**Nothing But the Sound of a Clock on the Wall**

Laura Tate

On the other side of four tall windows, the weeds grow thick

and high every spring until the maintenance crew mows them

down to stubble, so the baby rabbits no longer hide there

from the crows. And there’s the window on our classroom door,

so when the voice on the intercom says *Lockdown. Lockdown.*

I lock the door, tell the children to zip their voices,

then herd them gently to sit behind the ugly grey cabinet

that blocks the view from the hall. We sit on cold linoleum,

squeezed between metal table legs and the old green bookshelf,

the one where I store bins of books and writing supplies,

hoping, like always, it’s just a drill. I try to smile, to pretend

I’m not afraid, but today a girl with two braids tucked neatly

behind her ears says *a shooter could see us sitting here,*

*could shoot us from the windows,* so I reach for a picture book

about whales. We look at photos of humpbacks breaching,

a million droplets of water like misty fog around glossy skin.

I turn the page, point to a mother and baby at play,

their bellies the color of snow, the ocean a deeper blue than sky.

The children smile just a little. The floor is cold on our legs,

the waiting and silence a kind of torture, and nothing

but the sound of the clock on the wall:

*tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.*

When the police officer unlocks the door and tells us

*good job, please shelter in place,* we go back

to what we were doing andsharpen our pencils

and look at the clock

to see how much time we have left.