



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Witness links Syria to Hariri killing', *The Australian online*, 14/12/05.

Tags: [violence](#)

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The blasting horn from the car behind jolted her back into the present. The lights had already changed. She put the car in gear and it shuddered around the corner as she replayed the conversation in her mind.

'You will be back Monday though, won't you?'

She had hoped to leave without speaking to him but now she paused in the open door of the car, her overnight bag still slung over her shoulder, and looked at him as he walked up the driveway by the side of the house. His eyes held that mix of helplessness and menace that always gave her chills.

'Course I will. Towards the evening. You'll be alright. It's only the weekend.'

She slid the strap from her shoulder and tossed the bag across onto the passenger seat. Instinctively, she kept the open car door between them, so that he had to shift the shovel to his left hand and hold the door open with his right as he stepped around it to be closer to her.

'No kiss?'

She sensed the wounded tone in his voice, and her legs throbbed again, but she stayed calm. She offered her cheek mutely, her eyes downcast. Her flesh did not respond to his kiss. 'I've done all your meals for the weekend. They're in the fridge.'

His hand was on the nape of her neck as she ducked down into the driver's seat, and he gave it a firm squeeze, not at all friendly. The same mixed message in his smile; his lips were turned down at the corners and there was something steely in his gaze.

'Okay. See you then. Say hi to your mum for me.'

'I will. You know she'd like to see you too, one of these days.'

They both knew it was a lie. He had turned and walked back down the driveway without making any response.

The car came to a stop and she put it in gear and pulled the handbrake. Three times she had played the conversation over in her head. There was nothing to suggest he suspected anything amiss.

Her mother threw the door open as she walked up the front steps. 'Come in, love. Let's get that bag down in your room, and then we better get going.' She still called it 'her' room, although the girl hadn't lived in this house for years.

Her mother had already switched into that industrious mode all mothers adopt when there is hard work at hand. 'Right. We better get a move on. Now keep this in mind: you know all the fanatics will be there. Just remember, it's got nothing to do with you. They'll be waving their banners and they'll be in your face. Just ignore them. They ought to be ashamed for themselves, not you.' And then more to herself, she hissed 'To think of it!'

She shook her head in disgust, then shed her anger and continued, in a softer voice, 'All their tough talk and their banners. You know it's to make them feel better about themselves, it's got nothing to do with you. Imagine what you'd find if you started snooping around in their personal business! If they were as well adjusted as they want you to be, they wouldn't be camped out on the pavement harassing poor girls like you.'

She hopped in the passenger seat of her mother's car as the car started. In the rear-view mirror she caught a glimpse of her own face, streaked with tears and inky cheap mascara.

When they parked the car in a street around the corner from the clinic, she had been so focused on avoiding the mob and following behind her mother that the absence of any crowd at all had been lost on her.

The receptionist, dressed in starched white and giving all the appearance of being a nurse herself, was on the telephone when they entered. She raised her eyes giving a professional smile as they walked into the air conditioned room, and said quietly into the receiver, 'Just a minute, Cheryl,' then pressed the mouthpiece into her breast.

Her mother spoke. 'This is Susie, here for nine o'clock. I'm her mother.'

'Yes. Take a seat please, and I'll let the doctor know you're here.'

Her mother sat and reached out for one of the outdated magazines on the glass coffee table. The girl folded gingerly into the chair next to her, taking care to make sure her long skirt did not lift high enough to show the bruises on her legs from her latest beating. There were some things it was no use telling her mother. But at the thought the girl found her tears welling again.

'It's nothing', she said to her mother's raised eyebrow. And then she laughed a laugh without any mirth and reached to fondle the small gold crucifix at the chain around her mother's neck. 'It's just I can't believe you're sitting here with me in this room.'

Her mother squeezed her hand. 'Oh. We've been through this before love, a dozen times, and you know my views. I'm here, aren't I? Mothers adapt. It's what they're best at. You'll find that out for yourself when the time's right. But this is not the time.'

She lifted her daughter's chin gently between thumb and index finger, and held her gaze. 'You know the worst is yet to come. We've talked about this, haven't we?' The girl nodded. 'Well you be strong now, love. You're nearly there. One problem at a time. Get through this one, and we'll find you a way out of the big one soon, you'll see. We'll figure out a way he can't get to you in the end. Be patient.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Craig Doolan.*