Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

11.11.11

by Douglas Fresh

Bang! BANG! Am I a killer now?

Hands grapple before me—a civil war in uniform. Badges flash beneath fluorescent lights, sidearms point at sidearms, voices collide, and loyalties fracture. One team wins. They drag me out alive and cuffed. Officer Miles, a sore loser, pistol-whips me while I'm restrained. The blow splits my eyebrow, but his anger betrays him. By striking me, he outs himself. My blood mingles with the murderer's. I still can't say his name. Call me Daniel.

My daughter waits outside, as usual, her shock becoming anger, then fear, then the familiar sorrow no child should wear. An ambulance carries me across a dead sea of sirens. As the doors close, I fall into memory: entering his house without a warrant, crossing the lawn and slipping past a flower-filled veranda. Inside, the afternoon's warmth vanished. The cold reached into my soul. Our signature killer wore a death mask made of red wax.

He was intelligent enough to afford honesty. He told us what he intended, when and where it would happen, and how it would end. Then he made us watch. From abduction to murder, each ritual lasted exactly eleven hours, eleven minutes and eleven seconds. On the television, a woman writhed against a chair, all hope drained from her face. One fingernail remained unbroken. She used it to claw through the tape binding her wrists. I leaned closer, willing her through the grain. "Run! Don't stop! Go—no! Please!" Recognition burst behind my temple and blocked my throat.

A click. I ran towards the tripod, keeping low. My hands shook as I tried to secure the camera, but its mechanism spat out the cassette. I caught it and forced it back inside. Silence swallowed the house. I cleared each bleach-splattered room, finger on the trigger. Nothing moved.

Outside, I gulped cool air—then something struck me from behind. Metal and plastic smashed against my teeth. I fell and saw two legs standing sideways in my collapsing world.

An androgynous, mechanised voice said, “I hope this video camera works.” I laughed blood onto the floor as sirens approached. He had called the police and left me alive. Why? A year later, we recovered the camera, my dried blood still on its casing. In the evidence room, coloured light spilled through stained-glass windows, making the place look almost holy. The damaged tape showed him cutting Lorraine’s bonds just enough to let her escape, then recapturing her. He punished her for running, returned her to the chair and apologised tenderly, as though comforting someone he loved.

What did my wife feel? Did she know I was coming—or that I had failed? The timer read 11.11.11. I vomited. Miles placed a hand on my shoulder. “We didn’t get him.”

A month later, two words freed Chief Daniel Carter: “Inadmissible evidence.”

The murderer shared my first name and was also my boss. As Carter passed, calm and almost sympathetic, his eyes drifted towards my daughter. The courtroom exploded. I remember overturned chairs, fists, shouting and blood in my mouth.

Officers held me upright before forcing me down, smothering me with brotherly love. Miles, suspected of being Carter’s accomplice, later slipped on the rain-soaked courthouse steps and severed his spine. Ripe karma. But karma only goes so far. Another siren, another tape. This time, my daughter Kirsty was on it.

The code read 10.11.11.

He let her escape, as he had her mother, giving her a glimpse of freedom before reaching for her again. I found him before the final second. I swung the camera by its tripod into his red-wax head. His legs buckled, but I kept swinging until the mask cracked and the face beneath disappeared into blood.

“I hope this video camera works,” I said.

Yet court freed him again. Double jeopardy. Carter had mistaken survival for mercy and the law’s failure for permission to continue forever. Karma suffocated beneath the law. Two weeks later, sirens carried me back to today. The interview-room clock reads 11:10 a.m. Civilian Carter, stripped of his badge but carrying a pistol wrapped in black tape, smiles at me. My gun comes alive.

Bang! BANG! They call it self-defence. Call me Daniel.