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Tags: [incarceration](#), [violence](#)

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I am crouched on the floor near the filing cabinet. The boy has Gerda in a headlock and is holding a biro next to her ear. 'Shut up, shut up', he hisses at her. 'Shut your mouth or I'll jam this into your head', but Gerda keeps talking, low and calm. She's the professional. I am frozen.

I had to send an urgent email to a friend in Europe, which is why I was there. I needed my friend to get my message during the daytime, her daytime, so I had come in late to use the computer. I knew Gerda would still be there and I knew she wouldn't mind. It was after nine o'clock and I had nearly finished when there came raised voices in the corridor outside the office. My head snapped up.

The door opens. Gerda. Looks straight at me. 'I need you to call the police' she says. 'Tell them we have an escapee here from the juvenile centre. Tell them he's armed and dangerous. Tell them to come immediately. Keep this door closed'. She leaves.

I pick up the phone. My hand is shaking. I don't know whether to dial triple zero or the local police station. I flick open the teledex at P. Fumbling, I call the local police station. A woman answers the phone.

'Hello', I say, 'I'm calling from the community house on Sherbrooke Street. There's an escapee here from the juvenile centre. He's armed and dangerous. Can you please come immediately?'

She asks for my name, the address, asks what he's armed with, if he's drunk. 'I don't know', I stammer, 'I was just asked to call'. Outside there are hard running footsteps in the corridor. 'I think you need to come straight away' I say.

He freezes when he sees me. Stares. Blank. Didn't know I was there, Gerda is twisted over underneath his arm. 'Get down on the floor', he says to me, wrenching her around. I do. He swats at the light switch. I think of the boys at home. With his free hand he takes a pen off my desk and starts to gouge at the fly screen covering the window, it crumbles and flakes down on me, dust goes in my eyes.

'Right' he's saying—'We're getting out of here. We're going out the window and we're getting in the car and then we're driving'.

The lights go out in the house next door.

'Get away from the window', comes a woman's voice. The police. I can see her through the glass, leaning in flat against the wall of the house. She has a gun.

'You, get up', he says to me. 'We're going out the back'. I get up. He yanks Gerda out of the room and down the corridor. I follow. Then I stop. I turn and walk the other way. I try the front door. Deadlocked. I turn back and follow him. I would have run if I could. I would have left her there. Shameful but that's what I did.

The back door is deadlocked too. 'Unlock it', he spits at me. 'She has no keys', Gerda says. 'She doesn't even work here'. 'I don't work here', I parrot, 'I don't have a key'. 'Where are your keys?' he asks Gerda. 'In my office' she says. 'Get them', he says to me. 'In my bag', Gerda says. I walk into her office and switch on the light. 'Turn off the fucking light!' He roars. I do. I grab the bag from beside her desk. In the back room Gerda laughs. 'I think they probably heard that', she says to him. He spins her round and drives her head into the door. I gasp. She makes a strange high sound.

'Unlock the door', he says to me. There must be 15 keys on her keyring. 'Come on!' he growls. 'I don't know which key it is', I say. 'Which key is it?' he demands of Gerda who is now bleeding from her nose. 'It has a blue tag', she says.

I unlock the door, step onto the concrete landing. In the dark you can see the police everywhere, guns drawn and pointing straight at us. I have never felt so safe. Or so pointless. The police are talking. They know his name. 'Come on Simon, come on mate, what's going on? What's this all about? Put down the gun and we'll talk'. 'Oh', groans Gerda 'It's not a gun!' she shouts to them. 'It's not a gun! It's a pen!'

The police run at the boy. They tear him off Gerda who staggers into the driveway, a small blonde woman in a floppy skirt and red scarf. More police, shadow dogs, rise out of the garden; there must be twelve of them. They fall on the boy and they hit him. He cries out, sounds like an animal. The police punch him, and they punch him and they punch him and they punch him.

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