

Hands

By Jan Sproull
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A field trip permission slip.

A trigger.

He laughed and said it was an accident, a slip, he meant to tie her scarf.

Hot links from red fingers. Purple floral bruises. Cecilia's neck bore his mark.

Daddy made his mark at work. Mommy told Cecilia her Daddy was an important man who signed the orders to put men called criminals behind bars. Everybody called him "Your Honor."

Daddy told Mommy not to believe Cecilia.

Daddy said nobody would listen to Mommy.

"I'll say it was you," he said.

"Our hands are different," she said.

"The forensics man is my friend," he said.

"I'll go outside the County," Mommy said.

"They're all my friends, darling," he said. "Put her in a turtleneck, send her to school, shut the hell up."

Daddy threw a hundred-dollar bill at Mommy. "Here. Get her turtlenecks in every color."

Mommy did what Daddy said she should.

She bought yellow and blue turtlenecks in one store, and red and purple turtlenecks in another store.

Mommy then arranged for day off work, trading with her co-worker at the Artifacts Expression Gallery so she could go on the field trip with Cecelia as a parent monitor.

In the first room of the museum tour, standing five-feet-eleven in highest heels bought for the occasion, Mommy took her position. She made space around herself into which no curator would dare intrude. Students clamored, adults managed, and the field trip progressed.

Cecilia never saw the illustrated, printed page before which Mommy placed her body as schoolgirls and boys filled room number two.

Mommy had seen the page before. The words shouted in ALL upper case. The picture said another thousand words.

Removed literally by man's hand from the typesetter's wooden upper case, the letters spelled:

"SHE WOULDN'T DO WHAT HE SAID SHE SHOULD."

"So he choked her dead right where she stood."

By graphic illustration, the Captain's huge hand circles his Lady's small neck as he strangles her.

The bottom of the page read: "With May, the inn-keeper's wench, it might have been different."

Captain, Judge, Lady, May, Cecilia.

Cecilia never saw the murder at man's hand entitled "Disobedience Is Rebuked."

Cecilia never knew Mommy's bid to be an "X" to block the spot.

By necessity of body placement, Mommy also blocked Cecilia from seeing one credit to one woman in room number two: "Hand-Made Case by Hazel Dreis."

Mommy stayed close in room number three, where Margaret Hale's husband watched daughter Pavli from across a photographer's frame of vision. But by room number four of the museum, Mommy stepped aside. Cecilia saw a strong Dorothy Stewart with no man's hand near her neck. Cecilia read the label beneath the photograph: "Dorothy Stewart's hand-fed platen press."

Cecilia put her hand in Mommy's.

Museum As Muse

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