

This Is Where It Ends



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARIEKE NIJKAMP

Marieke Nijkamp grew up in the Netherlands and studied history and medieval studies in university. In her career, she has tried to promote diverse young adult fiction, serving on the board of the nonprofit We Need Diverse Books and founding a similar organization, DiversifYA. Her debut novel, *This Is Where It Ends*, became a bestseller in 2016. She has since written another young adult novel, *Before I Let Go*, which addresses themes of teenage depression and suicide.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

America has the most permissive gun laws and the highest rates of gun violence in the developed world. Gun violence takes many forms and threatens Americans of all walks of life. In particular, school shootings, which target society's most vulnerable members and imperil institutions normally considered safe, have become both flashpoints of outrage over this issue and testaments to the deeply entrenched disagreement about how best to address it. In 2018 there were 323 shootings, including three mass shootings that occurred at schools. 113 people died during shootings that occurred in schools.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

A number of writers have written novels addressing the threat of gun violence facing American teens at school. Like *This Is Where It Ends*, Walter Dean Myers's *Shooter* tracks three different teenagers through a series of events that culminates in a shooting. Jodi Piccolt's [Nineteen Minutes](#) explores the aftermath of a school shooting and meditates on the motivations of the shooter. Even more recently, novels have begun to emerge about teenagers who face violence at the hands of the police. *All-American Boys*, by Jason Reynolds, tries to unravel the circumstances surrounding a police beating of a teenage boy, while Jay Coles's *Tyler Johnson Was Here* chronicles the struggle of a teenage boy whose brother is killed by a police officer. Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*, about a girl who witnesses the police shooting of her friend and becomes an activist, has become a bestseller and inspired a film.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *This Is Where It Ends*
- **When Written:** 2016
- **Where Written:** Netherlands

- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary YA fiction
- **Genre:** Novel, young adult fiction
- **Setting:** Opportunity, Alabama
- **Climax:** Tomás's decision to sacrifice himself for Sylvia
- **Antagonist:** Tyler, gun violence
- **Point of View:** First-person limited (several speakers)

EXTRA CREDIT

Dangerous Math. There are more firearms than people in the United States – approximately 120 guns for every 100 residents.

Big Picture. Studies have found that high levels of gun ownership correlate not just with instances of homicide but greater rates of suicide, domestic violence, and attacks on police.



PLOT SUMMARY

The student body of Opportunity High School in Opportunity, Alabama, prepares to return to school after the winter vacation. The novel's four narrators – Claire, Tomas, Autumn, and Sylvia – each grapple with different fears as the start-of-term assembly begins. Immersed in track practice outside the school, Claire wonders what she will do after graduation and worries about being separated from her best friend and running partner, Chris. Grieving the second anniversary of her mother's death in a car accident, Autumn feels alienated from everyone around her except her secret girlfriend, Sylvia; she's worried about her older brother Tyler, a former drop-out who recently reenrolled in school but is nowhere to be found as the students file into the auditorium for the assembly. Meanwhile, Sylvia has just been accepted into Brown but is unsure if she should go; she fears being separated from Autumn and also feels responsible for her Mamá, who is currently dying from a degenerative illness. Tomás, Sylvia's twin brother, has skipped the assembly and is rooting through student files in the principal's office with his best friend, Fareed; he's looking for information on Tyler, whom he believes has been harassing his sister and is responsible for her withdrawal from him and the decline of their formerly close relationship.

Principal Trenton repeats the predictable speech she gives every year, telling the students to work hard and develop good character, and afterwards students start filing towards the back of the auditorium. Despite her dismal mood Autumn chats with an acquaintance about their mutual love of dance and her

desire to audition for Julliard. However, she and Sylvia soon realize there's some sort of holdup in the back of the room; just as students start whispering that the doors are locked, Autumn's brother Tyler enters the front of the auditorium, brandishing a gun.

Standing in the principal's office, Tomás and Fareed wonder why students coming from the assembly aren't filling the halls; when they hear two shots ring out, they immediately understand what's going on. Fareed calls the police, who instruct them to leave the school through a window and wait for help outside. However, Tomás knows that Sylvia is in the auditorium and refuses to leave her there. The two boys decide to stay and run to the janitor's office to arm themselves with tools against the shooter; there, they find that the kindly janitor, Neil, has been strangled.

Outside, Claire and her track teammates hear the shots as well. Coach Lindt is overcome by shock and incapable of giving instructions, so it falls to Claire to decide what to do. She instructs some of the younger girls to search for a phone near the school while she and Chris run for help. Before leaving the school they look for the security guard, Jonah, only to discover his dead body next to his car. Nearby Claire recognizes a car belonging to Tyler, her ex-boyfriend; she's horrified to discover that the backseat is full of gun ammunition, and realizes that he must be the shooter.

Sylvia and Autumn are near the back of the auditorium, but they have a clear view of Tyler shooting at teachers as they try to confront him. The first to fall is Principal Trenton. Autumn, who has always relied on her brother to protect her from her abusive father and support her passion for dance, is shocked that he's capable of murder. On the other hand, Sylvia knows that Tyler is capable of violence. In a flashback, she remembers an afternoon last summer when he confronted her about her secret relationship with Autumn. Blaming her for "corrupting" his sister, Tyler raped her in "punishment," but Sylvia has never told anyone about this.

Climbing onto the stage, Tyler tells everyone that they're under his control now, clearly reveling in the fear he's inspired. Ever since his mother's death and father's descent into alcoholism, Tyler's behavior has grown more erratic and aggressive; he's gotten into so many fights with other students, especially Tomás, that he had to drop out of school. Autumn is the only person who loves him despite his flaws and hopes he can turn his life around.

Claire and Chris run away from the school, hoping to reach a gas station and call the police. Claire is worried about her younger brother, Matt, who is inside the auditorium. She also feels guilty that, although she was Tyler's girlfriend, she never anticipated his actions, even though she saw him becoming more and more angry. She even witnessed him threaten Sylvia at a school dance, an event which precipitated their breakup, but didn't tell anyone about it. However, Chris comforts her

and reminds her that she doesn't have any responsibility for Tyler's actions.

In the auditorium, Tyler starts accuses the community at large of abandoning him and turning his own family against him. Sylvia fears that Tyler has come for revenge against her and that she'll soon be targeted. As Tyler moves through the front rows, finding students with whom he has particular grievances and killing them, Autumn crawls slowly towards her brother. In a flashback, she remembers his anger when he discovered her plans to apply to Julliard, which he sees as an act of abandonment. In fury he exposed her to their Dad, who has forbidden her to dance and beats her as punishment. Tyler demands that his sister show herself, and after a long pause, Autumn gathers the strength to stand up.

With bolt cutters from the janitor's office Fareed heads off to cut the chains around the front doors, while Tomás takes paperclips to the locks near the auditorium. However he fails to pick the locks and must wait for Fareed to return. In the meantime, he taps out a soft rhythm – a favorite childhood lullaby – on the door. When someone returns the rhythm from the other side, he realizes that he's right next to his sister. When Fareed arrives they use the bolt cutters to snap the chains around the doors and carefully open them. Tyler's attention is distracted by Autumn, who is onstage trying to explain to Tyler that she loves him, and it's in fact he who alienated himself from family and friends. Taking advantage of the distraction, Sylvia, Fareed, and Tomás crawl among the terrified students and silently urge them to escape.

Claire and Chris encounter the police, who have already been alerted by Fareed's call and several students using their **phones** from inside the auditorium. In fact, lots of students are tweeting to the outside world and communicating with loved ones about their fears. They ride back to school in the police cruiser, but the officers won't give them any information about the shooting or accept their frantic offers to help. They stand outside the school and watch helplessly as parents begin to arrive and demand information about their children. In the midst of all the confusion, Chris admits that he has long had feelings for Claire and is "terrified" of losing her; they kiss, and Claire suddenly feels that her future is less alone and uncertain.

Autumn continues to talk to her brother, knowing she needs to hold his attention while students sneak out of the auditorium. Accusing her of valuing dance more than him, Tyler forces her to dance on the stage, which she does; but suddenly he kicks her to the ground and hits her several times. He starts shooting at Sylvia, who flees the auditorium with Tomás and Fareed. They decide to hide upstairs, even though Sylvia fears that Tyler will never leave the building while she's inside. Tyler exits the auditorium through another door. Left inside, Autumn tries to care for Claire's younger brother Matt, who has been wounded.

Upstairs Sylvia, Tomás, and Fareed hear Tyler mounting the

stairs. They find an unlocked classroom and use its window to get onto the roof. Sylvia and Tomás hug and apologize to each other for being so distant in the past months, but at the last minute Tomás jumps back into the classroom to distract Tyler, knowing that he can give Sylvia some time to escape even if it means sacrificing himself. He encounters Tyler in the hallway, and after a brief confrontation Tyler shoots him and kills him. Sylvia struggles to open the heavy window; just as she descends back into the classroom, she hears shots and knows that her brother is dead.

Autumn finds a phone so Matt can call his sister, Claire. He pretends to be unharmed, but Autumn can see that he's growing weaker from his gunshot wound and will probably die. SWAT officers empty the auditorium and round up the uninjured students, but despite Autumn's desperate pleas for help they say that paramedics can't enter the building until it's secure. She's forced to leave the auditorium and Matt stays on the phone with his distraught sister until he dies. Chris holds Claire as she sobs.

Autumn manages to sneak away from the group of escaping students and runs up the stairs, searching for her brother and Sylvia. She finds Tyler standing over Tomás's dead body and ranting about "showing Sylvia her place." Again, she tells him that she loves him and tries to convince him to step down, but it's impossible to change his feelings. He spitefully shoots her in the knee, thus ending her aspirations as a dancer, and then kills himself.

The police storm up the stairs and enter the classroom where Sylvia and Fareed are hiding. Sylvia walks out in the hallway to see Tyler and Tomás lying dead on the floor and Autumn writhing in pain and clutching her brother's hand. Despite her grief for her brother, Sylvia knows she must stay strong and calm for Autumn, and she soothes her girlfriend as paramedics load her into an ambulance.

That night, after the police have finally left the school, Fareed breaks onto the roof and organizes a ceremony of remembrance. All the students stand in a circle and light paper lanterns inscribed with the names of the dead. It's a nod to a similar yearly ritual organized for seniors by the beloved English teacher Mr. Jameson, who has also died at Tyler's hands. Fareed urges the gathered crowd to live good lives in honor of the friends and relatives they have lost. Sylvia holds her brother's lantern, wanting to keep him close as long as possible; but knowing that she needs to release him "toward the promise of a new day," she finally lets go.

outside the school attending track practice, so she spends the morning running for help and watching from the outside as police attempt to defuse the situation. Because she once dated Tyler, the shooter, Claire feels guilty for failing to anticipate his actions or warn someone about his descent into anger and bitterness after his mother's death. Deeply rooted in the track and JROTC communities at her high school, Claire is feeling directionless and struggling to conceive of an independent identity as graduation approaches. The shooting has the unexpected consequence of causing her to feel more rooted in her community and committed to improving it; by the time the day ends, she has decided to become a teacher. Her relationship to her best friend, Chris, also evolves; amid the day's heightened emotions he confesses to a longtime crush on her, and the two find respite from their feelings of alienation and insecurity by planning a future together. Claire is extremely close to her older sister Tracy, a soldier on deployment, and her Lupus-stricken younger brother Matt, whom she cares for and protects; however, since Matt is trapped inside the auditorium during the shooting, she's helpless to protect him from her ex-boyfriend, and in the final passages of the novel she has to grapple with her brother's murder.

Tomás Morales – One of the novel's four narrators and Sylvia's twin brother. Previously the school's foremost prankster, Tomás has vowed to shape up this year in order to help his family, which is struggling to cope with his Mamá's degenerative illness; however, it's Tomás's penchant for thinking outside the rules that lands him outside the auditorium during the fatal assembly and allows him to plan creatively enough to open the doors and, alongside Fareed, free many students. Throughout the novel Tomás is troubled by his relationship with his sister Sylvia, which was once close but is now distant and strained, a transformation he eventually discovers is due to the trauma of her rape by Tyler the previous summer. Tomás eventually sacrifices his life for Sylvia by distracting Tyler and buying her time to escape. As a brother, he's a notable foil to Tyler. While both boys view their bonds with their sisters as the central relationships of their lives, Tomás reacts to changes in that relationship by trying to understand and aid his sister, rather than seeking to sabotage her as Tyler does to Autumn.

Autumn Browne – One of the novel's four narrators, a junior at Opportunity High School, and Tyler's younger sister. On the day of the shooting, Autumn is grieving the second anniversary of her Mom's death in a freak car accident. She's also grappling with the consequences of this tragedy on her family: her Dad has descended into alcoholism and is increasingly hostile towards Autumn, who reminds him of his dead wife, while her older brother Tyler is given to disturbing mood swings, alternately loving and violent. Autumn has few friends at school and cultivates a gruff, outsider persona; her two comforts are her passion for dance, which she's determined to pursue as a



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Claire Morgan – One of the novel's four narrators, and a senior at Opportunity High School. When the shooting begins she is

career, and her secret relationship with Sylvia, which gives her the love and validation she lacks at home. Although Autumn looks up to Tyler and is shocked by his actions, her flashbacks reveal that he's been actively sabotaging her relationship and career plans for months in an effort to control her. Autumn's memories provide a disturbing account of her brother's sense of entitlement and desire for control, but also humanize him and provide nuance to his character. Although Autumn's bond with Tyler is a negative contrast to that of Sylvia and Tomás, her persistent love for him argues that sibling ties are among the most central human relationships and the most difficult to escape. Although Autumn confronts her brother and expresses her unconditional love for him at the end of the novel, he maliciously shoots her in the knee before killing himself, ending her aspirations to become a dancer.

Sylvia Morales – One of the novel's four narrators and Tomás's twin sister. Unlike her trouble-making brother, Sylvia is known for her good behavior and better grades; at the start of the novel, she's just received her acceptance letter from Brown. However, Sylvia is considering deferring her dreams of academic success in order to stay home and care for her Mamá, who is dying of an unnamed degenerative disease. She's also hesitant to leave Opportunity because of her relationship with Autumn, which she fears might fracture because of the distance. Furthermore, Sylvia is recovering after being raped by Tyler last summer as "punishment" for her illicit relationship; her refusal to share this trauma with anyone else makes her withdrawn and anxious, and strains her formerly close relationship with Tomás until she finally confesses her secret to him. Sylvia is gentler and more conventionally feminine than the tomboyish Claire or the combative Autumn, but her calm competence emerges as another, equally formidable form of strength, allowing her to hold her family together in a time of crisis and fearlessly confront Tyler during the shooting. At the end of the novel, Sylvia continues to stay strong for Autumn, who has been seriously wounded by Tyler, even as she mourns her own brother's death at his hands.

Tyler Browne – Autumn's older brother and the shooter who murders dozens of students and teachers over the course of the novel before killing himself. Tyler's character emerges chiefly through flashbacks of the four narrators. Autumn initially presents him as a troubled but loving older brother with whom she wants to repair her relationship, but her own recollections show that he's also an abusive and controlling sibling, actively sabotaging her career plans because he wants his sister to be single-mindedly devoted to him. Homophobic and jealous of his sister's closeness to Sylvia, he repeatedly threatens and eventually rapes Sylvia in an effort to break them apart. His behavior towards his sister's girlfriend has led him into numerous fights with Tomás and ended a relationship with Claire, on whom he relies for support and stability after his Mom's death. Ultimately, Tyler emerges as both a teenager

struggling with universal feelings of insecurity and alienation, and a deeply entitled killer who can't even conceive of the feelings of others, much less respect their validity. By presenting Tyler's horrible crimes as the culmination of smaller acts of violence that are dismissed or even tolerated by those around him, the novel argues that mass shootings are manifestations of a pervasive culture of male entitlement and aggression.

Chris West – Claire's best friend and comrade on the track team and JROTC squad. Claire admires Chris for his calm demeanor and good judgment. Moreover, she's a little in awe of him for being the school's "golden boy" and a little insecure about her own less popular reputation. Contrary to her expectations, while they attempting to help the police end the shooting Chris admits that he's long harbored a crush on Claire. He's a source of emotional support as she grapples with her feelings of guilt for her previous involvement with Tyler and her anguish over Matt's death inside the building.

Fareed Al-Sahar – Tomás's best friend and fellow mischief-maker, a recent transplant to Opportunity High. Throughout the novel Fareed displays bravery and quick thinking; he's the first to alert the police to the shooting and, along with Tomás, calmly makes a plan to open the school's doors and save students. In the past, Fareed has suffered some stigma because he's the only Muslim student in the small, insular school, but by the end of the novel he emerges as a community leader, organizing and leading a nighttime vigil for the dead.

Matt Morgan – Claire's younger brother. Although Matt is only a few years younger and has started high school this year, he acts – and is treated by his family – like a much younger child, in part because he has Lupus and requires a lot of care. While Claire's sense of responsibility for her vulnerable younger brother sometimes makes her anxious, she derives a sense of purpose by caring for him. Struck by one of Tyler's bullets, Matt dies at the end of the novel.

Mr. Browne / Dad – Autumn and Tyler's father. By all accounts he's a terrible parent; after Mrs. Browne dies he disregards his children and his business and turns to alcoholism, and he openly favors Tyler over Autumn. He disapproves of his daughter's aspirations as a dancer and physically abuses her when she tries to pursue them. His desire for control and feeling that he's entitled to control the lives of the women around him deeply influence Tyler, who displays these traits both during and before the shooting. In this sense, Mr. Browne's character forms part of the novel's argument that mass violence is an outgrowth of the male entitlement that pervades society.

Principal Trenton – The principal of Opportunity High School. While Claire mocks her for starting every semester's assembly with the same boring speech, for the four narrators she also represents the security of their ordinary – if boring – lives as high schoolers. Her death in the first moments of Tyler's

rampage signals the end of this untroubled period in their collective lives.

Mr. Jameson – The school’s beloved English teacher and leader of an annual nighttime assembly in which seniors write wishes on paper lanterns and release them into the sky. Mr. Jameson is killed while bravely trying to confront Tyler. At the end of the novel, the students recreate his ritual by lighting lanterns inscribed with the names of the dead, honoring both his memory and the sense of community he fostered during his life.

Jay Eyck – An Opportunity High student who skips school on the day of the shooting and tweets about the day’s events in anguish from his home. Jay has a crush on Kevin Rolland and texts him repeatedly throughout the day, not knowing that Tyler murdered him in the first moments of the shooting.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Joni Browne / Mom – Autumn and Tyler’s mother, a well-traveled ballet dancer and director who inspires her daughter’s love for dance but then is killed in a car accident. Appearing only in flashbacks, Mrs. Browne represents the happier portion of Autumn’s childhood, before her family descends into dysfunction and violence.

Mrs. Morales / Mamá – Sylvia and Tomás’s mother, a former lawyer currently dying from an unnamed degenerative illness. While their mother used to be an inspiration and a support, now caring for her has become the responsibility of her children and forced them to mature quickly.

Mrs. Morgan – Claire, Matt, and Tracy’s mother, a woman faced with the immense task of raising three children and running a household even while finances are constantly strained by Matt’s medical bills.

Tracy Morgan – Claire’s older sister, currently deployed with the U.S. Army. Claire has always relied on her sister for guidance and her departure from home means that Claire has to take on more responsibilities.

Lt. Colonel West – Chris’s father, a career soldier whose bravery and strength Chris and Claire admire.

Abuelo – Sylvia and Tomás’s grandfather, who runs the family farm and acts as a father to them. Abuelo is tough but generous, and both teenagers strive to earn his approval through maturity and good behavior.

Asha – One of Sylvia’s friends, who bonds with Autumn over their shared passion for music and dance. Asha is horrified and grief-stricken when she witnesses the death of her sister, Nyah, at Tyler’s hands.

Nyah – Asha’s younger sister, whom Tyler brutally murders.

Steve Johnson – A sophomore student whom Sylvia gently helps escape the auditorium.

Coach Lindt – Claire’s gruff and demanding track coach.

Although he’s usually the one giving instructions, when the team hears shots from the school he succumbs to shock and relies on Claire for leadership, highlighting her maturity and competence.

Mei Jameson – Mr. Jameson’s daughter and the author of a blog through which she comments on the events of the shooting as they develop.

Kevin Rolland – One of the school’s few proudly queer students, famous for having successfully confronted Tyler over his homophobic views. In retaliation, Tyler seeks him out and kills him during the shooting.

CJ Johnson – A sophomore and one of Claire’s comrades on her JROTC squad. Throughout the shooting CJ tweets out her thoughts and feelings, sending vital information to the families and community waiting for information outside the school. Her brother is Steve Johnson.

Neil The school janitor.

Jonah The school security guard.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



GUN VIOLENCE

Gun violence is an ongoing crisis in the US, and *This Is Where It Ends* comments on this state of affairs by chronicling a school shooting in the fictional town of Opportunity, Alabama. The shooter, Tyler Browne, is a disaffected high school student whose rage and grievances stem from a strong sense of male entitlement, which he derives from his father. Through the character of Tyler, whose profile matches that of many real-life shooters, the novel argues that gun violence perpetrators are shaped by the environment in which they grow up, leveling a critique not just against these individual men but the society that produces them. This nuanced psychological portrait of Tyler contrasts with the novel’s presentation of the shooting itself, which is often sensationalized and unrealistic and focuses on the behavior of a few students in a position to help others rather than the plight of those who can do nothing. Ultimately, this strategy reduces the novel to what is essentially an action-driven battle between the villainous Tyler and the heroic students who fight him, rather than an indictment of the broader social ills that engender situations like this.

Like many real-life shooters in the US, Tyler is a young white man nursing a series of grievances and a strong sense of his

own entitlement. Some of these grievances are legitimate: Tyler feels that his community didn't do enough to help him recover after his Mom's death, which may be true. He's also upset about his sister Autumn's plans to leave him behind to pursue her dance career, a feeling that reflects understandable anxiety about change and sibling relationships.

However, Tyler's anger stems not only from a fear of losing his sister but a feeling that he's entitled to control her life. In order to prevent her from leaving, he repeatedly exposes her plans to their abusive Dad, who also disapproves of Autumn's ambitions. Tyler's behavior shows that he thinks it's acceptable to sabotage his sister in order to further his own interests.

Tyler also believes he has the right to punish people for failing to go along with his plans. Threatened by Autumn's romantic relationship with Sylvia, he threatens his sister's girlfriend and later rapes her. Telling her that she's getting what she "deserves," Tyler displays a belief that his own desires come before anyone else's, and that it's acceptable for him to dispense punishment to those who stand in his way. When Autumn confronts him during the shooting, he self-righteously tells her that the whole thing is "your fault." His belief that other people deserve to die for opposing his will is indicative of the extent of his entitlement.

It's important that Tyler seeks to exercise control primarily over the women in his life; he clearly learns this behavior from his father, who is generally kind to him but abuses Autumn and dismisses her plans to become a dancer. The similarities between Tyler and his father show that his actions aren't totally random. Rather, they spring from the behavior of a parent that the town has tolerated—and perhaps even dismissed as natural paternal authority—for years beforehand. In this sense, the novel levels a powerful critique against male entitlement, which society often accepts but which can quickly escalate into violence and destruction.

Despite creating a complex picture of Tyler's motivations, the novel presents the events of the shooting as a sensationalized fight between the evil Tyler and the unequivocally good students who fight him, a technique which arguably trivializes the actual horror of school shootings and undermines the novel's social critique. While the novel carefully depicts some of Tyler's flaws through his behavior toward Autumn and Sylvia, during the shooting he makes several seemingly irrelevant racist and homophobic comments. These moments detract from his status as a nuanced antagonist indicative of specific social ills, and transform him to a stock villain with a meaningless collection of evil characteristics.

Conversely, most of the novel focuses on the efforts of a few ingenious students to save the others, highlighting a kind of agency and possibility for heroism that doesn't exist in many gun violence scenarios. Even in the midst of trying to save their lives, the protagonists always have time to eloquently express their bravery and devotion: before their mutual deaths, Tomás

and Tyler both give lengthy speeches about their motivations, and Claire and Chris find time to declare their love for each other and kiss while also aiding the police and securing the school. By carving out space in the midst of the action for these moments, the author attempts to create tension and drama, thus engaging the reader's sympathies. However, these moments could also be seen as ineffective or even inappropriate in describing a crime that deprives young lives of their potential and meaning.

This Is Where It Ends convincingly links gun violence to the uncontrolled male entitlement that pervades the novel's society. However, by focusing on sensationalized villainy and heroism during the events of the shooting, the novel seems to undermine its overall project, deflecting attention from a broader American problem that individual heroism is insufficient to solve.



COMMUNITY AND TRAGEDY

Narrated by four high school seniors, *This is Where It Ends* details the effects of a mass shooting on the small, insular community of Opportunity, Alabama.

As they prepare for the first day of school at the novel's outset, all the protagonists are concerned with their individual goals and feel either trapped or alienated by their community. However, as it becomes apparent that there's an active shooter in the building, each narrator explicitly chooses to act to help the larger community, surpassing their own and others' expectations of bravery and self-sacrifice. By the end of the novel, although the town is still reeling from this disaster, students and parents have renewed their commitment to and faith in the community. Ultimately, the novel points out the ability of traumatic events to strengthen existing community ties and forge new ones.

In the novel's opening pages, nearly every character is dissatisfied with his or her place at Opportunity High School. Making fun of the principal's predictable first-day-of-school speech, which encourages students to embrace their school community, Claire says that "if Opportunity shaped me, I didn't notice." She feels that her community has little bearing on her character and is unable to help her cope with the uncertain future after graduation.

Sylvia is likewise dissatisfied with Opportunity. She describes her acceptance to Brown as the "ticket out of town" she desperately wants, yet she's also wary of leaving her sick Mamá behind; her thoughts show that she's both distanced from her community and trapped by it. Sylvia's girlfriend Autumn also longs to leave. Her single-minded passion for dance, which no one else in the community shares, leads her to feel alienated and to set her mind on moving to New York. She's convinced that no one in her town can understand her thoughts or desires. She's additionally unhappy because the mores of her community prevent her from going public about her

relationship with Sylvia.

While they paint an unsympathetic and fractured picture of their community, the protagonists all act in its defense during the school shooting. Sylvia's brother Tomás and his best friend Fareed have always seen themselves as outsiders and mischief-makers, but they risk their lives to unchain the auditorium and free their fellow students. Hiding at the back of the auditorium, Sylvia quietly and bravely alerts other students rather than immediately making her own escape; meanwhile, Autumn confronts her brother Tyler, the shooter, bravely risking herself to save people from whom she claims to be extremely distanced. Rather than rushing out the doors, alerting Tyler's attention, and leading him to shoot more people, the students sneak out of the auditorium quietly and cooperatively. This episode suggests that the characters are much more committed to those around them than they previously thought.

Outside the school when the shooting begins, Claire runs to get help from the police and begins to feel part of the school as never before. Telling an officer that "Opportunity is our home," she shows how the drastic circumstances of the shooting have altered the thoughts she expressed at the beginning of the novel.

By the end of the book, although the town is still reeling from the shooting and deaths of dozens of students, a strong sense of community is pervasive. In the last scene, all the students sneak onto the school roof to light lanterns inscribed with the names of the victims. This communal expression of grief shows that they find comfort and fulfillment in being together—not, as they believed at the beginning, in getting out of town for good. It's especially important that the ceremony is led by Fareed, who has previously felt discriminated against because he is Muslim; it's clear now that the other students have learned to accept him and that he feels more entrenched in the community.

As she lights a lantern, Sylvia releases her worries about caring for her sick mother, which have dogged her throughout the book. Although her twin, Tomás, has died, she's learned that she can count on her remaining and large family community to support her, rather than shouldering all these burdens alone. At the novel's outset, Claire felt that her community had given her little insight into her future; however, the events of the day have inspired her to invest fully in that community by becoming a teacher.

As the novel ends and the protagonists consider the direction of their lives after this awful event, each one considers the ways in which their community has influenced them and continues to support them. Their feelings now argue that, when collectively experienced and mourned, traumatic events can strengthen a community's bonds.



FAMILY AND SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

Some families in *This Is Where It Ends* are characterized by generally positive relationships: Claire takes pride in caring for her younger brother,

Matt, while the twins Sylvia and Tomás have a fraught but close relationship. Elsewhere, the dynamic is less healthy: Autumn sees her brother Tyler as a loving defense against her abusive Dad, but as the novel progresses Tyler reveals himself as violent and predatory towards her as well. Despite the differences in their family situations, the love between Sylvia and Tomás is a strong parallel to the bond between Autumn and Tyler; while Sylvia gains new respect for her brother because of his brave actions, Autumn continues to love her own brother despite his crimes. Ultimately, the novel argues that regardless of personal character or flaws, sibling bonds are among the most formative and inescapable of human relationships.

Each of the novel's four protagonists is deeply grounded in the particular struggles of his or her family. The dynamic in Claire's family is highly positive. She has two living parents and untroubled relationships with her older sister Tracy, currently serving in the military, and younger brother, Matt. Much of the family's life revolves around caring for Matt, who has Lupus, but this challenge ties the family together rather than weakening its bonds.

Living on a farm, Sylvia and Tomás's family is of humbler origins. Their father is absent, and their Mamá is suffering from a degenerative brain disease. Still, their older brothers and Abuelo help keep everything running, and Sylvia is thankful for their support and acceptance of her girlfriend, Autumn.

Autumn and her brother, Tyler, are still reeling from their Mom's death a year earlier. Since this tragedy their father has become an abusive alcoholic, leaving them to fend for themselves. While Autumn loves her older brother and considers him her prime support in this time of trouble, it becomes increasingly clear that he is trying to control her life and even behaves violently himself.

Throughout the novel, Sylvia and Tomás's evolving relationship shows how sibling ties can define one's life in a positive way. At the beginning of the novel, the twins' relationship is distanced and fraught, as Sylvia has been shutting her brother out since being raped by Tyler the previous summer. Still, both siblings fondly remember their previous closeness and the mischief they make together. As the shooting unfolds, both siblings' actions are motivated by concern for the other: Sylvia is thankful that Tomás has escaped imprisonment in the auditorium while he risks his life to unchain the doors and free her, proclaiming that if Tyler hurts his sister, he will "kill him slowly." By the end of the novel, Sylvia has explained the trauma that disrupted their relationship and the twins reconcile before Tomás sacrifices his life for her, distracting Tyler so that Sylvia can escape.

Although Autumn's relationship with her brother is not nearly so positive, it's equally defining and precious to her. Like the twins, Autumn and Tyler are two siblings close in age. Autumn, like Sylvia, is devoted to her brother and relies on him for support. As does Tomás, Tyler claims to love his sister more than anyone else, but unlike Tomás he actively sabotages her dreams in order to keep her with him, and ultimately embarks on a killing spree because he feels she doesn't love him enough. Despite this troubling dynamic, during the shooting Autumn confronts her brother, not just to save her friends but to prevent him from committing further crimes for his own sake. Her desperate speeches show the love she still has for him, even though he's a murderer. And though Tyler shoots his sister in the knee just before he kills himself—a spiteful action to make sure she can't ever dance again—Autumn is still distraught that he's dead. The image of her weeping over his dead body mirrors Sylvia mourning for Tomás and shows that sibling relationships remain strong and defining even when they're definitively unhealthy.

The different characters' trajectories show that sibling relationships can draw a family together or tear it apart. Whether they are positive or negative, these relationships remain equally central and compelling to all the characters.



CHANGE, UNCERTAINTY, AND GROWING UP

As seniors in high school, all four narrators of *This Is Where It Ends* face significant anxiety about leaving high school and beginning new lives as adults. While all the characters share the understandable fear that physically leaving their town will erode their most important emotional relationships, Tyler takes this philosophy to the extreme, attempting to enforce stability in his own life and exploding in catastrophic rage when those around him refuse to comply. In fact, one of Tyler's chief motivations is his inability to face the challenges of growing up; this link between Tyler's insistence on stasis in his own life and his transformation into a murderer argues that embracing change and uncertainty is not only an inevitable aspect of graduating high school, but a key aspect of developing a healthy adult identity.

At the beginning of the novel, each character is defined by his or her anxieties about life after graduation. Doing laps on the track, Claire wonders if she should join the army or (as her ex-boyfriend Tyler once suggested) become a teacher and stay in Alabama. Most importantly, she doesn't know what she'll do without her long-time best friend, saying that "life will be grayer without seeing Chris all day, every day."

Autumn is desperate to leave home and escape her abusive Dad, but she also doesn't know if she can make it in New York as a dancer. She's also worried that in the coming upheaval, her girlfriend Sylvia will "realize that [Autumn] doesn't deserve her"

and break up with her.

Meanwhile, Sylvia has been accepted to Brown but fears that leaving for college will rob her of time with her Mamá, who is ill and dying. She also worries that telling Autumn—who is eager to leave town as well—about her own success will jeopardize their relationship.

Tyler shares these understandable fears, but unlike the others, he takes them to a psychopathic extreme. Tyler is especially resistant to change given a recent and drastic upset in his life: the death of his mother. It's normal that he wants to cultivate stability, but the way he does so is destructive to those around him. While dating Claire, he tries to convince her to become a teacher and stay close to him, dismissing her thoughts about joining the army. Most notably, because he doesn't want his sister to leave town, he sabotages Autumn's career as a dancer by revealing her plans to their abusive father, who has forbidden her to dance. In order to keep his sister close, he knowingly exposes her to physical abuse. Several times during the shooting itself, he says that he's motivated by anger over his sister's decision to leave him. Claire also remembers him saying that "this school took everything away from me," framing the natural changes of growing up as a deliberate act of aggression.

In contrast to Tyler, at the end of the novel, the surviving characters find themselves at peace with the uncertainty of the future, showing the best way forward towards a healthy adult identity. Becoming romantically involved with her best friend Chris over the course of the day, Claire realizes that important relationships can endure change and survive despite distance or the upheaval that will accompany graduation.

Worried about their impending separation, Sylvia and Autumn have always tried to remain together, both emotionally and physically. At the end of the novel, Autumn is sent to the hospital for surgery while Sylvia mourns her brother with the other students; Autumn's serious injuries suggest that she might not be able to leave town with her girlfriend next year. Despite the threat of future separation, Sylvia feels newly connected to her and confident that their relationship can resist these new stressors.

While Tyler lets his uncertainty about growing up drive him towards murderous acts, the protagonists learn to accept the changes that growing up entails. Their new feelings of tranquility on subjects that were once major sources of worry indicates that they are on the way to (relatively) healthy and fulfilling adult lives.



ABUSE

The town of Opportunity, Alabama, seems to be a quaint and wholesome place, but flashbacks throughout the novel show moments of violence and abuse perpetrated or endured by nearly all the characters. Most notable is Tyler's history of abusing others, namely

Autumn and Sylvia, prior to becoming a mass shooter; however, Tyler himself has also been abused, and his experiences certainly shape his nefarious character. In all these cases, instances of abuse are either hidden or dismissed as the routine unpleasantness of adolescent life; by showing how these supposedly minor events of abuse culminate in a mass shooting, the novel argues that they are in fact major problems and encourages the reader to reexamine accepted but problematic social behaviors.

Prior to the shooting, most abuse in the novel is perpetrated by Tyler. Tyler is frequently involved in fights with other kids at school, notably Tomás. He picks on a queer classmate, Kevin Rolland, and his ex-girlfriend Claire says that he “wasn’t just angry...he was vindictive.” Tyler specifically targets Sylvia because she’s the sister of his nemesis, Tomás, and because as Autumn’s girlfriend she takes his sister’s attention away from him. During a school dance, Tyler corners Sylvia and threatens to “teach her” to leave his sister alone. When the two girls continue their clandestine relationship, he eventually rapes Sylvia as a form of “punishment.”

In her own narrative, Autumn characterizes Tyler as a source of protection and support, but her flashbacks reveal that he has knowingly revealed her plans to leave town to their abusive Dad, who subsequently hits her; on another occasion, Tyler even hits her himself. Just as insidiously, he intimidates and threatens his sister while simultaneously trying to convince her that he has her best interests at heart, a form of mental abuse that keeps Autumn trapped in an unhealthy relationship.

At the same time, Tyler is himself a victim of abuse. In response to his angry and vindictive nature, his classmates at school unite to shun him. Although this is an understandable reaction to his bullying, it’s also a form of social abuse and a less productive response than, for example, trying to address the sources of his anger. Tyler also lives with a largely neglectful and often abusive father. While most of his father’s explicit rage seems to be directed at Autumn, it’s clear that Tyler’s home situation is frightening and disturbing as well. Even though he’s not being physically hit, he’s being deprived of any peace of mind and learning that it’s acceptable to express one’s feelings through violence against others.

Prior to the shooting, characters dismiss these abusive situations or regard them as natural; this allows Tyler’s behavior to escalate into mass violence. Both Autumn and Sylvia hide, even from each other, Tyler’s abuse. Autumn’s refusal even to acknowledge the meaning of her brother’s behavior suggests that she thinks it’s natural or deserved, while Sylvia seems to think there’s no way to stop his actions.

Although the novel’s description of Opportunity High is rife with incidents of bullying and fistfights, teachers never seem to step in and address this problem. Rather, they appear to think that the students’ tendency to inflict pain on each other is acceptable and unlikely to lead to serious consequences—a

belief which, as Tyler’s actions show, is deeply misguided.

The novel shows that Tyler’s character has been shaped by and expressed itself through social behaviors which the people around him see as unpleasant but unavoidable, but are actually highly insidious. By showing how comparatively small instances of abuse lead to much bigger problems, the novel argues that society should seek to address these behaviors on a smaller, containable level before they spiral out of control.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Even though the student body of Opportunity High School is trapped in the auditorium during the shooting, they communicate with the outside world using cell phones and social media. Some, like Steve, call loved ones with desperate pleas for help; others, such as CJ, tweet updates and feelings throughout the day. Having stayed home from school, Jay tweets in solidarity with his endangered friends, and Mr. Jameson’s daughter Mei updates her blog regularly, trying to stay hopeful even as it becomes clear that her father is dead.

In the midst of crisis, all these people use social media to stay connected to each other, and their actions illuminate the ties that bind Opportunity residents together. CJ’s feed is flooded with comments, sometimes with strangers, sending prayers and reporting on the actions of the police; the anguish that Jay expresses on Twitter shows his deep sense of connection to other students. Mei uses her blog to report on the parents outside the school, who support and comfort each other despite their previous differences. At the same time, CJ, Jay and Mei receive many comments, often by anonymous users, mocking their grief or questioning the veracity of their accounts of the shooting. Social media isn’t just a tool of connection but a means by which community members tear each other down and sow division. Nijkamp presents Opportunity’s insular, tight-knit spirit as both positive and negative, a source of security and an entrapping force. This duality is further represented in the novel’s omnipresent social media.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Sourcebooks Fire edition of *This Is Where It Ends* published in 2016.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ It sounds glorious, but with months left until graduation, I have no clue what the future looks like. If Opportunity shaped me, I didn't notice. Running, I know. This track, I know. One step after another after another. It doesn't matter what comes next, as long as I keep moving forward.

Related Characters: Claire Morgan (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Claire Morgan begins her narrative in the midst of an early morning track practice outside Opportunity High School. She's thinking about Principal Trenton's annual speech, in which she stresses that each student belongs to a strong school community; for Claire the speech feels false and inaccurate, since she feels that she lacks the grounding and direction such a community would provide. Saying that "if Opportunity shaped me, [she] didn't notice," she expresses her feelings of alienation from the people who surround her, feelings which are notable given how much they will eventually change. By the end of the novel, Claire will speak for all the students in saying that "Opportunity is our home." The day's crisis will show her how enmeshed in her community she really is—for better or worse.

because she's grieving her dead mother and struggling with her abusive family, she doesn't "deserve" Sylvia's love. Autumn's insecurities make it hard for her to be honest with Sylvia about her feelings, but later passages will reveal that Sylvia suffers the same worries. Over the course of the novel, both girls will learn that while change is inevitable, communication and empathy can preserve relationships through all kinds of upheaval.

It's also notable that, like Claire, Autumn sees herself as fundamentally separate from her school community; she's only able to feel at ease with Sylvia when "Opportunity falls away." Over the course of the novel Autumn will develop new feelings of empathy and responsibility for those around her, but her status in the community will be permanently affected by the fact that she's related to Tyler, the shooter who tries to tear it apart.

☝☝ Before we broke up, Tyler told me the best part of high school was getting out ASAP. Still, I wish it didn't have to end yet. It'll be hard to say good-bye to our team, to our cadets, to each other. Life will be grayer without seeing Chris all day, every day.

Related Characters: Claire Morgan (speaker), Chris West

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

As she continues to run around the track, Claire reflects on different attitudes to the enormous change looming on the horizon: high school graduation. Her reference to Tyler offers an unusual glimpse into the shooter's psychology, suggesting his dissatisfaction with high school and desire to make a change in his life; however, it's important to note that this picture of Tyler's worldview and motivations will be complicated by Claire's flashbacks later in the novel. This paragraph complicates the thoughts she expressed earlier about her alienation from the Opportunity community. Even though high school hasn't given her a sense of purpose, she derives security from her routine life and especially activities like track and JROTC, in which she is most comfortable. Like the other narrators, Claire's not exactly happy with the way things are now, but neither is she ready to move on; by the end of the novel she will be much more comfortable accepting change in her life, thus taking the first step into independent adulthood.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ It's as if all of Opportunity falls away. We're lost between making a home and escaping one. It won't be long before our secrets choke us, before she finally realizes I don't deserve her and she leaves me too.

Related Characters: Autumn Browne (speaker), Sylvia Morales

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Autumn Browne stands inside the auditorium, chatting with her girlfriend Sylvia and reflecting on her uncertain future. Even though Sylvia is very important to Autumn, to her their relationship feels tenuous at best: Autumn doesn't know if their bond will survive physical separation after graduation, and she also feels that,

☝ Because what can I tell her? That I have the ticket out of town she's been longing for? That I don't even know what to do with it? Before Mamá fell ill, I would've leaped at this chance. But how can I leave now? Autumn would never understand.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker), Autumn Browne

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Inside the auditorium, Sylvia stands anxiously by her girlfriend Autumn, surreptitiously clutching an acceptance letter from Brown University that came in the mail. The girls have bonded by planning their escapes from Opportunity and imagining the exciting lives they will lead elsewhere. But at the same time, both see such a change, especially the physical separation it involves, as fundamentally destructive to their relationship.

In fact, what's actually destructive is the emotional distance between them now. Sylvia feels that Autumn "would never understand" her dilemma in choosing between her own future and her family's needs, yet Autumn herself is actually facing the same problems, trying to plan her career as a dancer despite the obstacles posed by her abusive father and brother. Over the course of the novel, both girls will become better at communicating and understanding their similarities. By the end, their new emotional intimacy allows them to confront physical distance and the changes involved in growing up with new confidence.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ My brother, who cared for my bruises when Dad couldn't contain his grief. Who helped me dance in secret. My fingers wrap around the ballet charm. Even after everything he's done, he is my home.

Related Characters: Autumn Browne (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Autumn must confront the terrible fact that the shooter terrorizing the students in the auditorium is in

fact her older brother, Tyler. This is one of Autumn's earliest and most positive portraits of Tyler. She describes him as aligned with her against their abusive father, and as a supporter of her passion for dance—he even gave her the ballet bracelet she's wearing. At the same time, her cryptic reference to "everything he's done" foreshadows the eventual revelation that he too has behaved abusively towards her and Sylvia, and that he's tried to sabotage her career as a dancer. Even though Autumn has firsthand knowledge of her brother's dangerous tendencies, she prevents herself from acknowledging them, even within her own thoughts, because she depends on Tyler to provide the security and belonging of the "home" she lost when her mother died. This passage is both a hint at the duality of Tyler's character and a window into Autumn's psychology, showing the centrality of sibling relationships in her life and foreshadowing the existential crisis that will occur when she has to distance herself from her brother forever.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ The only things that give us purpose are the stories that tie us together. We all have so many secrets to keep. And I hold mine close.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker), Autumn Browne

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Like Autumn, Sylvia is also horrified to see Tyler Browne in the auditorium with a gun, but she's much less surprised than her girlfriend that he's turned to violence.

Unbeknownst to everyone else, Tyler raped Sylvia last summer in "punishment" for her clandestine relationship with his sister, of which he disapproves. Sylvia keeps this secret "close" because she doesn't want her family and friends to worry about her, and because she worries that revealing it might derail her relationship with Autumn.

In fact, both girls are telling "stories" about Tyler that falsify the past and obscure his true character. Autumn hides his abuse in order to avoid acknowledging that her family is broken; the illusion that he is a good brother gives her stability and a sense of "purpose," as Sylvia says here. Sylvia is coping with her trauma alone because she fears being a burden to others. Both girls believe they are acting with independence and maturity, but in fact they are letting crimes go unpunished and allowing Tyler's aggression to

continue. In this sense, the novel argues that this lack of openness and willingness to accept abuse allows social issues to fester and eventually explode. When they move away from their destructive tendency to keep secrets at the end of the novel, Sylvia and Autumn strengthen their own relationship and model a way forward for their recovering community.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ I smiled sadly, not wanting to deny him his dream. Almost everyone in our class talked about leaving Opportunity, but even though Ty wasn't happy here, he never did. Sometimes it felt as if he and I walked the same road, but each of us was going in a different direction.

Related Characters: Claire Morgan (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In this flashback, Claire recalls a moment when Tyler (then her boyfriend) explains his plans for life after high school. Tyler wants to buy land and set up a farm in Opportunity, and he encourages Claire to become a teacher so she can stay with him and continue their relationship. This moment thus illustrates Tyler's extreme aversion to change; even though he's unhappy in Opportunity, he wants to solve this problem by trying to keep things the same and control those around him.

Fear of change is normal for teenagers on the threshold of adulthood; all the narrators experience it. However, it's becoming clear that Tyler's determination for things to stay the same causes him to behave destructively. Here, he's aggressive and entitled in suggesting that Claire abandon any other vision of the future in order to embrace his; in other moments, he sabotages Autumn's career plans in order to make sure she stays in Opportunity. In this sense, it's Tyler's failure to grapple with the inevitable upheaval of growing up that causes his behavior to spiral out of control.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ The Browne family had been part of Opportunity for generations—but no more. When Mrs. Browne died, Ty raged against everyone who tried to help him. He wouldn't eat the food anyone brought; he snarled at our sympathy. Still, the town forgave his grief. Until Mr. Browne drowned his sorrows in alcohol and Tyler doused his in hatred. After a while, Opportunity took the withdrawal and the lashing out personally.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sylvia explains the already tense relationship between Tyler and his community that existed prior to the shooting. By virtue of having lived in Opportunity for many generations, the Brownes are considered integral members of the community, entitled to help and acceptance in times of need. But because they have acted against community standards without remorse or improvement, they've given up that role.

In relation to Tyler, the community shows both its capacity for solidarity and its potential for neglect. In general, the community comes together in times of tragedy; this impulse is reflected in the impromptu gatherings of parents outside the school during the shooting. At the same time, the community is apt to be harsh in its behavior towards those deemed not to belong; this uglier truth comes to light in the anonymous, derogatory comments on many of the students' earnest social media posts during the shooting. The novel does not argue that the community is responsible for pacifying Tyler or foreseeing his extreme behavior. Rather, it suggests that by simply dismissing all unpleasant elements of community life, the community allows abusive behavior such as Tyler's to escalate and ultimately imperils its own safety.

☝☝ This isn't about returning fire or self-defense. This is about revenge. If this guy hurt my sister or anyone else, I'll kill him. Slowly.

Related Characters: Tomás Morales (speaker), Tyler Browne, Sylvia Morales

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Right now Tomás is in the janitor's closet, gathering supplies and weapons with which he hopes to free the entrapped students and confront Tyler. Hearing more gunshots, he worries that his twin sister Sylvia has been hit and promises to kill Tyler "slowly" if she has been hurt. The novel intends Tomás's anger to illustrate the monstrosity of shootings, especially in the hurt it causes to victims' families. However, by dramatically emphasizing Tomás's heroism here, the author shows how gun violence can sometimes be reduced to a simplistic battle between "good" and "bad" students. Tomás's bravery and Tyler's death will do little to solve the larger issue, and in other moments that contrast with this one, the novel pointedly encourages readers to contemplate the social origins of the gun violence epidemic and the ways in which communities can fight it.

It's also interesting that, instead of acknowledging his anxiety and pain (conventionally female emotions), Tomás deflects them by concentrating on his anger (a conventionally male response to a crisis). At many points, the novel suggests that Tyler's actions are not random but rather derive from a sense of male entitlement he's learned from the men around him. That Tomás as well conforms to norms of "male" thinking shows how gendered expectations for behavior pervade society and prevent all kinds of men from accessing or addressing their emotions.

to him, she's also witnessed his "angry" and "vindictive" nature. However, it's much easier for Claire than for Autumn to parse these clashing emotions and ultimately put distance between herself and the shooter. This comparison suggests that sibling relationships—even if they are abusive and especially if they are combined with family instability—are the most important and inescapable bonds for adolescents.

Claire also hints at the misogyny that, over the course of the novel, comes to characterize Tyler. Tyler targets Sylvia not just because he's mad at Tomás but because he views women as objects belonging to their boyfriends or brothers, and thus appropriate recipients of the hatred he feels for those men. While Claire doesn't have all the facts here (Tyler's behavior towards Sylvia is also motivated by his jealousy of her relationship with Autumn), she implicitly points out his belief that women's lives are secondary to those of men.

☝ This town—this school is taking everything away from me. My home. My mother. My sister. Why am I to blame?

Related Characters: Tyler Browne (speaker), Autumn Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

While pacing on the stage in front of the terrified students, Tyler unleashes a tirade of frustration with the school and the way he believes it's harmed him. Even though Tyler has largely disowned all responsibility for those around him—and, as Sylvia explained earlier, has rejected all outside efforts to help him recover after his mother's death—he still believes that the community has obligations to him and deserves to be punished for failing him. His speech presents a one-sided and untenable view of communal engagement, ultimately demonstrating Tyler's narcissism and lack of empathy.

It's also notable that Tyler views the "loss" of his mother as an overt act of aggression. Mrs. Browne's death is the result of a random accident, for which no one was to blame, while the changes in Tyler's relationship with Autumn are the natural result of growing up and developing new identities. To cope with changes he can't stop, Tyler assigns responsibility to people who have just as little control as he does. Again, the inability to face the natural changes in his

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ "Ty wasn't just angry," I manage at last. "He was vindictive. When he got into fights with Tomás, he wouldn't take it out on him. He'd take it out on the people close to you."

Related Characters: Claire Morgan (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a police officer interviews Claire on her past relationship with Tyler, and Claire opens up about his disturbing behavior. Like Autumn, Claire has conflicting views of Tyler's character; while she was once very attached

life is one of the most important drivers of Tyler's aggression.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ I can't imagine what it's like not to have that. For as much as I despise Tyler, I love Autumn. It's why I could never tell her what he did. I want her to be able to keep the only true family she has.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker), Tyler Browne, Autumn Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sylvia considers confessing to Autumn that Tyler raped her the previous summer. However, before doing so she reflects on her loving and supportive family, who have accepted her sexuality and welcomed her girlfriend into the fold. Sylvia believes that by telling Autumn about her brother's crimes, she'd be stripping her of the one attachment that compares to Sylvia's family solidarity.

Sylvia is thinking of Autumn's best interests; her empathy contrasts starkly with Tyler's narcissism in manipulating his sister. But in fact, by participating in the charade that Tyler is a good brother, she's encouraging Autumn to accept a highly abusive relationship, not helping her girlfriend. Moreover, in thinking about others she completely neglects to consider her own trauma, and the steps she needs to take to heal herself. By disregarding her own needs, she's tacitly validating Tyler's sense of entitlement and affirming his belief that female bodies and female experiences are fundamentally unimportant.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ "It was your fault," he says. "All of this, it's your fault."

Related Characters: Tyler Browne (speaker), Autumn Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

After shooting many of the teachers and terrorizing the students, Tyler demands that his sister reveal herself and talk to him. Gathering her courage, Autumn confronts her brother, affirms her love for him, and begs him to lay down his weapon. Tyler refuses to do so, instead laying the blame for his aggression and rage on her. Autumn has previously described her relationship with her brother as supportive and rewarding, but this passage reveals the stark difference between this depiction and the actual truth. In fact, their relationship is governed by Tyler's narcissism, and rather than being supported, Autumn has to devote her energy to managing her brother's rages.

It's also interesting that Tyler believes Autumn has betrayed him in some fundamental way, simply because she is determined to leave Opportunity and pursue a career that has nothing to do with him. That Tyler takes offense at Autumn's assertion of her own personhood shows that he believes women's lives should revolve around those of men—a point that also came up earlier when Claire remembers Tyler asking her to become a teacher in order to stay in Opportunity with him. In this sense, Tyler's actions aren't random or illogical but an extreme expression of the masculine entitlement that pervades society in many subtler ways.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝ I need to get to Sylv before Ty sees her. Because if he does, there will be nothing left. If she dies, I will never be able to tell her that she is the one who keeps me standing. That her lips taste like a promise. That she makes me want to be a better version of myself.

Related Characters: Autumn Browne (speaker), Tyler Browne, Sylvia Morales

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Autumn has always been scared to expose her sexuality and relationship to scrutiny from her town and family, but when she confronts Tyler, she finally admits publicly that she's in love with Sylvia and not ashamed of it. Here, she finally understands and accepts that in order to pursue a healthy and fulfilling relationship with Sylvia, she must let go of her abusive family forever. Because Autumn loves Tyler, this choice has always been a matter of anxiety for her, but now that she's finally realized how much her family has harmed

her, letting go of them is a positive moment of asserting independence. Like Tyler, Autumn must choose between the stagnant familiarity of childhood and the unfamiliar but potentially rewarding terrain of adulthood. While his inability to confront this transition destroys Tyler, this passage shows that Autumn will emerge empowered and newly confident in herself.

☛ It's everywhere and all consuming. Some days you think you can't go on because the only thing waiting for you is more despair. Some days you don't want to go on because it's easier to give up than to get hurt again.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

After Autumn talks to Tyler and fails to subdue him, Sylvia confronts him in an attempt to keep his attention engaged while other students quietly escape the auditorium. Sylvia acknowledges that Tyler has faced tragedy and grief, and commiserates with his resulting suffering. She also points out that Tyler's problems—which he claims none of the students have experienced or could understand—are in fact nearly universal. Sylvia herself is losing her mother to a degenerative illness, and as the novel's multiple perspectives show, each student has their own all-consuming problems. By choosing to identify with a person who has literally raped her and otherwise behaved hatefully in so many instances, Sylvia is demonstrating a radical form of empathy and demonstrating an alternative to the entitlement that has consumed Tyler and prevented him from recognizing anyone else's suffering. This passage frames the issue of gun violence not as a conflict between heroic and villainous individuals, but as a choice between choosing to empathize with others and indulging one's own narcissism.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☛ “Do you think it would've made any difference if I stayed with Ty?”

Chris winces. “No. I don't think there's anything any of us could have done.”

Related Characters: Chris West, Claire Morgan (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

As she stands outside the school, watching dazed and bloody students exit one by one, Claire is consumed with anguish and guilt for failing to have perceived Tyler's intentions while she was dating him. In her question to Chris, she takes personal responsibility for managing Tyler's emotions; without meaning to, she tacitly affirms his earlier assertion that his behavior is the just result of neglect from the women around him. It's Chris who challenges this point of view, saying that neither Claire nor any other specific person could have stopped Tyler's rampage. By stressing Tyler's personal responsibility for his own actions, Chris challenges the culture of male entitlement in which the shooter is steeped; as in many other moments, Chris emerges as a positive contrast to Tyler.

Throughout the novel, Claire responds to the horror of the shooting by trying to act heroically, for example running for help and begging to be allowed to join in the police rescue. Chris's statement, however, is a reminder that gun violence stems from widespread social issues, rather than specific individual actions. Ultimately, his perspective argues that rather than relying on individual heroism to resolve a crisis, people should change the broad trends and values of their society to prevent such crises from arising.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☛ There are so many people here, and Chris is by my side, but I have never felt more alone. I wish my parents were here, but at the same time I'm not ready to face them.

Related Characters: Claire Morgan (speaker), Chris West

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

Because she's not allowed to help the police liberate the school, Claire spends most of the morning helplessly standing outside and waiting for the shooting to end. On the one hand, she's surrounded by her community: her best friend is by her side, and parents and residents are congregating outside the school to support each other and offer assistance. The scene is a demonstration of communal

solidarity, but on the other hand, it also shows the limits of such solidarity: no matter how tight-knit the town is, it's helpless to respond to unexpected attacks like Tyler's.

As the novel progresses, Claire reevaluates her relationship to her community, so being surrounded by others and feeling enmeshed in her town is important to her evolving identity. At the same time, recognizing the limits of any community to prevent change and provide security is an inevitable part of growing up. Claire's reluctance to face her parents is perhaps the result of her realization that, as she becomes an adult, her relationship with them must change forever. For her, growing up involves both positive new alignment with her community and a recognition of life's fundamental uncertainties.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☞ You can't always settle your life in one place. The world was made to change. But as long as you cherish the memories and make new ones along the way, no matter where you are, you'll always be at home.

Related Characters: Fared Al-Sahar (speaker), Sylvia Morales

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

After fleeing upstairs and hiding in a science classroom, Tomás runs into the hallway to distract Tyler while Sylvia and Fared escape onto the roof. When Sylvia realizes what her brother is doing, she rushes back down, only to hear Tyler shoot her twin fatally. Fared holds her and soothes her anguish with his father's advice on moving to a new country and accepting the heartbreak such a transition brings. He argues staying in one place and cultivating stasis isn't a route to feeling fulfilled and at home; paradoxically, the best way to achieve security is to accept change, no matter how difficult this seems. The principles Fared articulates are exactly opposite to Tyler's belief that change must be prevented at all costs; that Tyler fails to achieve a sense of belonging even in his hometown, while Fared thrives even after moving across the world, is a strong affirmation of these principles.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☞ The last thing I see before I fade is Ty turning the gun on himself. The last thing I hear is Ty saying, "I just don't want to be alone anymore."

Related Characters: Autumn Browne (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

As the police are closing in, Autumn confronts her brother for the last time. Even though she continues to affirm her love for him, Tyler shoots Autumn in the knee and then kills himself. His last words diverge from his previous rants, expressing less rage with others than dissatisfaction with himself. His plaintive tone is a nod to the relationship he and Autumn once enjoyed and her previous admiration for her older brother. At the same time, Autumn's repeated attempts to reconcile with her brother have shown that the choice to be alone is ultimately his; choosing to commit suicide isn't a brave act but a rejection of his own agency in life. While Tyler has tried to put the blame on others throughout the novel, this passage shows that it's he who is responsible for the situation in which he finds himself.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☞ Ty made good on his promise. I didn't need to die for him to kill me. He simply lowered his gun and pulled the trigger. And his bullet tore my knee to shreds.

Related Characters: Autumn Browne (speaker), Tyler Browne

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

Even though Tyler's actions this morning have angered, horrified, and hurt Autumn, she's repeatedly stated her love for him—if only to reconcile with him before he dies or is killed by the police. However, Tyler responds to her efforts by shooting her in the knee, inflicting a wound that will probably prevent her from dancing again—and thus choosing to end his life not in reconciliation but a final moment of spite. While Tyler has argued many times that his behavior towards Autumn stems from a desire for a

closer relationship with her, this act shows that what he really wants is to control her and rob her of her independence. While Autumn has vacillated between idealizing and criticizing her relationship with Tyler, this final act establishes it firmly as an abusive one. Even though Autumn's wound is a tragedy, by liberating her from any illusions about her brother it may ultimately help her recover from his betrayal and the dissolution of her family.

Epilogue Quotes

☝ We are tied to Opportunity, and maybe that's the way it's supposed to be. We plant our seeds here to take root and blossom.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 279

Explanation and Analysis

While most of the novel's events unfold in the morning, the epilogue takes place at night, when Fareed breaks onto the school's roof and summons all the surviving students and teachers for an impromptu vigil. Sylvia encapsulates the students' spontaneous demonstration of solidarity by saying they are "tied to Opportunity." She's made similar statements before, usually when feeling trapped in her town or longing to get away. But her description of the students as plants waiting to "take root and blossom" gives a more positive cast to this attachment to their hometown, turning it from an impediment to a source of strength and growth. As it has for Claire and Autumn, the shooting has forced Sylvia to reevaluate her feelings about the community and her place within it. For her, growing up no longer means

cutting ties with her hometown; rather, as she becomes an adult she commits to honoring her connection with it.

☝ I hold on for one more moment. Then, around me, other lanterns are released. They float over our heads into the darkness, toward the promise of a new day.

Related Characters: Sylvia Morales (speaker), Tomás Morales

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

At the vigil organized by Fareed, the students and teachers light paper lanterns inscribed with the names of the dead. In the novel's last paragraph, Sylvia holds onto Tomás's lantern, gazing at it before she sends it into the sky. Tomás's death means that she's alone in a new and fundamental way, robbed of the sibling relationship that has anchored her for many days. However, right now she stresses her closeness to those around her, emphasizing that she shares her grief with others. Describing the lanterns floating upwards together, she even imagines a sense of togetherness between Tomás and the other murdered students. Sylvia's sense of peace in the midst of tragedy is a contrast to Tyler's growing alienation and anger in the wake of his mother's death; the parallels between the two argue that communal engagement is critical in facilitating healthy and constructive mourning. It's also notable that while Tyler has tried to create as much destruction as possible, Sylvia actively rejects his narrative; describing both Tomás and herself as looking forward to "the promise of a new day," she ends the novel on a note of continuity and optimism.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: 10:01-10:02 A.M.

The crack of a starter gun rings out, and several teenage runners spring around the track. Even though it's the middle of winter in Opportunity, Alabama, Claire Morgan spends the frosty morning practicing outside with the rest of her track team. Still, she'd rather be running drills with Coach Lindt than listening to the boring and predictable speech that Principal Trenton repeats at the start of each new semester. This morning at breakfast, Claire recited the speech from memory to amuse her younger brother Matt.

Principal Trenton loves to repeat the school's motto: *We Shape the Future*. But Claire is unsure about her future, and says, "if Opportunity shaped me, I didn't notice." In fact, it's only while running that Claire feels totally at ease. Suddenly her foot slips and another runner catches up with her and makes fun of her for getting out of shape over Christmas break. Chris is not only Claire's best friend but also the team's star runner and one of the most popular boys in school. Running together, they leave the rest of the team behind and fall into step with each other.

Meanwhile, Tomás is inside Principal Trenton's office, rifling through her drawers. He's already lined his teacher's desk drawers with superglue to create a distraction and escape the student assembly. But now he's running out of time, and his best friend Fareed elbows him and gestures that someone is outside. For a minute, Fareed and Tomás crouch in tense silence, wondering how they can explain their presence here. The footsteps stop outside the office door, but after a few long minutes they start up again, and the boys let out their breath.

Inside Opportunity High's auditorium, Autumn is listening to Principal Trenton's speech. The principal tells the students that the choices they make now will determine their entire futures, so they should think hard about who they want to be. As Trenton looks over the crowd, Autumn feels that she can see everyone's "hopes" and "heartbreaks;" when the principal's gaze reaches her, she blushes and looks at the seat to her right, which is empty. Her brother is supposed to be sitting there, but he's nowhere to be found.

The immediate reference to the starter gun creates tension by referring to the shooting that's about to happen, but at the same time, this abrupt noise is just an ordinary part of the school day. This contradiction suggests that the day's events both violate Opportunity's norms and come from factors deep within that very community.



At the novel's outset, Claire doesn't feel that her time in high school has affected her; her alienation from her community is front and center. By the end of the day, however, her relationship to Opportunity will change significantly. Although Claire describes Chris as her best friend, her remark that he's one of the most popular and respected boys in school suggests that she's a little intimidated by him, too.



Tomás's first appearance casts him firmly as an experienced troublemaker, but eventually his unconventional behavior will help him save other students. Both he and Tyler rebel against the school's expectations for good behavior, but while Tyler does so in a malicious way that is harmful for others, Tomás always has his sister or his friends in mind.



Claire finds the principal's speech meaningless in part because she has no idea who she wants to be. For Autumn, who has more definitive ideas about the future, the speech is a call to action. Even though both girls might be skeptical of the principal's platitudes, it's clear that Trenton nonetheless represents the school that has sheltered them for so many years.



Sitting at Autumn's left, Autumn's girlfriend Sylvia points out the lack of originality in the principal's speech. Stung, Autumn points out that everyone really does want to be their best selves, but Autumn is actually grumpy because she knows Sylvia will be accepted to any college she applies to, while Autumn's future is much more uncertain.

Autumn is determined to study dance after high school, but her Dad won't pay for it, not after the accident that claimed her Mom's life. Her father says that "dance took everything" from his wife, and now there's no one to stop him from crushing Autumn's dreams, drinking too much, or even hitting her. In her mind, Autumn can hear her brother Tyler's voice, saying that "it's up to [Autumn] to make [her] future the best it can be." Autumn would rather just leave town.

Sylvia looks at the empty seat next to Autumn as well. She's relieved that Tyler isn't going to come to school, and feels safe for the first time all day. Still, she doesn't ask Autumn about him; today is the second anniversary of her mother's accident and she's preoccupied with grief that she won't share with anyone, even Sylvia. These days, it's only when she thinks no one is watching that Autumn dances as freely and joyfully as she used to. Sylvia wishes she could watch Autumn dance forever, but she knows that Autumn is going to flee town and leave her behind "as soon as she can."

Sylvia has a history midterm now, but she hasn't studied because her mother's health has declined over break; Mamá no longer recognizes even her own father and refuses to leave the house, so Sylvia spent hours inside, soothing her with old family stories.

In an exchange of **tweets**, CJ, a student inside the assembly, complains about being sleepy, while another student, Jay, hints that he's blowing off school to stay home.

CHAPTER 2: 10:02-10:04 A.M.

Feeling daring again, Tomás opens the drawer of files. He knows that the principal will speak for exactly five minutes, after which the hallways will be clogged with students dawdling on the way to class. Tomás complains about the piles of paper and Fareed mocks him, calling him a "barbarian." While he continues to search, Tomás extracts Fareed's file and hands it to his friend for inspection.

Throughout the novel, Autumn and Sylvia each view the other's future as more secure and worry about the other instigating a breakup of their relationship, but they don't discuss these concerns with each other. This pattern shows how lack of communication can create tensions within a relationship.



Autumn's home life is a source of tragedy; instead of supporting her aspirations her father attempts to quash them. It's clear that he sees Autumn not as a person but as an outlet for his own rage and grief. While Autumn thinks of Tyler as a supportive brother now, flashbacks will show later in the novel that this is actually far from the case.



Already, it's clear that Sylvia and Autumn have highly divergent views of Tyler: Autumn misses him and worries about his whereabouts, while Sylvia seems afraid of him and is glad he's skipped school. This contradiction suggests that Tyler presents very different sides of his character to different people in his life.



While Autumn is neglected by her family, Sylvia is forced to adopt outside responsibility within hers due to her mother's illness.



Throughout the novel, social media will be an important vein of communication between those trapped inside the school and those waiting outside for news.



Even though Tomás sets himself outside the community with his frequent pranks, he still counts on the school's reliable predictability, as his remark about the speech shows. Already, Tomás's character is an example of the tension between community and individuality that shapes the novel.



After some more searching, Tomás finds what he's looking for: Tyler Browne's file. Looking at Tyler's contemptuous snapshot makes Tomás want to bang Tyler's head into a locker. He's disappointed with the lack of information in the folder—just a record of Tyler's mediocre grades—but takes note of the last line, which states that his nemesis is reenrolling in school this semester. Sylvia has already mentioned this to Tomás, and her terrified look when she brought it up is the reason why Tomás is breaking the rules to find more information.

Like his sister, Tomás clearly sees Tyler as a threat and enemy. This moment represents both his closeness to Sylvia—he's willing to break rules to find information on someone who scares her—and his distance from her: he doesn't even know exactly what's wrong, because Sylvia isn't comfortable telling him.



Autumn's back is full of knots, which Sylvia patiently massages. Autumn didn't sleep well last night, especially because, with Tyler absent and Mr. Browne drinking, she suffered the grief of the anniversary alone. Her father used to make her laugh, but now he hates everything that reminds him of his dead wife, including his daughter. Autumn is afraid that she's going to lose her entire family, but she doesn't want to admit her feelings because she knows Sylvia dislikes Tyler.

Autumn can't rely on anyone for support except Sylvia. Even though her family situation is much less positive than that of her girlfriend, she still cares for her brother and father as much as Sylvia loves her own family.



Suspecting what she's feeling, Sylvia tells Autumn that she can talk about anything, but Autumn just shakes her head. Another girl comes over to talk to Sylvia about the upcoming midterm. Autumn knows that she's named Asha, but she doesn't want to put any effort into getting to know people when she's going to leave town anyway.

This is another missed opportunity for communication between Sylvia and Autumn. Even though they clearly love each other, both girls are too insecure at this point to express their feelings for each other.



Turning to Autumn, Asha tries to make conversation, asking what she did over the break even though Autumn puts on a bored and disaffected front. Finally Autumn admits that she watched an old film of her mother dancing *Swan Lake*. New to Opportunity and not knowing that Mrs. Brown is dead, she casually asks if the production was any good. Autumn is relieved not to be faced with pity. After telling Asha that her mother was "amazing," Autumn leans against Sylvia and feels as if "all of Opportunity falls away."

For Autumn, talking to someone not "from" Opportunity is a moment of liberation from her town's insularity. Like Claire, she feels trapped and uneasy at the idea that she belongs within her town and should be loyal to it.



On the track, Claire begins to warm up in the cold air. She's thinking about her JROTC drill team, which will soon begin practice as well. Chris asks about her break and she says she enjoyed celebrating her brother Matt's birthday—albeit without her older sister Tracy, who is serving in the army. Chris's father, Lt. Colonel West, is about to leave on his seventh army tour, so Chris knows what it's like to be constantly worrying about a family member. Claire wishes she could be as strong and resilient as Tracy.

As captain of the track team and the JROTC drill team, Claire is clearly a leader among the students—but as she'll soon find out, this is very different from being a leader in the midst of an adult crisis. Claire compares herself unfavorably to her sister's strength, but her behavior over the course of the novel will show that she really does possess the qualities she thinks, at this point, that she lacks.



On the bright side Matt, who has lupus, has been doing relatively well recently and enjoying the beginning of high school. Chris says he should join the JROTC team to keep up the family tradition once Claire leaves. She's sad to think that she and Chris will be separated next year: he'll almost certainly go to West Point, but she doesn't know where she'll end up. Most seniors—including Claire's ex-boyfriend, Tyler—can't wait to finish high school. But she wishes she had more time before giving up all her friends.

Sylvia listens hopefully as Autumn opens up about her Mom's beautiful dancing. Students are trying to exit the auditorium and grumbling at the congestion, but Sylvia wants to stand still and let her girlfriend talk. Autumn even begins telling Asha, who plays piano, about her own plans for her Julliard dance audition. Sylvia observes that if Autumn put a little more effort into making friends, she wouldn't always feel so lonely, but she's also a little jealous that Autumn is telling Asha things she'd never mentioned to Sylvia before.

When Autumn asks Sylvia if she's heard from Brown yet, Sylvia says no, even though she's actually clenching her acceptance letter in her pocket. She feels guilty that she already has the "ticket out of town" that Autumn wants, and even guiltier about the thought of leaving her sick Mamá behind. Around them, other people are chatting and flirting, united by the start of a new term. However, for some reason no one is moving out of the auditorium.

In a **text message**, Matt tells Claire not to worry about him, and jokes that the speech was exactly as she said it would be.

CHAPTER 3: 10:04-10:05 A.M.

Autumn reflects that while Sylvia thinks of dance as a career, Asha understands that for Autumn, it's a "heartbeat." Autumn wishes she could talk to Asha more, but Asha walks away and Autumn feels sad again. Her only friend in this school is Sylvia, and her Dad and brother seem like they don't care what happens to her at all.

Shaking off his pensive mood, Chris increases his pace and leaves Claire behind. She focuses on her running again, trying to improve over her times from last season. All of her worries and fears for her siblings disappear, and she thinks only of the freedom of running. Suddenly, she feels that she's exactly where she belongs.

Paradoxically, Claire wants high school to continue longer because she doesn't feel grounded enough in her community—she worries that her friendships will dissolve once she no longer lives in the same place. By the end of the novel, however, she'll realize that physical separation won't dissolve the bonds with those who are important in her life.



Even though Sylvia is Autumn's partner and the person she's closest to, it's often hard for Autumn to open up. In a way, their relationship parallels Sylvia's dynamic with her twin Tomás: the love both siblings feel contrasts with the fact that they're actively hiding things from each other.



Unlike Claire and Autumn, Sylvia's successful exit from Opportunity is all but assured. She's held back not by worries about her own prospects but by her sense of responsibility for the family she'd be leaving behind.



Matt's text demonstrates his reliance on and sense of camaraderie with his older sister.



Even though Autumn's relationship with Sylvia is fulfilling, moments like these show that it's not enough – she needs a community in which to feel at home, not just one person on whom to rely.



Running gives Claire a sense of purpose because it provides her with a specific task. In contrast, she'll spend much of the morning trying to confront the fact that, during the shooting to come, there's nothing she can actually do to help those inside the school.



Tomás replaces the file, feeling that this whole excursion was stupid and there's no way to help his sister. Fareed suggests they skip the rest of the day. Ever since Fareed arrived at Opportunity last year, he and Tomás have shared the "dubious honor" of being the school's chief mischief-makers. Tomás says no; he doesn't want Principal Trenton to call his Abuelo again, and he doesn't want his Mamá to find out that he's behaved badly.

Sylvia lightly holds Autumn's wrist as they move towards the back of the auditorium, even though her girlfriend hates when they touch in public. She hates thinking about Autumn's determination to leave town, especially when she doesn't know what's going to happen to her. Around her, other students are murmuring that the doors are locked; as the bell rings, Sylvia wonders if her twin, Tomás, is playing some kind of trick. One of the doors at the front of the room opens and a blond figure wearing a cap enters. All at once, everyone realizes that the figure entering the room is holding a gun. He tells Principal Trenton that he "has a question," raises his arm, and fires.

In a **blog**, a girl named Mei muses that while "Opportunity always looks the same," she enjoys the stability of her home.

Here, Tomás's personal desires clash with his family obligations: he wants to break the rules as he's always done, but because of his family circumstances he knows he must change his ways. Even before the shooting starts, Tomás is already grappling with the challenges of growing up.



Sylvia uses physical contact with Autumn to soothe her worries about the emotional distance she fears will accompany their graduation from high school. Her reference to Tomás here creates another parallel between him and Tyler, but the shooter's entrance with a gun right now draws a clear distinction between Tyler's character and that of her brother.



Like Mei, the novel's narrators all chafe at Opportunity's predictability while also relying on it for security.



CHAPTER 4: 10:05-10:07 A.M.

In the principal's office, Tomás waits for the bell to ring, but he's spooked when it does and the hallway isn't filled by the usual rush of students. Fareed seems undisturbed, but suddenly they hear two loud cracks; Tomás has gone hunting and Fareed grew up in a "war zone," so they both know what is going on. They need to find a way to warn someone, but Tomás also realizes with horror that his sister, Sylvia, is in the auditorium.

Sylvia is shocked and terrified to see Tyler standing at the front of the room. She and Autumn are too far from the doors to escape; they can see teachers trying to approach Tyler and being shot, one by one. Two students are lying on their seats in pools of blood, and the English teacher, Mr. Jameson, tries to stanch the principal's wounds. An elderly librarian starts walking toward the door; remembering how the woman regularly brings her Mamá fresh bread, Sylvia starts praying for her while she watches Tyler. He fires at the librarian, who falls down on the floor.

Even though Tomás likes to play pranks and shake things up at the school, he also counts on things to be comfortably predictable—as his unease at the absence of students, even before the gunshots, illustrates.



The teachers in the room are the first to confront Tyler, but they all fail immediately. This signals that the narrators can no longer count on adults to protect them; rather, they have to act like adults themselves. This is a sudden and extreme dramatization of the questions about growing up that all of the narrators were already facing. Although everyone enjoyed making fun of Principal Trenton's speeches, her death signals the end of the era of tranquility and safety the speeches represented.



Initially thinking it's the starter gun, Claire hears the second shot from the track. Understanding what's happening, Chris runs to the gym doors, only to find that they're locked. Two students start crying, Coach Lindt is in shock, and Claire knows that her brother needs her. Eventually everyone turns to Claire, who is in charge of the JROTC team. Since everyone's phones are inside, Claire decides that the coach should find the emergency phone while she and Chris notify the security guard, Jonah, and ride with him for help. Chris follows Claire as more shots echo through the school.

Just as the teachers inside are unable to protect the students, Coach Lindt is too shocked to take charge of the situation as he normally does. For Claire, this is a moment of realization that she's just as qualified to handle the crisis as an adult. Her quick thinking now emphasizes her personal strength but also robs her of the comforting idea that responsible adults will always be able to care for her.



Sylvia screams and Asha drops her bag. Autumn realizes that all the doors are locked, and there's no way out of the auditorium. She can't believe that the boy standing on the stage, picking off students and teachers, is her brother. After all, Tyler is the one who protects her from her Dad and appreciates her talent for dance. She knows she should reason with him, but instead she clings to Sylvia and they edge towards the back of the auditorium, as Tyler shoots a small girl running towards the door. Then, he shoots the clock in the auditorium and tells them all to "stay where [they] are."

Throughout the novel, Autumn will be forced to acknowledge the difference between her idea of Tyler and his actual behavior, both towards her and towards other students. Her pattern of excusing her brother's actions prior to the shooting shows how much she cares about maintaining family relationships, even if doing so entails suffering abuse.



In a series of **tweets**, CJ posts that an active shooter is inside Opportunity High. A variety of other users doubt her account and criticize her for playing dangerous pranks.

CJ is trying to reach out to others in Opportunity, but she meets with scorn and disdain. The town can be a bulwark of support, but it can also drive residents apart.



CHAPTER 5: 10:07-10:10 A.M.

Fareed picks up the principal's phone and calls 911, while Tomás fights the urge to run straight to the auditorium. He hits a cabinet instead. Calmly, Fareed tells the operator everything he knows about the situation. Tomás is worried that Fareed will be labeled as a suspect, since school officials are often quick to question the Afghan student about problems that have nothing to do with him. Fareed tells the operator where they are, and explains the position of the auditorium. The operator instructs them to leave through the window and wait outside for help.

Like Tomás, Fareed is somewhat of an outsider in the school—but evidently because of his ethnicity, not his own choices. Throughout the novel Fareed will distinguish himself by his quick thinking and calm demeanor, which many of the other students lack. Ultimately, these traits will make him a leader in the community that once looked on him with suspicion and demonstrate how prejudice can blind people to others' true virtues.



Frozen with shock, Sylvia can barely hear or understand what's going on around her. She thinks about her Mamá, incapable of caring for herself, and her Abuelo struggling to keep the family's farm running. Most of all, she thinks of the two people most important to her: Tomás and Autumn.

The fact that Sylvia thinks of other people instead of her own immediate safety shows that she conceives of her own identity through her relationships with her biological family and her chosen loved ones.



Tyler has tried to tear them all apart, although Sylvia has never told the others about this. Sylvia and Autumn habitually spend the summers hanging out in an abandoned shed, where Autumn dances and Sylvia works on her applications. One day last summer, Tyler accosted Sylvia outside the shed, saying that Autumn isn't allowed to be there. Sylvia walked away from him, but he caught up and grabbed her, accusing her of taking his sister away from him and "corrupting her."

Sylvia hoped that Autumn heard her brother's voice and would come out of the shed, but she didn't. Tyler threw Sylvia to the ground and said that her relationship with Autumn is "a disease," and that she's "stealing" his family. Sylvia countered that Tyler doesn't even care for his own sister. He kicked her in the stomach. Sylvia couldn't run from him that afternoon, but she's been trying to "escape" ever since.

Chris thanks Claire for taking charge as they reach the parking lot, looking for Jonah's patrol car. Jonah, the school security guard, once drove Claire to the hospital during one of Matt's illnesses, and they've become friends. Next to his car, she recognizes Tyler's car parked across three spaces, and assumes that Tyler and Jonah went looking for jumper cables. She hopes that if Tyler is inside, he will protect her brother.

Claire is disturbed to see that Jonah's radio has been cut out of the patrol car, and Chris finds ammo boxes in Tyler's back seat. Looking down, Claire is shocked to find Jonah's dead body hidden under the car. Chris concludes that Tyler is the shooter.

Autumn knows that people only feel fear when they have "something to lose;" she hasn't been afraid in a long time, but now she's about to lose her brother and her girlfriend. She hugs the crying Sylvia and promises to protect her, pulling her into the farthest corner of the room. Tyler closes the one remaining door, produces a padlock, and orders a young student to attach it. Calmly and dramatically, Tyler tells everyone that if they keep calm they won't "force [him] to waste [his] bullets."

On [Twitter](#), Jay, the student who skipped school, begs for more information and messages his friend Kevin, asking about his safety.

While Sylvia and Autumn's inability to share feelings may seem like a small, everyday issue, in fact it leads an enormous problem: Sylvia has suffered a serious trauma and can't talk to anyone about it. In these moments the novel shows how negative behaviors, if accepted by society, can soon spiral out of control.



Tyler's deranged rant shows that he considers Autumn a piece of property, a thing that Sylvia has stolen rather than a person who has entered a relationship of her own accord. Throughout these flashbacks, Tyler's rage is directed primarily at women who refuse to make him the center of their lives. His homophobia toward Sylvia and Autumn's relationship also shows how societal biases can lead to interpersonal cruelty.



Initially, it doesn't even occur to Claire that Tyler could be the shooter. Yet as she grapples with this fact over the course of the book, she'll start to think of previous moments in her life as hints of his true character. While Claire doesn't bear responsibility for Tyler's actions, her reflections will show that his crimes proceed from a pattern of malicious, abusive behavior.



In this moment, Claire has to process the death of a trusted adult and the revelation that her ex-boyfriend is responsible. Both her faith in Tyler as an individual and her confidence in her community are shaken.



Ironically, it's only when her life is at risk that Autumn realizes how much she has to live for. It's also important to note that Autumn still cares for her brother, even though he is the shooter; this moment shows the strength of sibling love, regardless of individual flaws.



Even though Jay is physically safe, he's still extremely emotionally invested in what's going on at the school, showing the strength of the community's bonds.



CHAPTER 6: 10:10-10:12 A.M.

For once, Sylvia wishes she could forget everything, like her Mamá. Around her, students are holding and comforting each other, or talking to loved ones on the phone, while Tyler “revels” in the fear he’s caused. Seemingly oblivious to everyone around him, one boy has a loud phone conversation with his mother, until Tyler fires at the ceiling and tells everyone to get off their phones. Sylvia knows she can never hide from him.

Claire can’t bring herself to believe that Tyler is the shooter. She wants to believe that some sort of accident happened, but Chris points out that all the evidence is against him and adds that Tyler was “never good for [Claire]” anyway. With Jonah dead, the two have to change their plan; they wordlessly start running to the nearest gas station, where there is a phone.

Claire thinks back to a moment she shared with Tyler. In the flashback, he tells her that she doesn’t have to be like Tracy; she could stay right here in Opportunity with him. He says that he won’t “let the army steal [his] girl.” Claire feels glad that Tyler, often aggressive and angry at school, feels safe and affectionate with her. In fact, Tyler’s Dad owns the gas station she’s running towards right now, and he once offered to take Matt there after hours as a treat—but that was before the breakup.

Returning to her flashback, Claire asks Tyler what her dream should be, if not to follow her sister Tracy into the army. Tyler says that she should stay close to him and become a teacher. That way they could build a home together, living on one of the farms on the town’s edge. Claire marvels that he has his life figured out, and Tyler says he’s going to make sure that the world “never forgets [him].” Now, Claire knows, he’s trying to do so in the deadliest way possible.

Fareed opens the window in the principal’s office, but Tomás looks at the empty hallway and knows he can’t leave, not with Sylvia still in the building. Grimly, Fareed says they should be prepared to encounter the shooter; he suggests finding the janitor, Neil, and arming themselves with hammers. Anxiously they walk down the hall, wondering who could possibly be responsible for the shooting. Turning the corner, they see that the janitor’s office is wide open.

Even though Tyler seems to be targeting the school at large, Sylvia suspects that he’s actually seeking revenge on Autumn and her. Tyler sees the community as responsible for his personal problems; his sense of community investment is dysfunctional and harmful those around him.



Chris’s comment suggests that he’s personally invested in Claire’s breakup, not just worried about the shooting. Meanwhile, Jonah’s death is another reminder that adults aren’t always able to protect students like Claire and Chris.



Tyler’s remark is conventional and even seemingly romantic. However, in retrospect it suggests a disturbing desire for control and authority over Claire. Moments like this show how small instances of masculine entitlement, left unchecked, eventually build into larger crises.



Tyler’s plans for the future all involve the minimization of risk or change, showing how an avoidance of uncertainty can grow into a toxic need for control. By the end of the novel Claire will in fact decide to become a teacher, but she does so not from fear of the unknown but from a desire to give back to her community—a desire that Tyler notably lacks.



Tomás and Fareed are trying to behave bravely, but their naïve belief that they could fend off a shooter with hammers shows how young and inexperienced they really are. This is a poignant moment that contrasts the necessity of growing up with the pain of leaving childhood behind.



Tyler spitefully addresses the school from the stage, saying that he once liked Opportunity High and wanted to fit in, but instead he “lost everything.” Autumn feels sick hearing his words and continues pulling Sylvia towards the door; she doesn’t want to get caught in a crush of students if it opens. She remembers that her father used to admire Tyler’s “hunter’s grace.” Students scramble to stay out of his path while he accuses them of having “perfect lives” and not knowing what “losing feels like.” Menacingly, he says that if the students cooperate, “some” of them will go home safely.

Matt **texts** Claire for help, telling her that he is scared and trapped in the auditorium.

Tyler’s speech indicates severe narcissism: the things he believes he’s “lost,” like control over his sister, are things to which he’s never been entitled. He also displays a marked lack of empathy; dismissing everyone around him as enjoying “perfect lives,” he ignores the fact that everyone is dealing with issues that are as valid as his own. His words here underscore the broader social context that has led to Tyler’s decision to turn to violence, as well as his twisted interpretation of that context.



Matt’s trust in Claire mirrors her faith in the adults around her—but just as the adults necessarily fail Claire, Claire can’t do anything to save Matt right now.



CHAPTER 7: 10:12-10:15 A.M.

Sylvia reflects that Opportunity is a community oriented around its history and roots, from the mayor whose family has been here since the Civil War to the farmers like her Abuelo who congregate to discuss the weather. Even though she wants to leave, she still feels at home here.

In contrast, the Browne family has lost its place in the community after Mrs. Browne’s death, due to Tyler’s aggression and Mr. Browne’s increasing alcoholism. After their efforts were rebuffed several times, the townspeople lost interest in trying to rehabilitate the family. Autumn is the only person who didn’t notice her growing exclusion.

Despite Tyler’s behavior, Autumn is extremely loyal to her brother and only questioned his character once, when Sylvia revealed to her that Tyler knew about their relationship and tried to pressure her into stopping it. Autumn worries that Tyler hates her, and wonders why he’s so angry all the time. Even though Sylvia loathes Tyler, she pities Autumn and can see that she has bruises from her Dad’s beatings, so in the past she has reassured her girlfriend that Tyler would never hurt anyone.

Unlike Autumn, Sylvia likes the community in which she grew up, but by applying to college she acknowledges that she needs to leave in order to grow and evolve. In doing so, she evinces a bravery that contrasts with Tyler’s cowardly desire for everything to stay the same.



Although Tyler’s claims that the school failed him in some essential way are obviously baseless, Sylvia does point out that isolation from one’s community, however unavoidable, can have devastating effects on an individual.



Rather than realizing that Tyler has no right to question her relationship or control her life, Autumn sees herself as the problem and wants to placate her brother. Just as their father’s behavior has conditioned Tyler to be entitled and aggressive, it’s also taught Autumn to undervalue her own needs and desires.



On the stage, some teachers try to approach Tyler, but he shoots one of them in the leg and waves them away. Only Mr. Jameson stands undaunted; he's the school's most beloved teacher, who knows everyone's name and takes time to give advice about the future. Every year he makes a bonfire for the seniors, where all the students write their wishes on sky lanterns and send them up. Everyone loves the ritual, even his skeptical daughter Mei.

Fareed tries to open the school's front door, but it's locked from the outside. Meanwhile, Tomás enters the office to find Neil, the janitor, tied up and suffocated in his chair. He throws up at the grotesque sight. Tomás covers the man's body with a school flag lying on a shelf and takes all the tools that look useful, from crowbars to screwdrivers. Right now, he's not worried about self-defense but rather revenge: if Tyler hurts Sylvia, Tomas vows to "kill him slowly." He hopes the police get here fast.

Claire feels that the day is a nightmare from which she might soon wake up. Her lungs are burning and the gas station seems so far away, but Chris urges her to stay strong. Almost crying, she asks him how she could have missed the warning signs in Tyler. Chris reassures her that she's not responsible, and tells her not to blame herself; after all, Tyler has been angry since his Mom's death, and everyone in the community was aware of this.

To distract Claire, Chris reminisces about the first race they ever ran together, when he forgot his running shoes. He lost the race to Claire, and he reminds her that she can "live up to anyone." Claire said that she thought he had let her win, and Chris touches her hand and says that she doesn't need to win to "be perfect."

Everyone watches the onstage confrontation between teacher and student. Tyler pushes Mr. Jameson aside and resumes his monologue, saying that if the students want to survive they have to know who their friends are and learn to stop caring. His malicious smile reminds Autumn of an incident only a few nights ago, when Tyler revealed to their Dad that Autumn is still dancing against his wishes and allowed her to be beaten. Later, Tyler cleaned her bruises and swore that it was an accident. He reminded her that they need to stick together against their father's anger, and suggested that she stay home from school to recover.

Mr. Jameson fosters community by cultivating rituals for the students, encouraging them to see themselves as part of a supportive group. In contrast, Tyler tries to fracture that community and sees himself as both alienated from it and above its laws.



Tomás's experience with Neil parallels Claire's discovery of Jonah's body. While Sylvia and Autumn lose their confidence in adult protection by seeing Principal Trenton shot, the narrators outside the auditorium also experience the same unwelcome epiphany through these two murders.



Although he doesn't necessarily realize it, Chris pushes back against Tyler's assertion that other people are responsible for placating him and mitigating his behavior. On the other hand, Claire's question points out that Tyler's actions don't spring from nowhere, but rather stem from a pattern of past behavior.



While Tyler needs to be in charge of everyone around him, Chris is comfortable ceding authority to others and acknowledging female independence. In many ways Claire's budding love interest is a sharp contrast to her ex-boyfriend.



Prior to this, Autumn's thoughts have characterized her brother positively, emphasizing the way he cares for her. However, this disturbing moment of violence seriously undermines her stated opinion on her brother. It's notable that she doesn't actually say how this betrayal made her feel; even though she intellectually understands what happened, she's not able to emotionally process her brother's abuse. Autumn's memories also make it clearer than ever that Tyler's violent behavior has been building over time.



Tyler demands that all the seniors raise their hands, and when only a few comply he shoots in the air. He turns around and shoots Mr. Jameson in the chest, killing him. Returning to the students, he identifies a senior who didn't follow instructions and shoots him, saying "bang bang, you're dead."

Horrifying moments like this embody Tyler's desire for control of those around him. But, paradoxically, they also shows that he's lost control of his own character and humanity as he descends into violence.



In an increasingly frantic tone, Jay **tweets** about the shooting at Opportunity High and asks for more information. An anonymous user tells him that he must be "drunk" to believe this rumor.

Just like CJ, Jay faces malicious replies to his earnest cries for help, showing how the community at large can fail its members in moments of need.



CHAPTER 8: 10:15-10:18 A.M.

Tomás can hear shots from the auditorium, and he desperately wants to get inside. Fareed reminds him that they need to open the school doors first to make an emergency exit. Handing him a bolt cutter, Tomás tells him to do what he can and turns toward the auditorium, hoping to pick the lock. In every hallway he expects to see students milling around as usual. When he arrives at the locked doors, "the very core of Opportunity High," he checks to make sure the coast is clear.

Tomás's fantasy that he'll find school life proceeding as usual shows how hard it is for him to understand that the routine he took for granted has been so brutally interrupted. His description of the auditorium as the "core" of Opportunity High also highlights how the importance of this location to the community contrasts with the fact that it's now the site of a brutal assault on that community.



Hearing indistinct speaking from inside, Tomás edges toward one of the locked doors and carefully takes his paper clips to the locks. Grimly, he imagines what Principal Trenton would say to him flouting the rules now.

Tomás has transitioned from breaking rules in order to flout community standards to doing so in order to protect that very community.



Sylvia has always been seen as the strong one in her family, the best at caring for her sick Mamá. Right now, she feels weak and wishes that Tomás was here to take care of her, but she's also glad that her brother is safe and outside the auditorium. She sits with her back against the wall as Tyler announces that he's thirsty and demands someone give him a drink.

Sylvia's selfless gratitude for her brother's safety underlines her love for him, even though their relationship is currently strained. She's a marked contrast to Tyler, who only thinks of other people in terms of what they can do for him.



When no one volunteers, Tyler points at Kevin Rolland, who once won a history class debate over gay rights in which Tyler argued that "outsiders like Kevin had no place in Opportunity." Everyone in the class sided with Kevin for standing up to Tyler's bullying, and at lunch one of his friends spilled soda on Tyler, setting off a chain of pranks and confrontations that culminated in Tyler dropping out of school. When Kevin can't produce a water bottle, Tyler shoots him. Sylvia thinks it's scarier to watch Tyler carefully pick his targets than to see him murder people randomly.

Tyler's chilling behavior shows that he's not just engaged in a random rampage but rather targeting people against whom he holds specific grievances. Tyler's attempt to define Kevin as an "outsider" due to his sexual orientation shows that while towns and schools can be sources of strength and support, the idea of community can also be mobilized for exclusion and bigotry.



Sylvia looks at Autumn, who she knows would “do anything for Tyler.” She wants to hug her girlfriend, feeling that it’s useless to care about what other people think about their relationship at a time like this. Looking at the ray of light coming through the door, she seems to see someone outside, and wonders if Tyler has an accomplice somewhere.

Chris reveals that he’s always thought Claire was perfect; he commends her for being quick to take command when everyone else is shocked by a crisis. Claire looks ahead at the familiar horizon and admits that Tyler wasn’t just “angry,” he was also “vindictive;” for example, after getting in a fight with Tomás, he tried to corner Sylvia at a dance and kiss her in revenge. Claire stumbled upon him in the act, just as he was telling Sylvia that she needed to “learn some manners.”

In fact, this incident is what sparked Claire and Tyler’s breakup. Thinking back on that night, Claire sees a new, “feral” side of her boyfriend; when she asks him why he would cheat on her, he starts ranting that “this town is taking everything away from me.” Claire reminds him coldly that neither she nor Sylvia is involved in his fights with Tomás. Seeing how angry she is, he begs her not to leave him, but she just walks away.

Chris reminds her that everyone is “more than their mistakes” and Claire squeezes his hand. They continue to run in sync towards the gas station.

Seeing Sylvia backed against the door, Autumn hates to think that her tough girlfriend is breaking down under her own brother’s actions. She whispers that they have to lie low and hope the police get here soon. On stage, Tyler rants that he’s lost everyone, from his family to his girlfriend Claire, to the opinion of his town. Now, he’s reclaiming the community for himself.

Autumn wonders where Tyler got the gun and remembers seeing him hunt with her Dad, “laughing together like they never laughed with [Autumn].” She wishes she could go back to the days when Tyler took care of her. She releases Sylvia and crawls toward the stage, hoping that if he finds her he won’t be able to hurt her girlfriend as well.

Sylvia’s remark here is an acknowledgment that Autumn loves Tyler as she herself loves Tomás, despite Tyler’s evil behavior. Autumn’s love is a reminder that Tyler is not an easily dismissed stock villain, but rather a human whose personal crimes are indicative of larger human issues.



Claire’s understanding of the facts is slightly faulty: Tyler targets Sylvia because of her relationship with Autumn, not her proximity to Tomás. Still, she’s correct in pointing out that rather than confronting the challenges in his life, Tyler takes out his anger on people who are not responsible for them at all.



Tyler’s rage against the town is a continued disavowal of his responsibility for his own life. His desperate plea for Claire to stay with him is a reminder that he craves support and companionship just like the four narrators—but he goes about achieving it in an incredibly destructive way.



Chris’s ability to understand individual nuance contrasts with Tyler’s immediate dismissal of every person who doesn’t fall in line with his desires.



It’s obvious that the “community” Tyler envisions isn’t actually a community; it’s just an extension of his destructive authority to those around him. Meanwhile Sylvia’s inner strength, as pointed out by Autumn, contrasts with the strength Tyler can only possess while holding a gun.



Tyler gets not only his physical gun but his guiding principles from his father, who models aggression and teaches him to exclude and suppress women with the men-only outings Autumn remembers. Moments like this emphasize that Tyler’s crimes stem from a socially pervasive culture of male entitlement and unchecked aggression.



In a flashback, Autumn recalls Tyler accosting her after finding her Julliard audition invitation. He threatens to tell their Dad but then condescendingly promises to keep her secrets. Autumn is perplexed by this sudden interest in her life; since Claire broke up with him and he dropped out of school, he's been working in their father's shop and ignoring her. Now he tells her that she should leave Opportunity and her girlfriend behind. She knows that he's bluffing and hoping she'll stay for him, but she just tells him: "The sooner I can get out, the better."

Although Autumn originally characterized Tyler as an unfailing source of support, now it appears that he only pays attention to her when it suits him—or when he no longer has a girlfriend to support him. While it's obvious that Tyler needs family and companionship, he's going about obtaining these things in an extremely destructive way.



In the auditorium, Tyler says that the community has "corrupted" his own family into abandoning him. Addressing Autumn by name, he calls for his sister to come forward and confront him.

Here, Tyler conflates the community's duty to him with his own duty to support and protect his own family members.



CJ **tweets** that she's trying to be brave but is so afraid. Her cousins and friends outside the school reply that their thoughts are with her. A reporter tweets at CJ, asking if he can interview her about the situation inside the school.

That CJ could theoretically give an interview while the shooting is happening shows that she is both deeply entrenched in and, at this moment, alienated from her community.



CHAPTER 9: 10:18-10:20 A.M.

Autumn hesitates to answer her brother's call. She's surprised that the people around her don't point her out right away. In a flashback, Autumn remembers the first anniversary of their Mom's death. To distract her from their Dad's alcoholic stupor, Tyler takes Autumn to a diner and later to a ballet performance of *Othello*. It's the first time she's "felt safe" since their mother died. Autumn had hoped that Tyler's return to school this semester would begin a new era of safety and security for them. At the front of the room, Tyler suddenly shoots a kid who previously made fun of him in gym class.

Autumn feels that Tyler's actions affect her integrity and reputation, as well as his own; once she derived comfort from her sibling relationship, but now it's just embroiling her in someone else's crimes. Autumn's memory of Tyler's kind behavior contrasts with his monstrous behavior right now, showing the two radically different sides of his character and showing how sibling bonds are inescapable even at horrific moments like these.



Moving down the row, Tyler yanks a sophomore out of her seat; it's Nyah, Asha's younger sister. The younger girl calls to her sister for help and Asha tries to run to her, but other students tackle her to keep her safe. Still addressing Autumn, Tyler says that "it's a terrifying idea" to "lose everything you care about." Autumn knows she should do something to save Nyah and ensure that she has a future: the vibrant and messy high school life that they all took for granted before today.

Tyler acts as if his feelings of loss are so profound and unique that the other students can't understand them; really, he's just displaying his own narcissism. In contrast, the students restraining Asha show a poignant maturity in the choices they're facing today; even though it goes against norms to prevent one sibling from helping another, they know that they can't let Asha pointlessly sacrifice herself.



Tomás recalls the long years during which his Abuelo taught him and his brothers all the tasks of running a farm, including picking locks. He never included Sylvia in these classes because she was “the apple of his eye” with a “bright future ahead of her,” but Sylvia was always angry about her exclusion and followed them to the fields anyway. Tomás thinks about Sylvia’s competence and facility in caring for their Mamá and the fearless attitude that defined her until last summer. It makes sense that Abuelo believes Sylvia could succeed, while he never has much faith in Tomás’s own plans to go to college.

Right now Tomás is trying to pick the padlocks on the auditorium, but the lock is strong and the paperclip snaps. He hopes Fareed is having better luck. Tomás admires his friend, who has overcome the stigma of being the only Muslim student in school to charm students and teachers alike, while also praying several times a day and remaining “confident in his traditions.” Tomás doesn’t even remember the words to the Spanish prayers he grew up with, and with his Mamá sick and Sylvia so distant, his family seems like it’s about to fracture.

Watching Nyah struggle in Tyler’s grasp, Sylvia is frozen in fear. Then she springs forward to join the group pinning Asha down. She knows it’s no use trying to protect the younger girl from Tyler, who “clearly doesn’t care about anything anymore.” She sees Autumn crawling down the aisle as Tyler threatens to continue killing people unless she reveals herself. Then he shoots Nyah and kills her.

Claire hears sirens in the distance and, exhausted, falls to the road. Chris tells her to get up and start running before her muscles cramp; thinking of Matt, she gets to her feet even though she has to retch several times. A line of police cars passes them and the last one stops and opens the door for them. Claire is anxious to return to the school and heartened to see that the police are taking care of the situation. But the officer sternly warns them not to try any kind of “heroic mission” or interfere in the operations.

On her [blog](#), Mei Jameson posts that her father (Mr. Jameson) isn’t returning any of her texts, and that she hears sirens passing by outside. Anonymous commenters extend sympathy and prayers, but others accuse her of making up an emergency for attention and say that they “wouldn’t miss [her] at all” if she vanished from the blogosphere.

Sylvia often occupies conventionally feminine roles in her relationships: her grandfather prevents her from learning farm tasks and her brothers look to her to take charge of her mother. Because of this, Tomás sees her as a fragile being in need of protection. However, Sylvia will emerge as a beacon of calm and strength in the midst of crisis, showing that femininity doesn’t equate to vulnerability.



Fareed has managed to stay loyal and connected to his family while also cultivating an independent persona. This is the task that all the narrators face as they grow up and prepare to leave high school, yet none of them currently feel they are equipped to succeed in this balancing act.



Asha’s desire to sacrifice herself for her sister foreshadows Tomás’s determination to lay down his life for Sylvia. In contrast with this moment, she won’t ultimately be able to prevent him from acting on this decision.



The presence of the police officers—and the fact that they learned of the crime long before Claire and Chris were able to alert them—is a reminder that this crisis isn’t a fight between heroic and evil students. Rather, it’s a social problem which individual students, however well-intentioned, are not equipped to confront alone.



The callous comments that Mei receives are emblematic of a community’s ability to turn on its members—especially when they can do so from a distance. Mei is being both supported and undermined by those around her.



CHAPTER 10: 10:20-10:22 A.M.

Riding in the police car, Claire is both comforted and terrified. She thinks of Matt playing with his soldier figurines or chatting with Chris. She needs to have a clear mind so that she can be of use when they return to the school. Placing her hand over Chris's, she knows that the students will find a way to be "stronger than our fear." Even this road is evidence of their shared traditions: every year the entire track team runs down it to the school, where they camp out and share food and candy. Claire looks forward to doing this for the last time as a senior, marking the best possible end of her high school career.

Several more of Tomás's paperclips break without any success. There's no sign of Fareed or the police, no noise despite the thousand students on the other side of the door. Suddenly, a knock comes from the other side of the door. Tomás jerks back and grabs his screw driver, since he doesn't know if it's an innocent student or a violent shooter. After a few minutes of silence, he raps out a quiet rhythm in return.

Sylvia doesn't know if it was smart to knock on the door, but she's more and more sure that someone is out there; meanwhile, everyone is too distracted by Tyler's rants to pay attention to her. In the reciprocal knocks, she recognizes the rhythm of one of Abuelo's favorite songs; she realizes that her brother is outside, safe from Tyler and possibly able to help. But she's immediately terrified again when she sees Autumn walking slowly towards Tyler.

Autumn seems to get smaller with every step she takes toward Tyler, and Sylvia wonders when she last "laughed without reservation." She doesn't want her girlfriend to give in to Tyler's poisonous attitude, but she also knows that she would do anything for her family—her brothers who returned home to take care of Mamá and her Abuelo who tries to keep Tomás on the right track, and everyone who accepted her sexuality without question. She can't imagine how hard Autumn's life is without all that support, and Sylvia has never revealed the truth about Tyler because she wants her girlfriend to have some vestige of family. She feels torn between her girlfriend onstage and her brother behind her.

This is an important turning point in Claire's conception of herself in relation to her community. At the outset she said that Opportunity hadn't "shaped" her, but now she speaks in the first person plural and feels that not only she but also the landscape around her are defined by the communal rituals that take place within it. Seeing her community in danger has shown her how much she treasures it.



Tomás believes that he possesses the abilities and responsibility to address this crisis on his own. The fact that he manifestly fails in doing so suggests that mass shootings are not arenas for personal heroism, and that focusing on such narratives detracts from the discussion of gun violence as a larger social issue.



Here, the family history that Tomás and Sylvia share allows them to communicate and give each other strength, even though they haven't been on good terms in months. Their sibling relationship is much stronger than passing tensions or disturbances. At the same time, Sylvia's fear at watching Autumn approach Tyler highlights how sibling relationships, though always meaningful, can also have highly toxic effects instead of strongly supportive ones.



Like the Brownes, Sylvia's family has confronted a tragic crisis—her mother's illness—and the revelation of a daughter's sexuality. But while the Sylvia's family shows solidarity on both occasions, Autumn's father collapses under his grief and Tyler takes her sexuality as a personal affront. Sylvia's reflections right now show how families can be both sources of strength and undermining factors.



Autumn can't stop thinking about Nyah's brutal death. Even though Tyler is her brother, she wishes he would kill himself. She feels that everyone around her blames her for his brutality, and wishes she had spoken up sooner. Suddenly, she sees Tyler reaching for young Matt—of whom he always spoke fondly when he dated Claire—who is trying to crawl under the seats. She can't believe this is the person who once brought her chocolate after dance practice, but then she remembers how he exposed her dancing to their Dad and allowed him to beat her. Speaking hoarsely, she calls out to her brother.

CJ **tweets** that people all around her are dying and she can't find her brother. A reporter tweets back asking if she feels that the school is "to blame for the situation."

Autumn feels guilt for Nyah's death and responsible for preventing Matt's. This shows her capacity for bravery and empathy, two traits that Tyler lacks. On the other hand, she's perversely succumbing to Tyler's line of thinking: that his rage and violence are her fault, and that it's her job to placate him and keep him from inflicting harm on others.



Through exchanges like this, the novel characterizes the media as self-serving, looking for a scoop while ignoring CJ's desperate pleas for help.

CHAPTER 11: 10:22-10:25 A.M.

When the knocks from the other side of the door complete the rhythm he started, Tomás realizes that his sister is there. He regrets that he and Sylvia have barely talked all year, breaking apart after years of being partners in crime. Sylvia had been becoming more serious ever since their Mamá got sick, but Tomás feels that her behavior truly changed last summer. Sylvia starts tapping out another song, but a shot interrupts her.

In frustration, Tomás decides to abandon the paperclips and hammer the lock until it breaks. Just as he's about to start, Fareed stops him, saying that there are sirens in the distance and they should keep quiet until the police arrive. He's opened up some of the doors to the outside, and now Tomás takes the bolt cutters and pushes down with all his might on the metal chain that blocks the auditorium door.

Claire can hear confusing dispatches over the police car's transmitter. A road block is being set up and SWAT teams are coming in from other towns. Claire can't believe that all of this is real, much less that her own brother is inside the building. She doesn't even know what to say to Chris, who's staring at his hands next to her. Hoping that at least part of her plan succeeded, she asks the police if they received a call from the track team, but the officer says that they were alerted by several students inside the building. Claire asks for more information, but the officer says she's not supposed to talk about it. Chris says that they just want to know if their friends are safe.

Tomás is still puzzled by Sylvia's withdrawal, but in fact it's Tyler's assault that has strained all her relationships. In a way, Tyler reacts to the decline of his relationship with Autumn by trying to undermine Sylvia's bond with Tomás.



Unlike Tomás, Fareed understands the limits of his own abilities and responsibilities; he shows that growing up doesn't just mean taking heroic action but also recognizing one's role within a larger community.



The police officer's revelation puts an end to Claire's feeling that she and Chris were uniquely positioned and responsible for raising the alarm. They feel that the police are preventing them from taking a more active role in the rescue operation, but in fact they're probably distracting from that operation by focusing on their own anxiety and desire to do something heroic. This moment shows how their understanding of responsibility is still somewhat immature.



Sylvia is torn between hope that Tomás will help and fear for his safety. She can't imagine the pain of losing both Autumn and her twin, the closest of her many siblings. She has to believe that Tyler can't destroy her entire life, even as she watches Autumn walking towards "certain death." She wonders if she could have stopped this by speaking up earlier about being assaulted by Tyler.

In a flashback, Sylvia remembers the fateful night of junior prom, when Tyler "demanded" to dance with her. When she rebuffs him, he follows her outside and tells her not to "deny" that she wants him; then he grabs her and threatens to hurt her if she doesn't stay away from Autumn. Sylvia has to kick him to extricate herself. He reminds her of the people in her grandmother's stories who are possessed by evil spirits and doomed to be destroyed by darkness.

Staring down at Matt in the present, Tyler tells him that he has "a score to settle with [his] sister," as well as with his own. More loudly, Autumn calls out to him again; her brother looks at her with contempt, taunting her that it's rude to shout across the room. Bracing herself, she walks closer to her brother, now a stranger who raises his gun at her.

In a flashback, Autumn remembers Tyler's announcement of his decision to return to OHS. Speaking formally and stiffly to their Dad, he says that he "needed time to evaluate" but is ready to resume his education. Their father nods approvingly and tells him that he's dealing with his problems head-on, like a man. Bitterly, Autumn reflects that her father is doing the opposite, ignoring all his problems with the help of alcohol. He always calls Tyler "son" but never extends any of the same warmth to her. Neither Autumn nor her father could have realized what Tyler was planning.

Tyler shoots at the air over Autumn's head and warns her to keep walking, or he will shoot Matt. She steps over the body of another student and reaches the stage, where several teachers lie dead or injured. Aghast, she asks her brother why he is doing this; seeming "devoid of feeling," he grabs her by the hair and asks why she didn't listen to him. He accuses her of thinking she's better than him and abandoning her family for her girlfriend, Sylvia. Crying, Autumn replies that she loves him. Tyler smiles, and the familiar expression is heartbreaking to her.

Matt sends another **text message** to Claire, begging her to come save him.

While it's obviously not Sylvia's responsibility to anticipate Tyler's crimes, her reflection suggests that Tyler's earlier actions—namely, his attack on her—aren't unpleasant incidents to be ignored, but rather serious issues that deserve recognition and justice and can spiral further out of control if left unaddressed.



Tyler's actions seem unusually aggressive, but in fact they reflect ideas that society often tacitly accepts: that men are entitled to pursue women who have no interest in them, and that women are somehow responsible for inviting unwanted sexual attention.



Tyler's threat suggests that he has as acute an appreciation of sibling ties as Autumn and Sylvia do, but he uses this appreciation to cause people pain through their siblings, not to empathize with them.



Neither Mr. Browne nor Tyler actually deals with their problems "head-on." Mr. Browne escapes his grief through alcoholism, while Tyler seeks to soothe his rage with violence. While Mr. Browne mentions Tyler's masculinity as a compliment by saying that he's "like a man," he's inadvertently pointing out patterns of male entitlement and aggression, which he models and Tyler perpetuates through his own actions.



Autumn continues to empathize with her brother even though he's actively threatening her and her friends. Her capacity for compassion contrasts with his complete inability to enter into the feelings of others, and his insistence on viewing his sister's life and aspirations as secondary to his own.



Matt conceives of Claire as a hero who can do anything, but in fact her agency as an untrained teenager is very limited.



CHAPTER 12: 10:25-10:27

As the police car draws closer to OHS, the police officer again warns Claire and Chris to stay outside the safety perimeter and wait to be interviewed; they must not get in the way of the officers doing their jobs. Reluctantly, they promise to cooperate. The officer apologizes for not being able to give more information about the kids trapped in the auditorium; Claire, who didn't even know this small fact about the students' whereabouts, imagines Matt and her friends trapped inside with a murderer. She grabs Chris's hand and leans against him as they pull into the parking lot.

Sylvia watches Autumn and vows to kill Tyler if he hurts her. On the other side of the auditorium, she sees some teachers and a student, CJ, getting to their feet. She realizes that even though they're trapped and terrified, they haven't lost their courage yet. Meanwhile, everyone who heard Tyler talking about Autumn's "girlfriend" is beginning to look at Sylvia, who feels embarrassed but knows it's too late to worry about Opportunity's disapproval.

In a flashback, Sylvia remembers Autumn's fifteenth birthday. Still alive, Mrs. Browne takes them to Birmingham to see *The Nutcracker* and go out for dinner. When she sees how enthralled Autumn is by the performance, she begins to fall in love with the other girl. They hold hands for the first time during the performance, but six weeks later Mrs. Browne dies in a sudden car accident and their carefree girlhood ends. Even though Sylvia is losing her mother as well, she knows that she's better off than Autumn because she's able to "be who [she] wanted to be at home."

Unfortunately, the chain on the door to the auditorium doesn't break or even bend under Tomás's attack. He curses himself for not working harder in PE. Eventually, he's able to snap half a link; when he breaks the entire chain, he and Fareed, who remains calm and focused, unwind it from the door, careful to make no sound. Before opening one door, they decide to cut the other chains; that way there will be more channels for escape.

More loudly, Autumn tells Tyler that she loves him and that he is her best friend. She doesn't know if she's lying. He's still pointing the gun at her, but he seems confused and uneasy. He tells her that he "lost everything," but she says she always relied on him above anyone else to protect her and support her in her dream. Bitterly, Tyler says that her dream was just to get away from him, while he wanted to be "your excuse to stay home." He tells her that he's been all alone, and that she could never understand his feelings.

Again, Chris is a source of physical and emotional support to Claire during a moment of crisis. In this sense he's a notable contrast to Tyler, who relied on Claire for support without bothering to offer anything in return. This contrast suggests that fulfilling relationships are only possible when both partners take on equal amounts of emotional labor.



Part of Tyler's stated aim is to force others to share his feelings of alienation and acknowledge his control. By persisting in maintaining a community and refusing to treat him as an authority figure, the students can subvert his aims, even if they can't actually fight him.



It's important that Sylvia's love for Autumn springs from a genuine admiration of her girlfriend's passion and talent. Unlike Tyler, she sees Autumn's love for dance as a positive trait, not a betrayal or abandonment. For Autumn and Sylvia, growing up yields some benefits—like their relationship with each other—but is also inevitably accompanied by loss, represented here in the form of Mrs. Browne's death.



Again, Tomás's hotheadedness contrasts with Fareed's cool appraisal of the situation. Tomás shows both great potential and room to grow – a combination that heightens the sense of loss when his life is cut short at the end of the novel.



Saying that he wants to be her "excuse," Tyler conjures up the idea of a cozy sibling relationship that could have formed if Autumn stayed home. In reality, though, he wants her to completely sacrifice her aspirations and independence so he can feel more secure. In order to break free of her brother's control, Autumn must learn to see the events of her life as they really are, rather than accept Tyler's manipulative explanations.



Becoming increasingly angry, Autumn asks how she could have abandoned him when he himself has been so distant and cold in the last months. In fact, it's he who betrayed her to their Dad. Frustrated, Tyler shoots at the ground next to her and tells her that this whole situation is her fault.

By shooting at the ground in frustration, Tyler implicitly suggests that Autumn is right – it's not possible for her to abandon him when he pushed her away long ago.



Mei posts on her blog as she makes her way to OHS. She reflects that she's always liked school, and that her town isn't to blame for the shooting. Some people comment asking Mei for more of her thoughts on the origin of the shooting, while others share their love of her father's English classes.

One of the community's most important functions is to help its members process tragedies like this. Yet the unanswerable questions people are posing to Mei suggest that there is ultimately a limit to "explaining" meaningless instances of mass violence.



CHAPTER 13: 10:27-10:28

Tomás and Fareed prepare to open the doors, knowing they must be stealthy yet still communicate the possibility of escape to those inside. Pulling gently, he sees Sylvia alive inside the auditorium; but he's shocked at the bodies onstage, including those of several teachers. It's chilling to see Tyler onstage with a gun; he should have believed Sylvia when her sister told him Tyler was dangerous. Still, he knows that as long as Tyler is paying attention to Autumn, people can sneak out the doors. He gently taps Sylvia, who is relieved to see him and starts quietly directing those around her out.

Tomás is both shocked and unsurprised to see that Tyler is the shooter. This shows that he was aware of Tyler's malicious behavior prior to the shooting, but also that he didn't believe that it merited a response or would lead to larger problems. Although it's not clearly Tomás's fault that the shooting happened, his reflection points out how dangerous it can be when society accepts or dismisses "routine" acts of abuse and misogyny.



Tomás and Fareed crawl into the auditorium, silently showing students the way out. Surprisingly, no one makes a disturbance or rushes out the door; instead, the students move with care and coordination. Tomás wishes Sylvia would leave immediately, but she instead works her way through the students, spreading the word.

Despite their fright, the students leave quietly so as not to jeopardize the escape prospects of others. Their ingrained sense of community responsibility saves lives and shows that Tyler has failed to break their values.



From the corner of her eye, Autumn can see people leaving the auditorium; she knows she has to keep Tyler's attention on her. She remembers the night of her Mom's death, which had been preceded by weeks of hectic work with the ballet company she ran. In the memory, Autumn waits for an hour after dance class for her mother to pick her up, only for the police to tell her that she's crashed the car in exhaustion and died. In the present, Autumn whispers to Tyler that she can't change the past; she can only honor her mother by continuing to dance, as she wanted. She reminds him of the good times they shared, like the ballet they saw together last year.

Tyler hates Autumn's dance in part because he believes his mother died as a result of working too much; in contrast, Autumn sees dance as the best way to continue her mother's legacy. It's normal to try and "make sense" of a random tragedy like their mother's death, but Tyler does so by succumbing to his fear and letting it harm those around him. In contrast, by accepting that she can never rationalize the accident, Autumn is able to appreciate her mother's life and move on with her own.



For a minute it seems like Tyler will lower his gun, but then he shakes his head and turns around, glimpsing the students crawling toward the door. Autumn grabs his shoulders and he hits her in the face with his gun, throwing her to the ground. He says that she's too late to save him.

While Tyler's abuse seems extremely aggressive, it's just an escalated version of his attack on Sylvia during the junior prom—which neither she nor Claire, who witnessed the incident, thought was serious enough to act on.



Sylvia sees Autumn fall to the ground and watches Tyler strike her again. She wills Autumn not to fight, and to let her and Tomás take care of things. She alerts a group of freshmen to the open exits, watching Fareded's calm demeanor as he alerts other students. She feels pride as she watches people slip out the doors to freedom.

While Sylvia wants to help Autumn, she knows that doing so would turn Tyler's attention to the fleeing students. Her loyalty to the community clashes here with her personal loyalty to her girlfriend.



Claire stares at OHS's old-fashioned exterior; she's grief-stricken when she sees Jonah's empty car. All around, police officers are working to build a road block and set up a tent to process survivors. Another officer gestures to Claire and Chris, clearly waiting to interview them. Behind him, she sees Coach Lindt and her teammates from the track team.

The physical transformation of the school's exterior into a chaotic war zone shows both a determination to address the crisis and the fact that even the police can only do so much to help the students trapped inside. In this sense, the scene outside the school mirrors the emotional tumult within the community as it tries to process this attack from within.



On **Twitter**, Jay responds in frustration to reporters, saying that he skipped school and has no idea what is happening. An anonymous user chides Jay for being "naïve" enough to believe rumors about the shooting. Privately, Jay messages Kevin again, asking if he's safe.

This callous comment from a Twitter user points out that it's partly the community's unwillingness to cope with unpleasant truths—like Tyler's long history of abuse—that leads to crises such as this. Jay's message is especially poignant given that the reader knows Kevin has already been murdered.



CHAPTER 14: 10:28-10:30 A.M.

Tomás stays low to the ground as he makes his way through the auditorium. He can see Tyler leaning over Autumn onstage. He wishes that he'd done something about Tyler's behavior earlier; he thinks that, after all, the other boy was "never one of us." He feels protective of Autumn, since she's his sister's girlfriend. Reaching a football player he knows, Tomás taps him on the shoulder and urgently whispers for him to run. This situation is nightmarish, but soon everyone will be safe and Tyler's power over them will be ended for good.

Tomás acknowledges that the community failed by neglecting to address Tyler's behavior before it spun out of control. Yet with his thought about Tyler being an outsider, he also sees community as an exclusionary force, which can and should cast out undesirable members rather than trying to create a society in which everyone can thrive. Tomás's reflections here encapsulate the complex role that the school community plays in the novel.



Tyler “seethes” at Autumn that he hates her, especially because all she cares about is dance. He tells her that if she wants to dance so much, she should use the stage she has now; hoping to distract her brother from further shooting, Autumn takes up fifth position and prepares to dance, disregarding the confused and angry looks of the students around her. She has lots of solos prepared for her Julliard audition, but instead she starts dancing one of her own impromptu compositions, inspired by her love for Tyler and all the good times they’ve shared. However, she can’t concentrate on these memories anymore; she can’t stop thinking about his cold smile as he watched their Dad hit her, or his brutal shooting of Nyah.

When Autumn catches sight of Sylvia, she’s able to dance again with joy and hope. But then her ankle twists, and it gets harder to move. She thinks about Sylvia’s Mamá, who’s getting sicker every day, and the possibility that Sylvia will stay in Opportunity to care for her rather than going to college. They never talked about these things, and Autumn never admitted her fear of losing Sylvia; she wonders if by not speaking up, she’s pushed her girlfriend away for good. Suddenly, Tyler kicks her legs out from under her and she lands on her back.

Sylvia taps a particularly dazed and terrified sophomore to tell him that the doors are open, but he can barely focus on what she’s saying. She instructs him to find as many people as he can and get out, but he still doesn’t move. Trying another tactic, she points to Asha and tells the boy, whose name is Steve, that she just lost her sister and needs someone to care for her. She’s learned from Mamá’s illnesses that giving people specific tasks works better than vague instructions. As Steve moves off, Sylvia starts to believe that she really can save everyone.

In a rare display of affection, Coach Lindt hugs Claire and Chris, but he doesn’t have any more information on the situation than they do. The police officer leads the two students to a quiet corner of the parking lot to debrief them; they can see the cars of concerned parents speeding down the road toward the school. Claire is unsurprised to see that the Opportunity gossip mill has sprung into action so quickly; here, “even the staunchest enemies come together to share the latest news.”

For the first time, Autumn understands that loving her brother and trying to redeem him could earn make her the enemy of other students, who understandably see him as an unmitigated criminal. In fact, Autumn’s inability to think of anything other than the ways he’s abused her shows that she’s changing her conception of her brother as an authority figure, which until now has guided their relationship and prevented her from acting against him.



Autumn’s emotional dependence on Sylvia as she dances shows that their relationship is replacing family ties as the central bond of her life. While Autumn doesn’t want to give up her father and brother, she’s beginning to understand that in order to respect herself and move towards a fulfilling life as an adult, she has to let go of the abusive relationships that have defined her life.



Tomás has always seen Sylvia’s gentleness with their mother as evidence of her vulnerability and need for protection. But now, these skills allow her to take charge in a desperate situation—ultimately showing that fulfilling feminine norms isn’t a sign of weakness.



Claire’s comment mirrors Sylvia’s earlier depiction of the town and creates an image of a community determined to overcome its differences. However, the online conversations that are periodically dominated by malicious or divisive commenters present a more divided, cynical view of the community that complicates the unity shown here.



Before the officer can ask any questions, Claire desperately asks if they can help the rescue operations in some way. The officer ignores her and asks her to repeat everything she saw and heard before running from the school. Chris quickly explains the situation, their reasons for skipping the assembly, and the shots that they heard. When the officer asks if they've had contact with anyone inside, Claire realizes that although her phone is in the locker room, she could borrow someone else's to call Matt. But then the officer mentions Tyler's name, and she feels sick.

On **Twitter**, Jay demands that reporters stop asking him questions and "GTFO of my feed."

Claire has felt completely cut off from her brother; the possibility of calling him alleviates that anxiety, but it doesn't actually get her any closer to saving him. This moment hints at how technology and social media represent both the community's desire for connection and its inability to protect itself from violence.



Jay sees the reporters as deeply unscrupulous, rather than people doing a job and trying to bring information to the wider world. Their role here again emphasizes how different forces within a community can cause harm and good at the same time.



CHAPTER 15: 10:30-10:32 A.M.

A few rows down, Tomás spots the captain of the cheer squad, whom he's long had a crush on even though she's never noticed him. Filled with adrenaline, he knows now is his chance to make a move, even if he never gets another. Sneaking up behind her, he puts on a charming smile and tells her the doors are open, asking if she "wants to go out." She's startled, but when she realizes what's happening she gathers the other cheerleaders and starts crawling away. Tomás is disappointed that she doesn't even acknowledge him, but as she passes by she squeezes his shoulder and mouths a thank-you. Tomás is pleased that when he finally asks her out, she'll know who he is.

Fareed is now standing by the door helping people exit, not seeming to care that he's made himself a target. Other students are helping the wounded to walk, but the front rows are still full of dead bodies. Sylvia knows she could turn away, but she can't leave Autumn alone with Tyler. As she moves, she thinks of Autumn's hand touching her own, Tyler's hand pushing her down in the grass, and Tomás coming back to save her, despite their strained relationship. She knows that the only two people that matter right now are "the boy who broke me and the girl who put me back together."

Tomás's penchant for wordplay even in the midst of a crisis shows his confidence and his refusal to take himself completely seriously; in this sense he's a contrast to Tyler, whose inability to put his own grievances in perspective has led him to perpetrate violence. Tomás seems full of life both in his actions and his conviction that he has plenty of time ahead to ask out the cheerleader—this moment emerges as a poignant testimony to the life he could have had, if he had emerged from the shooting safely.



Even though others have seen him as an outsider, Fareed takes on the responsibility of leadership when no one else can bear it—suggesting that communities work best when they acknowledge the potential of "outsiders," rather than fearing or marginalizing them. For her part, Sylvia is thinking not of the community but of the personal relationships—both fulfilling and abusive—that have defined her and helped her grow into the person she is.



Autumn waits for Tyler to shoot and kill her, feeling totally blank. But he continues to talk, saying that while he thought Autumn shared his feelings of loneliness, actually she's betrayed him for "that slut," Sylvia. Taking courage, Autumn says that he can blame her for a lot of things, but she'll never regret her relationship with Sylvia. She raises her voice as she tells Tyler how much she loves Sylvia, hoping that her girlfriend will hear the things she's never said before. She expects that her brother will shoot her, but instead he turns around to face the auditorium.

Speaking to Claire, the officer says that they're trying to build a picture of Tyler's motivations. Chris explains that Tyler has a younger sister, Autumn, and that everyone knows the Brownes, who own a store on Main Street. At first Claire can't speak, but eventually she admits that she used to date Tyler, who made her laugh and "feel like [she] mattered." In a flashback she remembers a day when Tyler picked her up from JROTC drill and gave her a present: a package of vintage pewter figurines for Matt to play with.

However, Claire says, Tyler's behavior completely changed after his mother's death and he became withdrawn and brooding. The officer asks if he was ever "angry or violent," or if Claire has any insight into his motivations. She responds that Tyler never fit in at school and often fought with other students. While he never explicitly expressed a desire for revenge, he did tell her often that "he'd show the world." Claire is offended when the officer asks if he ever discussed his plans with her or told her that he was going to commit a crime.

Claire tells the officer that she hasn't had much contact with Tyler since they broke up. She only saw him when she went to his store, where he worked long hours due to his Dad's escalating drinking habits. She's seen him with strange bruises and believes that his father hit him. The officer tells her to stick around in case someone wants to interview her further; Claire says that she needs to do something to help her brother who is inside, but the officer again rejects her offer. Receiving a message on his radio, the officer runs back toward the school; even though they've been told to stay away, Claire and Chris follow.

Matt **texts** Claire again, telling her that he "hurts" and wondering why she hasn't called him.

Tyler's use of a slur and characterization of Autumn's relationship as shameful demonstrates his homophobia. Tyler picks on people with marginalized identities in order to make himself feel less like an outsider, but as Autumn's declaration shows, love is a much better way to alleviate loneliness than hatred.



Like Autumn, Claire has positive memories of Tyler that make her ambivalent about his overall character. The girls' portrayal of him argues that it's foolish to dismiss gun violence as perpetrated by obviously evil people. Rather, mass shooters are often seemingly ordinary men who behave kindly in some situations.



Even though Claire was unhappy about Tyler's growing anger, she clearly didn't know who to talk to or how to raise the alarm. Because their society accepts and even endorses masculine aggression, it's hard for people like Claire to prevent these harmful behaviors from spiraling into major crimes.



Claire's account of the strange bruises makes clear that, even though he perpetrates most of the violence in the novel, Tyler himself is also a victim of abuse. That Tyler is perpetuating a pattern of behavior he learned from his father suggests that one way to combat mass violence is to address subtler forms of abuse that are present in everyday society.



This first hint of Matt's injury highlights the literal distance between brother and sister, just when he needs her most. Again, Claire is no longer there to play the protective role that she has throughout Matt's life.



CHAPTER 16: 10:32-10:35 A.M.

Tyler laughs angrily when he sees students escaping through the doors, saying that he won't let them go. He starts shooting at the ceiling and walls as students and teachers start running to get out; while many make it into the hallway, the auditorium descends into chaos. Tomás looks around for Sylvia, who is standing too close to Tyler. Thinking about the possibility of the shooter hurting his sister again, he's full of rage. Suddenly, Sylvia darts onto the stage to help the injured Autumn and confront Tyler. Tomás wants to do something, but Fareed pulls him out of the auditorium, saying that by distracting Tyler she's given them a chance. Just then, a bullet hits and kills a freshman right in front of them.

To Claire, the area outside the school looks like a "war zone," full of police and parents who become ever more concerned as gunshots ring out from the school. Even more disturbingly, news crews are beginning to set up shop and report on the situation. Claire and Chris resent being turned into a sensational story on the news. Among the parents frantically demanding answers from the police, Claire thinks she sees her father, but it turns out she's mistaken. She doesn't want him to be here and see that she made it out of the school without Matt.

Claire feels that something is changing between her and Chris, and she begs him to tell her what's wrong. He's been her best friend for so long, and she needs to stay close with him. Chris admits that he's "terrified" of losing her. Suddenly, they see students running out of the school's front doors.

Autumn wants to think that the worst is over, but Tyler continues to fire on the students and shows her that's far from true. She crawls away from him as fast as possible, knowing that she needs to get to Sylvia before Tyler does, if only to tell her how much she loves her. She passes an injured girl, who squeezes her hand, and then she reaches Matt, whom she vaguely knows as the younger brother of Tyler's ex-girlfriend. She approaches him, bracing for disgust and anger, but he seems relieved when she promises to take care of him and strokes his hair. Autumn looks over the chairs and, to her horror, sees that Sylvia is bravely walking towards Tyler as he reloads his gun.

The random death of a freshman in front of them points out that Tomás and Fareed are surviving the crisis not because of any special abilities on their part, but through pure luck. Framing the shooting as a conflict between evil Tyler and the heroic students who fight him undermines the novel's depiction of gun violence as horrifyingly meaningless; moments like this help remind readers that ultimately, personal heroism isn't an effective way to combat gun violence.



Claire and Chris don't appreciate that the news crews are performing an essential function, in that the larger community relies on them for information. Yet it's also easy to see how the reporters might be selfishly looking for a "scoop" rather than honoring the victims' trauma—showing how a community can fail individual members even as it tries to support the group as a whole.



Interestingly, Chris's deepest fears mirror Tyler's— he dreads the unraveling of his closest relationship just as Tyler fears losing Autumn. However, Chris addresses these anxieties by being open and honest with Claire, rather than abusing her.



Both Autumn and Sylvia used to feel that the best way to maintain the equilibrium of their relationship was to avoid sharing their deepest feelings with each other—but after facing down Tyler, they both come to the more mature understanding that their bond is strong enough to withstand any confession. Additionally, Matt's implicit trust in Autumn hints at the possibility that the community might heal, even after a terrible tragedy like this one.



Sylvia is bolstered by Autumn's declaration of love for her in front of Tyler. Approaching him, she quietly says that she understands how it feels to be overwhelmed by grief, unsure how to go on. She thinks about the approaching loss of her Mamá, and perhaps of Autumn as well. She tells Tyler that he can take out his desire for revenge on her, but he should know he's not alone. Tyler shoots at someone behind her and insists that he is, in fact, alone. Taking her chances, Sylvia turns around and runs up the aisle, and Tomás yanks her out of the auditorium as soon as she reaches the door.

Outside the room, Sylvia can hear bullets thudding against the walls. She hugs Tomás fiercely, unsure if she's mad at him for interfering or grateful that he saved her. Both siblings confess that they've missed each other in the past months, but they keep hearing gunshots from the inside so they run up the stairs, trying to get as far away as possible before Tyler leaves the auditorium.

In fury, CJ **tweets** that she would kill Tyler if she had a gun. Other people respond that help is on the way, while an anonymous user chides her for her anger, saying that shooting Tyler would make her just as bad as him.

Sylvia has always been notable for her empathy—for example, whenever she is personally in danger she thinks of the other people who are important to her. Now, that empathy contrasts with Tyler's narcissism: he can't accept that other people have problems as important as his own, even if doing so would make him feel less alone.



Sylvia and Tomás's joyful reunion contrasts with Tyler and Autumn's bitter confrontation. They're able to reconcile because both siblings admit to having made mistakes, while Tyler's inability to admit his own failings catalyzes his crimes and the demise of his relationship with his sister.



Of course, CJ is in no position to follow through on this threat, and may not even mean it literally. However, her endorsement of vigilante justice points out how one breach of communal norms can easily lead to others.



CHAPTER 17: 10:35-10:37 A.M.

All the parents start running towards the emerging students, but the police make them stay away from the school. The students look confused and terrified, and some are covered in blood. Claire recognizes football players and a group of girls from Matt's class, one of whom she suspects of having a crush on him. She wishes she could run inside the school and drag her brother out. The police quickly usher the students into medical tents. From that point on, dazed students exit the school every few minutes.

Claire looks over at the crowd of parents and sees Mr. Browne standing alone, shunned by all the others. She almost goes over to confront him, but police officers reach him first and quietly escort him away. Instead, Claire buries her face in Chris's chest and quietly cries that Tyler's father "ruined" him. Quietly, Chris says that even though Tyler's father abused him and Claire failed to report it, it's not their fault. Most abuse survivors don't kill other people. She couldn't have done anything about it even if she'd stayed with Tyler.

The everyday drama of high school crushes contrasts starkly with the images of bloody and dazed students. These seemingly banal moments do even more to point out the pointlessness of gun violence and the horror of shortened lives than the novel's more dramatic action sequences.



Claire's outburst shows that she recognizes that Tyler's evil actions spring from the abuse he endured at his father's hands and the values he learned from him. However, Chris argues that individual behavior can't be attributed solely to environmental circumstances. The horrific example of Tyler violence illuminates the larger struggle that all the narrators face in figuring out who they are and what they value.



Sylvia, Tomás, and Fareed are out of Tyler's sight but still worried, as Tyler has left the auditorium to pursue fleeing students. Fareed suggests they hide upstairs, even though Sylvia is worried about getting trapped there. She worries that Tyler won't leave the building as long as he believes she's inside, since he blames her for taking Autumn away from him.

Sylvia understands that Tyler's actions spring from his rage at "losing" Autumn; her thoughts frame the entire crisis as the consequence of failing to address anxieties about evolving relationships and growing up.



Fareed and Tomás come up with an idea to get onto the roof from one of the second-floor classrooms. The police will see them and help, and Tyler won't know where they are. Sylvia looks at a boy who is dying of gunshot wounds in front of the auditorium, and absentmindedly clutches the Brown acceptance letter still hidden in her pocket.

Even before the shooting started, Sylvia's acceptance letter represented both the potential of the future and the difficulty of leaving home. Its reappearance now emphasizes the choices and possibilities that Tyler has robbed from so many students.



Pulling Sylvia along, Tomás sneaks up the stairs. He knows that Fareed is right and there's nowhere to hide on the first floor. Sylvia thanks Tomás for coming back for her, saying that he should've just run away. Tomás feels a little stung, but he realizes that he and his sister have gotten so used to pushing each other away that they can't even drop the habit now.

Even though Sylvia and Tomás have just stated their love and good intentions, they still have trouble being open with each other. As twins, their relationship is central to both their lives, but it's also the most difficult to navigate.



Tomás reassures Sylvia that the shooting has nothing to do with her, even though he doesn't really think this is true. He knows that Tyler cornered her at junior prom last year and hurt her somehow, even if the details are murky. That's the reason why he first picked a fight with Tyler, starting the series of pranks that ended with Tyler dropping out of school. Tomás thought that he'd seen the end of Tyler, and he didn't realize that his sister was still scared of him until today.

Tomás's behavior towards Tyler springs from a good intention: to protect his sister. Yet it's notable that, perceiving Sylvia has been traumatized, he doesn't try to talk to her but takes the more straightforward course of fighting her abuser. In these displays of aggression, Tomás too succumbs to harmful modes of conventionally masculine behavior.



Tomás asks if Sylvia ever saw Tyler after junior prom, but Sylvia just looks away and doesn't answer. Suddenly, Tomás remembers a night last summer when Sylvia came home late and immediately went to bed sick. Even after she got well three days later she wouldn't "face" Tomás or talk to him; even though he could guess what had happened, he didn't really want to know.

Tomás's admission that he always "knew" what happened to Sylvia suggests his fear of the emotional maturity and intimacy that talking to her about her rape would entail. It's easier for him to treat his sister as an object in need of protection than to interact directly with her suffering.



As soon as Tyler leaves the auditorium, the remaining students debate closing the doors; they don't know if it's better to risk escaping or barricade themselves in the building. Autumn stands up to survey the dead bodies all over the floor and the teachers tending to the wounded. Every face that looks back at her seems to be filled with "anger, loathing, and fear." She knows that she needs to find Sylvia and protect her from Tyler, but Matt is counting on her for comfort and protection as well. She helps him crawl out from under the seat, disturbed by the blood spreading across his shirt, and retrieves a first aid kit from the wall, hoping something useful is inside.

Autumn's sense of being an outsider reflects not only her classmates' suspicion but her sense of being intrinsically tied to Tyler, even after she's seen his true character. However, the evident willingness of people to turn on her simply because of her relatives shows how a crisis like this can cause innocent and like-minded community members to turn on each other needlessly.



Other students report that the police have arrived and secured the outside of the school. Speaking loudly, Autumn suggests that anyone who can run should get out of the school, while those who want to stay should treat the most severely wounded first. Bitterly, CJ says that no one should trust Autumn, because the shooter was her brother, but another student sticks up for Autumn, pointing out that she tried to stop him. Autumn asks the people who are communicating with the police to request EMTs and stretchers.

By taking charge here, Autumn distinguishes herself from her brother and his crimes. Drawing on their positive childhood memories, her previous confrontation with Tyler emphasized her love for him and her desire for his redemption; now, she's given up all faith in his character or their relationship, and wants instead to align herself firmly with the community that he's harmed.



CHAPTER 18: 10:37-10:39 A.M.

Fareed instructs Tomás and Sylvia to find an open classroom and barricade themselves inside, after which they'll use an emergency exit to climb onto the roof. They split off down the hallway, looking for an unlocked classroom, desperate to get out of the exposed hallway. Tomás thinks that there's no one he'd rather be undergoing this ordeal with than Sylvia.

In a time of crisis, Sylvia's presence provides courage to Tomás that nothing else can. Their growing confidence in each other provides a contrasting parallel to Autumn and Tyler's fracturing relationship.



Autumn listens to the other students quietly conversing with the police. She returns to Matt as one boy announces that a SWAT team will be in the building soon. Matt smiles faintly, but blood is still oozing out of his shirt. Autumn suggests that he use his phone to call home, but just at that moment it lights up with an unknown number and he picks up.

Throughout the novel Matt is presented as especially vulnerable and innocent. His prolonged anguish and death in the next few chapters highlights the meaninglessness of gun violence, in that it often targets those who are least able to protect themselves and who have had little to do with the shooter previously.



Claire is relieved and terrified to hear her brother's voice on the **phone**, which she's borrowed from a kind stranger. Matt tells her softly that he hid under the seats and is fine. Claire promises him that the police are outside and that everything will be all right. Matt informs her that Tyler ran out of the auditorium, and Claire asks more questions about his whereabouts so she can notify the police. She hears another girl's voice reassuring Matt that Tyler won't come back, and recognizes Autumn. Autumn says she's sorry for everything that happened, and Claire responds that she is as well. An officer approaches and asks to speak with Matt, taking the phone from Claire.

Here, phones represent the simultaneous closeness and distance that is present in various relationships throughout the community. Matt believes that his sister Claire can take care of anything, and his haste to call her demonstrates that faith, but their phone conversation merely emphasizes their physical separation and Claire's inability to save Matt.



Sylvia can't believe that she's left Autumn behind in the auditorium. In a flashback, she recalls enlisting her family's help to throw Autumn a surprise birthday party last year, since her Dad and Tyler had gone out of town and left her alone. They eat a delicious meal and share a movie marathon, and then Sylvia walks Autumn home, daring to hold her hand in the open air.

The novel often presents sibling relationships as inescapable—no matter how much Autumn dislikes her brother's behavior, she can't break free from loving him. This flashback suggests another mode of existence, in which one deliberately chooses a family that can provide support and acceptance.



In the flashback, Autumn opens up enough to ask Sylvia for help preparing her Julliard audition, and Sylvia agrees. Autumn says fiercely that she wants to leave a legacy when she dies, not spend her life in a town where she doesn't matter. Sylvia tells her not to worry, but she selfishly wants her to stay in Opportunity so they can be together. When they reach the house, Sylvia braves the neighbors' disapproval to kiss Autumn on the lips.

On [Twitter](#), Jay privately messages Kevin and confesses that he was planning to ask him to this year's prom.

Both Sylvia and Autumn have spent the last months worrying that physical distance will tear them apart, just as they worry about being separated during the shooting. However, the events of the shooting will actually reassure them about the strength of their bond and prepare them to meet future challenges.



This poignant admission is a reflection of the multitude of possibilities lost with every casualty of the shooting.



CHAPTER 19: 10:39-10:42 A.M.

Autumn sits with Matt leaning against her, the position that seems most comfortable for him. The auditorium is quiet and fairly calm as students wait for the police to arrive. Not seeming to understand how serious his wounds are, Matt says that he knew Claire was waiting for him outside and would never desert him. Rambling, he asks Autumn if she thinks it will ever snow in Alabama. His older sister once saw snow when she was in elementary school, but he never has. In fact, Autumn remembers making snow angels in the yard with her mother that day.

Autumn confesses that she too relies on her brother a lot, especially since her mother died. Matt says quietly that she shouldn't blame herself for Tyler's actions, just as Claire shouldn't worry too much about him and Tracy. Autumn is touched, but she's also worried that Matt's voice is getting weaker and weaker. He tells her that he's getting tired.

Tomás has never been more frustrated at the school policy that demands doors stay locked between classes. Finally they stumble upon a classroom whose door handle Tomás broke in a prank last year. Tomás drags Sylvia inside, but he's still worried that Tyler could sneak up on him in silence. Sylvia asks him if she thinks they could have stopped Tyler, and Tomás reassures her that it wasn't her fault. Moving quickly, he opens the window and looks out onto the roof. Quietly, Sylvia admits that she "could have had [Tyler] arrested." Tomás turns on his sister and demands to know what Tyler did to her.

Matt's speech emphasizes his confidence in his older sisters, showing the centrality of positive sibling relationships in his life. This could be distressing to Autumn, whose relationship with her brother is marked by abuse and destruction. However, because she's able to empathize with others rather than focusing only on her own needs like Tyler does, Matt's rambling actually gives her strength.



Matt's comforting words remind Autumn that although her life has been indelibly marked by her abusive family, she can take steps to extricate herself from them, rather than enduring and eventually perpetuating abuse as Tyler has done.



Here, Sylvia is closer than ever before to unburdening herself to Tomás. His anger is well-intentioned, springing from a desire to protect his sister, but his outburst mostly shows anger at Tyler and eagerness to achieve revenge, rather than a desire to truly engage with his sister and address her trauma. Ultimately, he seems more concerned with his grievance against Tyler than with his sister's experience.



Outside the school, everyone grows quiet as the SWAT teams prepare to enter. The police won't be able to treat the injured until they find Tyler, but this is a step in the right direction. Claire hopes that Matt will manage to walk out of the school, even if he's feeling ill and tired. She remembers Matt's last birthday, when he and Chris pretended to fight with the crutches he had to use because of his Lupus.

In the flashback, Claire and her mother set the table and Mrs. Morgan confides that Matt is having liver problems again, and may have to be hospitalized. Claire's mother is confiding in her more and more, especially since her father is working long hours to pay for Matt's treatments. They both disguise their worries during the birthday celebration, sharing dinner and a Star Wars cake. Claire wants to savor this picture of her family, rather than the worries about money and illness that have formed so much of their life.

Over the phone, Claire hears Autumn telling Matt that the SWAT teams are finally inside. In relief, Claire turns and kisses Chris, who responds enthusiastically. She begs him never to leave her, and he promises he won't.

Again, Tomás asks his sister what Tyler did to her. In a flashback, Sylvia remembers their previous closeness as children, when they used to sneak out of bed at night to roam the farm and the woods. One night Sylvia even fell off the garage roof and sprained her wrist, but Tomás snuck into the house to get her ice and snacks without even getting caught. In the present, Sylvia realizes that she's hiding the truth about her rape because she doesn't want Tomás to feel guilty for not protecting her. Tearfully, she turns away and says that Tyler did nothing.

Writing on her **blog** from outside the school, Mei says that she's never seen so many community members in one place. Everyone is supporting each other while watching the students who run out of the school in small groups, waiting desperately for loved ones to turn up safe.

Claire's hopes for Matt's safety reveal her ignorance of his true condition. By deceiving her about his injuries, Matt has shown his love for Claire and desire to safeguard her, but by keeping the truth from her, he's actually pushing her away.



Even though Claire's family life often seems picture-perfect, this flashback reveals their struggles and the way that Claire has already had to grapple with some adult responsibilities. By engaging so deeply with the four different narrators, the novel allows the reader to enter into and appreciate their individual problems—an ability that Tyler, who can only focus on himself, notably lacks.



Claire's romantic relationship with Chris shows how open communication and mutual support can lead to genuine connection—a sharp contrast to the manipulative relationship she had with Tyler.



Sylvia has decided that Tomás's potential feelings of guilt are more important than her evident need to talk about her trauma. Tomás thinks Sylvia needs protection, especially because of her physical vulnerability to Tyler's abuse, but emotionally speaking, it's more often she who protects him. Their dynamic here also shows how societal attitudes of silence around abuse can protect people like Tyler, who may go on to perpetuate even worse violence.



The shooting has exposed previously undetected cracks in the community's serenity, yet by forcing parents and virtual strangers to come together, it's also reminding Opportunity of its core communal values.



CHAPTER 20: 10:42-10:44 A.M.

The auditorium door opens, and Autumn sees a group of SWAT officers sweeping through the aisles. She wants to show Matt that they're safe, but his lips are turning blue and he can barely speak. Unable to understand his murmurs, Autumn shouts for help, but an officer orders her to exit the building, saying that paramedics will only come in once it's safe. Autumn is appalled that she's expected to leave Matt behind; she also doesn't want to leave the building while Sylvia and Tyler are still inside. Despite what her brother did, Matt is right in saying that Tyler will always be her family. None of the other students look at her as they line up to leave the school.

Claire listens to this interaction over the phone, realizing for the first time that Matt is seriously injured and can't leave the school. Matt says that he didn't want her to worry about him, but admits that he feels cold and sick. He says that Tyler didn't shoot him "on purpose," and Claire feels sick thinking that Matt is protecting her ex-boyfriend the same way she once did. Trying to comfort her brother, she reassures him that the police will be back for him soon and the doctors will fix him up. She promises to take him to the beach when their sister Tracy returns from deployment. Claire says that she's always admired him for being so creative and brave, but Matt doesn't respond, and she realizes she can't hear him breathing anymore.

Looking out the window, Fareed concludes that the roof is safe. He helps Sylvia over the windowsill and walks off across the roof to look for the police. Still inside the building, Tomás wraps an arm around Sylvia and asks if she's afraid, but she says she's fine now. Tomás hugs her and says that he loves her.

To himself, Tomás thinks that he would do anything to see Sylvia smile again. He apologizes for fighting with her so much over the last year, and she immediately forgives him. He confesses that she's not the only one hiding things: even though it's always assumed that he won't go to college, he secretly wants to study archeology and learn about their heritage.

Tomás asks Sylvia to tell their Mamá what he did during the shooting, about all the pranks they played together as children, and that he had great friends and was happy. Before Sylvia realizes what's happening, Tomás lets go of her hands and shuts the window, turning back into the school. He knows that Fareed and Sylvia need time to escape, and he can give that to them.

The arrival of the police comes as a relief, but their inability to save injured students like Matt is another reminder that Autumn can no longer depend on adults to swoop in and fix every problem. By deciding to stay inside the school, Autumn both affirms her love for Sylvia and honors the sibling relationship that has defined her life, even though it's now been changed forever.



On a personal level, Claire and Matt's desire to see the best in others is laudable. However, it also reflects the community's habit of denying circumstances that would be unpleasant to address – like Tyler's aggressive behavior or the family abuse that, in part, causes it. This moment suggests that while everyone should strive for tolerance and empathy, apologizing for abusers only perpetuates a negative cycle.



Tomás and Sylvia have become increasingly close over the course of the day, but their inability to address Sylvia's rape indicates that there is still a limit to their emotional intimacy.



Here, Tomás shows that his fractured relationship with Sylvia has been harmful to him as well. Just as he could have supported her better, being able to talk open about their experience might have given her a chance to support him as well.



Tomás is trying to make a heroic gesture, but by refusing to consult his sister about his actions, he's robbing her of the agency and equality she wants in their relationship. Here Tomás shows that the cultural value of taking heroic action (especially when the actor is a man) can overcome even genuine intimacy between loved ones.



CJ reports via [Twitter](#) that the auditorium is almost empty. It seems like everything that happened was a dream—or at least she wishes that were the case.

The contrast between perceived normalcy and actual chaos hints at the long journey the community faces before recovering from this crisis.



CHAPTER 21: 10:44-10:46 A.M.

Claire doesn't want to believe that her brother has actually died. In a flashback she remembers Matt's sixth birthday, when the family indulged his obsession with all things flying by turning his bike into a pretend spaceship. Chris brings Claire some water, but all she can think about are the memories she's shared with her siblings—like a long-ago trip to the beach on which she, Matt, and Tracy lay together in the sand at night, marveling at the enormous sky.

While Chris is a comparatively minor character, his ability to empathize with women in his life is notable. Unlike Tyler, who only conceives of Autumn in relation to himself, and Tomás, whose anger and volatility prevent Sylvia from relying on him emotionally, Chris is mature enough to understand that what Claire needs most is for someone to listen to her and value her concerns.



Claire starts pacing around, feeling incredibly alone even though she's surrounded by people. When she spots a police officer she demands to be allowed to help in some way. Although he initially refuses her offer, eventually the officer takes her and Chris to the medical tent, where they can help comfort frightened students who are waiting to be registered and reunited with their families. The officer says that Claire and Chris should try to find their families instead of doing this, but she points out that "Opportunity High is our family," and they have to support the students.

At the beginning of the novel, Claire felt very alienated from her high school community and found the idea of a cohesive student body (as presented in Principal Trenton's speech) unrealistic. Her explicit identification of herself with Opportunity High is indicative of her new awareness of how entrenched she is in her community.



The SWAT officers lead a group of students out of the auditorium, with Autumn trailing behind; as they leave she sees bullet-riddled lockers and more bodies on the floor. She wonders if Sylvia has gone outside, but she knows that Tyler must still be in the building if he hasn't been caught by the police. As a shot rings out and the group rushes towards the doors, Autumn turns a corner and runs upstairs instead. She thinks about the trip she and Sylvia planned to New York, a shared road trip after graduation towards a new future together.

Autumn's hopes for a New York road trip with Sylvia contrast with Tyler's desire for stasis, even if it has to be achieved by force. Even though the changes involved in growing up are frightening, they also open up new possibilities—like the opportunity to travel and deepen relationships. Autumn's thoughts here show that she's moving definitively away from her brother's mindset.



Tomás exits the classroom and moves down the hall, where he can see Tyler rattling door handles. The shooter is startled to see him but recovers his balance, taunting Tomás for trying to protect Sylvia. He says that Tomás is in his control now and can do nothing to save himself, but Tomás replies coolly that since he doesn't care if he dies, Tyler doesn't have any power over him.

Tyler has repeatedly said that possessing a gun gives him complete power over others, but by demonstrating their own bravery, Tomás and other students challenge the idea that control can be achieved by physical threats alone.



Tyler shoots at the wall and threatens to assault Sylvia again after killing Tomás. Tomás counters that even without him Sylvia will still be safe and loved, whereas no one will care about Tyler after he's dead. As Tyler raises the barrel of his gun Tomás thinks of all the times he's seen his sister laughing, and knows that his sacrifice is worth it.

It's notable that Tyler doesn't even think of Sylvia as a person—to him, she's merely an object that he can use to get to Autumn or Tomás. While Tomás's sacrifice is noble, given that his sister and Fareed have already escaped to the roof it's not clear if this dramatic gesture is necessary. Even in this crucial moment, Tomás continues to be influenced by conventionally masculine ideas about what heroism should be.



Sylvia is appalled by her brother's behavior. She can hear parents and police on the ground below, but she bangs on the window and sobs, trying to get back into the school while Fareed tries to calm her down. A helicopter descends towards the roof and Fareed goes over to speak to the police, but Sylvia won't leave the school without Tomás. With all her strength, she opens the window and dives back into the school before Fareed can stop her. Right away she hears gunshots, and then Tyler bragging that he's "won."

Tomás imagined himself as a stereotypical male, willing to take any risk to protect the women for whom he's "responsible." That Sylvia protests rather than accepts this behavior argues that this brand of masculine volatility is not actually beneficial to women and may only perpetuate violent cycles.



Jay **tweets** that he has "no words for today," and lots of other Twitter users reply that they're thinking of him. A priest tweets that his church is holding a candlelight vigil that night.

It's bitterly ironic that even though people use language and social media to comfort each other, no one can truly explain or rationalize what has happened.



CHAPTER 22: 10:46-10:47 A.M.

Sylvia reflects that Tomás has always enjoyed gray days like today; he likes to harness the horses or go for a ride, even in the middle of the rain. Another shot rings out and it seems like another storm is coming "to make him fly."

In order to avoid confronting the fact of Tomás's death, Sylvia thinks back on the more joyous moments of their life together, showing how their bond will always be part of her life.



Claire watches as a blood-spattered student begs an officer for information about her friend, but he can't even tell her if the other girl has made it out alive. Meanwhile Claire talks to Steve, whose sister is CJ, a tough girl in her JROTC squad. Blankly, he says that he doesn't know where his sister is, and he leaves in one of the ambulances. All of the students carry their own stories out of the school, and all Claire can do is listen. Some talk about plans they were making with friends who are now dead, or about the brutality of Tyler's behavior. Claire realizes that this job is much more difficult than she thought it would be, but suddenly Chris hugs her and tells her how brave she is.

Like many of the novel's male characters, Claire initially believes that dramatically rescuing people is more difficult and worthwhile than providing emotional comfort and support; now, she realizes that this seemingly easy task requires just as much courage and ingenuity as physical action does. This moment argues for the importance and the difficulty of prioritizing emotional recovery in the wake of communal traumas like shootings.



Autumn walks down the seemingly endless second floor corridor, looking for Sylvia. As she rounds the corner she sees Tyler standing in the hallway over Tomás's dead body, ranting that he can no longer "stop me from showing [Sylvia] her place."

Tyler's bizarre behavior demonstrates his obsession with subjugating the women in his life, seriously undermining his claim to be motivated by loneliness and legitimate grievances.



In her **blog**, Mei writes about the hope that each emerging survivor inspires in the bystanders, and the way the parents have banded together to support each other. Sylvia's sick Mamá is confused and frightened, but Chris's mother comes to stand next to her and soothes her. Meanwhile, Mei watches for her own father, Mr. Jameson, to make an appearance.

Throughout the novel, Mei's blog is a reminder of the ability of community members to heal each other. At the same time, her optimism is tempered by the reader's knowledge that she'll soon have to cope with her own personal loss: her father's death.



CHAPTER 23: 10:47-10:48 A.M.

Autumn's appearance startles Tyler, but she ignores him to bend over Tomás and close his eyes. Standing up, she tells Tyler that the police are downstairs; his time is up. She tells him that she always looked to him for support in her dancing, especially after their Mom died. She was planning to wear a bracelet he bought her to her audition. It's not her fault that he chose to be alone.

In their previous confrontation, Autumn presented herself as subservient to Tyler, begging him to listen to her and stressing her love for him; now, she's firmly aligning herself with Tomás and showing Tyler how completely he has squandered Autumn's love for him.



Students exiting the school bring reports of the dead with them, and Claire listens to officers repeating the names, even though she's not supposed to. She feels that there are no words to describe this awful waiting period, just "fingers that entwine" and "arms that link in solidarity." Even though the officers tell parents to go to an improvised processing center at a nearby church, no one leaves the school. Claire thinks about the town's role in providing a communal "home" for everyone.

Again, Claire's portrait of communal solidarity—from the physical closeness of waiting parents to their refusal to leave school grounds—shows that she's far more grounded and invested in her community than she was at the beginning of the novel.



Inside the classroom, Sylvia can hear Autumn telling Tyler that the police have arrived, and knows that the ordeal is over; if only Tomás had waited, he would be alive as well. Suddenly Fareed drops through the window; when he sees Sylvia's face he hugs her silently. As Sylvia cries, he repeats his father's advice after they immigrated to America: even though you can't always keep your loved ones close, if you "cherish the memories...you'll always be at home."

In a way, Fareed's advice puts into words the lesson all the narrators have learned about growing up: in order to become adults, they have to accept that their relationships will change and evolve, even as these bonds remain important. However, because of Tyler's drastic actions Sylvia has to accept not just change but the end of her most important sibling relationship.



CHAPTER 24: 10:48-10:50 A.M.

In a flashback, Sylvia recalls the day that Autumn came to school wearing the bracelet that Tyler gave her. Autumn says the gift is a sign that “someone understood what dancing meant to her,” and Sylvia goes home sadly to her mother, feeling left out by Autumn’s new closeness with her brother. She tells Mamá that she’s recently submitted her college application, which pleases her mother since she doesn’t want Sylvia to stay home and take care of her. She tells Sylvia not to forget the stories of her heritage or the family she came from; when Sylvia apathetically promises she won’t, her mother scolds her for her tone, and Sylvia is happy to get a glimpse of the ferocity that vanished with her mother’s illness. Now, she asks Fareed how she will break the news of Tomás’s death to her mother.

Many of the surviving students find their parents waiting for them outside, and Claire is heartened to see the happy reunions; they make her feel as if Matt might walk out of the school at any moment. Suddenly she sees CJ leading a group of students; hugging Claire, CJ berates herself for not having done more to stop Tyler. Claire responds that she did everything she could, and reassures her that her brother Steve is waiting for her. In relief, CJ starts sobbing.

Autumn tells Tyler that she has always loved him and only ever wanted to be a normal family. He says that this is what he wanted as well, but that his sister has never understood that “the world is against us.” With police footsteps now audible, Tyler sits down on the floor and takes off his watch. Fearing for her life, Autumn pleads with Tyler not to kill a member of his own family, but her brother just says that family no longer means much to him, and mockingly asks “who will mourn” her.

Angry, Autumn snaps that the police are coming and Tyler has accomplished nothing. Tyler turns the gun on her with a mischievous smile and shoots; through a haze of pain she sees him turn the gun and shoot himself, saying: “I just don’t want to be alone anymore.”

CJ **tweets** that daylight feels “too bright.” She’s disillusioned with the entire world, but she knows she’s lucky because her brother is alive.

In a way, Sylvia’s feeling of exclusion mirror Tyler’s mindset as Autumn becomes more involved with her girlfriend. However, rather than stewing in her anxieties like Tyler does, Sylvia talks to her mother, reminding herself of her place within a supportive family network. Her mother’s remarks about her strong heritage reassures Sylvia that she’s capable of handling change in the present. While Tyler displays a pathological resistance to the changes involved in growing up, Sylvia models a way to confront these challenges successfully.



In wishing they could have singlehandedly stopped the shooting, Claire and CJ implicitly wish to simplify the problem of gun violence, framing it as a conflict between good and bad people rather than what it really is: a social problem whose causes must be addressed on a broader level.



On the face of things, Autumn and Tyler are articulating the same regret for destroyed family relationships. However, Tyler’s bizarre statement that “the world is against us” shows that he thinks of personal relationships as fundamentally combative—a way to “get even” with the world—rather than as supportive connections that can also be tied to broader communities.



Paradoxically, in his wish to bring people’s attention to his loneliness, Tyler has made himself more alone and reviled than ever.



CJ’s pensive tweet contrasts with her tough demeanor in front of Claire. Social media helps her air the feelings that she doesn’t feel comfortable expressing in person.



CHAPTER 25: 10:50-10:53 A.M.

The classroom door opens suddenly and Sylvia starts screaming. Confusion ensues as the police ascertain that she and Fareed aren't armed, and question them about how they arrived on the top floor; Fareed explains that he and Tomás were the first ones to call the police. Sylvia wonders if Tomás can possibly be alive; maybe she only imagined the gunshots she heard. Fareed helps Sylvia stand up and they walk into the hall, where she sees Tomás's body crumpled against the wall, next to Tyler's. Even though she should feel "victorious" that her enemy is dead, she's overcome by "emptiness." Nearby, Autumn is alive but injured on the ground. She's holding Tyler's hand and can't stop sobbing, even as the police try to move her.

CJ walks away towards one of the police vans and Claire returns to Chris, who is talking to an angry and distraught Asha. Too upset to be tactful, Asha snaps that Tyler killed both her sister and Claire's brother, explaining that Matt got shot accidentally. The girls exchange condolences.

In a flashback, Claire remembers the day before Tracy's deployment. Looking at her sister's new uniform, Claire asks if she's scared, but Tracy just tells her to take care of Matt; now that she's the oldest sibling at home, she has to take on new responsibilities. In the present, Claire and Chris hold hands, not able to put their feelings into words. Suddenly, Claire announces that she wants to become a teacher, and Chris starts laughing. Their conversation is interrupted when a student runs into the tent and announces that Tyler has shot himself; she heard the information over the police radio.

Overcome by pain, Autumn can't stop thinking about her brother's cruel smile as he shot her in the leg. Coming to her senses, she finds a police officer leaning over her and calling for a paramedic. She's confused and terrified, but then Sylvia arrives to stroke her face and calm her down. Autumn wants to kiss her, no matter who sees them. When Sylvia looks down at her girlfriend's knee in pity, Autumn knows that in his last action Tyler has ensured that she'll never be able to dance again.

Sending a **private message** to the murdered Kevin Rolland, Jay mourns the fact that he'll never be able to say goodbye, and he wishes he knew how little time they had together.

It's notable that the police initially seem to think that Fareed and Sylvia have been involved in the shooting; this shows how one act of violence can erode community members' trust in each other, and also how perceived "outsiders" like Fareed can get blamed for problems they have nothing to do with. Sylvia's feelings of emptiness demonstrate her rejection of revenge, which both her brother and Tyler have pursued until their deaths. In this moment, Sylvia chooses to extricate herself from the harmful patterns of male aggression and entitlement that have hitherto dominated her life.



Asha's brusque behavior is indicative not of her feelings towards Claire but rather of the fundamental trauma she's suffered. While the two girls have a new understanding of each other, it's important to understand that this intimacy—just like the broader community's new sense of solidarity—comes at the terrible price of wasted young lives.



Now that Matt is dead, Claire can't fulfill the responsibility Tracy passed on to her. Her decision to become a teacher—thus taking responsibility for her community—is perhaps inspired by the need to redirect her energies. This moment suggests that community responsibility is inextricably linked to sincere personal relationships.



Even in his last moments of life, Tyler refuses to seek even a shred of redemption. Instead, he chooses to harm his sister as much as possible before he dies. In Autumn's case, Tyler will always be present in her life through her injury, showing how sibling bonds—even abusive ones—always persist one way or another. However, it's also important to note that the relationship by which he felt most threatened—Autumn's bond with Sylvia—has survived even his most brutal attempts to destroy it.



Writing to Kevin both allows Jay to feel close to his murdered friend and emphasizes the irrevocable end to their relationship.



CHAPTER 26: 10:53-10:55 A.M.

Sylvia follows Autumn as the paramedics put her on a stretcher and take her out of the building. She hates to leave Tomás behind next to his murderer. There's a small smile on his face, and it seems like he might get up and join her. She reflects that she always wanted Autumn to stay home and near her, but not at the price of her passion for dance. They pass through the empty hallway and Sylvia looks into the auditorium, which she entered that morning with no idea what was coming. Hazily, Autumn asks if they're "free" now, and Sylvia squeezes her hand.

Claire watches as paramedics begin to carry wounded students out of the school. Finally, the ordeal is over. Claire walks away from the crowds and police cars, heading for the woods behind the school. She knows she should call her sister and go home, but for now she just sits by herself and cries.

Autumn floats on the stretcher, holding tight to Sylvia's hand. She feels that the world has completely changed since the last time she was outside the school. Even though she has no idea who she is or where she belongs, she knows she can't and won't lose Sylvia—that would mean letting Tyler win. As she's loaded into the ambulance, Autumn turns and kisses Sylvia on the lips.

Mei posts on her **blog** that despite all the information coming out of the school, she can't bring herself to believe that her father Mr. Jameson is dead. After all, he always told her that the universe is full of stories— and thus full of hope.

EPILOGUE: 11:59 P.M.

After the police finally leave Opportunity High, Fareed breaks in through the roof and spreads word through **social media** to the students, who gather their siblings and friends and descend on the school. It's almost like any other drive to school, except everyone is aware of the thirty-nine people now dead. Autumn is in the hospital having surgery on her leg, any plans for dancing now forestalled. Instead of running away, she's now "tied to Opportunity," but Sylvia reflects that everyone who endured the shooting is bound to the town as well.

It's important that Sylvia stays loyal to Autumn, never questioning her despite her brother's actions. In this way, Sylvia is a contrast to the other students, who seem suspicious of and even angry at Autumn. Sylvia's behavior is a firm rejection of Tyler's habit of abusing others in retaliation for events outside their control.



The officers' successful evacuation of the school represents the technical end of the shooting. However, Claire's feelings of paralysis suggest that the day's psychological consequences— personal and communal—will be long-lasting.



At the beginning of the novel, Autumn's relationship was a constant source of anxiety. Now, even though everything else in her life is upended, the one thing in which she has total confidence is her relationship with Sylvia. Accepting the possibility of change in that relationship has allowed it to grow stronger.



Mei's wishful thinking is understandable, but it also indicates her psychological inability to accept and understand the horrific events of the day.



While social media usually represents clashing moments of agreement and discord in the community, now Fareed uses it as an unequivocal expression of solidarity between the students. The eerie drive back to school reflects the students' feelings of being newly bound to their community even as it has been fundamentally altered.



On the roof, everyone forms a quiet circle. Fareed stands next to Sylvia and prays quietly. She wishes that Tomás were here, playing a prank as usual, but instead Claire stands on her other side, mourning her brother Matt as well. Fareed addresses the crowd, saying that no one will ever forget this day or the people that died in the school. Then he reads out the names of all the fallen students; for each one, a friend or sibling retrieves a paper lantern from the center of the circle. Sylvia picks up Tomás's.

When all the names have been read, Fareed encourages the others to live good lives in honor of those they lost. The students light the lanterns in unison and send them up into the sky. Sylvia wants to keep hold of Tomás, but she knows that she needs to release him "toward the promise of a new day," so she lets go.

It's notable that Fareed—whom Tomás initially characterized as an outsider who sometimes experienced racist discrimination—emerges as a communal leader now. It's only by rejecting false divisions that the community is able to cultivate strength and protect itself against hatred.



Sylvia's release of the lantern—a representation of her murdered brother—signifies the importance of confronting even the most horrible of changes head-on. Only by doing so can she and the other students cope with tragedy and build meaningful and fulfilling lives for themselves.





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