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Adzema

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### The Dark Knight Falls

I see him again. I cannot see his face. In fact I can't see much of anything about him, not even his eyes or hair color. That's right; he was wearing a mask, a gas mask. Then I see it, the gun in his hand. I see him raise it and point it at me. That's it; I know I'll be dead in a matter of seconds. I stand there motionless waiting for the shot to come, but it never does. It never does. I hear a loud beeping. What could that be? The fire alarms going off? No. It is my alarm clock. I wake up from yet another nightmare. Of course only a dream, right? No, not exactly.

I was there in the theater. Not in nine, but in eight. Some people might wonder why I have these nightmares; I was not even in the same room as the shooter. Everyone who was in the theater, we all had that same moment of paralyzing fear when we heard the shots and the people screaming. At first we thought it was the theater playing along with the midnight premiers of one of the most anticipated movies of the year. Then we realized there were people running trying to find a way out. That's when the alarms went off. I looked over to see people trying to get out of the emergency exits. I was one of those people along with another three. We were all trying to get out of this little door when it slams shut and a guy yells to us, "No' we can't go out there! There's someone out there shooting!" I'm holding onto my friend's arm; I can feel my whole body shaking. What do I do? Do I call the police, my mom...anyone?

Then I see a light at the top of the rows. Not being able to move, Jordan, my friend and date, pulls me up the stairs behind him. There's blood on the stairs. I reach out to grab the railing for support and I touch something wet and sticky. "Oh, it's probably just someone's pop," I think to myself. Even though I know it's not. Finally we are out of the theater on the balcony. I look down to see no one in the lobby except two police officers. They both have their guns drawn. Then it hits me like a slap to the face. I cannot breathe and my eyes are burning. Tear gas? Why would the cops be throwing tear gas at us? We are not a threat. Later I learned it was not the cops. It was the same person who would haunt my nightmares; it was the shooter. When we finally get out of the theater, it's chaos. Children crying, people screaming, while others look frantically for their missing friends or family. Blood stains the concrete and people's clothing. We get out of there and I go home. Not knowing the whole extent of what happened at the theater.

When I watch the news, I now know everything. How many people got killed, who died, who was in critical condition. I just sat there not knowing what to do or how to react.

My mom says that I have changed since that day. I guess I've noticed, too. I do not want to go out in really crowded places or be around loud noises. Just the pop of a firework makes me jump and brings me back to the theater. I do not like sitting in a room where I cannot see the door or other people around me. I am constantly watching and listening to everything around me. I hear others talk about it as if they were there. I feel suddenly superior to them. Knowing that I was there and they were not.

Since that day, it is the first thing I think about when I wake up and the last thing I think about when I go to bed. I went to my psychologist, Erin, to see if she could help. I actually went to her before all of this happened for anxiety; now I go to try and deal with the shooting. She tells me I'm hard to read. I like that. I do not show my emotions to people because I do not want to look weak. I need to be strong for my family and friends. I do not need them to worry about me all the time.

Before the shooting I used to only think about myself. I mean, what teenager doesn't? After the shooting I started thinking about my family and how much they mean to me. I do not know what I would do without them. Now "we" comes before "I"; I do not like to bring the shooting up to my mom. Or to anyone really. When something comes on the news about the trial or his name is mentioned, I can see the pain come across her face. My stomach twists and turns every time I see or hear something about it, but I don't tell her that. I don't tell anyone.

According to Ronald Adler and Russell Procter, authors of Looking Out Looking In, your personality comprises the ways that you think and behave across a variety of situations. They say it is supposed to be stable throughout your whole life and is, in fact, part of your genetic makeup. They also say that your self-concept is the relatively stable set of perceptions you hold of yourself. I think that my personality has changed. If someone asked me before the shooting how I saw myself, I would say I was a sarcastic, outgoing girl. I loved my friends and family. I was someone who could never take anything seriously and someone who liked to make people laugh by dancing stupidly or telling lame jokes. Now I just want to be left alone. I have gone

back to that shy girl who does not want to talk to anyone. I try to act normal around my friends and family so they don't worry about me, but the truth is, I'm not.

I've become more aggressive towards people I do not know. I used to be very trustworthy. Now I'm very skeptical and it takes a lot for me to trust someone. My willingness to communicate with people is almost non-existent. I do not want to talk to people if I don't have to.

People always want me to talk about it. I mean I guess that is just how humans are. We want to know every little detail, no matter how horrifying or gruesome it is. It's hard for me to talk about it. And I do not like talking about it. I get the reflected appraisal from others. They see me as a survivor I guess. Who do I see myself as? The truth is, I do not see myself as anything. Not a survivor, definitely not a hero, maybe a victim. I feel guilty. The little girl who got shot, she didn't deserve to die. None of those people did.

I think of AJ and Mikayla. AJ went to Gateway; I only met him once when our baseball team played against them. But Mikayla, we walked in the same halls of the same school. She was three years older than me. I was probably scared of the senior and she probably thought that I was just another annoying freshman. For all those people, I feel guilty that I'm still here and they're not.

After the shooting I didn't cry. I didn't get angry or sad. All I felt was nothing. Except guilt, survivor's guilt. And to this day I still feel guilty. "Initially, the person escapes it. They feel okay but they realize the other person did not survive and they did," Exeter University psychologist John Potter says (Potter, 013). Everyone just goes on with their everyday lives.

Some people may have already forgotten about it. But I don't want to forget. I don't want to forget all the people who lost their lives, all the people who got injured. I don't want to forget. I just can't. If I do, I feel like they would be lost forever.

## Works Cited

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