

65. The End of Colmes

I watched Colmes walk steadily away, his Victorian double breasted suit jacket buttoned tightly around him, his walking stick tapping on the floor, his head held high. I could not get a full view of his face because he had turned away so quickly in the middle of the ruckus that swept through the President's outer office as Tochiarty, Bates, Kana and Dolittle laughed and yelled as Bates repeated Colmes' hate speech, and even tried to copy his fake English accent. O'Brien reached out to Chi-Ling, pulling her to him in a tight embrace. Their lips met in an slobbering open-mouthed kiss that was enough to make anyone in the room a little embarrassed. Enough to cause the revelers to stop their chanting and stare at the loving couple as they slowly separated and walked hand-in-hand into the President's office.

O'Brien was about to slam the door shut behind him when he saw his secretary still curled up in a little ball, sobbing.

"Everything is OK, my dear," O'Brien purred, "you may leave now and go home to your family. And take tomorrow off as a reward for your wonderful bravery."

Chi-Ling turned to her husband and gave him another sloppy kiss, then drew back and said, "my Sir Lancelot!"

The secretary scurried out the door and fled past the raucous bunch who took absolutely no notice of her.

O'Brien kicked the office door shut.

It is with great difficulty that I describe the events that followed. I am bedeviled by thoughts that I do not want. I should have run after Colmes and walked with him. I should have shouted out loudly that Colmes was nothing of the scoundrel his accusers claimed. I should have told them to their faces that it was they who were the haters, not Colmes. But of course, this is all very well in hindsight. How was I to know that Colmes would simply disappear, and I mean completely disappear from our lives, "our" being Rose the younger and myself?

Instead, I found myself first rushing to Colmes's office, but he was nowhere to be seen. I called out for Rose, but no answer.

She too, had gone off. His office desk was exactly as it always was. Nothing had been touched. I ran down the corridors and through all the tunnels, even looking behind some of the huge pipes that populated the tunnels in most places. I ran down to the hairdresser, but he had not seen Colmes. Where could he be? I ran back to his office and looked more closely at his desk and search its drawers. Everything was perfectly arranged according to his particular manner. The crossword puzzle remained exactly square with the desktop, unfinished. Actually, it was always unfinished. Nothing had been touched. He most definitely had not been back to his office. He had gone away, who knows where.

I stood at the door to his office as it slowly dawned on me that I was alone. That my life was suddenly changed forever, it was a turning point. Yet I refused to acknowledge this obvious, and looking back, inevitable outcome. Colmes was quite a bit older than me, and some day it had to happen. But not like this. Not so suddenly, and without a chance to say good-bye. I thought we were such great friends and colleagues. Had he no thoughts for me? Was I merely one of his accretions, like his *Times* crossword puzzle, or his walking stick?

I returned to my little office, it seemed so tiny now, and took to my bed. I was in a kind of delirium. My thoughts jumped from all of the encounters and problems that Colmes and I had solved, our happy banter, his silly Victorian ways, so rigid yet so open, to not surprisingly, Rose the younger. I loved her presence so much. I don't think I actually loved her, nor she me. It was more like a respectful and very close friendship. But now I yearned for her, and wondered where on earth she could be? Was she not concerned that Colmes had disappeared? Perhaps she had gone with him? No. Surely not. She was his daughter after all. She would not want to live her life cooped up with an old man set in his ways. She had a life of her own to think about.

And so I tossed and turned on my bed, perhaps sleeping, sometimes dreaming crazy dreams, sometimes imagining I heard Colmes's knock on my wall.

And then, to my astonishment I found myself sitting at my desk writing my dissertation proposal. You might say that I was delirious. I banged away at my old Olivetti typewriter for I don't know how long, returned to my bed and again wrestled with my horrible dreams.

The local papers next morning featured on the front page bottom right, the headline “*Renowned professor fired for hate speech.*” Of course, he was not actually fired, he simply quit and walked away. Dolittle did not get the chance to tell him “you’re fired.” There followed a reasonably accurate recounting of Colmes’ hate speech and his general reputation of being a know-all, a cunning and mysterious buddy of the President of Schumaker university. And sources also informed the writer of the article that in fact Colmes was an imposter who did not even have an undergraduate degree. Had not graduated from college! So it was only to be expected that he would indulge in such misogynous behavior.

The article continued for another couple of paragraphs to speculate whether or not President O’Brien would be able to withstand this scandal, and mildly suggested that perhaps the President should resign for the good of the university.

Indeed. It was not long until it was announced that President O’Brien had resigned in order to take up a new position as President of the all-male University of Szchinzen somewhere in China.

The Provost had played her cards very well. The board of Regents of Schumaker university appointed her as interim President while a search was mounted to find a replacement for O’Brien whose great achievements in the university were lauded to no end. She of course appointed Colmes’ nemesis Tochiarty to the position of Provost and Vice President for DEI (Diversity, Equality and Inclusion). A new era in higher education had arrived, and Schumaker University would be its proud leader.

Although all this was totally predicable as far as I was concerned, I was, in my fragile delirium thoroughly overcome by these changes and continued to take to my bed, alternately jumping up and banging at my typewriter, and the more I wrote (if that is what it was) I slowly managed to calm down a little. It was at this point, satisfied that I had completed my first draft proposal, that I heard the familiar knock on my wall.

Colmes was back!

Just to make sure, I pressed my ear to the wall and sure enough it was Colmes’ familiar knock, there was no doubt. It was

Colmes. I rushed out of my little office into the tunnel and saw that Colmes's door was ajar. I pushed it open so hard it banged the wall behind it and bounced back at me, I pushed again and then found myself standing in front of Colmes' desk. He was sitting like always, doing his crossword puzzle.

Except that it wasn't him. It was Rose the younger, sitting there dressed in a navy blue striped double breasted Victorian suit, tightly buttoned, bright white shirt with a starched collar, and deep blue striped tie. Her hair was dyed a dark resplendent black, clipped short, combed with a part on the left side. Her reddish brown eyebrows once bushy like her mother's, were now carefully shaped and trimmed. Her eyes, though, and this was the most disappointing to me, remained the original pale grey with a touch of green, but seemed dull, and lacked the sparkle of the rest of her countenance.

In my haste and shock, I ran into her desk and had to put out my hands to prevent from falling. I grabbed at the wicker chair but it tipped up and clattered to the floor.

"Hobson," she said, "we have a most interesting case."

She even spoke with a fake English accent. I at last steadied myself and stood as erect as I could. This was not Colmes. It was an abomination of Colmes. I did detect a slight twitch at the edge of her mouth. She had it all down pat. But it wasn't enough for me. I stood silently for some time and she nonchalantly returned to her crossword. I had an urge to go on as if nothing had happened, what was the case? And so on. But it was just not the same. So I slowly turned and walked out of the office and back to mine.

I began in a robotic fashion to tidy up my desk, stack my belongings as though ready to depart. And that was I discovered on my desk the proposal I had typed in my fit of madness. I sat down to read it, mesmerized. For it was not a dissertation proposal at all! I had written a lengthy and somewhat garbled description of my dream. I could not believe that it was I who wrote this. And to this day I do not remember having done so. There have been times, probably kind reader you have also experienced them, that I have awoken from a dream and tried to write down what it was about. But I could only manage to recall small parts of it, and could never make sense of what I had written. But this is different. I wrote the dream while I was

experiencing it. I wrote it in my sleep! It has to have been me. I am alone always in my office. Always alone. It would be a cruel trick if someone had sneaked in and written it.

In any case, being an honest and true academic, I am obliged to present for you the dream, mostly unedited, except here and there where my unconscious grammar departed from accepted rules. I have given it a name. It is called, *The University of the Chosen*.

