

Lockdown

by Dan Tricarico

I'm explicating Emily Dickinson when the alarm starts: three long, two short. Lockdown mode. Only there was nothing in the staff bulletin about a drill. So I tell the students to get down on the floor, away from the window. I open the classroom door and lock it from the outside. I kill the lights. Inside, thirty-eight teenagers hunker on the floor, pushing and shoving like it's a game.

But I'm wondering if some basement-dwelling outcast has finally snapped, having overdosed on his X-Box. I listen for the pop, pop, pop of gunfire, but hear nothing. I try to glimpse the campus from the windows, but my blinds are drawn.

I crawl beside my desk at the front of the room, trying to salvage my authority and maintain my sense of dignity. But my knees are putty and my mouth is balled cotton. Maybe I watch too much television.

Kayla, get your head down, I say, stay away from that window.

She looks at me like I belong in an asylum.

But what if some greasy-haired, pimply-faced boy in baggy camouflage pants is patrolling the campus at this very moment, an assault rifle cradled in his arms, looking for unlocked doors? I can't protect all thirty-eight of these kids. We're supposed to stay in the room until a police officer pounds on the door and says it's safe to leave. At another school in our district, a student brought a gun one day and the lockdown lasted three hours. How, I wonder, did they even go to the bathroom?

The damned alarm is still ringing: Three long, two short. It's giving me a headache. I told them it wasn't safe to teach in a room without a telephone, but they started talking about budget cuts, so I stopped listening. The students writhe and twist on the floor, their muscles tightening. I imagine the door bursting open, the deafening blast, the blaze of muzzle flash. My breathing is shallow, rapid. My

ears anticipate the tense patter of gunfire, my nostrils strain for the ashy odor of cordite.

Eventually, I hear the tick of the intercom. The vice-principal's secretary apologizes for the interruption; some technicians working on the bell system accidentally tripped the alarm. She gives the "all clear," and the students stand, working out the knots and kinks. I flip on the lights and ask them to return to their seats.

As Samantha slides into her desk, her backpack tilts. It is unzipped and, based on the sound the object makes hitting the ground, I think she's dropped a cell phone or an iPod. But when I look at her, our eyes lock. From the corner of my eye I see the object glinting on the thin carpet—the sleek design, the seductive shine of barrel and cylinder, the unlimited potential for destruction. For a split second I wonder who will dive for it first.

