



The timeframe changes. The theme of incipient violence against women may not.

It is now eighty years later, late September 2016. My name is Francine Olnay.

By way of background, I am thirty six, a rangy fair haired woman and mother with my hair cut short and parted and smarmed down like a man's which is part of my signature look. I have a small head on a long neck and body, 'diminutive' if you like it -- which cameras do -- or 'not very pronounced' if you don't like it if -- you have an ideal of a woman with big lips and big cheekbones. I'm six foot tall. I'm a fashion model and I design and tailor suits for women who wish to make a serious and elegant presentation, mainly women who work in Silicon Valley businesses or associated law or brokerage firms, that kind of person.

My line is known as *Francine Demure*. I still model, for my own line and when shoots are looking for the anxiety which is endemic in my face and which I can, prompted or directed right, turn luminous with a smile that is, I hope, not superficial. I didn't go to normal college but apprenticed in tailoring in Milan and in sourcing fabrics with a French fashion house. I also draw a lot, always looking for trouser, skirt and jacket looks that fit the real shapes of modern women. I like neckties and if men consider them old fashioned, too bad. I try to make suits that are elegant and don't shout. I drew wild flowers as a child, then botanicals for fabric designs which is where I started, now I draw for tailoring.

I try and fail to be dedicated to green interests. I worry a lot. And I try to enable those around me. Friends and my children. I am a widow. I'll come to that --and to my guilt. I am what my twelve year old daughter, Lilit, calls *Homo Californicus*, a third generation Californian which she then changed to *Femina Californica*. Which her fifteen year old brother Nick said could not be a genus.

Lilit is learning Latin. She discovered that the word *vagina* is the same in both languages. She is in a group after school who are discussing bullying on social media. One of the issues is nudity and another is virginity.

They are only children. This subject of violence against women and distortion of female expectancies is one that concerns me to a point of obsession. There are more Barbi

dolls in the USA -- yes I had them -- than people and increasingly young girls are sexualized and made adult before they are psychologically or physically ready. My profession is badly at fault.

And maybe me. I think about clothes and body image a lot and this is a puzzle to Lilit because I refuse to have a boob job or wear uplift bras or have the now-arriving lines on my face smoothed out. Her friends' mothers don't get it. They talk about plastic surgeons and their big treat is to go to Victoria's Secret with their daughters. It is the more muddling for Lilit because I earn money through my looks and the clothes I sell.

My darling Lilit is solid and dark. Lilit is actually an Armenian name and my married name and the childrens' surname is Agopian. When I say married, I am a widow. In July 2015 I was responsible for my husband dying. I'll come to that. There is quite a lot I need to come to.

I like to think the three of us huddle close, support each other without Nick senior. We live in a Victorian house with a *cottage orné* design in Davis in California, thirty miles north of San Francisco. Davis is an important University of California campus with a long history of wine science which was my late husband's field. Nick was a specialist on grape vine pests and a professor.

It is September, 2016. I am in a state of anxiety about the solidity of Hilary Clinton's lead.

Well, I am trying not to be.

The children are quiet and I am sketching for summer suits and dresses with coats for the next spring line. I'm working on new ideas for rounded lapels and collars that are elevated all the time. The children are doing home work or looking at their social media accounts. They both read books a lot. It's OK by me.

The home phone rings and Nick junior goes to get it. We've had dinner. I am expecting a late call from a client.

'Granny Juliette!' he mouths -- his granny, my mother.

Nick holds the receiver away from him, as if it is hot and he's making a mischievous face. He brings the handset over.

Hand on phone....'Granny Juliette says something terrible has happened,' Nick says.

He gives me the receiver.

'Juliette?' I call her that.

My hydraulic engineer mother threw my father out before I arrived. She, my mother, now lives in 'our' house which was my Granny Sonia's in Beverly Hills. It's not in the posh part. The property is high in a canyon, a small house that can only be reached by walking up fifty six steps. Juliette is calling from there.

'Hullo, Mum,' I say. I know the cheerfulness won't fit.

'I've had a letter', Juliette blurts out. 'It's one big lie. My mother isn't who she said she was and she never bought that mirror at Butterfields.'

'Hold on, Juliette,' I say. 'Who is *she*?' I ask.

'Who *was* she? She was supposed to be my mother.'

'Granny Sonia?'

'Yes.'

*My* mother, who is calling, Juliette Olnay, is a hard-to-upset woman and she is badly upset. 'My mother was another person,' Juliette says. 'This is drastic. I want you to come.'

'Another person? What do you mean?'

'Can you come tomorrow?'

'The children are in school.'

'I don't care about the children.'

Wait. I have to de-fuse this. 'Just go back, Juliette. Do you mean Granny Sonia's big mirror?'

The Beverly Hills House is a cedar wood cabin. The silvery mirror is oval with a flat base and perhaps thirty inches high. It sits on a slab of stone mantle. It has scallop shells around its frame and these are silver leafed. The glass is antiqued. It is either an Italian antique or a copy of one. It was brought by my grandmother Sonia for that house. I used to dress up in vintage dresses she had and look at myself in the mirror -- part of my introduction to the beautiful things she surrounded herself with, to my sense of patina and restraint -- Beverley Hills being about the most unrestrained place on earth.

'Why did she hate me?' Juliette asks

'Look Juliette we'll come on Friday evening.'

'This is not for children.'

I manage to diffuse it. The children are so patient with me that they accept their weekend plans being changed. Juliette hardly acknowledged the awful death of my husband,

did not offer to come and help, did not come to his funeral, said she had a long term conference planned and I did not consult her about the funeral date.

It really is a problem for Juliette. My father is a neurologist interested in the part of the brain that controls laughter and in the psychology of laughter. Why Juliette married him I am not sure except that she is an engineer and she needed sperm to have a child.

Or why my dad, Harry Zimber married her? She told him to leave before I was born and then three days after I arrived she left to go back to work. She went back to the small apartment she has near work in Anaheim. Her breast milk was sent over by courier. Hence my being brought up by Granny Sonia who looked so much like me.

Even then there is a discrepancy and a mystery about Sonia. She was an orphan, born in 1914. She said her parents were in the lumber business in northern California, that they had died in early 1919 in the worldwide flu epidemic. She said she had no memory until she was five or six, then going to church in Lake Forest, Illinois, north of Chicago. She lived with an aunt there and went to high school there.

She did 'various jobs', she said -- nothing about college.

In World War II, she had a secretarial job attached to the US embassy in London and could not talk about it.

Either she could not talk about it because it was secret. Or she could not talk about it because the memory was painful.

All her childhood photographs were lost to a bombing attack on a flat she had in London in 1944.

After the war she worked for McIntyre Aircraft Corporation in Los Angeles. She was married to an army doctor and biological scientist, Jacob Ungar, who sounds to have been a wonderful man. In theory they had two children, Juliette and my uncle Andrew. In theory -- and according to her birth certificate -- Juliette was born in a tiny settlement of Lovelock, Nevada in September 1948 -- Andrew in 1949.

My mother is convinced her part of this is a lie. The story is that pregnant Granny Sonia was taken short on the road. The baby was coming when they were on a trip back from Utah and she was born in Lovelock, Nevada, which issued her birth certificate.

My mother is hard and fast certain this is not true. The difficulty with all this is that Granny never talked to her only daughter. It was all made worse by the fact that Jake Ungar died of leukaemia when the two children were in their teens and then Andrew, her brother,

was killed in Vietnam. I see Granny as flawless. Yet this was a big flaw – her inability to tell the truth about who Juliette’s father was. Now it turns out we don’t know who she was either. I have never got on well with my mother, alas. Granny Sonia bought me up. She photographed me with a black and white Roliflex from a young age. She taught me everything about clothes and carriage and being with people.

It was eerie how alike we were. When I was in Paris I got overwhelmed by the money I made, being on three covers in as many months, being ‘hot’ and too many men, drugs, near starving, running around naked. Karl Lagerfeld, the great designer at Dior, held my hand a lot. He paid me to talk to people or read his art books. It was such a complement that he liked the way I stood, somehow moved from the small of the back. I learned all this from her. Luckily I was saved by meeting Nick Agopian, my husband to be. Otherwise I might have ended up like so many models, discarded. And now she has this other life.