



TAKE



DOWN

Gorden Schweers

TAKE DOWN

*Live every day as if it's your best
and your last.*

The endemic trademark of the Claremont's partnership was long periods of silence, sharing the same space and little else. After twenty four years of marriage, Frankie and Viola were at the stage where they could share an evening together in a restaurant yet say nothing to each other before, during, and after the meal. Even if other married couples, neighbors, or relatives came over for a visit, the conversation would falter on some poor joke or slight difference of opinion on the weather. Inertia was the result. Their guests were left facing two silent people, man and wife, joined in holy matrimony *until death do we part*.

Unfortunately for Frankie Claremont, his departure was approaching faster than he cared to imagine. If this fact would have been drawn to his attention, he would have protested that he was completely disengaged and fell amongst those best described as *politically apathetic*, an Anglophone with no interest in public affairs. With such an innocuous personality, Frankie reasoned that he had avoided giving both His Maker and His Political Masters any provocation. So why should he worry that his life might end suddenly without any warning or preparation?

For the couple, intimacy had been supplanted by routine. Every weekend precisely at noon, Viola would take their miniature poodle out for a walk along the river and around the net perimeter of the nearby driving range where Frankie practiced his poor swing while dreaming of being the next Tiger Woods. If he happened to glimpse Viola walking Cha-Cha in the distance, Frankie would never have thought of offering her a wave, holding up his #9 club in a gesture of mock bravado. Likewise for Viola, even if such a greeting was proffered from a distance, she wouldn't have wasted her time with an acknowledgement.

They were not openly hostile to each other however. Rather it was that they were no longer friends, and even less so intimate when it came to sharing their thoughts and feelings. If this silence was in need of a description in the psychiatric community, it may well have been decorated with a fancy title like *advanced catatonic neurosis*. But it's more likely that those in the habit of ascribing Latin nomenclature to new discoveries would have given their marriage a title more aptly describing some species of fungus that thrived in the dark areas of a damp cellar.

Frankie and Viola had separate bathrooms and slept in separate beds. Viola had instituted the separation of their sleeping arrangements after her husband forgot to come

home with a gift for Mother's Day. He returned from the assembly line the following Wednesday and –*Voila!*– their spacious double bed was now - two singles. Instead of complaining bitterly - such as *Vi, darling, why have you done this?* - or even confessing *I don't like sleeping alone!* - Frankie accepted defeat and asked submissively, “Which bed is mine?”

The idiosyncrasies of their relationship were the brunt of gossip throughout the neighborhood. Peering out of the curtain one Saturday morning, Larry Seville had spied on his neighbors as Frankie loaded up his clubs and Viola walked away with her poodle on the end of a leash of imitation diamonds.

“Just what do you think you are doing?” his wife said to Seville.

He closed the slit in the living room curtains and weighed the question carefully.

“I'm just wondering when the top is going to blow off on that volcano,” he replied in a dry tone.

If the Sevilles were clever enough to keep intimacy alive in their union, the Claremont's embers were stone cold. The defining situation supplicated a dozen years earlier. Frankie

and Viola were standing in line at the Wal Mart of all places when he recollected his intention to remodel the laundry room. He commented to his wife, almost thinking aloud:

“I should pick up some finish nails for those cupboards in the laundry room.”

Viola had been waiting for this one moment for a very long time. This was an ideal opportunity to remind her husband of his growing list of inadequacies and to do it with an audience at her disposal. She quipped in response:

“You can buy all the nails you want but you know you never finish what you start, ever.”

People in the lineup several cues ahead of Frankie overheard the remark and turned to look. Viola tossed her dyed hair back in defiance and Frank grinned as if he were a primary student who had been chastised by Sister Superior. His face colored. Rather than fight back in the contest of marital sleights, Frankie passively accepted a *hard left hook* to his jaw in public. Viola had scored very nicely:

The bell sounded - Round One - forcing the apolitical fighter to stagger to his feet. Frankie Claremont was unwilling to fight for his marriage; whereupon his opponent deftly landed her first blow on the side of his

face. Thump! The ring of gold on his finger had mutated in to a boxing ring. When that first blow landed, the homicidal crowd of in-laws surrounding the ring leapt to its feet in approval, calling for his blood and a complete knock out....

Frankie stood under Wal Mart signs of ***Blow Out Sales***, rubbing his jaw as if he had actually received a punch from his wife's sharp tongue. In the years that followed, he would be receiving many more such verbal jabs, each rabbit punch intent on driving him on to the ropes or in to a corner. Viola would write in her diary:

January 21st 1998

I finally put Frankie Boy in his place, once and for all. He tried to pull that ruse on me about reminding him to buy something or other but I didn't fall for it. You should have seen the look on his face when I told him straight out that I wasn't going to be his patsy any longer. I won't be co-dependent. I won't! No matter how many times he tries to drag me back in to that hole, I'll fight back every inch!

In the production of her memoirs, Viola had discovered the perfect outlet. The topic of her annals had less to do with her own aspirations and more with the faux pas of her

husband, Frankie Boyd Claremont. Within a few years, she had penned several volumes. In them, she described (for example) how Frankie had awoken her with his snoring on *April 7th, 2002*; how on *February 5th 2003* he had put the butter in the wrong compartment in the fridge; and how on *May 11th 2004* he had spilled milk on the kitchen floor and never showed the least interest in cleaning up the mess, excusing himself that he was late for work. Her diary noted that he was *always late* and posited the question: *Who does he think he's kidding?*

When transcribing, Viola was not about to let any flaw in Frankie's personality slip past her for a second. The critique was written down in her handwriting and dated, page by page, proof for when and if she needed such before a court of law. Much to her surprise, her expectation would be fulfilled. The defense team of lawyers for the Police and the Ministry of External Affairs would subpoena the diaries as concrete evidence of the dysfunctional nature of the Claremont marriage. Everything she wrote for twenty five years was to become part of the public court record. It was more recognition than Viola could have dreamed possible.

One of those entries dealt with the time they were in the local Mexican Bistro, having an evening meal together. This was a routine every other Friday which Viola had insisted they establish and maintain for the health of their relationship. The real reason (poor Frankie never seemed capable of looking past the face value of any of Viola's lies) was that it was pay day and 'the boys' at work always hit the local bar together. Cheques were cashed over the counter and 'free rounds' for everyone were paid for by gullible chumps like her husband. She had to put a stop to his wasting money and so, concealing her boredom, made sure Frankie was parked in a booth at the Bistro and not in front of a dozen beer steins. But the time shared in the Bistro was just as uncomfortable as every meal. Frankie liked young waitresses and made no effort to conceal his infatuation. Even in church his wandering eyes could be seen following the chaste Marys as they came back from communion, their heads lightly veiled in lace and bowed. In the Bistro, the waitress, Shelley, was not wearing any wedding ring that Viola could see but was obviously a few months on her way to a full blown pregnancy. Frankie commenced fawning all over the waitress. He was overly friendly and did not hesitate to make flirtatious remarks. Viola was silent but furious.

The waitress had on a Mexican costume with a blouse that clung from each shoulder by an elastic band that left nothing to the imagination when she delivered food to the table, exposing the cavernous divide between her breasts when bending forward. Frankie was acting like an infatuated school boy as the waitress scribbled down their choices for dinner. Viola ordered the same dish as she always had for months on end: tacos made with carnitas filling. Along with her tacos came a variety of other dishes but she always chose the same side dish of guacamole.

It was Frankie's turn to order. The waitress stood waiting to transcribe his meal in her shorthand. But Mr. Claremont was smiling at her instead of studying the menu, admiring the braid of hair that lay coiled across one shoulder. Her hair was dyed from auburn to black to agree with the ethnic theme of the restaurant. The change enhanced her appearance. She waited patiently, smiling back at Frankie for a few seconds. This couple had been coming in for months now and she had been warned that the woman could be a jealous bitch when provoked. Trying to make every attempt to remain aloof, she asked Frankie, "Sir?" Frankie however was not about to let the young lady off that easily.

“Well,” he said, “don’t you think us old guys have enough weight to lose already without ordering more rich food?”

Shelley replied softly, “You’re not old, you just look it.”

Frankie laughed and said, “Its been a hard week, I’ll give you that.”

“Go ahead and order,” Voila interjected. “Stop wasting the girl’s time.”

Frankie did as he was told, ordering a dish of cochinita pibil. But he mispronounced the Spanish. Shelley corrected him so that he apologized but not before Viola interrupted, saying:

“That’s roasted pork. It’s far too rich for you!”

“But,” said Frankie, “it’s the only one I can pronounce on the menu.”

As he spoke, Frankie grinned at the waitress whose tongue passed smoothly across her own lips, trying not to intercede between the couple in their annoying match for power and control in public places.

“Why not order flautus with guacamole along with frittata? It’s on special today. It’s really delicious.”

“Done,” said Frankie who in reality would have accepted anything the waitresses suggested for a meal. If

Shelley would have suggested he jump to his death over a cliff, Frankie may well have considered that too, as would any man enslaved by pheromones.

“I’ll take a glass of Vila Torroja to go with my meal,” said Viola, indicating the liquor list that sat on the table in their booth. The waitress scribbled down her request but not before Frankie had searched down the list of wines and found his wife’s choice. Rather than attempt to pronounce the wine, he said:

“I’ll take the same.”

“No you won’t,” said Viola. “You’re driving. All we need is for you to be in an accident and end up with an impaired charge and a lawsuit for killing some innocent pedestrian.”

Shelley waited with an expression on her face that would have matched that of Mona Lisa. Frankie backed away from any confrontation as always and said, “Tea would be okay then.”

“Tea de Manzanita?”

“Yes, fine. That’s nice of you to remember what I usually drink with a meal.”

But their dinner and its challenges were far from over. Frankie refused to openly stop flirting with the young woman, who was struggling to make enough money to take

some time off with the birth of her child in five months. Once the table was littered with dirty dishes, the glass of wine took control of Viola's tongue. Shelley approached the table with the bill while serving five other tables. What Frankie did next was infuriating. Reaching across the table, he stuffed a cool \$20 in the girl's hand and thanked her for her impeccable service. The girl was humbled and showed no slight amount of emotion when she accepted the money, in a small way acknowledging that she was carrying a child with no husband around who was willing, or whom she wanted, to share in the responsibility of the raising of a child. All of this passed in front of Viola who was abashed and infuriated that her husband was acting as if she wasn't sitting right across from him. In the diary she added to each Saturday morning she wrote:

June 3 2005

He did it again! That man cannot keep his hands to himself. We were in the restaurant enjoying a decent meal together when he ruined the whole evening for me. I could not believe my eyes! Here I am trying to economize on 50% Off bakery items and Romeo hands over \$20 to a harlot right in front of me. When will he learn? I can't go anywhere but he's virtually pawing all the hussies he can

lay his eyes on. It's shameful. I'm his rasion d'etre and what do I get back for it? This nonsense!

It may seem implausible but whenever she finished writing in her diaries, Viola Claremont left the pages open on the table next to her bed. The diaries were not locked and she made no attempt to conceal her activity. *Let the turkey read it if he dares* she said to herself. But Frankie never did bother. There was a wall of thick glass between the two of them. He appeared to have lost interest in anything his wife was doing, including the barbs she made about him and their marriage in her diaries. Of course he was aware of the diaries and occasionally (such as when she was gone to jazz dance classes with her mother) he would sit at the kitchen table and read her comments. Most of the time he would burst out laughing, amused by what she was writing. He thought perhaps he was either losing his mind or had opted for amnesia, unable to recall most of the incidents that prompted such a snide commentary. Even in the worst of times (such as in POW camps) a few men are known to have the skill to survive whereas hundreds if not thousands of others succumb around them. Such was the case with Frankie Claremont. He was either stupid or exceptionally skilled like an Olympic gymnast balancing

his weight and testing his strength to its limits. Frankie considered some things necessary sacrifices in the prolonged agony of keeping a home intact in the modern war zone of a marriage. If asked, he always said *My cup is half full, not half empty*. Or he would say that *9 out of 10 ain't bad*, not elaborating at what constituted the last digit, Number 10. But of course everyone who looked from the outside could see in a moment that this man was enduring an untold amount of animosity from his wife and doing it with aplomb. From his perspective, Frankie Claremont was getting out of life what he wanted; and the man had achieved an enormous amount of equanimity - according to the eulogy delivered at his cremation by one of his golfing buddies.

Several years earlier, the Claremonts had downsized to a fashionable brick tenement. Each day, they returned to their second floor apartment to recover from their public activities. The entire unit of buildings was attached but each section had separate marble steps leading up to a front main hallway with its fourteen residents listed by name at each buzzer. It was a struggle to get groceries up to the second floor, let alone hauling his bag of clubs up and down once a week, but he told himself (and Viola at times)

it was good exercise. The tenement had been Viola's idea once Veronica, their youngest, left for summer college courses and a life of her own. Standing at the curb next to the open luggage compartment of the *Greyhound* they had wished Veronica well with her studies at McGill. Viola had chastised the girl:

“I'm glad to see you are on your way and have ambitions. But don't forget us! Once you girls have fancy careers and hot shot friends, you turn your backs on your parents, just like clockwork.”

Veronica was close to tears, stricken with guilt by the pull of conflicting commitments. But Frankie stepped forward and gave his daughter a bear hug, almost lifting her off the ground, and said:

“It's your time to leave the nest and learn to fly, honey bunch. Your mum and I will be fine. Live every day as if it's your last and best.”

“My sta-stomach is in a knot, da-daddy,” Veronica confessed, wiping the tears from her eyes.

“Just make sure you call back home again on that charge card I bought for you. It should be good for the next 6 months.”

Then they stood on the curb, holding each other for the first time in years, watching the bus roll away. The

windows were tinted but they assumed Veronica was at one of them, waving back as their youngest progeny. It was the last time she would see her father alive. Viola would write in her diary:

June 1st 2006

I can't say that I was that displeased to see the last of that Veronica, daddy's little pet. She was always so emotional and now it's her time to face up to the realities of the world. No matter what I did for that girl, she resented it. With that face scarred by acne, and her stutter, she'll never find a man even though she thinks she will. I'm her mother, I know! Every time she dated, not one of them called her back. Not one. I told her time and again: Keep that mouth of yours shut. Be submissive. Once the ring is on your finger, the ball is in your court. But instead, she tries to bury herself in academics, competing in sports, swimming laps in the pool and risking serious injury on the bars in gymnastics. Just to be noticed! Just to try to compete with men. I kept telling her, it's a waste of time. Men want: Pretty Women. Not plain ones. I'd say to her, 'Just look at your father. Watch him turn his head at some blonde, or remember how he fell all over that Jessica Thomas when you brought her home from school'. That's

men for you. But she didn't listen to a word. Just wait. She'll find out once she enters college, scholarship or no scholarship, and finds the pretty ones are the ones who get the best grades. Just wait until some femme fatale walks in the class and the professor just about jumps out of his shoes ogling her. That's life, I told her. Suck it up, I said. That's men for you.

The diary containing that entry was marked #14 on the spine. Viola's life of pathos was described in detail in the diaries. She thought of them as *chronicles par excellence* and one day in the distant future becoming literary benchmarks, brought down from the stacks by librarians on long ladders in libraries where one could hear a pin drop. The diaries described the birth of her first of two children. They passed through the struggles she had with post partum depression and the utter failure of Frankie to be a supportive partner and parent in their home.

Then out of the blue, while still nursing Julie, Viola was pregnant with their third child - Veronica. She wrote of her disappointment in the pregnancy but had no choice but to pass through the experience. To deal with her anxiety, this time she planned ahead, laying aside a small amount of grocery money for a counselor, a professional,

for help after the birth. That had been the worst mistake of her life. With no warning, she ended up in the arms of Dr. Hide, a family psychologist. That too, she wrote about in her diary, describing the stages of her infatuation until she dropped her guard and allowed the doctor to start an affair with her in his office. She wrote of the experience:

May 12th 1988.

For once, great sex.

She left the diary open in the bedroom but as usual Frankie was too preoccupied to even take the time to read it. But, in fact, he had. Once again, his survival strategy allowed him to forgive his wife, making excuses for her trauma with the long birthing; and then he separated his emotions from her infidelity, hoping for better times.

The affair with the doctor lasted for several months yet came to an abrupt halt. Viola wrote:

August 10th 1988

Well, I could not believe my ears when my handsome William arrived at our executive suite and instead of taking me in his arms (and sweeping me off my feet) he started to make excuses. Is there something wrong, I asked him,

trying to be patient. Yes, he says, I can't go on meeting you like this. It isn't right. We both have families. You don't love me? I demanded. William took my hands in his and kissed them, saying, Yes, Yes, my dearest loveliest Vi. I love you with my heart and soul. And so? I demanded. I feel terrible, he says. Absolutely terrible. You came to me in a vulnerable state. You were so beautiful, with the sun shining in to the room, falling on your beautiful hair and the tears streaming down your cheeks. I fell in love with you once and for all. And I'm not beautiful now, I demanded. You've gotten use to me, is that it? You want some new plaything not the challenge of intimacy. No, no, that's not it at all, the esteemed doctor says to me. You are as beautiful as ever. He tried to put his arm around my waist like he always did, before getting really serious, but I stepped away. My heart was growing cold to him, even as he made one shallow excuse after another. Please don't torture me, he begs. I went over to the window and stood looking out, half expecting to see some plain clothes detective looking up to the room we had shared every Wednesday for the last months. I turned on him, my arms folded across my chest. Spit it out, Bill, I demanded. You know what he did then? I had my negligee lying on the bed and he took it up and began to sob in to it. The whole

scene was pathetic. I have a career, he sobs, and by taking advantage of you in this way, I've compromised my ethics. So, that's it, I says, you choose a career and ethics over intimacy, is that it? Please, please, he sobs, don't make this more painful than it already is. What an actor! This guy really wanted me to swallow his alibi, hook, line and sinker. So, I says, if your career is so important to you, why don't I take you to the college of professional psychologists and have them strip you of your license, huh? His face dropped. Vi, he says, I've wronged you in a way that I will regret for the rest of my life. Boy, I thought, this guy can really spin the BS when he feels he's in a jam. So, I says, you've wasted my time, my emotions, my everything, and now you want to just walk away from it all. Fat chance, I told him, straight out. Then (you won't believe this) he says, All right, how much? Ten thousand, I said. Five, he says, I don't have ten thousand. I'm up to my teeth in a second mortgage. Oh, I thought, he's been letting along all of the time that money is no object to him, paying for the suite, paying for flowers and dinners; for taxi fare and a baby sitter. Now he's pretending he can't come up with ten thousand if it means he loses his license to practice. I'll settle for seven thousand, and not a penny less. You should have seen handsome Will rush to his coat

and cut me a cheque for seven thousand dollars! I tried to calculate how much each time in bed had cost him, and came up with a worthwhile amount. Once he handed me the cheque, it was my time for tears. I stuffed the cheque in the top of my blouse for safe keeping, and let him have my broken heart full force. You betrayed me, I sobbed. You used me and took complete advantage of me in the worst possible way. He tried to put his arms around me but I shot back a look of the deepest contempt for his kind. Get out, I insisted, before I call the police and have you arrested. Yes, yes, I'm so sorry, Vi, he said. And in a moment he was gone. I never went back again for any of his so called counseling. Alone in the hotel suite, I was numb and stood looking at the cheque for \$7000. He got off lightly.

With the affair over, Viola tried to make sense of the last few months in her life, when happiness seemed possible. She should have known, she reflected, when he brought up the topic of her keeping a diary. They had finished making love and were lying together on the disheveled bed in the suite. William was smoking a cigarette and Viola lying on his chest, reassured by the steady beat of this man's wonderful heart, when he said:

“Have you ever considered not writing everything in your diary?”

The question struck Viola as pretentious and unnecessary. Was he going to resume being the clinical psychologist after she had spiraled up the column of love with him for the last breathless hour?

“No,” she replied.

They lay silently together. He exhaled a few more times, blowing the smoke towards the ceiling, watching it roil in the pale light.

“I think it would benefit you, if you just let things happen, without analysing them down to the last detail”.

“If you stop smoking, I’ll stop writing in my diary, okay?” Viola said coyly.

Back home once again, sitting alone in the bedroom at the desk Frankie had bought for her one Christmas, with its rosewood surface and louvered sliding panel, she made note of her contempt for the therapist. Here was a man who made his living by taking notes on everything people confided to him; and here he was telling her to stop doing exactly the same thing!

Still angry a week after the affair had crashed, she reflected in her diary:

I was wary of what he was suggesting. I figure out people like that charlatan by writing in this diary. It is the real me, the situations I describe are the creme de la creme of my life. So my darling Dr. William Hide turned out to be a manipulator after all! We made love once a week and then just as I anticipated, he tries to change my personal choices. Face it, he was bored with me. I wasn't the first client that predator has hustled off to bed from his office. Yet, I couldn't stop either. Just the smell of him drove me wild."

With the money deposited, Viola wrote she may have lost a good lover but regained her objectivity, emerging wiser for the experience. The process of keeping her diary was a bridge and cathartic. While it facilitated the slow dismemberment of her husband's character, it also left her scanning the horizon for a better opportunity. The fanfare of their marriage had fizzled after a dozen years and three children. Now she watched from a safe distance as her husband forgot one important commitment after another. First, Frankie forgot their wedding anniversary; then her birthday and mother's day; the date (June 21st) of his original proposal of marriage; and finally the birthdays of all three of their children. Rather than remind him, Viola simply waited until the time was over and he had forgotten, confirming his failure as a decent husband and father.

Frankie had to face up to his karma sooner or later, followed by the reclamation of her own life. Viola was so certain of the outcome, she was willing to step back and wait. Women always outlived men. But even she was a little surprised, and then vindicated, when her Frankie became another one of the city's homicide statistics.

It was late June, the most appealing time of the year for living in the city. Though their boulevard seemed transformed under a canopy of summer leaves, a seething infestation of caterpillars was attacking the soft foliage. During the day, hundreds of soft larvae fell from the limbs to the pavement, getting crushed underfoot. But nothing was available apart from large scale poisonous spraying that could eradicate the blight. The balance of nature had been seriously compromised. Starlings refused to eat the bitter antibodies produced by the soft green tissue of the invaders. At nightfall the swarms crawled back in a mass to their gauze cocoons for safety. Rather than lose the park like character of the metropolis, city hall sent out workers dressed in white disposables and wearing gas masks. Crews worked nocturnally throughout the city, looking like invaders from another planet. Carrying long poles, they removed the cocoons from the tree limbs and burned them

in the incinerators they were pulling along behind city trucks. Rather than giving a sense of environmental stewardship, the white aliens gave everyone good reason to remain off the streets at night. Viola wrote:

June 28 2006

What next? Who wants to live in a place where the secret police are dressed in coveralls complete with white booties, and can bang on your door at any time, demanding you 'Come in for questioning'. Orwell was right. We do live in a police state. Strangely, in my heart of hearts, I feel safer at the same time, knowing at any time I can have Frankie Boy hauled away for questioning. I wonder how he'd stand up to a few sessions of water boarding?

The white aliens had cleared the trees along Adanac Avenue the previous week. Viola was standing at the window of their second floor tenement the following Saturday morning, staring down at the street. Frankie was lounging behind her on his recliner, still dressed in his pajamas, slippers, and a full length housecoat.

Concentrating, he was reading a manual he needed to understand for his work as a welder on the assembly line. Every two years, the company forced their workers to

challenge the tests that would give their trade its accreditation. Meanwhile robots were being introduced to his factory, displacing hundreds of jobs through automation.

Frankie looked up and for once saw his wife in finite detail. Her aura in the sunlight was an image he could not forget, a premonition of poetry he was unable to misplace. His golf bag was leaning against the wall near the door. In a few hours he'd be dressed in pressed pants and a new cardigan, following through on a perfect swing that was sending a white ball soaring down a lane of imitation grass. The red sun was burning through the air pollution and filling their bay window, turning the curtains in to wisps of delicate cirrus, the light falling on her shoulders as luminous hands. *She could be an angel* Frankie thought for a split second. *Even after giving birth to our girls, she's never lost her trim waist.* As if spurning his thoughts, Viola turned and said in a critical tone:

“Where are those morons in white suits when we really need them? Someone should call the police!”

“Why?” asked Frankie. “They aren't hurting anyone.”

Viola turned back towards the window and gloated at the people who had congregated on the street below their

tenement. From the street, she looked more like a frozen gargoyle than an angel.

Cars parked alongside the curbs faced one direction on their side of the street. On the other side, separated by a peninsula of grass, the cars were parked facing the opposite direction for the tenement dwellers on the other side of the avenue. This long island of grass with a curb was in fact the one thing that differentiated their neighborhood from the poorer districts. The streets were, as a consequence, wider and more pedestrian friendly. Viola jogged her poodle along the sidewalks, dodging the flow of traffic through the residential district. To get to the overpass and on to the freeways bisecting the city in four directions, traffic had to wind its way past the Adanac tenements. What was happening now on the grass island irked Viola thoroughly. She was not, by any means, powerless in the circumstance:

“They probably don’t have a license,” she said, focusing on the small crowd that had gathered around the street musicians.

“Nonsense,” replied Frankie. “They’d force us to take out a license just to breathe in the monoxide if we let them.” He shook his head in distain. “Those technocrats in city hall have the nerve to ask us to vote them in to

office so they can run their by-laws all over our backs, all the while pretending they don't have a clue what they are doing!"

Viola's hard eyes locked on her target in the crowd that had gathered on the island. Amplifiers tethered to long cords surrounded the street musicians. She narrowed in on the lead singer and snorted with displeasure. Jack was a lean dude wearing a sleeveless tee shirt and faded Levis. The tendrils of tattoos decorated his arms. For shoes he was wearing a pair of high top black runners with the logo of the Greek god Mercury monogrammed to each shank. His bald head carried the white fuzz of a man whose barber had shaved his skull smooth. Hair stubble grew as a pencil line along his gaunt cheeks and chin. Across one shoulder was slung an old leather guitar strap supporting a pawn shop *Gibson*.

If he were clean shaven thought Viola *he'd pass for some German skin head*. The irony of her remark struck her as amusing and she smirked for a few moments. The impromptu concert had started. Broken rifts from guitars and bongo drums wafted across the street. Viola and Frankie could hear the faint rancor of the guitarist and his fellow musicians as they pumped out a rhythm of acid

rock. For a moment the tempo sounded African; then British; and next from the Ozarks and perhaps San Francisco. Whatever its origins, Viola found it offensive. The longer she stood watching, the angrier she became with the world she could not control. The police were just one phone call away!

The lead singer was jumping around with the guitar in his hands, gyrating as if suffering from St. Vitus dance, his body animated by electrical discharge. Dancing in circles, animated with musical ecstasy, he'd rush at the microphone, playing a mouth organ that wailed like a disgruntled warthog. His admirers (he had a few) called him *Jack the Live Jive*. Several dozen weekenders had congregated in the area to listen to the impromptu concert. A few with children in back packs and garlands in their hair were dancing on the grass to the music, their infants laughing on their parent's backs as they were bounced around in the sunshine. Others looking like the homeless, or those pretending to be the homeless in torn jeans, sat on the curb looking unrepressed and passing joints of grass amongst themselves.

The band was okay and played for free. Bursts of kinetic energy oozed from the old rocker as he twisted and turned while wailing in anguish to a microphone. Several

black amplifiers behind the band on both sides boomed out the message of peace and love, war and angst, to the faithful on the street, the electronic barrage of sound bouncing back off the walls of the tenements.

Disbursed around *Jack the Jive* was a collection of band members looking as if they were marooned from outer space but playing a variety of modern instruments with professional finesse. As a rate payer, Viola was not impressed. She imagined John Lennon had been pulled from his grave and, having aged another good ten to fifteen years, was on their front boulevard pleading *Give Peease a Chance*. Viola thought *Right, I'll give you just what you deserve, buster!*

She crossed the room and took the phone receiver in her hand. The numbers of the nearby precinct came to her automatically: 437-742-5672. She was intent on registering a complaint against the aging hipsters on her front porch. Her mind ran down a list of imaginary transgressions: **Vagrancy. Disturbing the peace. Obstruction of Justice. Playing profane music without a license. Making a fool of himself on my front porch. Singing offensive politically charged lyrics in public. Littering the streets. Blocking traffic. Encouraging the**

consumption of liquor and controlled substances in public.

Behind her, passing around her waist, Frankie's large hand found the button on the phone jack and cut off the tone to the receiver. Viola was alarmed:

“What do you think you are doing? How dare you!” She shook the phone speaker on its long umbilical cord in her husband's face. He stood his ground:

“They're not doing any harm,” he repeated. “Leave it alone, Vi. You were young once too.”

Viola was furious. Her diary was meticulous in describing a man who lacked the guts to confront any issue. Now, however, he was standing in his house coat and questioning her. She couldn't allow this to continue. But he had reached up and was holding the phone receiver in his hand. She tried to take it away, but he was, of course, stronger than she, and he held it fast until she released her grasp.

“How dare you!” she pouted. He had allowed her to separate their beds but now, on this small issue, he was standing his ground.

“They aren't doing any harm,” Frankie replied, unwilling to allow their conflict to escalate.

“No harm!” she replied. “They’ve been imposing themselves on us every weekend and you just sit there and let it happen.”

“I happen to like Jack,” he replied. “He’s a bit off at times when he’s high but still talks more sense than the goons we have in Ottawa.”

“And just who is Jack?”

“Mr. Hipster out there. They call him *Jack the Jive Man*.”

Frankie went around his wife and put the phone back down on its receiver with the expectation his wife would comply. But she was not about to back down so easily.

“I don’t care who he is, or what they call him. The guy is a creep. He belongs behind bars.”

“That’s what he said about you.”

“What?”

“That’s what he said about you, word for word,” repeated Frankie.

Viola’s mouth lost its struggle with gravity. “Who said what about – me?”

“Jack out there said precisely the same thing about you – that people like you (actually he said ‘snobs like that bitch’) should be behind bars.”

“And just when did you talk to him?”

“That would have been in –ah- early May.”

Viola stared at her husband in disbelief. Struggling to control her breathing, she was incredulous that her husband had actually held a conversation with the **John Lennon Impersonator** whom she despised. Even more unbelievable was the fact that Frankie Boy was talking back to her, standing in their living room, as if he owned the space! Viola knew exactly what she would be writing in her diary later in the evening: *The fool I married insulted me to my face!* She countered:

“You’ve never talked to that man in your life, you know that! When did you talk to him? Where?”

“It was at the council meeting for our strata. You didn’t want to go so I went alone. Mr. Jack Hamilton held the floor for the longest time, made jokes, and more or less smoothed things over for the rest of the meeting. An interesting man, actually. Diverse and well educated. A Vietnam vet, wounded and decorated, and so on.”

“You said he mentioned me specifically. This sounds like twattle.”

“Not at all, dearest Vi.”

Viola waited, standing near the phone that she still intended to use as her private line to the police station. She envisioned them arriving in white coveralls wearing gas

masks just like the aliens. As far as Viola and city hall were concerned, there was little difference between the invasion of the caterpillars and the hordes of homeless they had to deal with like a sociological disease. Frankie continued to explain in a nonchalant voice:

“After the meeting, a group of us were standing around with cups of coffee in our hands, and up pipes Jack (as if he suddenly realized it for himself) - “Hey” he says, “Aren’t you the fat jerk who’s married to that bloody snob? The one who walks her poodle around this neighborhood like she’s the maker of heaven and earth?”

“And what did you say?” Viola demanded.

“Precisely.”

Frankie smiled at his wife but she did not comprehend the response. Was he talking entirely out of context, answering an earlier question, or did he actually agree with that fool on his guitar, belting out old Stones tunes as if he had a pact with the devil? She tried to guess:

“You really didn’t let him away with insulting me - or did you?”

“Not at all. All I inferred was ‘*Yes, I’m her husband and she does indeed walk our poodle around our streets on a regular basis.*’ How inoffensive could that be?”

“But didn’t you just say that drip called me ‘*a bloody snob*’? And in front of the others who were there with you at the end of the meeting. I would have expected you to stand up for your wife in the face of such a vile insult!”

“He’s bigger than me,” Frankie responded. Then he thought over the false implication of his statement. *Jack the Jive Man* was in fact a head taller but with the drawn haggard look of a rock star suffering from heroin abuse. The music from the boulevard wafted in to the room, filling in the silences between Frankie and Viola. The difference in Jack and Frankie was a derivative of life style choice. Frankie was perturbed by his sudden awareness. Whereas Jack the political activist had chosen to chew through the calories of his daily meals with stress inducing attacks on the moral integrity of those in the government; Frankie’s rotund waist was a byproduct of his political and moral lassitude. But, as is well known, opposites attract. Frankie said to his wife:

“It seems that when you exercise Cha-Cha, you walk her around as if everyone on the street should get out of your way. People most certainly would have noticed but up until this point, as far as I know, no one but *Mister Jumping Jack Flash* out there has had the fortitude to comment. So, he spoke the truth at the end of our meeting

and everyone roared with laughter when I said (agreed in a second - with) *Precisely*. Have I ever told you how little you support *me* as my lawfully wedded wife?”

Viola was seething. She'd write everything down later in the evening and leave it open for Frankie Boy to read for himself. But first she demanded to know what else had been said behind her back.

“Well, if you must know, he said you never return his greetings when you walk past on the street. He said you should be *behind bars*.”

“And you said back?”

“Now I replied: *Really now, that's just too much! How thin is your skin anyways and after all you have been through?*”

Viola was somewhat pleased to hear her husband had stood up for her in a small way. But Frankie was not finished:

“I added as an afterthought, *Unless the bars you mean are like in a zoo!* It was a great comeback and all of us roared with laughter. You would have been proud of me, Vi Darling, really proud!”

The electronic shockwaves from the woofers and tweeters in the street seeped through the brick walls and in to the

room. Jack's larynx could be heard bellowing in to a microphone stuck on the end of a retractable steel pole. He crooned, in tribute to his idol Mick Jagger, *I can't get noo satisfaction, noooo groovy action, though I try and I try....* Meanwhile the bass guitar was heard following along like an obedient puppy, sounding like *doom, ta da doom, doom, doom....* followed closely by Jack's amplified voice screaming: *no satisfaction/no groovy action.*

Frankie and Viola stood for a moment separated by the intrusion of the sound waves in their conversation. It was their relationship that gave *them* no satisfaction whatsoever. When they *lost that loving feeling* a void was left in their hearts that they accepted for a normal life. Then Frankie said, "With all of those groupies chasing Jagger, he comes off sounding like Solomon: *All is vanity.* No satisfaction for the human heart apparently." Frankie laughed at his own joke.

Viola reached for the phone. "I'm calling the police," she said firmly.

Frankie decided not to interfere any further. He went to the window to watch the concert with its strange congregation of young people, some with mounds of filthy hair tied in rollogs as if they were the descendents of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Money was deducted from every one

of his pay cheques to keep the army of young unemployed alive in amphetamine infested shelters. He cautioned Viola one last time:

“It’s too late.”

Viola looked up, concealing the mouth of the receiver in her spare hand.

“What’s – too late?”

Frankie turned back from the window and said, “The police are already here.”

It was true. Perhaps someone else in the vast complex of apartments and tenements had complained; or perhaps a motorist with a cell phone and an axe to grind had called the police; or perhaps just by chance, the police had arrived. Far more plausible however, and according to a Freedom of Information request from the Civil Liberties Association, was the fact that Jack Hamilton was under surveillance. Here was a man who dared to pen letters condemning his government’s complacency in allowing “the bombing of women, children, and civilians” in the Middle East from Libya to Afghanistan. This was a targeted take down if there ever was one. His last letter had pushed the envelope with the Ministry.

The Claremont's picture window was like a huge TV screen. Below them on the street two heavily armed officers emerged wearing magnums in black holsters and handcuffs and radios dangling from the opposite hip. They walked awkwardly, trying to appear to be intimidating to the scores of people they were pushing aside. Of the two officers, the woman was the most animated, ready to arrest, with force if necessary, the riffraff of the street. Their orders however were to arrest the gaunt lead singer who (they had been briefed earlier) would attempt to resist arrest. His background included several tours of duty in Vietnam. It was his views that were considered dangerous, if not the man himself. The letters he had written to **The Department of External Affairs** condemning the escalation of his country's military involvement were shown at the briefing, read aloud word by word to the police officers who were dispatched to arrest "the radical" on the following Saturday. Further, they were warned that his supporters on the street might attempt to prevent his arrest. First a single squad car would arrive, followed by other vehicles racing to the scene with the wail of sirens and red bubble lights.

Superintendent Greenwood was the briefing officer. He advised the dozen or so officers involved in the daylight sting that Jack E. Hamilton was dangerous and would resist arrest. Hamilton's picture (talking at the strata meeting) was flashed on the overhead screen. Greenwood stated in a cool voice, "Be forewarned: It's almost impossible for a man of his temperament not to resist arrest." Once arrested, he would be charged with one infraction after another as he refused to co-operate: assaulting an officer; attempting to escape custody; causing a disturbance amongst other prisoners by going on a hunger strike; refusing legal council on the grounds that the whole system was corrupt; performing in public without a license. The pretext of his arrest was like a snowball rolling down a cliff that would gain momentum as the dissident came closer to a brief appearance in court. Once arrested, he'd be in confinement indefinitely. The government was employing a swat team to eliminate a gadfly.

"But he does have a license," interrupted Sergeant Lloyd at the morning briefing. The others turned their heads to the opposite end of the table. Greenwood stood at the front and the elder sergeant was seated at the other end of the table, directly opposite. Lloyd flipped open the report that lay in front of each officer and on Page 12 drew

their attention to subparagraph B3.1. It stated the suspect had been issued a permit on 15 April 2006 to be a busker along with his four band members, the Honey Suckers. Reading out the passage to the rest of the officers while Superintendent Greenwood listened with a tight smile, Lloyd made his point that the person or persons they were about to arrest were operating within their legal rights. Flipping the report closed on the desk, Lloyd repeated, “Mr. Hamilton is not breaking any laws.”

“Bullshit,” replied Greenwood. All the heads in the room turned back to the front wall. Clicking the remote in his hand, a handwritten letter was illuminated across the wall from an overhead projector. Greenwood’s onscreen pointer drifted down to the bottom of the page where Jack Hamilton’s signature was clearly legible. The pointer moved back up to the letterhead, addressed to The Minister of Defense, Ottawa. Greenwood pointed out that this character, Jack Hamilton, had clearly crossed the line. The letter read in part –

I am a veteran of one of the endless and senseless conflicts that have plagued our world since the Second World War. I was decorated for my sacrifice at the age of 17 after being ambushed while on patrol in the Mekong Delta. I can

assure you that no war is without its crimes against humanity, no matter which side (ours or theirs) commits these endless atrocities. Modern warfare is the work of the devil. The first thing that dies in any war is not the women and the children, it is the truth. With all due respect, Honorable Minister Klein, the reasons you have given in your speech to our Parliament are the words of a warmonger and fraud. You have never seen children killed and maimed in war as I have....

“Let’s not pussyfoot around with this arrogant bastard. Okay?” Greenwood spat back at the sergeant. But Lloyd refused to back away from his point in the discussion, aware that Greenwood had been promised a comfortable position in the Ministry of Defense once he retired. He countered:

“What’s the media going to do with this one? I mean if someone puts this up on UTube or worse if it shows up on the evening *Roundup*, our reputation in the city as impartial law enforcers could be questioned.”

All heads in the room swiveled back towards the superintendent.

“The press will be there,” Greenwood replied smugly. “I briefed the three major outlets last night. They’ll come

sweeping in with their cameras once the arrest gets underway. Remember this dodgy activist will resist arrest. He'll be hollering about his rights and so too will his supporters.”

Greenwood looked around the table at the faces of his praetorians and several recruits in new uniforms. Sergeant Lloyd knew what was happening in that room. They were being offered the opportunity to be privy to the intentions of an inner circle of powerful interests. For the privilege, they were being solicited to suspend their principles. Greenwood continued:

“Just remember what I told you: *The best officer makes the best actor*. I not expecting any Academy Awards but we want this bozo pulled down in public and fully discredited. Before you know it, we've got another David Koresh on our hands. If he thinks he can go around threatening our MPs, he is sadly mistaken, right?”

A murmur of consent passed around the room.

“I don't want anything to do with this particular operation,” replied Sergeant Lloyd.

All heads in the room turned to the left and back again to the right and the superintendent.

“Fine,” replied Greenwood, “then stand down. But remember, Lloyd, you are sworn to secrecy by your oath of loyalty.”

The sergeant got up to leave, tucking the binder on *Jack Hamilton* under his arm. He mumbled:

“Thanks for respecting my opinion on this one.”

With the conference door closed again, the officers looked across the table at each other in silence. Two items were obvious. Foremost, it was clear the sergeant’s position would soon be coming up as a job competition within their ranks. Secondly, they were sharing in the thrill of a conspiracy that came down from the highest level of government. Far less obvious was the misconception that anything proposed or promoted in that conference room would remain confidential. Lloyd would see to the latter. Greenwood asked in confidence:

“Well, ladies and gentleman, anyone else?”

The remaining officers made no attempt to leave. The matter was settled. The radical who wanted to change the world would be arrested the following afternoon. The briefing continued for another forty five minutes.

The take down went almost as planned. Stopping in the middle of the avenue, a patrol car parked in a defensive

maneuver, blocking the passage of other traffic.

Greenwood had not anticipated that the drivers and passengers caught in the blockade would leave their cars and join the hostilities. His riot force would end up surrounded, front and back, by weekend warriors.

Viola peered around her husband, up the street to where a mob was pressing towards the altercation on the boulevard. Not noticing the arrival of the police, *Jack the Jive Man* was intent on crooning Bruce Springsteen's famous song 'Born in the USA'. The amps behind him wailed out an impassioned message:

.....they put a rifle in my hand /sent me off to a foreign land/ to go and kill the yellow man... Nowhere to run / ain't nowhere to go... Yeah, I was born in the USA / Born in the USA / Born in the USA...

In the background, those who were stoned on grass while grooving on the free concert took notice in their paranoia that the vehicle directly behind the squad car contained *Le Press*. The whole thing was a choreographed set up. Two officers entered centre stage first, sauntering like pit bulls towards the Honey Suckers. Homeless people leapt to their feet, demanding to know over the crash of electronic rifts what the hassle was all about. *Who sent you pigs here, anyways!* shouted one distraught youth whose

image and voice was carried all of the way to the Late News on Channel 126. The officers backed off to one side. The burly female officer was seen putting her free hand on her holstered weapon while the other officer appeared to be using his radio to call for reinforcements. There was of course no need to do so. A wagon load of riot police was within minutes of the demonstration. The Honey Suckers stopped playing, their music breaking apart like a huge sheet of glass. The riot squad had formed a wedge at the end of the road and were advancing, beating their batons on their shields. People formed a barrier between the Honey Suckers and the police. *Le Press* with cameras on their shoulders filmed the whole debacle. Dozens of people from both sides of the street ran out of their tenements with cameras and garbage can lids, intent on downloading the altercation as soon as possible.

The escapade was out-of-police-control. Superintendent Greenwood's promotion in to any Ministry went up in smoke, along with the pension that had been waiting like a pot of gold at the end of his career rainbow. The size of the protest doubled from fifty to something closer to a hundred, and continued to grow in a matter of minutes. Mayhem had broken out. Much to their credit, the original two officers remained disciplined, forcing their way

through the mob until they were able to confront the emaciated singer who was inciting a riot, shouting *Resist the Fascists! Resist the Fascists!* Along the periphery of the mob, demonstrators were being clubbed to the ground while others were pepper sprayed by the riot police. *Le Press* cameras set up on tripods panned back to the front of the demonstration. *Jack the Jive Man* was clearly identified as the ringleader, an agitator and an enemy of the state. Just as predicted, he wasn't about to be taken down without a struggle.

“You're under arrest,” screamed the peace officer nearest the amateur rock star/environmentalist/activist/ex-marine/pacifist/poet and author/pensioner/defunct hippie/father of six and husband to several women/part time legal advocate/marine biologist/organic gardener/strata member/disciple of Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche / habitat for humanity volunteer /and blood donor at the Red Cross.

“For what, you asshole?” screamed Jack Hamilton in response.

The arresting officers did not find it necessary to identify any charges. They had *Le Press* on their sides and the charges would be overdubbed on the final editing of the news. More people and families poured out of the tenements on both sides of the street, running over to

ostensively join in the defense of their constitutional rights of expression and assembly (but actually wanting to watch for themselves on the late news). A few politically astute street people were filmed arguing with the police, informing them that their birth rights went all the way back to the Magna Carter. The police were outnumbered. Yet Jack Hamilton was close to being taken in to custody. It may have been his last live performance but he put out a remarkable effort, shouting he knew they were *bloody fascists*. One officer had managed to clasp a handcuff on his one wrist but Jack had thrown his fist up in the air in defiance. *Le Press* cameras zoomed in and held the image for a few seconds. Click. Click. Click. Each frame was worth a bundle with IP. The man with his handcuff held in the air was front page material.

Instantaneously his image was sent around the world on press outlets from London to Cairo, Singapore to New York. The headline would read (on huge screen readouts) *CANADIANS TAKE DOWN TERRORIST IN BROAD DAYLIGHT*. Jack Hamilton was on his way to becoming famous or infamous (depending on one's perspective) and for all of the wrong reasons.

Several officers surrounded Jack as he struggled to free himself. The Honey Suckers had joined the mayhem,

trying to ward off the assault. Jack fell to the ground, suffering from an attack of asthma, screaming - *I can't breathe, I can't breathe.*

Suddenly one camera lens swiveled wildly over to the extreme periphery. Blurred and then back in focus, it zeroed in on the absurd image of a pudgy middle aged man in a house coat and satin Chinese slippers. He was filmed running down the tenement steps with a #9 golf club in his hands and yelling ***Geronimoooo!*** The police report said they had acted purely in self defense. Yet the footage showed that Frankie discarded the golf club at the curb, before breaking in to the crowd.

Viola described on the witness stand part of what had transpired. She and Frankie watched dispassionately at their window as the scene of lawlessness was unfolding below them in the streets. Testifying under oath, she could not avoid a smirk when describing one of the police batons connecting with the skull of one of the protestors. That was when, she related in a quavering tone, Frankie grabbed a golf club at the door and ran out in to the street like a mad man. She said she watched in complete dismay as her husband pushed his way like some sumo wrestler through the mob.

Superintendent Greenwood who was on *administrative leave* was called on to the stand next. On behalf of the police department, he described how his detachment of officers was overwhelmed when an overweight man threw his body over that of the defunct war hero. The police now had two men to club but were confused as to who this new protestor was and why he was fighting with such fury to protect the deadbeat they were beating on the ground. Everyone in the court room knew what had happened after that point. **Le Press** camera swung over to the left and froze as millions of viewers heard the shot that ended Frankie's attempt to save a friend of conscience from an unjust and vile take down.

For her lawsuit, Viola had excellent legal counsel. She and her lawyers were suing city hall, the police department, and in particular Superintendent Greenwood and the Deputy Minister of the Defense Department for the death of her husband. When asked if she did not think the \$12.4 million she was demanding as compensation was excessive, she told the reporter that no amount of money could ever replace **Frank Boyd Claremont**, a compassionate and loving man who had been a wonderful father and husband.