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## The Crash

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# The Crash

**Author Bio**

Amanda is senior who was born and raised in New York City, New York. The inspiration from her short story was living in this wonderful city. She is a mathematics major, but while she is not in class she enjoys participating in Tri Sigma Sorority, Gettysburg College Dance Ensemble, B.O.M.B. Squad, and Colleges Against Cancer.

# The Crash

Amanda Kreuter

I walked back into the living room and turned on the TV to see what they were hiding from me. There was that one thing my parents did not want me to see on every news channel. Why couldn't I have been satisfied with the Disney Channel, like usual? My face scrunched up but no tears dropped.

\* \* \*

Ten a.m. meant that it was time for gym. It was my second day of fifth grade and my first gym class of the year. This was the one class where I did not have homework and where I could play games until the bell told me it was time to move on with my life. Tuesdays were special. On Tuesdays we went to Chelsea Piers for two hours instead of remaining at school for the usual twenty minutes. I raced downstairs to the locker room holding my aqua green music folder.

Upon entering the gym, we were greeted by the Phys. Ed. teachers, always wearing their windbreaker pants and T-shirts sporting the names of their respective colleges. The entire class of ten- and eleven-year-olds sat on the end line of the basketball court as we had been taught to do since kindergarten. I placed myself directly under the basketball hoop, staring up at the worn-out net that was starting to fall off one of its hooks.

"Hello grade five!" Ms. Quirk said. Mr. Passos stood beside her with his hands in his pockets.

"Hello Ms. Quirk," we replied in an exaggerated unison.

As you all know we usually go to Chelsea for our gym class," she said as a few students cheered. I thought she was about to announce that we were going to the rock wall or the basketball courts.

"However, we have to cancel our trip today," Mr. Passos continued. The cheering stopped, and a few smiles turned to frowns. "Instead we'll stay here. There'll be a game of knockout on the far hoop, a three-on-three game at this one, box ball on the side of the court, jump ropes and stilts in the corner, and we'll open Room 111 if you want to take a break."

Sam E. raised his hand to ask the question that everyone was thinking. "But why can't we go?" he asked.

"Mr. Davidson has asked all the students to remain in the building today," Ms. Quirk answered. Everyone was disappointed that we were not leaving the school, but even the principal must have had a reason. I figured

he forgot to reserve the school bus to get all forty-two of us across town to the field house.

All the students separated themselves according to which games they wanted to play while the adults brought the equipment out of the closet. Three rounds of knockout and one win later, I decided to change games and realized that some of my classmates were no longer in the gymnasium. Three more parents were standing in the doorway.

*Why are they leaving early?* I wondered, but that was a fleeting thought as I quickly ran to see what was happening in Room 111. Ms. Quirk had brought out a TV cart and was playing Shrek for all those students who cared to watch. I sat down beside the other girls and relaxed for the first time in forty-five minutes.

No sooner had I sat down than I saw my own parents walk through the main doors of the gym. They were searching through the cluster of athletic pre-teens when I ran up to them to say hello.

“What are you doing here?” It was rare for my father to come to my school, and my mother never picked me up before five in the afternoon.

“We have the rest of the day off work,” Daddy answered, “so we came to pick you up early.”

“But won’t my teachers be mad that I’m leaving before the rest of my classes are over?” I asked.

“Don’t worry about that. We talked to Mr. Davidson and he said you could leave,” Mama told me as I noticed that she did not have her New York tote bag with her. She took that bag to work every day, carrying all her papers that I could never understand.

“Come on Teeny, let’s go,” my father summoned as he grabbed my hand and started to walk away.

“Wait!” I yelled as I leaned back with all my weight, “I don’t have any of my homework; I need to go back upstairs and get it.”

“No Amanda. It’s OK; we’re just going to go home today,” Mama consoled me. That’s strange I thought to myself.

“What about my music folder? It’s on the floor over there. Ms. Abrams will be mad if I lose my music,” I said.

“Alright,” my father said, “grab it quickly.” So I ran to the corner of the gym to pick up my aqua green folder, which remained right where I had left it. I returned to my parents and we left my school before even having lunch. We exited through the orange doors that led away from the gym and out onto the gray sidewalks of Fourth Avenue.

“Take my hand,” Daddy instructed as we came to the crosswalk at 14th Street.

“I don’t need to,” I replied, but he took hold of my empty hand before I even finished my statement.

It was still a beautiful day outside. Of course it was still a beautiful day. It was barely three hours since I'd last been outside walking in the opposite direction, going to school. The end-of-summer blue sky was broken only by a single cloud passing to the north. I had to squint because the sun was so bright. I must have taken my eyes off Mama because she was not next to me when Daddy and I reached the other side of the street, the corner in front of Walgreens drug store. I looked back, and as a crowd of what looked like hundreds of people separated, I saw my mother emerge.

"I never knew this many people went shopping on Tuesday mornings," I said to my mother. I was always in class at this time, but I guess it would be silly of me to think the world stopped while I was stuck in school.

"Yes, I suppose they do," Mama responded. She seemed like she was not even paying attention. She kept walking, looking straight ahead as she continued, right foot after left.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," Mama said as she shook her head. "I just left my bag in the office." She did not know that I had already noticed that. The city smelled funny. I guess that I had not noticed it before, but it smelled like the stove, right after Mama finished cooking meatloaf. Like when some of the meat burns onto the metal pan.

The shade cast from the fifteen-story-building began to clear as we approached the next intersection. The "walk" sign appeared in my direction so I looked to my right to make sure the cars were stopping, just as my parents taught me. Way downtown, at the very end of the avenue, the late summer day looked as dark as a winter night.

"What's that?!" I asked. My parents hurried me across the street. "Something really is wrong," I thought. My question was not answered. We continued walking in silence. We finally reached First Avenue and turned left to walk the remaining four blocks to my family's apartment. There were no cars except for those ones stopped at the parking meters. Mobs of people were walking in the street, perfectly divided between those walking uptown, and those walking downtown.

"Water! Get some water here! Take a seat and drink some water!" I heard from my left. I looked toward where I heard the announcement and saw two men passing out water bottles to any and all passers-by. Another woman was giving a water bottle to a crying girl who was sitting down on one of the folding chairs. Why was she crying? And why was it free? Nothing is free in New York. We kept walking. Five minutes more and the three members of my family were back home.

"Go play in your room, Amanda," my mother told me. I was tired of asking questions and not getting answers so I did as I was told. The lilac purple walls of my room were comforting. They created my own little cave

of books, dolls, and board games. Mama soon brought me some lunch. It was my favorite: salami roll arms, carrots stick legs, cheese body, cucumber head, and cherry eyes, put together so that it looked like a lady.

Hours passed and I grew tired of playing alone in my room. I ran through the apartment to the kitchen where my parents had made their own hideout. As I walked in, they changed the TV channel. I could not tell what had been on before I entered the room, but after it was Oprah. My parents never watched Oprah. I grabbed a piece of American cheese from the refrigerator and walked out of the kitchen. Ten minutes later I went back to the kitchen to once again attempt to uncover my parents' secret and again they changed the TV channel. I took one more piece of cheese and went into the living room. Usually I was not allowed to watch TV before I finished my homework, but I figured today was different. After all, I did not have any homework today. It felt safe to turn on the TV to see what my parents were hiding from me, since the wall that separated the two rooms kept them from seeing what I was up to.

I saw the planes crash. One right after the other, into the top of two very tall buildings. Buildings I knew. I changed the channel only to find that I was watching the same image again and again. I finally found a new image. This time, one of the silver twins, surrounded by a billowing cloud of black smoke emerging from a thin ring of red, orange, and yellow flames, fell. It looked like a house of cards falling down into itself. Simple. Fast. Another image, this one looked like a replay, but it was not. This time, the other of the silver giants fell to the ground in a mushroom cloud of black debris.

I did not understand. It was like first grade all over again when I could not tell the difference between d's and b's. "Mama!" I called. She walked into the living room and saw what I was watching. I turned to her. "Why didn't you tell me?" I asked.