

Accidental Survivor

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It's Monday, September 8th, 2014. Selina, my best friend, and I are hiding in the handicap stall at 8:14 a.m., trying desperately to skip our first period Pre-Calculus test. The bathroom smells like banana-flavored vape from the girl in the next stall, mixed with whatever mop soap the custodian used the night before. Selina sits on the toilet, sighing as she reapplies the eyeliner I've lent her for the third time. I hold my phone up so she can use it as a mirror.

Shoes skitter past in the hallway. Selina steps out to grab a paper towel, she's gone too far with my blush. I text my mom back. She checked in earlier. "My mom is always so worried," I mumble. "It's honestly suffocating." Selina blots her face with a wet paper towel.

I glance down at my phone again when someone shouts something I can't make out.

Then the sound comes.

Not loud.

Just wrong.

There's a gap where noise should be. Selina drops before my brain can name what I'm seeing. My body moves without permission.. knees slamming into tile I don't feel. Screams blur together as I grab her. I think, If I hold her hard enough, this will be okay.

I stay sprawled on the cold tile with Selina in my arms. She isn't answering me. Why isn't she answering me? Adrenaline floods my veins. I squeeze my eyes shut and beg. "Jesus, please help me." I feel nothing. "Jesus, I need you. Selina needs you." My mind lifts out of my body. I watch myself from near the ceiling as my hands work without me. They're slick.. I wipe them on my jeans, confused when they stay wet.

Minutes pass. Or hours. I can't tell. Selina's weight feels unreal, like gravity has changed its rules. The bathroom shrinks. The air thickens. Ringing swallows everything. I gulp air and rock her, whispering, "You'll be okay," into hair that still smells like strawberry shampoo.

Shoes pass by. Slow. Then faster.

White and blue Adidas.

Emilee Perez.

I stare at the floor instead, tracing a crack in the tile like it might anchor me. I don't know if that choice saved me or carved something permanent into me. Somehow, I'm in the back of an ambulance with a blanket wrapped around my shoulders. Police officers, medics, and sobbing

parents crowd the front of the school. “Where’s Selina?” I asked an officer. He doesn’t answer. I hear him murmur, “Nine students injured. One fatality.”

One fatality.

How? Selina wasn’t stiff. She was only a little cold. The words slide off me. Was I one of the nine? Who died? Is Selina okay?

I woke up the next day in the hospital with a bandage on my knee and a cast on my wrist. I don’t remember hurting my wrist. My mom sits beside me, exhausted. When I ask about Selina, the room goes still.

One fatality.

Selina was the one fatality.

I cry until I can’t breathe. Why her? Why not me? My mom shortly gathered our things, and we left. At home, I walked into the bathroom. The door clicks shut and I’m back on the tile with Selina in my arms. The ringing screams again. I stand frozen, crying. Is this my new normal?

It’s Wednesday next week. Time loops. Officers say Emilee had schizophrenia, that she’d been unraveling quietly. I don’t remember her face. I remember the space she left behind.. the way sound feels dangerous, and silence feels worse.

Weeks later, Selina's uncle sits across from me in a quiet room pretending to be safe. I tell him part of me never left that stall. That my body reacts before my mind. He says trauma is the body remembering what the mind wishes it could forget. I don't feel healed, but I feel seen.

Bathrooms steal my breath. Tile floors tighten my chest. Sudden noises send my heart sprinting for exits that aren't there. Selina dies every night in my dreams, and every night I fail her differently.

I am twenty-eight now. Married. Two sons, alive in ways that terrify me. Today is May 8th, 2026.

I am pregnant with a little girl.

May 8th was Selina's birthday. Joy doesn't come first, fear does. For a moment, I am sixteen again, counting breaths that won't slow. I say Jesus's name out loud, not like a miracle, but like a tether.

I am not cured. But I am here. I've learned how fragile ordinary is and how quickly it can be taken, even on an ordinary Monday.