Rippling faster than a cheetah through the grandstands of the football stadium, the booming of the thunder, louder than the crashing of a giant’s steps, terminated everything. Every laugh. Every cheer. Every heartbeat. Deluges of rain started pouring down in sheets, drenching everyone to the bone.

Glancing nervously at the pale faces around me, I gripped my Gucci handbag, my trembling hands, clammy from perspiration, grasping onto the handles like a worn out candle, flickering in the wind. After several minutes of relentless downpour, an ominous creaking sound emerged from above. The stadium roof, unable to withstand the pressure, began collapsing down in sections. Gasps rolled through the spectators, unable to process how their euphoric night cheering their favorite players on became a harrowing, living nightmare.

Instinctively, I pushed and knocked away everything and everyone in my path. My auburn hair slashed at other spectators’ faces, leading them to stare at me as I attempted to escape the grandstand. Behind me, my parents, my sister who was nine, six years younger than me, and the stadium where I trained and marveled at my idols every day.

As I bolted down the stairs, towards the welcoming gates, memories replayed like a movie in my head. The joyful days when ice-cream slid down our chins, laughing together in the chairs labeled ‘COACH’ or the days when we held on to warm mugs of hot chocolate, our teeth chattering in the frigid winter air. Tears welled in my eyes, knowing that in a split second, those memories could be shattered.

The moment I reached the colossal stadium gates, my mind split into halves. On one hand, I wanted to run back, risk my life but embrace my parents and sister, but on the other hand, I wanted to protect myself, live safely, but without my family. As I glanced back at the panicked, chaotic crowd, I noticed the tragedy, the wreckage, the danger of the situation, and made a life changing decision, to protect myself but not my beloved family.

My body trembling with fear, I sprinted. Through the streets. Past friends’ houses. Away from everyone I loved. My chest tightened, my lungs piercing with pain. Each breath became more difficult, more shallow, until it became impossible. My vision began to blur. Then… black.

The putrid scent of chemicals and medicine wafted up my nostrils, filling my mind with a disgusting smell. My eyes snapped open, and I was blinded by the bright lights and snow white walls. “Oh gosh,” I whispered, “I’m in a hospital.” As soon as I regained consciousness, I asked the nurse next to me where my family was. The smile on her face, as warm as a mothers embrace, immediately faded away. “They… they… like many others, didn’t make it,” she stuttered. Tears welled up in my eyes, sliding down my cheeks and onto my chin, before overwhelming grief consumed me entirely.

I work as a counsellor for a living now, helping those who lost loved ones in tragic accidents, especially in the 2019 storm. Sometimes, I wish I had been less selfish and assisted others in evacuating the stadium, but on other days, I know there was absolutely nothing I could do.