

Tick. Tick.

By Emma Ferguson

The alarm starts blaring over the speakers at 9:37, waking up the students dozing off and startling me out of my day dream. “THIS IS NOT A DRILL. THIS IS A LOCK DOWN. THERE IS AN ACTIVE SHOOTER ON CAMPUS. POLICE ARE ON THE WAY. THIS IS A LOCK DOWN.” loops on the PA system overhead startling everybody into action.

The lights are slammed off and the classroom is thrust into darkness as those closest to the doors and windows check that they are locked. All of this occurs within the blink of an eye as our bodies run on the muscle memory we’ve developed over the years, making use of the drills we’ve been practicing since kindergarten.

I scamper to huddle under the window, snug against my classmates. I press my back to the wall tightly, wishing that I could melt into it. The feeling of the gravelly wall digging into my skin grounds me. My ears are still ringing as the alarm is cut off abruptly. My knees pressed to my chest, my arms circling around them tightly.

I remember to breathe. In and out. In and out. I force myself to breathe in and out.

Time slows as we sit on the cold and dirty ground of the classroom in the dark, the sunlight just barely breaching through the blinds pulled all the way closed on the windows. It is still in the room, everybody too scared to move. Too scared to think. I hear the furious *tick, tick* of the clock on the wall, seeming to move slower now that I've heard it.

A snuffle from a girl to the left somewhere in the huddled mass makes me jump. *Tick, tick*. The boy sitting next to me grabs my shaking leg, stilling it. *Tick, tick*. We hold our breath waiting for the worst, anticipating. *Tick, tick*. What was this boy's name again? Justin...Trevor. *Tick, tick*. We hold each other's arms, eyes wide, breath stolen from our lungs by fear, staring intensely at the round handle of the door. *Tick, tick*. My heart is beating so hard, I'm afraid it can be heard. *Tick*. I clap my hand over

my mouth hoping to muffle my labored breathing. *Tick*. The door handle jiggles. *Tick*. I clamp my eyes shut, still clinging to the boy next to me. *Tick*.