception of the media, it is in a university where words are the most visible means of exchange, where their true power emerges from the depths of psychology to demand a sacrifice of one or many.

I know what you are thinking. There he goes again. Waxing and waning over academia. He must deride it so much! Even despise it! But in response I say that if those accusations were accurate, why would I stay in my position, a lowly one at that, for so many years, about forty if I am not mistaken? Let me give an honest answer to your (or my) question. It is all because of my friend and mentor Thomas Colmes. Think what you like. Call me what you like. But I am proud of it. The two of us have affected the lives of many, all for the good, or mostly as good as it possibly could have been.

Defensive? Indeed, I am. For our consciences are not of course, like anyone else, entirely clean. Though my defensiveness that you no doubt have detected, is rather more confined to just this one case. It is a case to which I have alluded at various times throughout my description of Colmes's cases. This case was, like many others, was buried in the banter of both Tochiarty and Bates when they came to Colmes's office. Yet they often mentioned nothing of anything that might even sound like a possible case as far as I could make out.

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No sooner had Rose brought the afternoon tea, the phone rang. Colmes was having a small coughing fit so I took the call.

"Professor Colmes office," I said.

"This is the president's office, is Dr. Colmes available

please? The president would like to speak with him,” came the trembling voice of his secretary.

“Just one moment, this is Hobson,” I held out the phone and mouthed “Finneas” hoping Colmes would understand.

His coughing stopped, and he took the hand-piece. “Colmes,” he said.

“O’Brien,” came the familiar voice of his longtime friend.

“Finneas, jolly old son,” said Colmes, “what can I do for you?”

Colmes sat back in his chair, took a sip of his tea and listened. Both Rose and I sat staring at him and then at each other. We had become very good friends. We were both a little worried about Colmes. But this chat with the President clearly gave him a boost and he began to move more quickly and purposefully. Back to his old self. After some ten minutes, that seemed like an hour to Rose and me, Colmes hung up the phone and turned to us with a very big smile on his face, yet accompanied by a very serious frown. “We have the case of all cases,” he announced in a low voice.

Colmes said this of almost all our new cases, so I did not take his remark too seriously. “Oh? Really?” I asked almost with a yawn.

“You remember the young assistant professor Gloria Watkins who gave me a hard time over O’Brien’s rape charge?”

“Indeed I do,” I answered.

“That’s how you and my mom came together, if I remember rightly,” added Rose.

Colmes looked down, a deeply furrowed brow. “Watkins and an ex-con student by the name of Felix Grouse have O’Brien and his secretary holed up in his office. They have barricaded the door and are demanding that the police come and arrest O’Brien for rape, and me as an accessory.”

“Are they armed?” I asked feeling a little foolish that I had to ask that question. “I mean, what happens if their demands are not met?”

“This is the crazy part. They have issued a deadline of one hour from now, or else they will rape O’Brien to teach him what it’s like,” said Colmes.

Rose and I both turned a bright shade of red. “Good god!” I cried.

“Not God Not good!” cried Rose, holding back a smile..

“Has anyone called the police?” I asked.

“Not so far as I know. It’s up to us to mitigate this crisis. And calling the cops, of course, is our last option.”

“Indeed!” I said with enthusiasm

“The first thing we must do is contact O’Brien’s wife, Chi-Ling. Rose do you think you could do that?” asked Colmes.

“Sure” replied Rose “should I bring her here?”

“Yes. And of course she must tell no one.”

“Right you are,” said Rose, and just as she was leaving Tochiarty appeared at the door.

Tochiarty immediately rushed in yelling at Colmes, “you’ve done it this time Colmes. You’re not going to get away with this!”

“Do take a seat, Tochiarty,” said Colmes quietly, “and how may I be of assistance?”

“I knew this would happen,” she growled. “Your ex-con program was destined to cause violence and grief to my faculty. And now one of our lovely young assistant professors is in fear of her life.”

Colmes calmly picked up his pencil as though he were to fill in his crossword puzzle. “Of course, you know that it is not my program but that of the Provost. And who is this unfortunate young professor?”

“Gloria Watkins. She’s right now held hostage in the president’s office by that disgusting ex-con Felix Grouse!”

Her voice was again so loud, I was sure that I could have heard every word in my office and maybe the one further down.

“And what is your source of information?” asked Colmes.

“Grouse, that’s who! He phoned me in my office. It’s an outrage! A dreadful outrage! What are you going to do about it?”

“My dear Tochiarty,” sighed Colmes, “You have been ill informed....”

And at that moment, Tochiarty’s Washington Bates, her expert on critical race theory, who was never far behind her, came into the office. Colmes nodded at him and gestured to my chair which I quickly vacated and moved to my proper place in the corner on the overstuffed chair.

Colmes continued. “...Grouse is a black criminal ex-con who has done time for rape and various violent acts. You cannot believe anything he tells you....”

“Wait a minute!” yelled Bates, clearly rising to the level of anger displayed by his boss Tochiarty. “Let me be sure of what I just heard. In fact I must write this down. You said, ‘Grouse is a black criminal ex-con so you can’t believe anything he says’. That right?”

“Close enough,” said Colmes. “However you should know that the President called me and told me a completely different story. He said that Grouse and Watkins were in cahoots, and if anything, it was Watkins who was running the show. And their demands were certainly different from what your boss here is saying.”

“And what’s that?” asked Bates quickly glancing sideways to his boss, who pretended not to hear.

“Never mind. Let’s hear what O’Brien had to say,” answered Tochiarty more or less brushing Bates aside.

Colmes informed them of the demand and looked at his watch. Bates was outraged that Colmes would believe such a far-fetched story. He was sure that Watkins was behind it all though. He knew Grouse well and insisted that he was a kind and gentle person who would not hurt a fly.

Tochiarty, however, responded to Colmes immediately with the obvious— to her, that is. “Then get your ass over to the cops and tell them to arrest O’Brien. You’re shielding him because he is your buddy. Don’t think I don’t know. And it’s very clear that you’re an accessory. Consecrating O’Brien’s marriage of his victim Chi Ling to make it look like nothing happened. Enough!”

I was most pleased to be sitting in my corner left out of this awful mess, the viciousness whizzing past me like a cloud of darts. Now all that would be needed to complete this imminent destruction of Colmes was for Provost Dolittle to show up, and all Colmes’s enemies would be lined up against him.

Colmes replied calmly, “for the moment we do not want the police involved, unless you of course wish to speak with them?”

Tochiarty’s face was almost bursting with anger. But she fought valiantly to keep her thoughts locked inside that bulging body of hers. Bates took it upon himself to speak on her behalf. “Quite frankly,” he said, “the President deserves everything they have threatened him with. It will serve him right!”

Colmes looked at them both with detached amusement. “Perhaps you would like to switch places with Grouse?” teased

Colmes.

I shrank back into my overstuffed chair when I heard this. It was reckless and surely provocative. And I ask you, could those two Tochiarty and Bates be any more provoked than they were already?

“The trouble with you people,” added Colmes, “is that you see everything in black and white.”

Now there was the final straw, surely. Bates took a deep breath and drew himself up in an effort to make himself bigger or taller or something. And Tochiarty instead seemed to draw her rounded head back into her fat neck a bit like a tortoise pulling its head into its shell.

I looked at my watch and gave a little cough. “It’s almost time,” and left it at that.

“Could you repeat that racist remark?” asked Bates, as though he were a translator of a foreign language.

Colmes picked up the phone and dialed the direct line to the President. Then he grimaced and held the phone out to me to hear. It was O’Brien’s secretary. She was, apparently, hysterical.

“They, they’ve pulled down his pants!” she cried.

Colmes turned to his unpleasant guests. “You hear that? Is that what you want?”

“Call the fucking police!” yelled Tochiarty.

“Here’s the phone, you do it,” snarled Colmes, as he held out the phone.

Tochiarty shrank away and edged closer to the door. Which was a mistake, for at that moment Rose returned with Chi-Ling in tow.

“Chi-Ling” called Colmes, rising unsteadily from his chair. “I hope Rose has filled you in. I am on the phone with Finneas’s secretary. It’s not clear what is going on. “

“Let me speak to them,” said Chi-Ling in a most authoritative and decisive tone.

Colmes handed her the phone and she almost took it with a snatch. “Hello? Let my husband alone, do you hear me? I want to speak with him immediately!”

I could just hear a male voice come on the phone. At first I thought it was O’Brien, but then realized that it was Grouse, who I think said, “he can’t come to the phone right now he’s busy.”

Then Chi-Ling cried out, “doesn’t anyone care about my

husband?”

“Chi-Ling,” said Colmes, looking her straight in the eye, you know we cannot call the police. It would have far worse repercussions.”

“Worse than his being, ....being....gang raped?”

“Believe me,” answered Colmes, I have known your husband for much longer than you have. Calling the cops would be far worse.”

“Then what about the campus police?” asked Chi-Ling.

“They will just call the city cops. No, the best thing we can do is to wait,” said Colmes calm and in control.

“Let them work it out,” said Colmes. “Let the problem resolve itself.”

“You mean, let the President get raped?” asked Bates in disbelief.

“That may happen, but then again, they are all intelligent human beings equally divided by gender. Who knows. Maybe they will resolve it differently,” said Colmes unperturbed.

“The secretary,” Bates asked quietly almost as though he didn’t really want anyone to hear his question, “is she married, or... I mean... er... is there a partner?”

“If I know secretaries...” began Colmes, aware that he was in dangerous territory.

“And I know filthy men,” broke in Tochiarty.

“Then I think we are on the same wave length, are we not?” continued Colmes, to the consternation of Bates, who I could see was rolling his tongue inside a most likely very dry mouth. And I admit that Colmes had me biting my tongue for fear that he himself was going to step in it.

Rose gently edged her way to door two. “I think I’ll go put on the kettle and make a cup of tea. How many for tea?” She asked looking around the room.

Of course I raised my hand, and said “scones too,” with a grin.

“Then you had better come and help,” she quipped back.

Colmes did not answer but it was taken for granted that he would take tea. It was about time for afternoon tea anyway. Bates was too frightened to say anything more so he just raised his hand copying me. Tochiarty of course, could hardly wait for tea and scones, but would never admit it. “Just a little something,” she

said, “it doesn’t seem right for us to enjoy tea and scones when those poor things are being held hostage.”

“Hostage?” asked Colmes, “have you ever heard of the Stockholm syndrome?”

Bates shifted uneasily on his feet.

Colmes continued. “It was when a hostage, she happened to be a woman, wouldn’t you know it, who was taken as a hostage in a bank robbery I think it was, and she fell in love the with violent leader of the gang that had taken her hostage. She even joined them.”

Colmes had addressed this little explication at Bates and gave the distinct impression that he was telling Bates that he was ignorant. One could see the dreadful hate in Bates’s eyes as he comprehended this cold and heartless piece of Victoriana.

As I have mentioned in many places I have spent much time trying to teach Colmes to be careful what he says in this day and age. Maybe a few decades ago ordinary people might have remembered or seen in old movies, the strict, almost stoic, practice of Victorian public morality. Colmes mimicked it, his entire social life was a caricature of it. In any case, it was clear to me that in the last ten minutes he had impugned the dignity of Bates, and insulted Tochiarty. Of this he was totally unaware — at least I think so. He is also capable of doing this on purpose just to get them angry and thus prone to error.

Now I know what you’re thinking. Why don’t the fools call the police and be done with it?

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Gloria Watkins had already made a name for herself in the criminal justice world by publishing five papers in top journals every year for her first five years at the school, and was about to be considered for promotion and tenure. She even published a book and it was this book that made her a household name (well, a university-hold name) throughout the social sciences and criminal justice programs all over the United States, and even in Europe and the United Kingdom. In fact she had even received an invitation to speak at the famous Cambridge University School of Criminology, Cambridge England. Of course, such an invitation also carried with it an unstated offer of a position in the school. One could not obtain any more prestigious position in the world of criminology!

So one might ask, what is she doing threatening the President of a university, and worse, doing it with an ex-con collaborator. The answer is that it was her widely publicized book, Watkins appearing on every big talk show in America and even the U.K. The book recounted her no-holds-barred love affair with Felix Grouse while he was in prison doing time for a small number of robberies usually liquor stores or convenience stores. I say a small number, for the particular robberies for which he was tried and convicted were a tiny portion of the many series of robberies he had pulled off over a period of several months. He was sentenced to seven years prison, in the words of Judge Earnest Frost: "You are a blight on the good people in our neighborhoods. I would sentence you to many more years if only the law would allow it." Grouse ended up in Coxsackie prison that was just forty minutes or so down the New York State thruway from Schumaker University.

Professor Watkins had been present when Grouse was sentenced. She was there with a group of her students on an excursion of various parts of the criminal justice system. In class later, she lectured her students as to the severity of the sentence, given that, the total amount that Grouse took in his robberies came to less than a few hundred dollars. Seven years for that? It was an excessive punishment, was it not? And to make it worse, lectured Watkins in a strong voice of authority, walking up and down the aisle of her students sitting in their desk-chairs, most with their heads down, weighed down by the guilt put upon them by their top ranked professor. Watkins was, of course, oversimplifying the entire case, and certainly, there were many retorts that might be made, that merely taking into account the monetary damage done, putting aside the injury and fright caused the victims of the robberies, especially as Grouse routinely used a gun, though never fired it. In any case, even if the gun were a toy gun, the fear inflicted upon the victims certainly should be taken into account. I could go on there, and should admit that this is me talking, not Colmes.

When Watkins heard that Grouse was placed in Coxsackie prison, she decided to write him a letter commiserating with him for the excessive punishment he had received, pointing out to him that she was sure that the real reason the judge was so harsh was that he, Grouse, was black.



Grouse replied with a long letter telling her of his sorrow, especially for his wife and five children, and saying in his own defense that he could not get a job and had to find a way of feeding them. And he didn't want to hurt anybody, and that was why his gun was never loaded. And thank goodness, he said, that the judge did not demand that he pay back the amounts he robbed. That would have taken food out of his children's mouths.

That letter, and many others followed, in response to Gloria's sorrow for his plight, though surprisingly and maybe heroically, he insisted that he was not punished so harshly because he was black. Such a position really annoyed Watkins and over the next several months, almost a year, she managed at last to get him to acknowledge that he had been the victim of racial prejudice of the worst kind, both inside and outside of the criminal justice system. But her most important accomplishment was to get him into the high school diploma program at the prison so that he could graduate high school and then would be eligible to join the Schumaker University program for ex-cons. To achieve this she had, in addition to writing him letters every week and receive his in reply, visited the prison frequently, even offering to teach occasional courses inside the prison, for free.

The book she published recounting her personal journey into prison and out, was a sensation, especially the memorable last sentence of the book which said: "I challenge judge Frost to visit Cocksackie prison, or any prison for that matter, to see the results of his mean sentences, the moral authority of which hides the human damage, anguish and suffering not only of the criminal sentenced, but especially of his family." I need not go into any more details of the book, especially the parts where she imagined she was his partner and described such scenes in unheavenly detail. It was as though they had really met and done it all together. All of this as she met and became good friends (according to her book) with Grouse's wife and gave her money to keep her family afloat until the happy day came when Grouse would be released.

Things did not quite work out that way, or at least they did, but at a cruel price. Grouse, who had become a perfect inmate, studied hard and got his high school certificate. He then took a number of criminal justice courses in the Schumaker University ex-con program, and was released after his second year of

imprisonment. He did not go back to his family, but moved in with Professor Watkins who had been her guarantor into whose care he was released, the argument being that he had to be prepared for re-entry into the community, and that the first step was for him to stay away from his original neighborhood the culture of which the experts (that is Professor Watkins) claimed contributed to his being targeted as a criminal.

Watkins had heard much of Colmes, but steered clear of him as much as she could, given his reputation as an old fashioned individual who thought he was in the Victorian age. This she had not reconciled with the knowledge that he had also founded the ex-con Schumaker University program that provided a select few ex-con students with free tuition and a small stipend to get them by. It was this unresolved contradiction that surely resided beneath her outburst in the faculty meeting I described in case *Rape Advantage* in which she abused Colmes and called him a rapist.

I could say more about Felix Grouse, but I am most hesitant to do so. Recent criticism of the Watkins book has claimed that it is racist because it portrays Grouse as the placid, mild, and pathetically obedient personality which is, so they argue, the classic personality of the African slave—itsself a stereotype. And there, you can see where, if I continued along this exposition, it would lead to that familiar circularity from which the philosopher in me has great difficulty breaking free. I think it best to leave off at this point and return to the heart of the case.

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Provost Dolittle knocked lightly at the office of the Dean, newly appointed, the door always left ajar, signaling that all who approached were welcome to enter. This would last for a few months and then the Dean, no longer new, would keep his door closed, and there would be an aggressive secretary posted at her desk as close to the Dean's door as possible. Of course, when the Provost came by, all the minor personnel, that is, those not holding an academic appointment, felt an urgent need to rise and snap to attention, but that would reveal an awful soldier-like mentality, so they instead rustled papers, banged at their typewriters and computers, or answered fake telephone calls.

As soon as she entered newly appointed Dean Fartsworth rose from his large leather padded swirling desk chair to greet

her.

“Welcome to my humble office,” he said with one of his very big grins and as he did so his tongue darted in and out like that of a snake. This was most appropriate for Fartsworth who was known among his fellow faculty as a liar and dissembler. How else could one rise so quickly from the level of an associate professor to that of Dean? Dolittle had offered him instant promotion to full professor (technically illegal) and a miserly extra \$5,000 one time increase in his annual salary, which he jumped at, thinking that it had to be an easy job replacing the former Dean O’Brien who was now Schumaker University’s first president with an Irish name.

“I have laid the groundwork for you. It is now up to you to carry it forward,” said Dolittle.

“But I will have to get the faculty’s approval, won’t I?” answered Fartsworth, his tongue very active and leaving spittle all around his mouth and as far as his cheeks.

Dolittle stepped back a little to avoid any possible spray. “It is your prerogative as Dean to make administrative decisions. You have the power invested in you by me, your Provost, to change the name of the school to conform with the university’s diversity and inclusive principles. The president has stated that the word “criminal” is a derogative term that stigmatizes those who have been unfortunate enough to be labelled as such. The university does not wish to appear that it favors such insensitive discriminatory language, which carries with it much damage to the lives of those who have been labelled as such.”

Fartsworth splattered, “Provost, do have a seat,” indicating the large metal chair in front of his desk, no doubt a product of prison labor.

“Thank you, but I must off to another meeting. But do understand that you have my full support and that of the Head of Human Resources and of course the President. “

“But Provost Dolittle. What do we call them, then if not , er, you know...?” asked Fartsworth with a sloppy drool, his tongue getting caught briefly on one of his protruding incisors.

“Nothing. Leave that to the professors to discuss in class. We simply replace the word criminal in the name of the school with nothing,” said the Provost, a very straight business-like face, and staring right into Fartsworth’s pale almost dead eyes.

“So it’s just ‘The School of Justice’ then?”

“Correct. Now I must be off. I have a very important meeting with the President coming up. He will be very pleased to hear the news that you are changing the school’s name.”

“But what about Colmes? I thought he was the reason the change was not made long ago?”

“That is correct,” said the Provost with an most satisfied smile. “I am sure he will not be opposing it this time.”

“Are you sure about that? He has a lot of sway with our faculty, you know,” whined Fartsworth.

“I assure you he is not going to be a problem this time,” smiled Dolittle. “Just get this done by the end of the week. All right?”

And she left, Fartsworth’s tongue lashing his lips, but saying nothing.

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“Well now,” said O’Brien with no less than a teasing smirk on his face, “who will be first or is it going to be a foursome?”

Watkins shrank back. Grouse, not a large person, stood in front of her as though to protect her. The secretary sat curled up in a corner of the office, whimpering.

“Well? What will it be?” persisted O’Brien.

“It’s just you, the rapist, we want. And your co-star Colmes,” muttered Grouse.

O’Brien looked about the room. “Unfortunately, Colmes does not seem to be here. And my secretary would be a poor substitute, don’t you think?”

“Asshole!” cried Watkins. “Go on! You can go!” she ran over to the whimpering secretary, grabbed her roughly by the arm and dragged her to the door.

Grouse quickly ran to the barricaded door and began to pull the chairs and table away. But the secretary screamed and wrenched herself out of Watkins, grip and ran back to her corner.

“If you stay, you’ll be raped,” warned Grouse.

“No she won’t” cried Watkins. “We’re not rapists. We just want O’Brien to experience what he did to his innocent victims.”

“But we’ve warned that we’ll rape him if he does not accede to our demands,” muttered Grouse in some consternation.

“Raping a rapist isn’t rape!” announced Watkins with the authority of a preacher.

“What is it then?” asked Grouse, frowning and losing patience.

“It’s punishment, pure and simple. It’s getting what he asked for when he committed his horrendous crime. After all, you don’t call the death penalty murder, do you?” Now Watkins, finding her stride, marched over to O’Brien and pushed her face right up to his. “Get it? It’s retribution, evening the score, just deserts, name it what you like. An eye for an eye, a rape for a rape!”

“You are a criminal justice student?” asked O’Brien as he calmly placed his hand on Watkins’ shoulder and pushed her gently away. “Who teaches you this nonsense?”

Watkins’s face flushed and she pursed her lips. This was the ultimate insult. Here she was probably the most famous professor in the school of criminal justice, about to become tenured and full professor in less than 6 years, and this excuse for a president is calling her a student!

“How dare you!” she screamed, “how dare you?”

O’Brien looked at her blankly. He had no idea what he had said or done.

Now Grouse came up behind Watkins. “Come on, let’s do him over and get it done with. He deserves it more than ever now”

“Tut! ut!” cried O’Brien. “You already made me take off my pants and we have not heard back yet from Colmes. Perhaps the police are on their way this very minute?”

Grouse held back, gently tugging at Gloria’s sweater. “Colmes was supposed to call us, and he hasn’t,” she snarled. “Our demands have not been met, so now we rape you. And by the way, I’m the top rated professor in the school of criminal justice, that shows how out of touch you are!”

O’Brien tried to step back. Grouse grabbed a chair and pushed it into him.

Watkins reached down to where she thought might be O’Brien’s underpants.

At that moment the phone rang, and with some difficulty, O’Brien pulled away from Watkins, kicked the chair away and answered it. “O’Brien,” he said.

The sound of a male voice with a slight Victorian accent could be heard. “It’s Colmes!” cried Watkins. She snatched the phone away from the president. “Colmes, the rapist! I hope you are calling from jail?”

But all she got in reply was dial tone. “The filthy creep! He hung up!” She turned to O'Brien and once again put her face up to his. “Come on! what did he say?” she ordered, “or else!”

“Or else what?” teased O'Brien.

“What did he say?” insisted Watkins as her hands moved once again in the direction of his underpants.

“He said that the Provost was on her way to see him about an important matter. Something about a criminal... or criminal justice... or something else.”

“Criminal?” queried Grouse, always piqued when he heard that word.

“That’s what he said,” answered O'Brien with a shrug.

Gloria pulled back and put her arm around Grouse. “Don't worry I'm sure it's nothing,” she said softly.

“Then he hasn't gone to the cops?” asked Grouse.

“He did not say. But it was my impression that he was waiting for the Provost to arrive in his office.”

Watkins banged her fist on the President’s desk. “Our demands have not been met so let's get on with it. Once again she closed in on O'Brien and felt for his underpants.

“Maybe we should hold off until we hear what the Provost had to say with Colmes,” mumbled Grouse.

“If you like,” said O'Brien nervously, “I could call Colmes again and get more detail.” He reached for the phone.

“Yeh. Let’s wait,” mumbled Grouse. “You never know.”

“You're such a pussy,” complained Watkins with a sweet smile. She turned to him and gave him a hug. “Let's get away from this filthy monster and wait a while.” Gloria took him by the arm and they sat on the floor next to the whimpering secretary, who instantly recoiled, hugging her knees into an even tighter ball.

Grouse took pity on her. “You don’t have to worry, we’re not here for you. It’s not your fault you have an asshole for a boss,” he said, trying to console her, but just making things worse.

“Felix, leave her alone,” growled Watkins, “didn’t you learn anything in prison? Don’t trust anyone, even pathetic little shits like her.” She looked at the secretary derisively. “I bet you let him screw you too.”

“I’m married with two little kids,” whimpered the quivering

little ball.

“Yeh, well, with shits like him, that means nothing,” snarled Watkins.

Then the secretary uncoiled herself and said in as strong a voice as she could, “anyway he hardly knows I exist.”

“Well, that’s what Gloria means, don’t you sweetheart?” said Grouse.

Gloria looked at him with amusement. “This little man,” she thought, “he’s a little girl at heart.”

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Perhaps now I should say a little more about Felix Grouse, since his performance as a hostage taker was not quite up to scratch. After all, they had no weapons. He had complained to Gloria that they should at least have something to threaten O’Brien with, but she would have none of it. Not even a box cutter. She was against weapons of any kind. If their personal toughness and resolve could not intimidate him, two against one, a pathetic old man who hid behind his secretary, he with a gammy leg as well, they should not be in the hostage taking business.

In fact, Grouse had resisted Gloria’s relentless cajoling that they give O’Brien a taste of his own medicine. And she had insisted that they had secret support from higher up, but she refused to explain exactly what that meant. And after all, Watkins was his professor. She had a lot of power over him, could see to it that he never graduated, since she was chair of his dissertation committee. Not to mention that she was a very aggressive person, in fact intimidated him. And he was well used to that, probably why he fell for her. He had been intimidated all his life, he swears he could remember his mother laying into him with a leather shoe before he was old enough to walk. Who knew what would have happened if he had a father. But he had no memory of him. So Felix was well used to being ordered around by women. One can imagine how he got on in prison. Raped every day pretty much, although he was gradually passed over because his assailants found him too compliant and passive. There was no fight in him. And it was this that Gloria had cottoned on to. They were a perfect match, one might say. At least that was so from Gloria’s view of things.

The secretary managed to stop whimpering and Gloria put her arm around Grouse, offering him reassurance to the extent

that she was capable of doing so.

Something of a stalemate had arisen. O'Brien managed to pull his pants up from his ankles. He stared at the phone trying to decide whether to call Colmes. From what he had read and seen about hostage takers, this pair in front of him did not seem to be the real thing. Not violent nor threatening enough. They looked like easy meat. He was half inclined simply to get up out of his chair and go to the door, pull away the furniture and escape. But why bother? They had no weapons, they did not have the courage to carry out their threat to rape him. What on earth did they think they were doing?

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Rose brought us another cup of tea. I looked at Colmes waiting for some kind of sign, a twitch at the corner of his mouth, a quick blink of his lively eyes. But he gave no hint of any secret plan.

Tochiarty was now walking back and forth across Colmes's office, not realizing that she was following in his very footsteps, literally. Bates sat scribbling in a notebook. Rose and I sat in our corner, sipping our cups of tea. Colmes returned to his crossword. Finally Tochiarty spoke up.

"Enough! I will not stand by and let one of my outstanding young professors be raped either by Grouse or your buddy, the rapist President," announced Tochiarty.

Colmes ignored her.

But Chi-Ling, ever the aggressive small person, proud of her academic accomplishments—meaning of course all of her academic accomplishments which included her marriage to the President of Schumaker University, stamped her foot as she rose quickly from her chair and turned to Tochiarty. I truly thought she was going to hit her or do something violent, by the look on her face.

"Would you please shut up!" she yelled. "It is my husband who is under attack, not your favorite faculty. It is your people who have threatened to rape my husband. He is the victim, not they. They are the hostage takers, kidnapers. What is the matter with you? You are so deranged!"

Colmes looked a little amused. The more conflict that occurred in front of him the more he enjoyed it. To him it was like watching a gripping movie. Rose and I looked at each other,



and in an instant we connected, strangely I suppose, because it was via Colmes. And though I admit that I had admired Rose from a kind of psychological distance, I had never actually considered our closeness to be anything more than a psychological one. A friendship I suppose people call such a relationship. But our connection of looks was not psychological. It was, well, I have to admit it, kind of physical. We both sipped our cups of tea and sat back a little awaiting the drama to take its course. We saw Bates stop his note-taking and look up as though he wanted to enter the fray.

But then, there came a quiet knock on Colmes's door.

"Enter!" called Colmes.

A young girl, perhaps slightly overweight, a head of thick black hair, and swarthy face looking as though it had been under the sun for way too long, appeared in the doorway, a notebook in hand and a boxy looking tape recorder.

"Multi-disciplinary Professor Colmes?" she asked.

Colmes looked her up and down. She wore old gray baggy pants, a black tee-shirt covering a large bosom, at least large for a girl who was probably a college junior, and around her neck a voluminous necklace on which was threaded all manner of things, polished ivory looking teeth, pecan shells, or maybe they were whole pecans, colored feathers woven into small discs and rings, and thin red and white markings painted on her arms and cheeks, though so faint they were hardly visible.

"Who are you?" asked Colmes in his usual threatening manner, then continued with a grin, "a Red Indian or something?"

Bates almost dropped his notebook. "Professor Colmes!" he cried loudly. "That is the last straw!"

"I am Kanontientha, but everyone calls me Kana. Provost Dolittle sent me. I am the diversity editor for the university newspaper *Flotsam*," she said hurriedly, the words running together so very fast.

"And for what purpose?" asked Colmes. "As you can see I am very busy right now." He waved his arm around as one would on stage

"He's lying," interrupted Bates, "and you've definitely come to the right place. "I have so far recorded five glaring instances of hate speech."

Colmes looked with amusement first at Bates and then at

Kana. "My goodness me! I must be losing it. I would have thought there were many more!"

Kana stepped forward and placed her tape recorder on Colmes's desk. "Do you mind?" she asked meekly.

"I do mind. The spoken word is sacred, to be enjoyed when delivered, unsullied by the distortions of writing or recording. Speech was not meant to be preserved as in a jar of formalin, and when revived its true taste is lost. Speech remembered is speech forgotten, its true meaning lost forever. Do I make myself clear?"

"All I did was ask," replied Kana with a blank face, "I didn't ask for a lecture."

Kanontienentha's refusal to be cowed by Colmes greatly cheered Tochiarty and her apprentice Bates. In fact, they clapped their hands lightly, Bates looking to Colmes hoping for another of Colmes's hate speech outbursts. But there was no time for it because as Colmes was about to take the bait, as they call it, Provost Dolittle appeared in the doorway. This gave Colmes the chance to look beyond Kana and ignore her in favor of the Provost.

"Ah. So I see that the two of you have met. Is the professor being cooperative?" Dolittle asked Kana.

"Not really. But it does not surprise me, from what I have heard," she replied. "He won't let me record anything. But even so, he has already insulted me and my race."

"I was just joking my dear," said Colmes with awful condescension.

"That makes it many times worse," said Kana with some satisfaction.

Colmes looked at her blankly. I hate to say this, but I am sure that he had no idea what he was saying or doing. He had walked into a minefield, and I could see that it had been set up especially for him. I tried to warn him by wriggling a bit to get his eye. Rose understood and stood to take his cup and saucer and mine to the kitchen, giving him a big nudge as she passed by him. But he seemed not to notice.

"I bring you news, which I suspect you will not like," said the Provost looking intently at Colmes.

Colmes pretended to work on his crossword puzzle.

"Pray, do tell," answered Colmes raising his head.

"I have just come from a most productive meeting with the

new Dean of Criminal Justice, Morris Fartsworth.”

“And?” Colmes muttered.

“He has agreed to remove the word Criminal from the name of the school. So this change will be made by the end of this week. He is meeting with his faculty as we speak.”

“But you know that I objected to that some years ago when we dealt with that matter of the school’s identity and its organizational location.”

“In any case,” said the Provost, “I have spoken with President O’Brien. He says he has reached some kind of compromise or agreement with his captors. But they will not release him or his secretary until they hear directly from you, Colmes, in person.”

“And what was the agreement?” asked Colmes. “After all, I have no wish to be arrested by the town police, or even the campus police, for facilitating a rape or whatever.”

“The captors insisted that the agreement not be communicated over the phone. They wanted to make sure that all those involved be present to hear it directly, so there would be no rumors or distortions of the facts once revealed,” answered Provost Dolittle.

“Then what are we waiting for?” asked Chi-Ling. “Let’s get over there and set my husband free!”

Bates and Kana stared at her. It sounded to them like a kind of disrespectful theft of words from a well known anti-slavery song. Nevertheless Tochiarty, Bates, Kana and Dolittle rushed out the door.

To my surprise, Colmes did not budge.

“Colmes,” I said, “aren’t we going there to free your old mate?”

“Yes,” complained Chi-Ling, “we have to save Finneas !”

“Chi-Ling you go ahead. I am sure Finneas will be pleased to see you. And I assure you, he will be released whether I am there or not. And he will not be raped. I am very sure of that.”

“I, I,” stuttered Chi-Ling. She was about to plead again that he go when Kana stopped at Colmes’s doorway.

“The Provost has told me that I must stay with you no matter where you go, until I have enough material to do an article on you,” she said with a forced smile.

Colmes looked at me and to Rose as she returned from the

kitchen. He sighed deeply and said, “all right. If it will make you feel better, I will come. But I can tell you now. I have figured all this out. I know exactly how this silly crisis came about. There never was a crisis. I can tell you that.”

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Chi-Ling was the first to reach the outer room of the President’s office. She went straight up to the office door and banged it loudly.

“Finneas! Finneas! Are you OK?” she cried.

“Chi-Ling, my love! Do not worry I am fine. I have not been raped,” he yelled.

“Then who is that crying?” cried Chi-ling.

“Oh, that’s just my secretary. She’ll be fine. They left her alone.”

“Colmes! Where is Colmes! We want Colmes!” came the loud rasping voice of Gloria Watkins.

“He’s on his way,” called Tochiarty who had arrived breathless.

There was now a full contingent of persons, each of whom, with the exception of myself, had a bone to pick with Colmes. Actually, that’s not quite correct, as I have had plenty of bones to pick with Colmes. It was not as if we were totally in agreement about everything. I often took the opportunity to correct him when I thought it necessary.

“This is Colmes!” yelled Colmes with all his Victorian might. “I demand that the despicable criminal Grouse and his prostituted female collaborator come out now. The game is up! I will never call the police as you fools demanded.”

There was a long silence broken only by the scraping of Bates’s pencil as he scribbled in his notebook.

Colmes turned to Provost Dolittle and muttered, “what a pathetic criminal Grouse is, thinking he can use the typical weakness of the female character to his advantage.”

Kana fiddled with her tape recorder. Bates scribbled more in his notebook.

“Did you get all that?” asked the Provost.

“We did,” both Kana and Bates answered in unison.

“Then that’s it then. I think we have enough,” she said.

“I will remember this day the rest of my life,” chuckled Tochiarty gleefully.

The muffled noise of furniture being dragged away from the door now signaled that the hostage taking was at an end. The door opened, and there stood Grouse and Watkins, a little red in the face from moving the furniture, but arm in arm as though they were lovers, which they probably were.

Chi-Ling pushed past them and ran to Finneas who stood a little unsteadily behind his desk. The secretary remained curled up in a ball in the corner, still whimpering and sobbing.

Provost Dolittle went straight to Watkins and Grouse and gave each a little hug. “You have done well, I am so proud of you,” she said.

Colmes stood back, his hands clasped together, his double breasted suit pulled tight at the shoulders. “All right, Dolittle, what kind of trick are you pulling? Congratulating a pair of kidnapers and extortioners? All your doing no doubt!”

“Indeed it is!” mocked Dolittle. “A little of your own medicine!”

I was truly startled. Never had I heard or seen anyone make such fun of Colmes. He stood rooted to the spot, his pale eyes almost closed by a heavy frown, his lips turned down in consternation.

Dolittle continued. “Bates, read out what you have, and Kana. Be sure that you have it all on tape.

“Actually, I have a lot on tape, the recorder has been running most of the time since I entered Professor Colmes’s office,” she said slyly.

And so, while my mentor had figured out early on that Dolittle had engineered the hostage taking and that the threat to rape O’Brien was a sham, he had not realized that the entire enterprise had been thought up by the Provost with only one goal, which was to corner Colmes and force him into complying with whatever she was about to lay on him.

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Oh! How much I missed Colmes’s office right now so I could retreat to the overstuffed chair in the corner. But here, in the President’s outer office, surrounded by the smug Provost, the ugliness of Tochiarty prancing around as though her team had won a great victory, O’Brien and his love Chi-Ling retreating to his office to lick their wounds, seemingly oblivious to the unfolding defeat of Colmes, the supposed loving couple Grouse

and Watkins embracing each other, giggling with joy, and now Bates and Kana whatever her name was, standing tall (though as I have said she was very short), ready to reveal to all the horrors of Colmes's words of hate.

Bates, after a small cough read aloud:

*"Grouse is a black criminal ex-con so you can't believe anything he says."*

*"The trouble with you people is that you see everything in black and white."*

*"Called Kana 'a Red Indian' or something"*

*"a pathetic criminal Grouse is,"*

*"the typical weakness of the female character..."*

"That will do for now," interrupted Provost Dolittle. "I think, Professor Colmes, this should be enough to convince you that if we made these remarks public, as Kana here will do when she writes her article for *Flotsam*, your old time buddy O'Brien will have no other choice but to request your resignation. Your hate speech is far more extreme compared even to Nobel Laureate Sir Tim Hunt who was forced to resign for his prejudiced public statements about women not being compatible with science."

Colmes turned to look at each of those present directly one to the other, and then rested his stare at Tochiarty. He then unclasped his hands and put them in his pockets. "Do as you wish," and proceeded to leave.

Fortunately, or at least as far as I was concerned it was fortunate, President O'Brien saw Colmes departing and called out.

"Wait, Colmes! Wait a minute!"

Colmes turned. "I hope you were not part of the charade," he said in an accusatory tone.

"What was that?" asked O'Brien, pretending not to hear.

"He was not informed," said the Provost quickly, "for fear that the operation would be compromised."

Thus, the ruse was revealed to all present, much to the pleasure of Colmes's enemies, and much to the disgust to his supporters. O'Brien in his Churchillian stance, leaning forward on his walking stick coughed and seemed to growl at the same time.

The Provost quickly responded to the growl. “His hate speech, President O’Brien, it must stop. If the word gets out, the university will be irreparably tarnished.”

Tochiarty would not be left out. “In the name of justice and diversity...”

“Names,” interjected Colmes sarcastically, “it’s plural...”

“Whatever,” snarled Tochiarty. “This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century not the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We cannot allow hate speech of any kind to be used in this university. It is shocking in this day and age. “

“We are of course all concerned about the name and reputation of Schumaker University,” added O’Brien, “which has a reputation of excellence for its diversity and inclusiveness and especially the empathy it shows for those who are hurt by such speech...”

I could see that O’Brien was winding up to go on and give a lengthy and boring speech about excellence and empathy, but fortunately the Provost, bless her soul, saw things heading in that direction. “I agree completely with our president, of course. And I would suggest that in the short term we request that Professor Colmes cease and desist from his hate speech, and that as a sign of good faith he agree immediately to the change of name of the school of criminal justice to simply School of Justice, a change that he has resisted for some years, and one that must be made if we are to keep up with the times. Surely he can see that using a stigmatizing and negative word ‘criminal’ is a form of hate speech that should not have any place in a modern and progressive university of excellence as is Schumaker University.”

“What does it matter?” asked O’Brien. “Why was not the change made regardless of Colmes’s opposition?”

“Because he had convinced all the faculty of that school that it would do them damage,” added Tochiarty, eager to be part of this momentous occasion.

“I agree to the change,” said Colmes. “I have never been against it.”

And with that he departed, and uncharacteristically I chose to linger a while longer before following him.

Was this the end of Colmes?

