

It was half past seven o'clock in the evening when a bus pulled up to the Berkey Hall bus right outside Michigan State University. A middle-aged man stepped off the bus, the brim of his navy baseball cap keeping his face hidden, and pulled up the hood of his jacket to ward off the chill. Nothing was remarkable about this man except the flash of his red sneakers, so he went unnoticed as he began walking eastbound on Grand River. He passed the Broad Art Museum, uninterested in the massive abstract sculpture that looms there. Turning northward, he continues across the busy street, moving like a madman on a mission before stopping. His breaths puffed in the chill of the night air as he took in the massive building before him. He had reached his destination: Berkey Hall. Built in 1945, the building is a home to students studying the social sciences. In fact, some classes were in session at this very moment. Young, eager minds soak up as much information as they can from their instructors. The man looked around. While students milled about, chatting excitedly as they headed back toward their dorm. None of them spared the lone stranger a second glance. The man's face was an unreadable mask as he stepped inside. The wind slammed the door shut behind him, the sounds echoing, but still, no one noticed him.

Why? Why? Why? Why?

With a darkening expression, he reached around him to bring forward the black backpack he brought with him. He knew it was time to complete his mission.

They made me do this.

Silent as a whisper, Anthony McRae unzipped his bag, pulling out a gun, before stepping into an occupied classroom.

It started as any other typical Monday night. Marco Díaz-Muñoz stood at the front of classroom 114, his favorite room, as he continued his lecture on Cuban Literature. As student ratings go, Marco didn't have too many complaints. He was known to be strict but fair, and though he was terrible at responding to emails, he was still said to be kind and helpful. As he turned to look back at the class, he saw an unusual sight: a figure standing near the rear door. Before his mind could register anything, there was an explosion of gunfire.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The deafening sounds of the terrified screams of Marco's students surrounded him as he tried to direct everyone to get down, and countless shots were fired. He could hear desks overturning as students tried to take cover. However, the shots stopped just as suddenly as they had started, and the shooter walked back down the hall. Acting on instinct to protect his students, the professor rushed to the front door, slamming it shut, using his weight to try and barricade them against any additional shots. He did not care that he could be shot point-blank through the door handle; he would protect these kids, no matter the cost.

"Listen to me!" He yelled back behind him. "Kick out the windows! Get out of here NOW!"

The sounds of students struggling as they attempted to escape mixed in with the hysteria, followed by breaking glass as some managed to scramble through and flee to safety.

Sweat soaked his entire frame as he continued to push against the door. Students sobbed as they tried to help fallen classmates, covering open wounds with their hands to keep them from bleeding out. Despite their efforts, the rivers of blood flowed relentlessly, staining them red forever from this tragedy.

Jackie sat in her living room working on assignments like every other Monday night. However, on this particular night, she was distracted by a sudden flash of red and blue lights outside her window.

That's strange, she thinks to herself, frowning slightly.

Her apartment faces the MSU Union, so she doesn't usually get a whole lights-and-sirens show. She hops off the couch to get a closer look, just in time to see a police cruiser driving over the campus sidewalk to join two other cruisers. She looks down at her watch, but it's only eight o'clock. It seemed too early for a group of police cars to gather, especially on a Monday, but who knows how crazy students can be nowadays. Shaking her head, she heads back to her textbook, snuggling up with her favorite throw on the couch. Maybe twenty minutes later, however, there's more commotion outside, and her phone dings with a notification. She glances at the screen, freezing as she reads the message.

MSU Police report shots fired incident occurring on or near the East Lansing Campus.

Secure-in-Place immediately. Run, Hide, Fight.

Time seems to stop entirely and her stomach drops.

This can't be happening.

More lights flash outside, pulling her from her daze. She jumps up, looking for anything to barricade the door, then rushes around her apartment, shutting the blinds and turning off all the lights. Breathless, she reaches the bedroom, securing the door before crouching beside her bed. Blanketed by the darkness, her hands shake as she tries unlocking her phone. There were too many status updates, and she struggled to keep up with the influx of information. Everyone was trying to post their own updates, sharing footage of police and fire trucks. She could even hear the screams in the background as students were ushered into ambulances.

It was pure chaos. Unsure of what else she could do, she pressed on her dad's contact information on the screen, heart racing with every pulse of the dial tone.

Did he even know what was happening? Would he even be awake this late?

Her thoughts continued spiraling out of control until she finally heard her dad's drowsy answer.

"Dad, Dad!" she whispered loudly, voice trembling with fear. "Dad, I'm scared."

That seemed to wake him up. She could hear fumbling, then the jangle of keys in the background, before her dad responded evenly, "Jackie, stay where you are. I'm getting in the car right now."

The shooting must've finally been announced to the public, she assumed.

"I'm in my dorm, Dad, I'm hiding." She squeezed her eyes shut, clutching her phone tight against her ear, like it was a lifeline, trying not to cry. "Listen, I love you, Dad, just in case—"

He cuts her off. "None of that now. You're gonna be fine, kiddo." She swore she could hear her dad pressing down on the gas, the accelerator roaring to life. "No lights or sounds, okay? Just stay down."

Before she could respond, there was another ding from her phone. This time, the alert describes the suspected shooter: a shorter black male, red shoes, a jean jacket, and a navy baseball cap, followed by a grainy picture of the man. She tried swallowing past the giant lump in her throat, remaining silent. Thankfully, her father remained on the line, because she couldn't hang up. The thought of being alone was too terrifying.

She's not sure how long they stayed like that, sitting silently together, but another ding brought her back to reality. Finally, hours later, the school lifted the shelter-in-place warning. With a heavy whoosh, she finally let go of the breath she was holding onto.

It's over.

"Dad, they lifted the shelter-in-place warning. They got him."

Her father's relieved sigh was audible over the line. "I'm still headed there, kiddo. You don't need to be alone."

And with that, the dam holding back her tears broke down. She sobbed until the early light of the morning, hoping the rising sun would chase away this terrible nightmare.

Anthony McRae fatally shot three students, as well as leaving five students in critical condition, before turning the same gun on himself. Hand in hand, the whole school mourned together, trying to navigate the aftermath of the nation's 67th mass shooting. McRae was a stranger to them, having no connections to the MSU community, but he completely altered their lives. Police are still investigating any possible motive behind the shooting, but he did die with a

note in his pocket, claiming that "they made me the killer I am today." Who were they, and why did he pick to punish innocent lives?

Sadly, they will most likely not be the last victims of a mass shooter, but what can we do? How do we prevent more tragedy or protect future generations from repeating our bloody history? No one has the right answer because there isn't one. However, in the meantime, the community will remain Spartan strong as they try and fight for tighter gun laws to stop this from ever happening again.