

This Is Where It Ends Study Guide

This Is Where It Ends by Marieke Nijkamp

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Plot Summary

The following version of the novel was used to create this study guide: Nijkamp, Marieke. *This is Where it Ends*. Sourcebooks Fire, January 5, 2016. Kindle.

Tragedy brings out the worst and the best in people, the students of Opportunity High School (OHS) learn from a school shooting in *This is Where it Ends* by Marieke Nijkamp. Although, people who would listen to him, surround him — including his sister, Autumn — Tyler Browne believes he is all alone. He blames his fellow students for his loneliness and takes his frustration out on them by bringing a gun to school. At the end of the day, thirty-nine students and teachers are dead and many more are injured.

The tragedy at OHS is over in less than an hour. Four narrators tell the story of what happens minute by minute during the shooting. Each tells his experience from his own perspective while the author alternates among them. Electronic messaging about the shooting, sent both by students inside the school, and outsiders reacting to the news, is also incorporated into each chapter.

Tyler had dropped out of school the end of his junior year. Before that, tragedy marred his life when his mother died in a car crash. When he learned his sister was dating another girl, Tyler lashed out at that girl in anger. He also fought with other boys at school. Things came to a head at the junior prom when Tyler's girlfriend broke up with him when she discovered him trying to kiss the girl who was dating his sister.

Believing that their struggles were behind them, Autumn was relieved when Tyler told her that he was going to start back to school the beginning of the spring semester. Instead of being in his seat for the beginning of the semester assembly, however, Tyler secured the doors to the school and the auditorium. When the students were supposed to leave the auditorium to go to class, they discovered they were locked in. Tyler entered the auditorium and shot the principal. He then began shooting carefully selected students as the others cowered in fear.

Meanwhile, Tomas and Fareed did not attend the assembly because they were in detention. Tomas knew his sister, Sylv, is scared of Tyler and wanted to find out why. When he and Fareed were searching the principal's student files, they heard gunshots. After Fareed called 911, they got bolt cutters from the janitor's office to cut the chains on the main entrances to the school and the doors to the auditorium. Claire and Chris, two varsity track members, were also not in the assembly that morning. These two students also went for help.

Inside the auditorium, Autumn kept Tyler distracted while Tomas, Fareed and Sylv directed people out of the auditorium. Many were able to get away, but when Tyler turned to see the students escaping, he began shooting wildly. He left the auditorium in search of Tomas, Fareed and Sylv who had escaped to the second floor of the school. They planned to move to the roof to hide from Tyler as best they could. Knowing their plan is not a good one, Tomas tricked Fareed and Sylv into going out on the roof. Once



they were there he closes the window and goes to face Tyler, hoping to delay him until his sister, Sylv can get to safety.

When they face off in the hallway, Tyler shot Tomas. Instead of running, Sylv managed to get the window open and went back inside the school. Meanwhile, Autumn snuck up to the upstairs hallway where she tried to talk her brother into surrendering. Sylv heard them talking. There were two gunshots as Tyler shoot his sister, who had always dreamed of being a dancer, in the knee, and then shot himself in the head.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

In Chapter 1, from 10:01-10:02 A.M., Claire is practicing with the track team on the first day of school. It is her final semester of school at Opportunity High School in Opportunity, Alabama. The practice has kept her and the other runners from attending Principal Trenton's start of the semester speech. Claire stumbles in the cold and Chris, her best friend catches up with her to encourage her. At that moment, she believes nothing can touch them.

Because the principal along with all the other teachers and students are in the auditorium, Tomas, along with his friend Fareed, take the opportunity to look through files in the principal's office. He intentionally got detention so that he could get into the office. They hear footsteps, but no one comes into the office and the steps move away.

In the auditorium, Autumn is listening to the principal's talk. She sits between Sylv and an empty chair. While Sylv grumbles about the principal's speech, Autumn knows she has to do well in school to get into dance. Since her mother, a dancer, died in an accident, her father drinks and often beats Autumn when he learns she has been dancing.

Sylv, meanwhile, is happy that the seat next to Autumn is empty. She believes it is a sign that Tyler, a boy of whom she is afraid, will not be coming to school after all. Sylv knows that day is the anniversary of the accident that killed Autumn's mother. She wishes her friend would talk about the accident and her grief. Sylv has her own problems as she struggles to help care for her mother, who has dementia. At the end of the chapter, students CJ and Jay text one another about how boring the assembly is.

Chapter 2 records the activity between 10:02 and 10:04 a.m. Tomas finds the folder for which he was looking. In his picture, Tyler Browne has a blank look on his face. Tomas remembers the only time Tyler did not have that look was when he slammed Tyler's head into the lockers. Tyler had dropped out of school at the end of his junior year after that incident. According to the file, Tyler is supposed to be re-enrolling for that semester. Tomas cannot find any criminal charges associated with Tyler but remembers how scared his twin sister looked when she told him Tyler would be coming back to school. Tomas does notice in Tyler's file that while Tyler had only Cs, he scored a 2140 on his SAT.

In the auditorium, Autumn listens as Sylv tries to talk to her about the anniversary of her mother's death. She does not know what to say to Sylv. She is most worried about losing her brother, Tyler, but knows that Sylv does not like Tyler. Autumn notices the way Sylv's shirt and eyeliner make her eyes sparkle as she talks. As she and Sylv prepare to leave the auditorium, Autumn also notices that people are not filing out of the room the way they generally do after one of the principal's speeches.



Claire continues to run and begins to feel better as she runs. Chris notices she is thinking about something and Claire admits to him that it was strange for her sister, Tracy, not to be home for their brother, Matt's, birthday. Claire wishes she was more like her sister who is independent and has good leadership qualities. She worries about Tracy, who is deployed with the Army, but also worries about Matt, who suffers with lupus. Another worry on her mind is what her future holds.

Sylv encourages conversation between Autumn and Asha when Asha learns that Autumn is a dancer, too. Sylv thinks Autumn and Asha could be friends if Autumn let Asha know her better. She wants Autumn not to feel alone. When the two girls begin talking about dance, however, Sylv feels left out. She has an acceptance letter from Brown University, but believes she cannot go because of how bad her mother's health has gotten. Sylv notes students still are not moving out of the auditorium.

At the end of the chapter Matt sends his sister a text telling her that he will be okay in high school, that he is stronger than he looks.

Analysis

The first aspect of interest in this novel is the structure. There are four different first person narrators. These narrators are Claire, Tomas, Autumn and Sylv. Each chapter includes a section narrated by each of these characters with each chapter detailing what happens from each student's point of view during four minutes. The chapters cover the entirety of the tragedy in a linear fashion. The descriptions of the action begin at 10:01 a.m. and continue through 10:55 that same morning. The entirety of the novel covers a period of just more than 50 minutes.

The setting is a high school in the small town of Opportunity, Alabama. The name of the town and high school is ironic because many of the students who attend that school believe that they have no opportunities in that town. Sylv believes she cannot leave home because her mother is sick even though Sylv has been accepted to Brown University. Claire wonders what opportunities she has in that town and what her future holds.

Each of the students has his own issues. Claire worries about her sister, Tracy, and brother, Matt. She is distressed because her sister is deployed and the family is no longer one unit. She also worries because Matt has just started high school. Because he has lupus he is often sick. Because his legs are not strong, he walks on crutches.

Autumn is still recovering from the death of her mother. That day is actually the anniversary of her mother's death. She feels alone, as if everyone, including her brother Tyler or Ty, to whom she was once close, has abandoned her. She worries that her girlfriend Sylv, will abandon her as well. Sylv, meanwhile, has her own troubles. She is afraid of Autumn's brother, Ty. She is glad when he does not join them for the assembly even though it was believed that Ty would be re-enrolling that morning.



Tomas is not in the auditorium because he and his friend were put in detention. The reader learns that Tomas has gotten put in detention intentionally because he wanted an opportunity to look at Tyler Browne's file in the principal's office. He hoped to find out why his sister, Sylv was so scared of Tyler.

Tyler will become a main character in the novel even though he has not yet appeared in the text. Most of what is known about him at this point comes through Tomas' sections of narration when he reads Tyler's file in the principal's office. It is clear that Tomas and Tyler have had run in's before. Tomas describes having bashed Tyler's head into a locker. This leaves little doubt in the reader's mind that there is no love between these two boys. Additionally, Tomas is trying to find out why his sister is so scared of Tyler. He shows his dedication to her by his indication that he will protect her regardless because he believes it is his duty as a twin brother.

Even as Tomas looks through Tyler's file, he does not really expect to find any incriminating information about the boy. This is especially so after he sees that Tyler had scored so high on his SAT. Tomas thinks "Maybe that explains why, despite his bravado, Tyler never made good on any of his threats. He may be a maggot, but he's the smartest kind: a harmless one" (13). Tomas's belief that Tyler is harmless is an idea that will come back to haunt him.

The author uses a variety of literary techniques in this first section of the novel. The first, of course, is the play on the name of the town, Opportunity, when so few of the students there feel they have any opportunities. The author also uses simile in describing the bouts of dementia suffered by Sylv's Mama. "She slips away like starlight at dawn" (8) Sylv says of mother. There is also a metaphor used when Sylv describes how Autumn brightens when she talks about dancing. "When she opens up, she is the sun" (4). Remember that a simile is a comparison generally using the words like or as while a metaphor draws a direct correlation between two objects.

Discussion Question 1

What do all of the narrators in this novel have in common? What differences are their between them?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the structure of the novel. How do you think this structure will be significant?

Discussion Question 3

What are the clues given that something bad is about to happen at Opportunity High School?

Vocabulary

succumb, arduous, synchrony, coincidence, cyborg, barbarian, salacious, resilient, daunting



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

In Chapter 3, Autumn thinks about how important dancing is to her as Asha ends the conversation and walks away from her. She believes dance is the only thing that holds her together, that everyone will eventually walk away from her. In her hand is a key chain with a Venetian mask given to her by her mother and a silver ballet shoe. As Claire begins to concentrate more on her running, she stops thinking about her problems. She feels like the track team is where she belongs.

After Tomas' search of Ty's file brings up nothing, Fareed suggests they skip the rest of the day. Tomas does not want to skip, or get into too much trouble, even though he cherishes his title as the school's bad boy. He does not want his mother to remember him only as being a trouble maker.

Sylv slowly realizes that the doors to the auditorium are locked. Another student tries the emergency exit and discovers it is locked from the outside as well. When the bell rings, one set of doors opens and there is a figure that Sylv thinks at first is her brother but then she recognizes the blonde hair. Sylv hears murmurs that there is a gun.

The boy points the gun at the principal, telling her that he has a question. He fires the gun.

In her blog *The Adventures of Mei*, Mei mentions that Opportunity looks smaller and grayer after having visited her grandfather on the other side of the world.

In Chapter 4, Tomas notices how quiet the hallways are, even after the principal's speech should be finished. He is throwing a paperweight in the air and catching it when he hears two gunshots. He drops the paperweight and it shatters. Both Tomas and Fareed recognize the sound of gunshots. Fareed tells Tomas they need to let someone know what is happening.

Sylv is terrified because Tyler is back. She is not sure what she should do. Tyler is shooting anyone who gets too close to him. Teachers try to help the principal, but she has been shot in the head. The librarian, Mrs. Smith, makes her way to the emergency exit. Sylv recites the Hail Mary prayer as she watches the elderly woman. Tyler shoots the librarian just as she reaches the door. All Sylv can see is the look on Principal Trenton's face just before Tyler shot her.

Meanwhile on the track, when the runners hear the first shots, Claire notes the track coach looks at the starting gun in his hand. They know the shots did not come from that gun but instead from inside the school. Chris tries to open the doors to the gymnasium but they are locked. Claire knows that someone needs to take charge of the situation. Since the coach looks so pale, he does not seem capable. Chris looks at Claire with pleading in his eyes. Although she does not like being the one in charge, her sister was



always the leader both in JROTC and at home, she takes the lead. No one has a phone with them so she sends the coach to find an emergency phone. The other two members are sent to see if they can get into the school to a phone while Claire and Chris go to find Jonah, the school's security guard, to see if he can radio for help. In the case they cannot find him, they will run to a nearby gas station to make their call.

Autumn pulls Sylv toward her as the students group together to get away from Tyler and the gun. Tyler seems to enjoy the terror he is causing. Autumn gets a bad taste in her mouth when she thinks that it is her brother who is the school shooter. Before this, Autumn's brother had always been the person who had taken care of her when her father beat her and left bruises. He also encouraged her to keep dancing. She had thought of him as the only real family member that she had left. Autumn thinks to herself that she should get up and confront Tyler but she does not.

At the front of the auditorium, a freshman named Geraldine has stood up with her fists clenched. She runs toward the doors but Tyler shoots her as she runs. Tyler fires another shot into the air and tells everyone to stay where they are.

Meanwhile, a girl with the Twitter name CadetCJJ tweets that there is a shooter at the high school. Several people reply with shock, another believes CJ is kidding. One takes her seriously and calls the police. Another prepares to drive to the school.

Analysis

The shooting starts in this section of chapters. It is in Sylv's section of narration in Chapter 3 that she comes to the realization that the auditorium doors are locked from the outside. She is also the one who recognizes the shooter as Tyler, the boy of whom she is so afraid. Although the reader has no idea why Sylv was originally afraid of Tyler, it appears he is a person of whom she had a right to be afraid.

Autumn, however, gives a different view of her brother. She is shocked and sickened to see him with a gun. After her mother died and her father began taking out his grief on Autumn, Tyler was the only person who had been a true family member and friend to Autumn. As proof of her trauma both from her mother's death and her father's beatings, notice how wary Autumn is of relationships at this point. Even though she and Asha have a common bond because of dance, she believes that Asha will eventually leave her, like everyone else has done. It appears that Tyler has left her as well.

Notice the way that the author takes the time to develop characters, even those who are about die. The reader learns that the librarian, for instance, just had a hip replacement and that she always brings Sylv's Mama freshly baked bread. The librarian is described in Sylv's narration in this way: "She's seventy-three. Her youngest daughter is pregnant again and her oldest grandkid turns eleven today. She's lived in the same house on the same street since the dawn of time" (35). Geraldine, also, is described as a delicate freshman with braces and glasses that are too big for her. The descriptions of these characters help the reader to feel more connected to the story and the characters. By



knowing details about the characters, the reader can connect them to some person in their own life, it gives them a feeling of knowing the people who are being killed. They are not faceless characters but people who matter with lives and personalities.

Because they are not inside the auditorium, Claire and the others on the track team as well as Tomas and Fareed have the opportunity to get help. Claire, who always wanted to be more like her sister, a girl who was always in charge, makes her sister proud by stepping out in the lead even though she is unsure of herself. Meanwhile, it is Fareed who tells Tomas that the need to get away from the school and contact someone who can help. Tomas, who had just broken into the principal's office in an attempt to help his sister, realizes that she is in the auditorium. Because he wants so badly to protect his sister, Tomas knows he cannot leave the school knowing that he will be leaving his sister behind.

An important object in this section of the novel is the paperweight with which Tomas is playing when he hears the first shots. He drops the weight and it shatters. The shattering represents a shattering of common belief that many of the students had help up to that point. They had believed they were safe at school, that nothing bad could happen to them there and that they would survive that day. Many of these beliefs were shattered on that day.

Other important objects include the charms that Autumn has on her bracelet. One of the charms is a Venetian mask that her mother, also a dancer, gave her as a gift. The other charm is in the shape of a ballet shoe. This charm shows the importance of dance to Autumn. She believes that without dance, she would be nothing.

Notice Sylv's statement that "This is it" (30) when she realizes Tyler is standing in the door of the auditorium with a gun. Her statement has a sense of resignation to it as if she believes her life is over and that there is nothing left. This sentence will appear again in the novel but will have a different connotation.

The author continues to use a variety of similes in her writing. For instance, Claire notes she is always uplifted by Chris, who is able to "throw off his worries like a winter coat" (26). As he talks about himself, Tomas indicates that his reputation of being the school's bad boy fits him "like a well-worn glove" (28). He also indicates at one point that "a day without detention is like a day without sunshine" (26). This quote also illustrates Tomas' personality and the way he takes his bad boy reputation so lightly.

Discussion Question 1

At places Tomas seems to be proud of his bad boy reputation and in others it seems to bother him.



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Autumn hesitates to confront her brother? Do you think it would help at this point for her to intervene?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Autumn and Sylv's descriptions of the first few minutes of the shooting.

Vocabulary

strategy, cadence, guise, dubious, refrain, methodically, erratic, avail, adjacent, descends



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

In Chapter 5, at 10:07 a.m. Fareed locks himself and Tomas into the principal's office and calls 911. As Tomas listens to his friend's seriousness on the phone, he realizes he has never seen this side of Fareed before. Tomas remembers all of the instructions they were given during lockdown drills including instructions to run away if possible. Because he knows his sister and others are in danger in the auditorium, he does not think that running away and saving himself seem to be the right thing to do.

Sylv closes her eyes and sees her brother, Tomas, and Autumn, the people who mean most to her. She remembers how Tyler came between all of them. She knows that if she told what Tyler had done to her, Tomas would have killed him but it would also have torn Autumn's family apart. She remembered how she and Autumn had spent time hidden at an old shed where she practiced her dance. One day while Sylv was there filling out college applications Tyler confronted her because he knew she and Autumn were seeing each other. He had also accosted her at the junior prom and told her she was corrupting Autumn.

Claire notes there are two cars at the entrance to the school. One is Jonah's patrol car. The other car is Tyler's. No one is around either car. The radio is missing from Jonah's patrol car and the wiring for the base station has been cut. Chris notices ammunition boxes in Tyler's car. As Claire walks to look in that car, she kicks a shoe and looks down to see Jonah's boots sticking out from under the car. He is dead.

Back in the auditorium, Autumn tries to comfort Sylv and tells her they have to move. They make their way as far away from Tyler as they can. Tyler closes the auditorium door and asks a boy to lock the door for him. When the boy does not move fast enough, Tyler shoots him in the shoulder. A girl named CJ stands up to help the boy.

At the close of the chapter, Jay Eyck sends out a tweet, trying to find out what is happening at the high school. He also sends a direct message to Kevin asking for information.

In Chapter 6, at 10:10 a.m. Sylv hears the sounds of sobbing as well as students attempts to calm others. Some students are on their cell phones calling for help or advice. One student, later identified as Steve, speaks loudly into his phone. Tyler shoots into the ceiling and tells his fellow students they are being rude for being on their phones when he is talking.

Claire believes there must be an explanation to what she is seeing that does not make Tyler involved in the shooting. Chris tries to convince her that Tyler is responsible for Jonah's death and what is going on inside the school. Claire changes her focus to the problem at hand and tells Chris they have to get to the gas station to call for help. Claire



runs but she cannot out run the memories of Tyler's promises to her. He had told her that instead of going into the Army that she should teach. He had told her that one day he would make sure the world would never forget him. Claire wonders if Tyler is making good on that promise with the school shooting.

Tomas, meanwhile, sneaks into the hallway. Fareed has opened both the windows in the principal's office. He suggests they open the front doors as well. Tomas tells Fareed he has to help Sylv, who is in the auditorium. Thinking ahead, Fareed tells Tomas that they cannot try to get into the auditorium if they are unprepared. They make a plan to get tools from the janitor's room that they can use as weapons if needed.

Autumn thinks how she was once happy at Opportunity High School. At about the same time, Tyler tells the students he had wanted to fit in at the high school. He asks the other students if they know what losing something feels like. Tyler climbs the stairs to the stage and Autumn notices Mr. Jameson and three other teacher approach him. Tyler addresses the students again, telling them that on that day, they will listen to him.

Meanwhile, Matt sends texts to his sister, Claire, telling her they are trapped and that he needs her help.

Analysis

The students at Opportunity High School were prepared and had been through school shooting drills. This preparation did not keep that school safe. Even with all the precautions, one intelligent, depressed student managed to make his way into the school with a gun. One of the problems with active shooter drills is that nothing can prepare students or teachers for what they should do in the situation in which Tyler has put them. In this case, many use their cell phones to call for help, in many schools, however, students are not allowed to have cell phones during school hours. In this case, students would not even have been able to call for help in the way these students were.

Notice the differing opinions of Tyler between Autumn, Sylv and Claire. The reader already knows that Tomas does not like Tyler and is willing to do whatever he needs to in order to protect his sister, Sylv. Sylv is terrified of Tyler because he threatened her. In her words, Sylv says that Tyler "didn't trust anyone. It made him unpredictable, dangerous, and better left alone" (51). Chris also does not like Tyler and did not think he was good for Claire when the two were dating. Claire and Autumn appear to be the only two who have a positive opinion of Tyler at all. Autumn remembers her brother having stood up for her while Claire remembered only kindness from Tyler while they were dating and then even after they had broken up. When Claire first saw Tyler's car in front of the school she was relieved because she thought it meant he could help. "Despite everything that happened, Ty's good people" (56) Claire thought to herself.

Tyler begins to tell the story of how he came to be threatening his fellow students with a gun. He indicates that he feels alone, as if he does not fit in. He wants people to listen to him, to understand how much losing his mother hurt him. He believes the other



students have never experienced loss, keeping them from understanding his pain. Both Sylv and Claire remember him telling them that he wanted to do something to make others remember him.

Fareed is an interesting character since he is an Afghan. Tomas makes a comment that when Fareed calls the police department Fareed is careful to speak without an accent as much as possible. Because of his nationality, some people accuse Fareed of things that have happened. Tomas thinks to himself that he would not be surprised if the police did not think that Fareed was somehow involved if they knew he was Afghan.

Although Fareed and Tomas both have the reputations of being jokesters, they both become serious when they realize what is happening. It is Fareed who helps Tomas realize they have to have a plan in place if they want to help anyone. “Only Fareed’s rationality stops me. I never claimed to be the brains in this partnership. I’m here for bad ideas and impulsivity” (46). This quote not only describes Tomas’ personality but also adds a bit of humor to a highly tense situation.

Tomas is faced with a hard decision in this section of the novel. In shooter drills, the students have been told: “Run if you can. Hide if you have to. Don’t be a target. It’s the first thing all the instructors of our lockdown drills taught us: get yourself to safety” (49). Although this advice might have sounded good when going through the drills, Tomas realizes that it will not be easy to follow those instructions knowing that he will be leaving innocent students, as well as his own sister, behind to the whims of the shooter.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Tomas and Fareed are right for trying to put together a plan to help the other students?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author incorporate background information into this novel?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways is Tyler extremely thorough in his plan to lock the students into the auditorium?

Vocabulary

rationality, impulsivity, articulates, mirth, remnant, subtle, anecdotes, vehement, precarious, belies, enthralled, revels, oblivious, ludicrous, feign, mundane, indignation, stoicism, ajar



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

In Chapter 7, at 10:12 a.m. Sylv explains how the people of Opportunity included the Browne family as one of its own until Mr. Browne began drinking and Tyler became hateful. Autumn had not seemed to notice how her brother and father had withdrawn from and eventually been ejected from the fold of the town. The only time Autumn had mentioned the changes in her brother was when Sylv had told her that Tyler had found out about them during junior prom. Because she knew that Tyler was the only person whom Autumn considered a family member, she did not want to tell her how much he had really changed.

Tyler orders everyone to remain seated. He shoots one teacher who is trying to sneak up on him and orders to others off the stage. All the teachers with the exception of Mr. Jameson leave the stage. Sylvia describes Mr. Jameson as being a particularly caring teacher who would have listened to Tyler. She describes how that teacher was in the habit of organizing a bonfire for students at the beginning of each spring semester. They would meet at midnight to send their dreams up to the sky, written on sky lanterns. In the auditorium, Mr. Jameson tries to talk to Tyler but Tyler tells him to be quiet.

Tomas and Fareed arrive at the janitor's office to discover that the janitor, Neil, had been strangled to death. Tomas is so sickened that he throws up. After he regains his composure, he and Fareed gather up the tools they need to cut the chains on the auditorium doors. Tomas finds himself wishing he could find a gun in order to get revenge on Tyler.

As Claire and Chris run for the gas station and a phone, Claire asks why she did not know that Tyler had such terrible plans for the school. She believes his claim to her that he would make people remember him was a sign that she should have understood meant he planned violence for the school. She is angry with herself because she did not recognize Tyler's capabilities.

Autumn refuses to be more afraid than she is as Mr. Jameson tries to talk to Tyler. Tyler orders Mr. Jameson to be quiet and to move off the stage. When the teacher does move away, Tyler smiles. Autumn recognizes the smile as the same one Tyler had on his face when he had shown their father Autumn's ballet shoes and told him that Autumn was still dancing. Tyler had stood by and watched while Autumn's father beat Autumn. Tyler later told Autumn telling their father about her dancing was an accident and suggested that Autumn stay home from school the first day of the semester. He even offered to fake a doctor's excuse for her.

Meanwhile, Tyler asks for his former classmates to raise their hands. Very few of them do as they are asked. With no warning, Tyler raises his gun and shoots Mr. Jameson, once in the arm and once in the chest. He tells the students they should have learned



the same lesson he did, that if they did not get attached to anyone or anything, they would not get hurt. Tyler then points the gun at Jordan, a boy who did not raise his hand. Tyler tells them the second lesson they should have learned was to follow directions. He shoots Jordan.

Through messaging, Jay continues to try to get in touch with Kevin.

In Chapter 8, at 10:15 a.m. Tomas tosses Fareed the bolt cutter when Fareed tells him they need to break open the doors of the main entrance so students can get outside the school once they leave the auditorium. Tomas leaves Fareed in charge of getting the main doors open while he heads to the auditorium. Tomas decides it will be safer for him to start with the door farthest away from the one that is unchained. He uses paper clips in an attempt to pick the locks like his grandfather taught him.

In her section of narration, Sylv recounts that Tyler asks the students if anyone has a drink. No one steps forward. Tyler points out Kevin Rolland specifically. Kevin is one of the few students at the high school who is open about being gay. During a debate against Tyler, the other students had cheered Kevin because he had stood up to Tyler's bullying ways. This incident had led up to acts of retaliation which eventually resulted in Tyler dropping out of school. When Kevin admits he has nothing to drink, Tyler shoots him. Sylv believes that Tyler's shooting is more scary because he is intentionally choosing his victims. It is at this point that Sylv believes that she and other homosexuals who do not fit into Tyler's idea of a perfect world are his main target. About the same time, Sylv notices a shadow under the auditorium door nearest her. She wonders if Tyler has an accomplice waiting outside.

Claire listens as Chris tells her that she is perfect and that she should not blame herself for what is happening at the school. Claire continues to run even though she is at the point that she wants to give up. She finally manages to describe Tyler's vindictiveness, the way he had kissed Tomas' sister at the junior prom as a way to get back at Tomas. Claire admits it was because of that kiss that they broke up. Claire had witnessed that encounter. When she told Tyler to get lost, Claire noticed there was nothing in his eyes except a feral look. He had dropped out of school the following day. Back in the present, Claire and Chris continue to run. They hear sirens coming in their direction.

In her section of narration, Autumn records how Tyler asks the other students if they know what it is like to lose everything. Autumn moves through the auditorium until she is close to the stage. She remembers one of their last conversations when she had told him to get lost after he tormented her by telling her there was nothing holding her in Opportunity. She knew her words hurt him but she did not want to give him hope that she would stay there. Back in the present, Tyler accuses the students there of corrupting his family. He calls Autumn by name, asking if she agrees with him.

CJ sends out a tweet telling how afraid she is. Along with responses of support, CJ gets a response from a news source indicating reporters want to talk to her.



Analysis

The structure allows the reader to know the whole story as it develops while each of the characters only knows a piece. Claire does not know that Tyler was trying to kiss Sylv because he believed she had corrupted Autumn. Tomas does not know what Tyler did to Sylv, only that his sister is scared of him.

The feeling of being abandoned seems to be at the center of Tyler's rampage. Because he picks Kevin out of the crowd, Sylv believes part of Tyler's plan is for revenge against Kevin because students had cheered Kevin when he stood up to Tyler's meanness. Tyler also seems to believe that his sister was corrupted by Sylv. It appears the two are involved in a homosexual relationship.

Although Claire had at first told Chris that she had never known Tyler to be anything but caring and supportive, she does admit to Chris that when she broke up with Tyler she had seen a feral look in Tyler's eyes. She had believed he was trying to kiss Sylv because he was trying to get back at Tomas. It was at this point that Claire broke up with Tyler. She had noticed how his expression had gone from one of anger to one of surprise and pity when she told him to get lost.

Claire is not the only one who remembers telling Tyler to get lost. Autumn does so as well. Tyler had been talking to her about her plans to leave Opportunity as if he were fishing for her to say she would stay. Instead of telling her brother what he wanted to hear from her, Autumn told him the truth, not wanting to get his hopes up. In this same line of tough love, Autumn had told Tyler to get lost.

Meanwhile, even Autumn shares a memory that shows Tyler was not always kind to her. Just a few days prior, Tyler had let their father know that Autumn was still dancing. Tyler had known that their father would beat Autumn when he learned about her dancing. Tyler suggests to Autumn that she stay home the first day of school later when he apologizes for what he did.

Even though Tomas and Fareed are considered to be the troublemakers of the school, they quickly go into action trying to save their classmates. Tomas wants to get into the auditorium in order to help his sister. Fareed seems to understand something needs to be done and that they are the only ones who are in a position to quickly help the students. They think in advance, knowing that they have to get the doors to the outside open so that the students will have someplace to run once they are freed from the auditorium. Notice also that when Tomas directs Fareed to take the bolt cutter and open the front doors that he tells Fareed that he should make sure if the police come, that they know Fareed is not using the bolt cutters as a weapon.

Significant in this chapter is Sylv's mention of the bonfires that Mr. Jameson hosted. She notes he would have students write their dreams on sky lanterns and send these dreams up to the sky. These celebrations always took place on the first night of spring semester at midnight. The sky lanterns that Sylv mentions are a significant object in the story.



Notice the continued similes included in this section. Sylv describes how Tyler “tosses the used cartridge on the floor like a crumpled ball of paper” (102). This description makes it appear as if Tyler thinks no more of the cartridge than he might a discarded piece of paper. In one of Autumn’s sections of narration she indicates “My head feels light, as if I did a thousand pirouettes” (102). For one who lives to dance, it makes sense that she would use the results of dance techniques to describe her physical sensations even during a school shooting.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Tyler set Autumn up to be beaten by their father and then suggested that she stay at home the first day of the spring semester?

Discussion Question 2

Sylv believes that Tyler’s attack on the high school is prompted by bias toward gay people. Do you think this is completely the case? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How do Tomas, Fareed, Claire and Chris react to the shooting and terror around them?

Vocabulary

lineage, doused, fortified, claustrophobia, fixated, tentatively, converge, surreal, virtually, inaccessible, incredulousness, retaliation, spree, collateral, vindictive, feral



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

In Chapter 9, Autumn is surprised that no one points out to Tyler where she is as he calls for her. As Autumn watches, Tyler steps in front of Eve, a girl who once had a crush on Tyler, and her boyfriend Miles. He shoots Miles as Eve screams. He grabs Asha's sister, Nyah, by her baseball jersey. Autumn knows she should get up and stop what is happening. Nyah begs Tyler not to shoot her.

As Tomas tries to get into the auditorium, he remembers when his grandfather taught him how to pick locks. Sylv had been mad because her grandfather did not think lock picking was a proper skill for a girl to have. As he works, he wonders who will remember him if he does not survive. Sylv is one of the students who holds Asha back from going to her sister. She believes if she can keep Asha safe, it will mean she has done one good thing that day. Sylv thinks about how she would want to protect her own brother, but also believes that her brother does not care about her. Meanwhile, Sylv sees Autumn making her way toward the front of the auditorium. She hopes that Tyler will not see Autumn. Tyler addresses his sister again. He tells her that if she does not come out, he will continue to torment and kill. To demonstrate, Tyler kills Nyah. Sylv believes a piece of herself dies as well.

Claire and Chris are picked up by one of the police cars that rush past them. Claire believes that once she is back at the school she will be able to help Matt. In her blog, Mei expresses her concern because her father is not responding to her texts.

In Chapter 10 Claire thinks about her brother as the police car takes her back to her school. She tries to think positively, that they, the students and teachers of Opportunity, will be able to survive the attack if they stay together. Tomas continues to be frustrated with the cheap paper clips. As he works on the lock, he hears someone knocking on the door. Afraid because he does not know if the person knocking is someone wanting out or if it is a gunman, Tomas knocks back.

Sylv worries she might be bringing on disaster by knocking on the door, but she needs to know who was outside the door. She is surprised when she hears a knock in response. The knock follows the beat of a song her grandfather had hummed to her and Tomas. Sylv's hope that Tomas is still alive and that he could help them grows.

When Sylv looks up from the doors she is shocked to see that Autumn is walking toward Tyler. She understands what Autumn is doing even though she does not approve because she knows she would do the same thing for her family. Sylv is torn between wanted to pull Autumn away from Tyler but at the same time she does not want to do anything that will keep her from not being able to reunite with her brother.



Autumn keeps seeing the bullet that Tyler shoot hitting Nyah's face. She wants Tyler to die, to shoot himself. She believes the students around her blame her for Nyah's death. Autumn notices Tyler is trying to pull up the boy who was sitting next to Nyah but he has crawled under the seats. Autumn recognizes the boy as Matt when she sees his crutches. She remembers how fond Tyler always was of Matt. She realizes how bad things are if Tyler is trying to shoot even Matt. Even though she does not know if she can get through to Tyler, Autumn knows she has to try. She stands and calls out to Tyler, hoping to stop him before he shoots anyone else.

CJ continues to tweet. She sends messages indicating she cannot find her brother and that everyone is dying. A man named Jim Tomason sends CJ another message telling her that reporters want to talk to her.

Analysis

Autumn and Tyler and Sylvia and Tomas are both pairs of siblings who were very close at one time. In the past year, however, they have all drifted away from one another. Although Autumn feels she no longer even knows who her brother is, she feels she is the only one who might be able to get through to him. She is determined to try. Meanwhile, Sylv gets a sign that her brother is still alive. They knock to one another on the door of the auditorium with their knocks to the beat of a song their grandfather had once hummed to them. Because she and Tomas had also drifted apart, Sylv is given hope when she realizes that Tomas might still be alive. She hopes to be able to hug him and mend their relationship.

Even as teens, these characters are very negative. Claire is perhaps the only one with a positive attitude about what is happening. Even though she has a brother who is inside the auditorium where Tyler is shooting, she believes that once she and Chris arrive back at the school, they will be able to do something to help. She even uses the road on which they are driving "the road to Opportunity" as proof that something good will happen (119). Tomas, on the other hand, wonders if he does not survive that day, if there is anyone who will remember him.

A significant object in this section of the novel is Matt's crutches. They symbolize how close Tyler is to Matt. Matt is an important character because Tyler had once been protective of Claire's little brother. Before Chris had made Claire realize Tyler might be the one doing the shooting, she was relieved when she saw Tyler's car because she thought it might mean he would be able to protect Matt. Autumn is probably correct in her assumption that if Tyler is willing to hurt Matt, he is in a position where he will be willing to hurt anyone who might cross his path.

After Autumn sees Tyler shoot Nyah, she believes that she is responsible for that girl's death. It is for this reason that she stands up and calls out for Tyler. She thinks that if she does what he wants her to do, she can keep him from killing anyone else. Autumn also believes the other students in the auditorium blame her for Nyah's death. When the police officer picks up Claire and Chris, she takes these students back to the school as



is lined out by protocol. The officer warns the two students they will not be allowed to do anything heroic once they arrive at the school but Claire does not seem to hear her words as she continues to think she will be allowed to do something to help once she is back at the school.

Discussion Question 1

In her section of narration in Chapter 10 Sylv says: “Getting out alive is no longer the goal — not dying yet is” (121). What is the difference?

Discussion Question 2

How much responsibility do you think that Autumn holds for Nyah’s death. Is she any more responsible for that death than the others? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think including Tyler as a narrator would have been a good addition to the novel?

Vocabulary

incentive, taunts, liable, onslaught, surreptitiously



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

In Chapter 11, Tomas recognizes from the knocks that Sylvia, indeed, is inside the auditorium. He wishes there was a way to tell her through knocks that he had come back for her. Sylv begins knocking again, this time the rhythm of a lullaby their mother had once sung to them. It is interrupted by a gunshot. Tomas is so frustrated he is about to take a hammer to the lock when Fareed stops him. He reports he has heard sirens coming. Fareed has gotten two of the main doors open. Tomas takes the bolt cutters from Fareed to cut the chains on the auditorium doors.

Claire listens as police units from towns near Opportunity are called to assist. Helicopters and SWAT teams are also called for. Claire tries to talk to the officer, asking her who contacted the police. When the officer realizes Claire is talking to her, she tells Claire that they got several calls from inside the school.

Sylv realizes that even if Tomas can help them, he will be risking his life to do so. Sylv wonders if she could have stopped what is happening by speaking up about what happened at junior prom. Tyler had told Sylv he wanted to dance with her. She had run from him but he had followed her, warning her to stay away from Autumn. Sylv believes Tyler intends to get revenge by destroying everything that the people who have hurt him hold dear.

Autumn watches as Tyler calls for Matt to come out. He tells the boy he has a score to settle with Matt and with Autumn. Autumn calls out to her brother again. She walks toward him and he points the gun at her. Autumn remembers how Ty had told her and their father that he thought he could return to OHS and put things right. Autumn had felt her father was being hypocritical when he told Tyler that men confronted problems head on while boys ran from them.

Tyler shoots over Autumn's head, bringing her back to the present. Tyler threatens that he will shoot Matt if Autumn does not so as he asks. Autumn is sickened when she reaches the stage and sees all of the dead and wounded. She asks him why he is acting as he is and notices his eyes no longer hold any humanity in them. He pulls her to him and asks why she did not listen to him and stay at home. He points the gun at her leg and Autumn begs him not to shoot. She tells him that she loves him. Tyler smiles, like he once did. Autumn feels broken. Matt sends another text to Claire begging her to come and get him.

Chapter 12 at 10:25 a.m. the officer pulls the car in which Claire and Chris are riding over to the side of the road and tells them what will happen when they get there. She tells them she knows they are worried about their friends, but they have to stay out of the officers' way. She tells them it is too dangerous when Chris suggests they could help.



As Tyler grabs Autumn, Sylv notices two teachers and some students get to their feet. Sylv remembers how she had fallen in love with Autumn when she had seen the look on Autumn's face when they had gone to a performance of the Nutcracker with Autumn's mother. Six weeks later, Autumn's mother was killed when she dozed off on the way to pick Autumn up from ballet class. After Autumn's mother died, Autumn had learned to hide the things she loved, both Sylv and dance, from others.

Tomas discovers it is harder to cut the chains than he had imagined. They cut the chains on two of the doors. Tomas struggles with the second chain. Fareed offers to take over but Tomas believes cutting the chains off those doors are representative of his contribution to help Sylvia and the others.

Autumn tells Tyler again that she loves him. Even though Tyler claims that he lost everything, Autumn tells him that he never lost her. She wishes she had understood how Tyler felt so lost. She might not have gotten so lost in dance and Sylv. Tyler admits to her that he wanted to be her excuse to stay home. He feels as if he had no one. Everyone had left him including Claire and Autumn. She confronts him about sicking their father on her. He shoots the stage next to her in his frustration. His next comment is that everything is Autumn's fault. In her blog, Mei defends OHS as being a good school and not being to blame for what is happening. Someone comments immediately responds by asking Mei if anything could have been done to prevent the shooting and if she ever felt unsafe there.

Analysis

The atmosphere in the auditorium becomes more tense as Autumn faces off against her brother. She is looking for any sign that he is still the person who had once encouraged her to continue to dance and had protected her against her father. She sees in his face only a lack of humanity. When she tells him that she loves him she gets a glimpse of the Tyler she had once known but the look also breaks her heart because she cannot believe her brother would have hurt people the way he is doing. Autumn tries to talk Tyler down but he only becomes more angry when he ultimately accuses Autumn as being the source of all of his problems.

It is understandable why Tyler might believe that Autumn was responsible for his problems. Their mother died in a car wreck on the way to pick Autumn up from a ballet class. Tyler had gone on his rampage against Sylv because he saw that Autumn was spending more time with Sylv, a relationship of which Tyler did not approve. It was while he was trying to run Sylv off that Claire caught him trying to kiss Sylv. Because of this, Claire broke up with him.

One question this section raises is the question of Tyler's intent when he let their father know that Autumn was still dancing. Was he trying to hurt Autumn or did he hope the beating would make Autumn stay home for school and not be involved in the shooting? The reader has to wonder if Tyler was trying to help Autumn in his own twisted way by giving her a reason to stay home.



Meanwhile, Claire and Chris begin to learn about the protocol associated with school shootings. Although they want to help, they are told that they will not be allowed to help because it would put them in danger. SWAT teams and helicopters are called in. Because Opportunity is such a small town, police officers have to be called in from surrounding cities to help.

Even while she endures the shooting, Sylv searches for reasons why Tyler is acting as he is. She remembers the stories that her grandfather had told her about the Spanish tales of witches and spells. In that tradition Sylv realizes that it would be believed that Tyler was possessed. “Grief would’ve let the darkness in, and that darkness would consume him. It has, and now it’s destroying us all” (133).

Like Claire in earlier sections, Autumn begins to look back on things her brother said and wonders if she should have picked up on what he was thinking about. She remembers that he commented to his father that he believed he could return to OHS and “put things right” (135). Although Autumn had thought at that time Tyler had intended to mend his relationships with Tomas and Claire, he had probably been intending to get his revenge on the students whom he had believed had wronged him.

Throughout the incident, there are a variety of students who show courage. Tomas and Fareed show courage when they work to get students out instead of running and protecting themselves. The students and teachers who stood up to Tyler show courage. Autumn shows courage when she stands up to face her brother. Sylv realizes that even with the fear in the room there is courage there as well. “I thought the walls kept courage out, but maybe they are actually holding it in. We’re not just fighting for survival — we’re fighting for hope and a thousand tomorrows” (142). The author includes a sentence in this section that includes the literary technique of personification. “My words push against the wall Ty has erected around himself” (146). In this quote it is Autumn’s words that are personified as they push against an imaginary wall.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Tyler really intended Autumn to stay at home the first day of school?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it so important for Tomas to be the one to cut the chains on the doors to the auditorium? What did this act symbolize for him?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Tyler’s words to Autumn and Tomas that he wanted to go back to OHS in order to put things right.

Vocabulary

confirmation, chasm, scenario, debrief, perimeter, methodically, retrospect, devoid, protocol



Chapters 13 - 15

Summary

In Chapter 13, at 10:27 a.m. Tomas thinks through the timing, process of actually opening the doors. He cracks the door open and sees Sylvia. Crawling through the door he sees the bodies. Tyler's attention is focused on his sister. He knows while Tyler is focused on Autumn, they can get the other students out. Tomas puts his hand on Sylv's shoulder and she hugs him in surprise and relief. He motions to the door. She helps spread the word that the doors are open. Tomas is glad that as the word spreads there is no rush for the doors. Students move slowly and quietly.

Because she is facing the audience, Autumn can see the students beginning to move toward the doors. She tries to ignore what is happening so she does not alert Tyler to what is happening. Hoping to keep Tyler's attention, Autumn tells him that she knows that their mother's death was her fault but that there was nothing she could do to undo what had happened. As she talks to him, she notices he lowers the gun. She briefly looks at it, considering that she could get it away from him but he seems to read her thoughts and tells her no. Sensing he is beginning to turn back to the audience, Autumn grabs him and forces him to look at her. In his surprise Tyler fires the gun. Tyler raises it and hits Autumn across the face with it. He bends to tell her it is too late to save him.

As Sylv sees the students escaping and realizes that both Tomas and Fared are helping she begins to get the feeling that an escape might be possible, especially after she sees a group of girls she alerted slide out of the auditorium. At the school, Claire notices that the scene outside the school looks like a military operation. The officer lets them out of the car and directs them to the area where they should check in. Jay tweets he is not at school and knows nothing about what is happening. He continues to try to get Kevin to answer him.

In Chapter 14, at 10:28 a.m. as Tomas continues to alert students he notices that Tyler is leaning over Autumn. He now wishes that he had done more after the junior prom than just bash Tyler's head into the lockers. Although Autumn does not show any indication she knows the doors are open, Tomas thinks she is trying to distract Tyler so students can get out. Tomas feels protective of Autumn because his sister likes her. As she distracts Tyler, Tomas thinks that Autumn is looking out for everybody. He continues notifying students that the doors are open. He thinks perhaps this is his purpose in high school.

Meanwhile, Tyler tells Autumn he hates her because all she ever cared about was dance. He forces her to dance for him on the stage in the auditorium. She thinks the students looking at her are looking at her with anger and judgement. Because she does not want to taint any of the dances she learned from her mother or the things she prepared for Juilliard, Autumn begins an impromptu dance based on the feelings and



emotions she knows are in the room. It is when Autumn thinks about Sylv and looks for her in the auditorium that Tyler knocks her off her feet.

Sylv noticed the boy who had been talking on the phone seems particularly shocked. Just as if she was giving her mother a task, she tells the boy, named Steve, to help Asha out as he goes. She promises him that he will find his sister outside. Claire notices more and more family and friends are gathering at the school. Deputy Lee asks Claire and Chris what they remember before they left the school. When the officer asks Claire if she has spoken to anyone, Claire realizes she could borrow a phone and try to call Matt. Claire's stomach drops when the officer asks if she knew Tyler Browne. Jay continues to be questioned about the shooting even though he has already told his readers he is not at the school.

In Chapter 15, at 10:30 a.m. Tomas alerts Jennifer, the captain of the cheer squad that the doors are open. At first she says nothing to him. He is surprised and pleased when she returns to thank him. Sylv notices even some of the injured students are being helped out of the auditorium. She wonders when the situation will be over, what it will take to stop Tyler. Even though she wants to run to safety with the others, Sylv knows she has come to a point in her life where she cannot hide any longer. She feels she has to keep Tyler from taking Autumn away from her again.

As Tyler continues to face Autumn, he tells her that he was badly hurt when he found out about her and Sylvia. Autumn argues that she and Sylv are not an accident. That Sylv makes her feel safe, like Tyler once did. She tells Tyler again that she loves him as well. He tells her that her words are too little too late, and then turns to the crowd.

Claire is told that the police are trying to get an idea why Tyler is shooting his friends and school mates. Although she does not want to, Claire tells the officer she had once dated Tyler. She explains that his mother's death changed Tyler. Claire wishes that she could tell the officer why Tyler had changed and why he was acting as he was. The conversation is interrupted by more gunshots. She admits to the officer that Tyler had never like assemblies because he thought the auditorium was a prison. Even though Claire describes to the officer the Tyler she dated, she tells him that she cannot explain why he would hurt anyone. Before he is alerted by his radio, Claire tells the deputy her brother is still inside. He hurries away after he tells them to stay off to the side but Claire and Chris run after him.

Matt sends Claire a message telling her that he hurts. He wants to talk to her and assumes she does not have her phone.

Analysis

Just more than 20 minutes after Tyler appeared in the auditorium and shot the principal, Tomas, Sylv and Fareed begin helping students get out of the auditorium. With students escaping the auditorium, Sylv is refreshed by the hope that what is happening may not turn out all bad, that some students might be saved. Meanwhile, Tomas believes his



actions in helping the students out of the auditorium might actually be the reason for his being in high school at that particular time.

In the midst of the tragedy, the students on which the narration focuses are interested in being of some help to their other students. They show great bravery in their lack of concern for themselves as they try to save, or at least help, others. Even after Claire and Chris have been told twice that there is nothing they can do to help at the scene of the shooting, they run after the deputy to try to find someplace they can be of assistance. Even though she wants to run and save herself, Sylv continues to help her brother get the students out of the auditorium. "And for the first time, I believe I can do something. I can change this. I've been so afraid I was losing" (166).

Autumn shows bravery as she takes the brunt of Tyler's anger while allowing students to get out of the auditorium. She is able to compose herself enough that she follows his demands and ignores the students as they file out of the auditorium. In this way she is able to distract Tyler from discovering the students are leaving.

Because Tomas and Sylv are of Spanish descent, the two use Spanish phrases often. For instance when Sylv sees that the girls she alerted are actually able to make it out of the auditorium, she thinks to herself "Madre de Dios" which translates as Mother of God, a statement that indicates how shocked, and pleased, Sylv is that the plan to get the students out the auditorium is actually working (155).

Sylv also makes a valid point about what is happening that day when she thinks about what will happen once they are all out of the auditorium and Tyler had been stopped. "Tyler will forever haunt us, but he won't be able to harm us anymore" (161). Sylv knows that even after the initial threat is gone, the students who experienced it will be scarred for life by what they have seen and heard. The emotional and mental damage of trauma will be far reaching.

Notice the continued use of literary techniques in the writing. The quote "The open doors give us hope, like a gulp of fresh water after a day's drought" (166) is a simile comparing to feelings hope brings to a drink of water to a thirsty person. A simile is also used in describing how the people of Opportunity learned that there was trouble at the school. "Opportunity gossip is just as effective as any alarm system" (167). Because the town is so small the word about the trouble spread quickly by word of mouth, no messaging system needed. An oxymoron is used to describe how the students in the auditorium felt during the shooting. "This is who we are now — terrified and unafraid" (174). Describing the students as being both terrified and unafraid is contradictory.

Note also in this section that Claire tells the police that Tyler did not attend assemblies as well as the reason he gave. "He used to skip assembly because he thought the auditorium was a prison" Claire tells the officer who questions Claire about her relationship with Tyler. This comment may indicate that Tyler had been thinking about the possibilities the auditorium held as a place to carry out his rampage for some time (179).



Discussion Question 1

How does the author illustrate through words and phrases the hope the students are feeling as they see students actually escaping the auditorium?

Discussion Question 2

How might Tyler's comment that the auditorium was like a prison indicate that he had been thinking previously about the auditorium and its limitations?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Autumn's attempt to come up with a dance to perform for Tyler on the fly. Why does she not want to perform a dance she had already prepared? How is she able to improvise?

Vocabulary

obscures, defiantly, cordoned, imposing, impromptu, tainted, brazen, infallible, vantage, premises, euphoria, monologue, reverie, audible, triage, emanates



Chapters 16 - 18

Summary

In Chapter 16, at 10:32 a.m., Tomas reports that Tyler laughs, says no and then shoots a bullet over his head when he sees the students are escaping. Tyler then fires into the group remaining until his gun is empty. Tomas thinks perhaps they have caused more death by trying to free the students. He sees Sylv trying to make a move toward Autumn, who is in the process of crawling off the stage, but Fareed grabs him, keeping him from moving forward. He tells Tomas that Sylv is trying to distract Tyler to give them a chance to get out. When a student right next to them gets shot, Tomas knows Fareed is right.

Outside, Claire thinks she hears her father calling for her, but cannot see him in the crowd. As they take in what is happening, Chris tells her that he is terrified to lose her. At that moment, students begin streaming out of the school. As Amber crawls away from Tyler, she expects him to shoot her at any moment. She is trying to get to Sylv before Tyler sees her. Once she has made her way to the first row of seats, she sees Matt. He is shaking. He smiles at her when he sees her. She takes his hand, which holds a phone, and promises to protect him. There is silence and Autumn looks up to see Tyler putting another cartridge of bullets into his gun. In that moment, Autumn sees that Sylv is still walking toward Tyler.

Sylv tells Tyler that she knows about grief because he took everything from her. She tells him she is sorry for his loss and that if he wants revenge, he should take it out on her. Tyler shoots someone as they try to make a run for the door. He tells Sylv he is alone and then fires the gun all around her. She runs. Tomas' grabs her and pulls her outside the auditorium. Outside the auditorium Sylv and Tomas embrace. She begins running and drags both Tomas and Fareed with her, running for the stairs to the classrooms.

In Chapter 17, Claire estimates about a hundred students have filed out of the school. Claire sees Mr. Browne standing alone. She runs for him but the police get there first. Chris wraps his arms around Claire as she yells at Mr. Browne that he ruined Tyler. When she asks Chris if he thinks it would have made a difference if she had stayed with Tyler, he responds he does not think there is anything that could have been done to stop what is happening. Sylv and the others crouch on the stairs to watch Tyler, who has left the auditorium. Sylv thinks that Tyler blames her for losing his sister. She thinks he will come after her as long as he thinks she is in the building. Fareed suggests they go out onto the roof.

Tomas thinks it is foolish to go to the second floor but believes it is the best choice they have. He tells Sylv that what is happening has nothing to do with her but has a feeling that it has to deal with her, him, Autumn, and Tyler. When Tomas asks Sylv if she ever saw Tyler again after the junior prom, she looks away. He remembers that evening



when she came home late that she threw up, and then stayed in bed for several days. It is at this point that he suddenly realizes what happened.

After Tyler leaves the auditorium, Autumn listens as students begin fighting about whether or not they should barricade the doors. As the students begin to raise up from where they are hiding, Autumn believes they look at her with anger and fear. She helps Matt sit up. She looks at the red that is seeping through his shirt. She gets the first aid kit to help Matt as best she can. As she works, she advises the students who can run to do so. CJ speaks up hatefully asking Autumn who gave her permission to be in charge. CJ says that because Autumn is Tyler's brother, she does not trust her. Matt sends a message to his sister, Tracy, telling her that seeing her on his birthday was the best present he ever got.

In Chapter 18, at 10:37 a.m. Tomas listens as Fareed proposes a plan to find an unlocked classroom into which they can barricade themselves. Autumn wonders what is being said in the phones calls going on around her. Matt touches his shirt and seems surprised when his hand comes back bloodstained. Autumn suggests that she call his family. He does not answer the phone when it rings, showing a strange number. By the time Autumn tells him it is safe to answer it has stopped ringing but starts again. He answers. It is Claire calling Matt. Chris had found her a phone somewhere. Matt tells Claire that Tyler had left the auditorium. Claire notices that Matt's voice is growing softer. Another voice, Autumn's cuts in telling Claire that she does not think that Tyler will come back. One of the officers asks to speak to Matt. Claire hands over the phone even though she does not want to. Sylv remembers Autumn's birthday, the first day that Sylv had kissed Autumn.

Analysis

Claire gets to talk to Matt in this section, but she does not realize that her brother has been shot. Their conversation is one of the benefits brought about by the students being allowed to have cell phones with them. Because Matt has his phone, he is also able to let officers know that Tyler has left the auditorium. Significant in this section is Autumn's act of caring for Matt. She acts as a substitute sister for him while he acts as a substitute brother for her. The two are connected loosely because Autumn's brother dated Matt's sister though the two never met. In the absence of Claire, Autumn is able to comfort Matt during his last minutes.

During the time in the auditorium, Autumn has gotten impressions that some students support her while others feel she is somehow dangerous just because she is related to Tyler. CJ is one student who make no qualms about her opinion about Autumn. When Autumn speaks up telling the students in the auditorium that they should escape if they could, CJ stands up to Autumn and indicates she should not be telling other people what to do since it is her brother who has been shooting people. One student does speak up in Autumn's behalf.



Upstairs, Tomas, Fareed and Sylvia run into another problem with their school's safety procedures. It is required of teachers to lock the doors to their classrooms when they are not inside. This habit of locking doors puts the students at a disadvantage if they are looking for a place to take cover in the course of a school shooting like this one. Because they cannot get into the classrooms the students have to stay in the hallways where they are exposed and have no place to hide.

When Tyler turns to face the crowd, it is Sylv who takes Autumn's place as a distraction for Tyler. Since the beginning of the novel, the reader has been aware that Sylv is afraid of Tyler but the reason for her fear has not really been discussed yet. It is known that he assaulted her and tried to kiss her at junior prom. He had earlier threatened her to stop the relationship with Autumn because he did not approve of it. In this section Sylv stands up to Tyler and tells him that she does know what it is like to lose everything. He accuses her of taking everything from her, a comment that makes the reader think that perhaps Tyler raped Sylv.

Discussion Question 1

Do you agree with the anonymous person who posts on CJ's Twitter feed that if she kills Tyler it will make her just as bad as he? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think that Tyler did to Sylv? Why do you think this? Give reasons for your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Are the students right to judge Autumn based on the actions of her brother?

Vocabulary

ricochet, perforates, rendering, hoist, superlatives, discards, putrid, ventures



Chapters 19 - 21

Summary

In Chapter 19 at 10:39 a.m. Autumn notices that Matt's voice is fading as she tries to keep him talking. He talks about wishing that he could see snow. When he tells Autumn that Claire worries too much, especially since Tracy left, Autumn realizes perhaps they all worry about their siblings too much. She tells Matt that she wishes Tyler had talked to her and let her help him. After a while, Matt tells Autumn not to blame herself for what Tyler did. As they try to find an open classroom, Tomas thinks how stupid it is to have teachers lock their classroom doors. They finally find a class room with a lock they can break. While trying to open the window Sylv asks if she could have stopped Tyler if she could have gotten him arrested. Tomas asks his sister again what Tyler did to her.

Claire watches as the SWAT teams prepare to enter the school. She prays Matt will be able to walk out. She hears screams over the phone in front of her and Autumn's voice telling Matt the SWAT teams are there. Claire leans back in relief. She kisses Chris and asks him not to leave her. Sylv does not want to tell her brother that Tyler raped her for the same reason she does not want her Mama to know. She wants both of them to remember her as being happy. For this reason, she denies Tyler did anything to her.

Mei continues her blog from the school commenting on how many people there are there. She does not see her father. Mei comments that no one has any answers for what has happened. She has disabled the comment section.

In Chapter 20, after the SWAT team has entered the auditorium, Autumn notices that Matt's lips are turning blue. After they give the signal that all is clear, Autumn calls for help. A member of the SWAT team examines Matt. He avoids Autumn's question at first if he can help Matt. When Autumn pushes, he tells her there is nothing he can do. They have to get Autumn out. Although the officer will not let her stay with Matt, Autumn decides she has to try to stay behind and look for Sylv.

Claire is listening on the phone when the SWAT officer tells Autumn there is nothing he can do. She sits down in shock because she did not know that Matt was injured. He tells her that Tyler did not shoot him on purpose. Sylv is helped by Fareed and Tomas onto the roof. They hear more gunshots. Tomas hugs Sylv telling her that what is happening is not her fault. As they stand with Sylv outside the window and Tomas still inside he asks her to tell their grandfather he had always wanted to study archaeology and focus on their own heritage. Tomas tells Sylv to tell their mother that he was happy. He lets go of Sylv's hands and closes the window between them.

CJ notes in her Twitter feed that the auditorium is almost empty. she hopes to wake and discover it was all a dream.



In Chapter 21 even though Claire hopes for sounds on the other end of the phone, she knows Matt is gone. She begins pacing and feels alone. When she sees Deputy Lee, she asks again how she can help. He finally relents and allows her to talk to the students who are afraid. Autumn walks at the back of a group of students being escorted out of the school. She sneaks off when she gets a chance. Believing her brother has gone to the second floor, Autumn heads for the stairs. Two gunshots ring out from the upstairs hallway.

Tomas waits in the hallway for Tyler to notice him. They trade sarcastic remarks and Tyler fires the gun at the wall beside Tomas. Tomas tells Tyler that he will kill Tomas on Tomas's terms. Tyler points the gun at Tomas's head and tells him that without Tomas there, he will be able to more easily hurt Sylv. Tomas disagrees as he tells Tyler that even without him there, Sylv will still have friends who will protect her and love her. Even though Tomas knew that it was not worth it to tell Tyler what he thought of him, Tyler believes his death will be worth giving his sister a chance to escape.

When Sylv realizes what has happened, she tries to open the window from the outside. Fareed stops her but is distracted when a man in a helicopter shouts at them. When he steps away Sylv manages to get the window open and go back inside. She hears gunshots in the hallway and Tyler's voice saying that he has won. In the electronic messages at the end of this section, people send condolences in response to Jay's post that there are no words to explain that day.

Analysis

The action begins to climax as Tomas leaves his sister to face off against Tyler in the hallway, knowing that it will give Sylv time to get away. Tomas had known he was no match for Tyler and his gun but went anyway because he believed he was doing what he needed to in order to protect his sister. This willingness to die for a sibling shows the ultimate in love. Tomas also leaves his sister with messages for his grandfather and his mother. He hoped they would know that he understood what he was doing and that he died fulfilling what he thought was his purpose.

Meanwhile, Autumn sits with Matt as he bleeds from his gunshot wound. It can be assumed that Matt was hit by a stray bullet because he tells his sister that Tyler did not shoot him on purpose. Whether the shooting was accidental or intentional, it makes no difference to Claire when she realizes that her ex-boyfriend shot her brother. At the beginning of the events when Claire had first realized that Tyler's car was outside the school, she had believed Tyler would protect Matt. Now she learns that reality is exactly opposite. Tyler shot Matt and caused his death.

As Tomas, Fareed and Sylv try to find an unlocked classroom in which they can hide from Tyler, Tomas comments on a school policy that he believes is absurd: "Inane school policy. Why lock all the classroom doors between periods" (215). Although the rule was put into place to keep things from being stolen while teachers were not in their



rooms, the rule puts students running from danger at a disadvantage. Because they are not able to get into a classroom easily, they are exposed to danger in the hallway.

As Matt and Autumn talk while they wait in the auditorium for the SWAT team to come, Matt admits to Autumn that he believes that: “When Tracy left, she (Claire) forgot how to have fun. She worries too much” (214-15). Autumn wonders if Matt’s observation about Claire and Tracy is true of all siblings, that they all worry about each other too much. She tells Matt about Tyler without even thinking about it. She wishes he had let her help him the way that he had often helped and protected her.

Significant in this section are Matt’s words to Autumn that she should not blame herself for what her brother chose to do. This is significant because Autumn has felt all through the morning that the other students did blame her for what was happening just because she is related to Tyler. Sylv poses the question to Tomas if she could have stopped Tyler if she had gotten him arrested. Tomas asks again what Tyler did to Sylv but she will not tell him. He also does not answer her question about whether or not it would have changed anything if she had gotten Tyler arrested.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean for Autumn to realize that perhaps they all worried too much about their siblings? How is this true in her case? Did she perhaps not worry enough about Tyler?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way Claire’s opinion of Tyler has changed since she learns that Tyler shot her brother, even if the shooting was accidental.

Discussion Question 3

Is what Tomas is doing wise? Would it have been better for him to have gone out on the roof with Fareed and Sylv?

Vocabulary

mesmerized, inane, barricades, inaudible, tangible, inseparable, ransacking, distorting, imperceptibly, futile, rampage, immaculate, distorts



Chapters 22 - 24

Summary

In Chapter 22 at 10:46 a.m. Sylv remembered how Tomas liked to be outside running or riding horses when it stormed. When his grandfather worried, Tomas told him that nothing could catch him, not even death. When Sylv hears a final bang she thinks to herself that it was only thunder that had come to make Tomas fly. Claire is there when Steve Johnson, CJ's brother tells the officers his name. He adds that he has not seen his little sister. She continues to hear stories from students and teachers as they file through the line. She comments that she never realized "that courage was so terrifying" (246-247). Autumn finally spots Tyler in the upstairs hallway. He is telling someone that they will not get in his way again. When she gets close enough to see what is happening, she sees that Tomas is dead at Tyler's feet.

Mei continues her blog, telling what she is seeing and hearing on the school grounds. Included in her descriptions are how they are helping one another. She notes how frantic Mrs. Morales was when she first was brought to the scene. All it took was for someone to bring her tea to help calm her. She describes how her father cared about common humanity. She hoped he found humanity inside the building. She knows it exists outside the building.

In Chapter 23 at 10:47 a.m. Tyler notices Autumn. She tells him the SWAT teams are downstairs and asks him to give up. As she talks to Tyler she hears boots on the stairs. Claire hears more and more names of students believed to be dead. She describes the combined sadness when news is heard that a student is dead and the joy when another survivor makes his way out of the school. The students and teachers support each other as the good and bad news comes. Sylv hears Autumn's voice. Fareed has come back inside and sits next to Sylv with his arm around her. They listen as Autumn tries to reason with Tyler.

Jay sends a tweet indicating that he does not know what to do.

In Chapter 24 at 10:48 a.m. Sylv remembered how her mother had told her, during one of her more lucid days, had told her that she wished she could stay with Sylv forever and watch her grow up into a woman. Sylv had promised her mother that she would take care of her brothers. With this memory in mind, she asked Fareed how she should explain to her mother that Tomas was dead. Claire admits that as each group of surviving students is escorted out by the SWAT teams, she waits for Matt to walk out as well. Claire hears CJ's voice calling out to her. When they are reunited, CJ admits to Claire that she wished she had been able to stop Tyler. She asks Claire why they were not able to stop it. CJ is at first happy when she learns her brother is alive and then cries as she tells Claire that she watched Steve's friends die.



Autumn continues to talk to Tyler. When she tells him all she wanted was for them to be a family he agrees that was all he wanted as well. He puts the gun in the waistband of his pants. Autumn has sat down on the floor. He sits in front of her. She tells him that she does not think he will kill her since they are family. As they sit, Tyler asks Autumn who she thinks will mourn her. Feeling numb, Autumn stands. He smirks and then smiles with delight as he shoots her. The last thing she remembers is Tyler turning the gun on himself.

In CJ's tweets, she states even though it does not seem right for it to be so bright at the high school, she and her family are lucky because her brother is alive.

Analysis

Mei's blog and Claire's sections of narration both highlight the positives brought out by the school shooting. Both these girls see the way the members of their community is bonding together in order to help and support each other. Mei describes the way the people step up to help Tomas' and Sylv's mother who is frantic because of her dementia as well as the situation.

Contrasting with the support to others being shown outside the building, Autumn is once again facing off against Tyler. He tells her that he hates her because of all of the time and energy that she has devoted to dancing. He feels as if the two of them are hated by the world and that they should bond together. Autumn's refusal to agree with him angers him.

When Tyler does finally turn the gun against his sister he does so in the way that will be most painful to her. He has already halfway insinuated that he does not plan to shoot her since she is a family member. Tyler winds up hurting Autumn in a way that is worse than death when he does shoot her. His smile, the mischievous smile that was always full of delight that he gives her before he pulls the trigger is a symbol of just how cold Tyler has become.

Meanwhile, Claire makes an astute observation about courage. It is often said that courage is not the absence of fear. Claire realizes this is true as she listens to the stories told by the students who were trapped in the auditorium with Tyler. "I never realized that courage was so terrifying" (246-247) Claire indicates of her experience in helping the students.

As Claire works with the students, the author makes a comment that is very poetic: "There are no words in that fleeting moment between hope and the knowledge. There is no way to express how a heart can burst and break at the same time, how the sun can cut through the darkness but will cast shadows everywhere" (252). In this quote, the author addresses the way in which both happiness and grief can exist at the same time. How knowledge of a truth can be like the sun coming through the clouds. Claire notes that even sunshine has its downfalls because it allows shadows to be cast.



It is protocol for those outside the law enforcement not to know the identities of the dead before they are verified. Claire notes that even though she and Chris are not supposed to be listening to the names of the suspected dead being given to the officers, they cannot help but hear what is being said. Claire explains that the reason this information is not made public immediately is because “The report is part of the crime scene, and as long as the bodies haven’t been retrieved and verified, their deaths are not official” (251).

As Autumn sits with her brother in the hallway, she wonders how long it has been since Tyler started shooting. “It feels like days, an eternity” (260). Because the author has structured the novel based on the passage of time, the reader knows the entire shooting rampage has taken less than an hour.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Tyler believes he is alone?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Claire’s comment that she did not realize how terrifying courage was so significant?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the final encounter between Autumn and her brother. Do you think that Tyler really hated Autumn?

Vocabulary

prone, pivots, palpable, exodus, verified, void, solidarity, lucid, mundane, impeccable, monotone



Chapters 25 - Epilogue

Summary

In Chapter 25, Sylv screams when she hears gunshots. A moment later three officers barge into the room. When the officers help Sylv and Fareed out of the room Sylv sees her brother. Tyler is also dead. Autumn is crying and is surrounded by officers. She holds Tyler's hand. A girl tells Claire that Claire's boyfriend shot her sister and Claire's brother. After this confirmation that Matt was shot, Claire collapses. A girl runs up to the tent and tells them she overheard on the police radios that Tyler had shot himself. Even though the officers can say nothing to confirm what the girl has said, she comments that the ordeal is over.

Autumn remembers Tyler's smile when he shot her and feels the pain in her leg. Autumn hears Sylv telling the officers that she is Autumn Browne. The officers explain to her that they have to stabilize her leg. She realizes that Tyler's shot has not only destroyed her opportunity to dance, but also has destroyed her inside.

Jay direct messages Kevin telling him that he is waiting until he has a chance to say either goodbye to him. In a second message, Jay indicates he wishes he had known how little time they'd had.

In Chapter 26 at 10:53 a.m. as Sylv looks at Autumn's leg when she is taken out of the school, she does not know how she will ever be able to dance again. Even though she wanted Autumn to stay with her, she did not want it to happen like it has. Claire senses as relief takes over the crowd. She walks away from the crowd toward the woods. When she remembered how Matt had wanted to take his friends on a ghost hunt there she cries.

In her moments of consciousness, Autumn wonders what is left of her life. Sylv's hand holds hers, reminding Autumn that she still has Sylv left. She realizes that if they choose to stop living or to live in fear that Tyler will have accomplished what he hoped for. Instead of giving up, she plans to hold onto Sylv so they can rebuild their dreams together. Before Autumn is loaded into the ambulance, she and Sylv kiss. Snow begins to fall. At home, Mei continues to wait for her father even though other students say he is dead. She remembers how he had the seniors send sky lanterns up with their dreams printed on them. It was because in this way, they could ensure the darkness was never absolute.

In the Epilogue, at 11:59 p.m. Sylv notes that Fareed broke into the school. After he got what he had gone in after, he texted much of the senior class. The news spread among friends, family and neighbors. In the middle of the night, many of the people in the town made their way to the school. The sight reminded Sylv of other days on the beginning of the semester when students would gather at the school at midnight.



She notes that Autumn was having surgery on her knee. It was not known if she would be able to dance again. Sylv believes some fate has tripped Autumn up, keeping her from leaving Opportunity as she had planned. As they light candles and gather in a circle, Claire takes Sylv's hand. Sylv recognizes her as the girl who stood up for her at junior prom. Sylv knows she lost a brother too. Fareed speaks to those gathered. He asks them to always remember that day and then hand out sky lanterns. Fareed reads the names of those killed and someone steps forward to take a sky lantern with that person's name on it. Sylv gives Fareed her acceptance letter to Brown to use as a fuse to light the lanterns.

Sylv has the feeling of being alone with her brother again as she holds his lantern. Once it is warm enough to fly, she lets go.

Analysis

The sky lanterns are mentioned again in this section of the novel. Remember that it was tradition for the seniors to light these lanterns during a bonfire hosted by Mr. Jameson the first day of the spring semester. Had it been a usual first day of the semester the students would have celebrated the bonfire that night. Instead, Fareed breaks into the school to find the lanterns that Mr. Jameson had prepared for them. Instead of writing their dreams on these lanterns, the students write the names of the deceased on them. They symbolically send these lanterns to the heavens. Sylv describes letting go of the lantern on which her brother's name. It is implied Sylv is also letting go of the hurt, blame and hate associated with what has happened.

The ending of the novel is both uplifting because the people of the town did group together more strongly after the tragedy. The students seem to have a new respect for their hometown and a fresh desire to stay there. There is sadness not only because of the lives lost but also because of the possibilities that are lost. As Sylv walks beside Autumn's stretcher, she thinks to herself, "This is where we leave Opportunity behind" (273). The idea of leaving opportunity behind was mentioned once before in the novel when Autumn thought of the coming time when she and Syl would go to a bigger town to fulfill live their lives. In this instance, it appears that Sylv realizes because of the shooting, both of them will have to leave the opportunities they thought they had for their lives behind. Autumn may have to give up her dream of dancing because of the damage done to her leg. Sylv has made the decision that it is more important for her to stay at home to help take care of her mother instead of going to college.

Claire also realizes that the shooting is a point in time where they must re-evaluate. "We need to figure out who we want to be, who we can be, who we are. 'I want to teach,' I blurt out" (268). When they were still dating, Tyler had suggested to Claire that she teach. At the time she had not thought much about that suggestion but as she thinks about her life, she tells Christ that teaching is what she has decided she wants to do with her life.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the encounter between Claire and the black girl whose sister was killed by Tyler.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the imagery of the sky lanterns, both as Mr. Jameson intended them and later as they are used during the ceremony after the shooting.

Discussion Question 3

How does the shooting change things for all of the narrators in this novel?

Vocabulary

revolts, stabilize, brusque, cordoned, converge



Characters

Autumn Browne

Autumn Browne is Tyler's sister and Sylv's girlfriend. She is one of the narrators in the novel. Autumn's life changed drastically when her mother died in a car accident. Autumn's mother was a professional dancer and inspired Autumn to dance as well. Autumn blamed herself for her mother's death because her mother was driving to pick Autumn up from a ballet class when she had her fatal accident.

After the accident, Autumn's father told her that she was not allowed to dance any longer. Despite his threats, Autumn continued to dance and began her application to Juilliard. Whenever her father learned she was dancing again, he would beat Autumn. Autumn remembered her brother as being her protector and the one who encouraged her dreams. She wore a ballet shoe charm on her bracelet that Tyler had given her when he told her that he believed in her and her dream.

Autumn stands up to her brother during his shooting spree. She tries to reason with him and tell him that he is not alone. She learns he is angry with her for being homosexual. He is also angry because she spent more time dancing and with Sylv than she did with him. He was convinced she was going to abandon him.

Autumn is an important character in the novel because she distracts Tyler while students are allowed to escape from the auditorium after Tomas and Fareed get the doors open. Autumn again faces off against her brother just before he kills himself. He ends her dancing aspirations by shooting her in the knee.

Autumn realizes that even though she has lost her brother and her possible future, she still has Sylv. She decides to try to hold onto her girlfriend as long as Sylv will let her.

Claire Morgan

Claire Morgan is one of the narrators of this novel. Because she is one of four varsity track members she is not in attendance at the principal's beginning of the semester speech. Instead she is practicing at the track when the first shots ring out. Even though she is unsure of herself, Claire takes charge of the situation and tells the other members of the track team, as well as the coach, what they need to do in order to get help for the students inside the auditorium.

She sends others to find phones while she and her friend, Chris, go to find the security guard. When they reach the patrol car, they discover the guard is dead and the wires to his radio have been cut. Claire is devastated when she learns the identity of the shooter is probably Ty, her ex-boyfriend. She had broken up with him when she caught him kissing another girl at junior prom. She and Chris realize that Ty might be the shooter



when they see that his car is parked haphazardly in front of the school. There are ammunition boxes inside Ty's car.

Claire wonders if she should have known that Tyler was thinking about harming people. In retrospect, she saw how his comment that he would make sure people remembered him could be seen as a threat. Claire's brother is killed in the shooting. Even though she is upset about what has happened, Claire begs the officers on the scene to let her do something. The lead officer finally agrees to let her talk to the students who have survived the shooting.

During the tragedy of the shooting, Claire realizes that she loves Chris, the boy of whom she has thought as her best friend.

Sylvia "Sylv" Morales

Sylvia is Tomas' twin sister and Autumn's girlfriend. She is one of the narrators in the novel. Sylv fits into the story because Tyler took a dislike to her when he learned she was dating his sister. She was raped by Tyler but kept the rape a secret because she did not want her mother to know and she also did not want to destroy what was left of Autumn's family.

It is because Tomas was trying to find out what Tyler had done to Sylv that he was in the principal's office looking through the files for information about Tomas. Sylv is the one who sees Tomas' shadow outside the auditorium door. She knocks on her side of the door and realizes the person is Tomas when he knocks back in the rhythm of a song their grandfather once sang to them.

All through the shooting, Sylv fingers the acceptance letter that she got to Brown University knowing that it is her ticket out of Opportunity. She cannot decide if she wants to go or not because her mother is so sick. Sylvia is not sure it is right to leave her behind.

When Tomas is killed by Tyler and Autumn is badly injured, Sylv makes her choice. She uses the acceptance letter to Brown as a fuse to light the sky lanterns with the names of the deceased, including her brother's name, on them. This burning of the letter is a sign that Sylv has decided not to go to Brown.

Tyler Browne

Tyler is the Opportunity High School student who locks the entire student body in the auditorium, and then begins shooting them. During his shooting rampage, he kills 39 students, including himself, and injures many more.

After the death of his mother, Tyler had become withdrawn and angry. When he learned his sister was homosexual, Tyler became even angrier. He sets out to make life difficult



for Sylv, the girl his sister is seeing. Tyler not only threatens Sylv and tries to kiss her during the junior prom, he also rapes her.

Tyler's girlfriend, Claire, breaks up with him after she sees him trying to kiss Sylv.

Tyler tells his schoolmates that they never listened to him and did not understand what it was like to have so much loss in their lives. He blamed his decision to bring a gun to school on the loss of his mother and the knowledge he would be losing his sister.

At the end of the rampage, Tyler shoots Autumn in the knee, knowing that it will probably ruin her chances at being able to dance professionally. He then shoots himself saying that he did not want to be alone any more.

Tomas

Tomas is Sylv's twin brother and serves as one of the narrators in the novel. He is a boy who has the reputation of being one of the school's bad boys. He gets in trouble regularly and does not have any really good prospects for his life.

Tomas had never liked Tyler but had thought that he was harmless. The two had gotten into many fights in school. One significant fight was when Tomas bashed Tyler's head into a set of lockers after Tyler scared his sister so badly during the school's junior prom.

Tomas decides that his purpose in life the day of the shooting is not only to keep his sister safe but also to save as many other people as possible. In his determination to make his mark, Tomas is the one who uses the bolt cutters to cut the chains on two of the double doors leading to the auditorium.

Later, after he makes sure his sister is safe, Tomas goes to confront Tyler. He tells Tyler that he may kill him, but that he will kill him on his terms. He believes his life is worth the extra time that it gives Sylvia to escape.

Mr. Jameson

Mr. Jameson is a favorite English teacher at Opportunity. He is also Mei's father. Mr. Jameson tries to provide first aid to the principal when she is first shot by Tyler.

Later, he and three other teachers try to corral Tyler and take the gun away from him. Mr. Jameson also tries to reason with Tyler. When Sylv sees Mr. Jameson, she knows that teacher would listen to Tyler and tried to understand if Tyler had talked to him.

Tyler later shoots Mr. Jameson twice just after he warns his fellow classmates never to get attached to anyone so that they will not get hurt. Mr. Jameson is hit first in the arm and then in the chest.



Later, when the surviving students release the sky lanterns with the names of the deceased on them, they are following a tradition begun by Mr. Jameson. Each spring semester he organized a bonfire during which students released these paper lanterns with their dreams written on them. The students modify the tradition by using it to honor the students who were killed by Tyler.

CJ Johnson

CJ Johnson is a girl whom Claire knows because she is a cadet in the JROTC. CJ is inside the auditorium when the shooting starts. She is the one who takes the key from the boy who shot when he did not move quickly enough for Tyler's tastes. She locks the doors to the auditorium as Tyler had asked and then returned the key to him. During the shooting, CJ sends out tweets on her phone, asking for help.

After Tyler leaves the auditorium, CJ is critical of Autumn when she tries to take charge of the situation. CJ tells Autumn that because she is Tyler's brother, she does not trust that Autumn is not like Tyler.

CJ leads one of the groups of students out of the school after the SWAT teams enter the school. She goes directly to Claire, who is also a member of JROTC. CJ admits she wished she had a drill gun with her in the auditorium so she could have knocked Tyler out. She regrets not having been able to do more to stop what happened.

Mei Jameson

Mei is the daughter of Mr. Jameson. She has already graduated from Opportunity High School and has just returned back home from a trip to visit her grandfather, whom she describes as living on the other side of the world.

Mei blog about the shooting beginning when she first realizes what is happening, as she tries to determine what is happening and later when she hears her father is dead, even though she does not believe yet what she has heard.

She is the one who shares why her father had the senior students send up sky lanterns with their dreams written on them. She indicates it was because by doing so he believed that the darkness would never completely take over.

Chris

Chris is Claire's running partner and her best friend. He is secretly in love with Claire and believed that Tyler was bad for her.

Chris is the one who connects the dots and realizes that Tyler is the one responsible for the school shooting based on the way his car is parked and the ammunition boxes in his



car. He convinces Claire that Tyler is not the boy that she thought he was and that he was capable of harming his schoolmates.

After Claire realizes Tyler might have given her a hint of his intentions when he swore people would never forget him, it is Chris who convinces her that she is not responsible for what Tyler is doing.

Matt Morgan

Matt Morgan is Claire's brother. He walks on crutches because his legs are weak from lupus. Matt is wounded by a shot from Tyler's gun that proves fatal because he loses so much blood. He is one of the people who sends out texts to both Claire and his older sister, Tracy.

When Autumn sees that Matt has been shot, she sits with him until the SWAT team member tells her there is nothing they can do for her and that she must leave. Matt tells Autumn that she should not feel guilty about what her brother had done.

Fareed Al-Sahar

Fareed Al-Sahar is Tomas' friend and the only Afghan student at Opportunity High School. He, like Tomas, is also a trouble maker. Fareed is also on detention at the same time as Tomas, so he is not at the assembly either.

It is Fareed who takes charge of the situation once he and Tomas realize what is happening. Fareed calls 911 and reports the shooting. He is the one who suggests to Tomas that they need to get the main doors of the school unlocked as well as the doors to the auditorium so that students can escape from the building.

Steve Jackson

Steve is CJ's brother. He is a junior. He is the student who had argued on the phone with his mom, loudly, while Tyler was holding the students captive in the auditorium. Later, when Sylv tells Steve that the doors to the auditorium are open, he seems too shell shocked to understand what she is saying. In order to try to focus him, she puts him in charge of making sure that Asha gets out of the auditorium safely.

Coach Lindt

Coach Lindt is the coach of the track team. It is because Lindt wanted his star runners to practice that Claire and Chris were not in the auditorium for the beginning of the semester assembly. Although he was an adult, the coach did not take charge of his students like adults are supposed to do. It was Claire who took charge of the track



members and the coach. When Claire tells the coach what to do, he does so without question.

Jennifer

Jennifer is the captain of the cheer squad at Opportunity High School. Tomas had a crush on her since he saw her the first day. He has the opportunity to tell her the doors of the auditorium are open and point the way out. Tomas is surprised when Jennifer first walks away but then returns to him to thank him. He thinks it is a good sign because it means she will recognize him next time he asks her out on a date.

Principal Trenton

Principal Trenton is the one who speaks during the beginning of the semester assembly. It is because of the predictability of her speech and timing that Tyler is able to trap the students in the auditorium so efficiently. Principal Trenton is the first person whom Tyler kills when he enters the auditorium.

Kevin Rolland

Kevin Rolland is one of the few gay students at Opportunity who is open about his homosexuality. Kevin had once debated with Tyler if homosexual students had a place at the high school or not. Kevin had continued talking and talked louder than Tyler. Students had cheered Kevin because he stood up to Tyler. Tyler shoots Kevin when he discovers that Kevin does not have a drink to offer him.

Joni Browne

Joni Browne is Autumn and Tyler's mother. She was a star dancer who performed world wide. Joni was killed in a car wreck one night on the way to pick Autumn up from a dance practice. Both Autumn's father and brother blame Autumn and dance for her mother's death.

Asha

Asha is the student with whom Autumn connects briefly when Autumn learns that Asha also dances. Asha is later the student whom Sylvia and other students have to hold down to keep her from running to help protect her sister when Tyler threatens to shoot her.



Tracy Morgan

Tracy Morgan is Claire's older sister. Tracy is deployed over seas with the Army. Claire and her sister were always close growing up and Claire finds it difficult to be so far away from Tracy. Tracy is Claire's inspiration when she takes charge of the track students after they hear the first shots at the school.

Autumn and Tyler's Dad

After the death of his wife, Autumn and Tyler's father begins to abuse alcohol. When he learns that Autumn is still dancing, he beats her because he does not approve of dancing.

Deputy Lee

Deputy Lee is the officer who questioned Claire when she and Chris were first brought back to the OHS campus. Although he tells the two at first they can do nothing to help, he relents and allows them to talk to and comfort the students who are afraid.

Jay Eyck

Jay Eyck is a student who skipped school the day of the shooting. He is one of the students who tweets about the shooting trying to find out what is going on and then later trying to get his boyfriend, Kevin, to respond to his texts.

Jim Tomason

Jim Tomason is one of the people who tweets to CJ asking what is happening at the high school. Tomason works with some news source and tells CJ that reporters are wanting to get in touch with her. He seems unconcerned that students are still being shot.

Neil

Neil is the janitor at Opportunity. Although Tomas and Fareed had hoped that Neil would be able to help them get into the auditorium, they discover when they get to his office that he has been killed.



Nyah

Nyah is Asha's younger sister. Tyler shoots Nyah even though she begs for mercy. Because Tyler shot Nyah after he began calling for Autumn, Autumn blames herself for Nyah's death.

Sylvia and Tomas' Abuelo

Sylvia and Tomas' abuelo, their grandfather, is the one who taught Tomas how to pick locks. He is the one who brings Sylvia and Tomas' mother to the school to look for Sylvia and Tomas.

George Johnson

George Johnson is one of CJ's followers on Twitter. He calls the police when he first learns that there is a shooter at the high school. He later messages CJ to tell her that the police are on their way.

Jonah

Jonah is the school's safety officer. It appears that Tyler tricked this officer by pretending to have car trouble in front of the school. Tyler kills Jonah and disables his radio.

Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith is the elderly librarian who is shot when she tries to open the emergency exit doors in the auditorium.

Geraldine

Geraldine is the freshman who tries to run for the doors of the auditorium. Tyler shoots her as she runs for the doors.

Sylvia and Tomas' Mama

Sylvia and Tomas' Mama is suffering from some sort of dementia which has recently gotten worse.



Abby Smith

Abby Smith is one of the people following the school shooting through Twitter. She responds to posts sent by both Jay and CJ.

Geraldine

Geraldine is the freshman who tries to run for the doors of the auditorium. Tyler shoots her as she runs for the doors.



Symbols and Symbolism

Handmade Venetian Mask

This handmade venetian mask charm that Autumn has on her bracelet is a symbol of Autumn's mother, and Autumn's love for her mother. Autumn's mother brought the charm back from a trip to Italy when she once visited that country to dance.

Ballet Shoe Charm

This charm in the shape of a ballet shoe is a symbol of the affection that Tyler once had for his sister. It was a gift and a sign that he supported her dancing even though their father did not.

Paperweight

Tomas is playing with this paperweight when he hears the first shots fired in the auditorium. The paperweight shatters when Tomas drops it. The shattering of the paperweight represents the way the beliefs of the students that they were safe at school were shattered when Tyler began shooting.

Box of Ammunition

This box of ammunition that Chris sees in Tyler's car is a symbol that it is Tyler who is responsible for the shots they hear coming from the school.

Doors to the Auditorium

Tomas wants to be responsible for unlocking the doors to the auditorium in the school. He believes by doing so it will symbolize that he has done something positive in his life to help others.

Matt's Crutches

It is when Autumn sees these red crutches propped next to the chair of the student that Tyler is trying to shoot that she realizes Tyler is going after Matt, Claire's brother. Autumn remembers that Tyler was once very protective of Matt. She knows that if he is willing to hurt even Matt, there is no one whom he will not sacrifice.



Hidden Ballet Shoes

These hidden ballet shoes are a symbol of Autumn's disobedience to her father's demands that she quit dancing. When Tyler shows their father his sister's ballet shoes, he knows that his father will beat her. Perhaps he hopes it will change Autumn's mind about leaving him in order to go to school at Juilliard.

Brown Acceptance Letter

This acceptance letter to Brown University symbolizes Sylv's way out of Opportunity. Because her mother has gotten so sick, however, Sylv is not sure if she will feel right about going so far away to college.

Snow

The snow that falls when the EMS workers bring Autumn out of the high school seems to symbolize the promise of hope.

Sky Lanterns

These sky lanterns are a symbol of hope. They are a way that the teacher, Mr. Jameson, ensured that the darkness in Opportunity was never complete.



Settings

Opportunity High School

It is inside the building and on the grounds of this high school in Opportunity, Alabama that almost all of the action of this novel takes place. It is a specially cordoned area outside the school that friends and family members are allowed to gather to wait for information about their students. On midnight the night of the shooting, the students gather to write the names of the deceased students and teachers on paper sky lanterns and symbolically set them free.

The Auditorium

During the beginning of the semester assembly in the school's auditorium, Tyler locks students into the auditorium and begins a shooting rampage.

The Principal's Office

Tomas and Fareed are in the principal's office at OHS looking through files when they hear the first shots. It is because they had gotten detention that they were not in the auditorium when the shooting began.

The Second Floor Hallway of the School

It is in the second floor hallway of Opportunity High School that Tyler had his final showdown with Tomas and with his sister. After shooting Autumn in the knee, Tyler shoots himself.

The Track

Claire, Chris and two other track students are running on this track under the supervision of their track coach when they hear the first shots fired by Tyler.



Themes and Motifs

Grief and Loneliness

Each of the narrators in this novel has an experience with grief and loneliness. How they choose to deal with their feelings, however, varies greatly though their ways of dealing are generally positive. In contrast, Tyler deals very badly with his grief. Instead of realizing everyone has sadness, Tyler feels betrayed and alone. He takes his anger out on the students whom he believes caused his grief.

Although he does not serve as a narrator, Tyler is the character who most poorly handles the bad things that have happened to him. He has had a good deal of grief in his young life. Just having his mother killed in a car wreck is enough to make Tyler understandably sad as well as being angry with life. Instead of trying to connect with others or get help, Tyler lashes out at others and finally distances himself from anyone who might have helped him.

Tyler seems to focus his anger on Autumn. He had made what appeared to be an attempt to keep her from attending that morning's assembly by telling their father that she was still dancing even though he had forbidden her from doing so. After the beating her father gives her, Tyler suggests to Autumn that she stay home from school that day. She does not follow his suggestion and learns from her brother that he blames her for their mother's death and that he did not really want her to keep dancing because he knew it would eventually take her away from him. Even though he probably already knows he plans to take his own life, Tyler shoots Autumn in the knee, an injury that will jeopardize her dancing career. It is as if he believes Autumn should feel the same pain he believed he was alone in feeling.

Just as her brother suffered, Autumn also suffered. Because their mother had her car wreck on the way to pick Autumn up from ballet practice, Autumn blamed herself for her mother's death. It did not help her self esteem that her father beat her regularly. Although Tyler did not know it, Autumn missed the love and support she believed her brother had taken from her once she had begun dating Sylv.

Sylv is also a character who suffers from grief, but Sylv chooses to suffer in silence. In an attempt to keep Sylv away from his sister, Tyler raped Sylv. Sylv feels as if Tyler took everything from her when he raped her but did not want to report the rape because she was afraid it would destroy so many lives. She did not want to be the one to let Autumn know what sort of person her brother actually was. Sylv also did not want her mother, who was suffering with dementia, to remember her as a rape victim. She wants her mother, and her brother, to remember her as being happy.

Tomas' grief centers on his desire to help his family. He recognizes how scared his sister is of Tyler and wants to find out why. In fact, he arranged to get into trouble the day of the shooting so he could have access to the principal's office during the



assembly. He hoped to be able to find some clue in Tyler's file that would help him understand why his sister was so scared of Tyler.

Courage

The novel highlights the heroic acts performed by both students and teachers in an attempt to keep Tyler from hurting and killing more students. These heroes not only worked to get help to the high school but also put their lives on the line to help free the students. Finally, Tomas is the ultimate hero as he sacrifices himself in an attempt to save his sister.

Tomas is thinking primarily about taking care of his sister from the beginning of the day that Tyler opened fire in the auditorium. He glued shut the drawers of his Spanish teacher's desk so that he could get detention. This detention gave him the opportunity to look through the principal's files. He knew his sister was scared of Tyler but did not understand why. He hoped that by looking at Tyler's file he would be able to get some idea why Tyler scared his sister.

Because Tomas is inside the principal's office during the assembly, he is given the unique ability to help the students quickly. Tyler had thought through his plan in enough detail that he had padlocked not only the doors to the auditorium, but also the exit doors to the school. Tomas is able to access the auditorium doors and cut the chains off these doors, allowing students to leave the auditorium. Meanwhile, Fareed, who was also in detention with Tomas works in tandem to cut the chains securing the exits to the outside of the school. Later, Tomas stands up to Tyler in an attempt to save his sister. Tomas knows he will probably not survive the encounter but believes what he is doing it worth helping his sister.

Fareed is another character who selflessly helps the other students. Fareed becomes serious as soon as he hears the gunshots. He calls 911 and reports what is happening. Even though the dispatcher tells Fareed to run from the shooting Fareed joins Tomas in trying to free as many students as possible. Unlike Tomas, Fareed has no vested interest in any of the students. In fact, Tomas notes that because Fareed is of Afghan descent, he is often questioned when things go wrong in the school simply based on his nationality. For this reason, Fareed has every reason to be resentful of the people he is trying to save. Instead he puts himself in harm's way to help his peers.

Autumn shows courage by confronting her brother two different times in the course of the shooting. At first, Autumn hesitates when she first considers that she might have the power to stop her brother from hurting others. When Tyler shoots Nyah and calls out to Autumn telling her the shooting would not have happened if Autumn had come out when he called, Autumn knows she has to face her brother. Even while trying to convince her brother that he is loved and that he does not have to resort to any more violence, Autumn is competent enough to notice that Sylv, Fareed and Tomas are helping students file out of the auditorium. She complies with Tyler's request for her to dance



and tries to keep his attention focused on her while as many students as possible escape.

Autumn confronts her brother again in the upstairs hallway. She talks to him again, trying to find the brother she always knew. Instead of being able to stop a further tragedy, however, Autumn is shot in the knee by her brother. For her it is a fate worse than death because her dancing career is ruined by the injury to her knee. Autumn is also not able to keep her brother from hurting himself. He ultimately kills himself.

Sylv is brave in her own way. She holds up under the knowledge that Tyler has raped her because she is homosexual and is in love with Tyler's sister. Although she should have reported the rape, Sylv does not do so because she believes she is saving those around her from extra grief. During the shooting Sylv faces Tyler telling him that she knows about loss because Tyler took everything from her.

Claire's bravery is seen in her ability to step forward and organize her fellow track members in finding a way to contact the police about what is happening at her school. Even though she does not think that she is a leader, Claire shows leadership potential in her actions. Even though she is fairly certain her younger brother has been killed by the gunman, Claire still steps forward to do what she can to help her fellow students.

CJ shows courage when she steps forward to help the student that Tyler shot when that student did not move quickly enough to follow Tyler's commands. As erratic as Tyler has been acting, this act of stepping forward could have easily cost CJ her life.

Mr. Jameson is among the teachers who tried to stop Tyler from shooting more students. He is also one of the few who actively tries to talk to Tyler and reason with him. Of all the teachers at OHS, Mr. Jameson was a favorite because he did actually take time to get to know the students. He seemed to truly care about them but in Tyler's mental status, Mr. Jameson cannot even get through to him. Tyler kills Mr. Jameson in an attempt to teach students a lesson he believes he has had to learn, that they should not get too close to anyone because it will only hurt more when they are taken away.

Family Relationships

While the narrators of this novel were all concerned about some aspect of their family relationships before they learned their lives were in danger, their thoughts seem to focus on relatives and mending relationships when they are most scared. Autumn, Tomas, Sylv and Claire all wish they had a chance to talk to and make things right with their loved ones. The author teaches the lesson that in the last moments of life, it will be people and relationships that matter most.

Tomas and Sylv are unique because they are both narrators in the novel. The reader learns about their relationship from both sides. Tomas is worried about his twin sister because she has drifted away from him but he does not understand why. Sylv also feels the void between herself and her brother. A good deal of this separation comes because Sylv has not shared with Tomas that Tyler raped her. It is a secret that divides them



because Tomas senses Sylv is keeping a secret. He wants to protect his sister but does not know from what he needs to protect her.

When Sylv and Tomas connect while they are knocking messages to one another through the auditorium door, they both regret the time they have spent away from one another. They both wish for one more time to hug the other and share their affection. After Tomas is killed, Sylv wishes she were able to do something even as simple as telling her brother he was an idiot again.

Autumn is in the unfortunate position of having her brother be the school shooter. She feels that the other students are distrustful of her simply because of her relation to Tyler. Autumn, however, never guessed that her brother was capable of such violence. Up until recently, he had always protected her and taken care of her. It is only later that she learns that Tyler was so afraid of being left alone in Opportunity that he began his shooting spree. Autumn tries to convince Tyler she never intended to cut him out of her life but is unable to do so.

Claire is another narrator who struggles with worries about her siblings. Her older sister, Tracy, is in the armed forces serving overseas. Claire worries that something might happen to her sister during her deployment. Claire also worries about her younger brother, Matt, who has lupus. She tries to protect him but finds herself in a position where she can do nothing because Matt is in the auditorium with Tyler. Claire is devastated to learn Matt was shot by Tyler. The shot proves fatal.

School Shootings

Even with all the advances in school safety, people with bad intentions still manage to commit violence in schools. The book points out some of the failures in school safety plans along with the benefits of drilling students in what should be done in the case of an active shooter. A person like Tyler who is intent on doing violence can always find a way to do so, but there are always ways for students and teachers to be more prepared.

One of the main failures of the school staff was their act of making themselves so vulnerable by having all students and teachers attend an assembly. With no one but the janitor and school security officer not in the auditorium there was little chance for anyone to see what Tyler was doing and stop him. If there had been just a few teachers scattered around the building they might have seen Tyler chaining doors and preparing for his massacre. It might also have been a good idea to post teachers at the doors of the auditorium, not only to keep students from leaving the assembly without permission, but also to keep someone, like Tyler, from chaining them in. Because the assembly was the same length of time each semester and happened at the same time each semester, Tyler is able to plan his attack easily.

Although the school building at OHS is new and said to be state of the art, the auditorium could have perhaps been designed with more exits to the outside. When talking to police officers, Claire tells them that Tyler was in the habit of skipping



assemblies because “he thought the auditorium was a prison” (179). Tyler proves how easily he is able to convert this auditorium into the prison he always thought it was. With the doors chained, there is no way for students to escape.

One aspect of safety protocol that Tomas curses when he, Sylv and Fareed try to find an open classroom on the second floor of the school is that of having the teachers lock their rooms when they are not in their rooms. Although this rule was probably put in place to keep people from stealing from the rooms, it keeps students running from danger unable to take cover in any of the rooms. Instead, they are forced to remain exposed in the hallways.

Tomas also realizes the shortcomings of the instructions students have always been given in the case of a shooting. “target. It’s the first thing all the instructors of our lockdown drills taught us: get yourself to safety” (49). Although the instructors believe they are doing their best by teaching students to avoid the shooter, they do not take into consideration the human factor. Tomas is unable to reconcile saving only himself when he is leaving others, including his sister, in danger.

Overall, the students who are outside the range of the shooting do know what to do. When they hear the gunshots, Claire and the others know they need to get help. They have been drilled enough to know that they should treat what is happening as a serious situation and get help. Fareed also reacts in the same way when he realizes what he is hearing are gunshots. He immediately calls 911 and requests help. Although many schools do not allow students to have cell phones with them during school hours, this novel points out how a student having a cell phone might be helpful. Students in the auditorium are able to reach out to others for help because they had their phones with them. Because Matt has his phone with him, he is able to convey the information to the police that Tyler had left the auditorium.

Purpose

Sadly, it is during this school shooting that some of the students at Opportunity High School believe they have discovered their purpose in life. The most obvious of these is Tomas who is killed by Tyler. Tomas, who had always been a troublemaker in high school and did not believe he had much of a future, decided his purpose in life was to free as many students as possible and also to keep his twin sister safe. Tomas makes the ultimate sacrifice to do so.

Before the shooting, Claire struggles with unclear visions for her future. She is not sure if she wants to join the military, like she and her sister had always planned to do. Beyond running in track, Claire does not feel as if she has really found a place in high school where she can excel. Tyler, her ex-boyfriend, told her she should teach but she is not sure about that. After the shooting, however, Claire decides perhaps teaching is the career she needs to pursue.



Tomas' realization of his purpose in life is much more in the moment. He had the reputation of being the school's trouble maker. Others did not seem to have a good deal of hope for his future. Tomas did not see much of a future for himself. It is not only when he cuts the chains on the doors to the auditorium but also when he sacrifices himself for his sister that he believes he is fulfilling his purpose in life.

Autumn is a student who desperately wants to get out of Opportunity. She hopes to earn a spot at Julliard where she can study dance. When her brother shoots her in the knee, he destroys this dream, or at least puts it on hold. Instead of focusing on dance, Autumn realizes she must learn to focus on those she loves. She decides she must dedicate herself to Sylv as long as she can.

Sylv is a student intelligent enough to go to school anywhere she wanted. She has received her acceptance letter from Brown University but is not sure if she should go. Her mother has become sick with dementia and Sylv feels she is really needed at home. After Autumn is injured, Sylv decides her calling is to stay home with her family and friends.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of four different first person narrators. Each of these narrators is a student at the school. Two of the students — Sylv and Autumn — are inside the auditorium where Tyler is shooting. Autumn is an important narrator because she is Tyler's sister. She feels as if she should do something to stop what Tyler is doing and at the same time tries to understand why he is acting as he is. Sylv, on the other hand, has been afraid of Tyler ever since he raped her. Because she is Autumn's girlfriend, Sylv did not tell anyone, not even her brother, about the rape. She did not want to destroy her relationship with Autumn or destroy what was left of Autumn's family.

The other two student narrators are not in the auditorium when the shooting starts. Claire is on the track team and is at practice. Although she does not think of herself as a leader, she takes charge of the small group of track students and organizes a search for a phone so they can call for help. Claire is significant as a narrator because she dated Tyler for several years. She does not believe he is capable of killing others.

Tomas, the fourth narrator, is also outside the auditorium when the shooting starts. He is a significant narrator because he is Sylv's twin brother. He actually had arranged to be put in detention that morning so that he could look at Tyler's file. He knew his sister was afraid of Tyler and wanted to find out why. He and friend, Fareed, try to free the students in the auditorium by cutting the chains on the doors. Tomas eventually sacrifices himself in the act of saving his sister.

Language and Meaning

Although there are four different narrators, there is not a good deal of differentiation in the voices of these characters. The speech patterns and patterns of thinking of all of the characters is basically the same. The story is written in a very straightforward manner with no teen slang. The grammar and punctuation follow the accepted rules of English.

One unique feature of Sylv and Tomas' sections of narration is that they sometimes use Spanish phrases. Tomas, for instance, refers to his grandfather as his abuelo, the Spanish word for grandfather. Sylv repeats part of the Hail Mary prayer in Spanish when the shooting first starts. Many of the phrases can be understood using context clues while a basic understanding of Spanish could also help in some cases.

Included at the end of each chapter are a series of electronic messages. These messages include texts, tweets, blogs and direct messages. They are written in the language of those types of messages with hashtags, and abbreviations like "pls" for please, "ur" for your and DM for direct message. For the most part, however, even these electronic messages are written in plain text without an emphasis on abbreviations.

Structure

This story covers a period of just more than fifty minutes on the first day of school for the spring semester at Opportunity High School. Each chapter covers a time period of two-three minutes during the shooting. Each of the four narrators tells what he or she is doing and what is happening around them during those few minutes.

Chapters 1 and 2 give the reader a good deal of the needed background information about the main characters and the school. It is at the end of Chapter 3 that Sylv reports that Tyler has a gun and that he has begun shooting. It is when the students realize that there is a shooting that the story climaxes. There is another climax when Tomas faces off against Tyler in the upstairs hallway of the school. After Tyler shoots Tomas, and then shoots Autumn in the leg, he kills himself. The action falls as the students realize the shooting is over.

The denouement comes in the Epilogue of the novel as students observe the ritual with the sky lanterns that Mr. Jameson had always organized. Instead of writing their dreams on these lanterns, the students write the names of the deceased students on them.



Quotes

Today is two years since the accident. She refuses to share her grief with me — or anyone. Even when she smiles, she isn't the girl she used to be."

-- Sylv (Chapter 1)

Importance: The day of the shooting is the same day that Autumn's mother died in an accident two years before. Sylv worries about Autumn because she knows that her girlfriend has not been the same since her mother's death.

The first few moments after Trenton's speeches are always a mess, with everyone tumbling over each other trying to get out, but this is far more chaotic than usual."

-- Autumn (Chapter 2)

Importance: In her section of narration, Autumn reports noticing that students are not moving out of the auditorium as quickly as they usually. She notes the atmosphere seems more chaotic, with no one moving outside the auditorium, than the minutes after assemblies usually seem.

Tyler's reenrolling and my sister's terrified, but I do not know why. There's absolutely nothing I can do to make her feel better."

-- Tomas (Chapter 3)

Importance: Because his sister is so scared of Tyler, Tomas arranges to be put in detention so he can break into the principal's office in an attempt to find out what Tyler might have done or of what he might be capable. Unfortunately, Tomas is unable to find out what Tyler might have done to make his sister so fearful.

At the end of every aisle, students crowd around the double doors that would normally swing open but today don't budge. Near the stage, someone shouts that the emergency exit is locked too. We're locked in.

-- Sylv (Chapter 3)

Importance: Sylv reports the moments that students realize they have been locked into the auditorium. At first, she thought it might have been a joke but soon realized the students were under attack.

We need to get out,' Far says. 'Warn someone.' Despite his haunted eyes, his voice is clear and steady. It makes him sound older."

-- Fareed (Chapter 4)

Importance: As soon as Fareed realizes what he and Tomas have heard are gunshots, Fareed goes into emergency mode. He realizes that they have the responsibility to tell someone so they can get help. Tomas is surprised how quickly his usually joking friend becomes serious when the situation requires it.



Almost comically, Coach stares at the starting gun in his hand, as if it fired without his noticing. But the sound didn't come from him; it came from inside the school."

-- Claire (Chapter 4)

Importance: Even though the members of the track team know the sound did not come from his starting gun, the coach looks at the gun in surprise when they first hear the gunshots inside the school. This quote demonstrates how completely unexpected the attack at the school was.

We don't know what's happening inside, but if the situation sounds like a shooting and looks like a shooting, treat it as a shooting. We need emergency responders here as soon as possible."

-- Claire (Chapter 4)

Importance: Even though she did not like to lead, Claire steps up and takes charge of the situation. She had thought just a few minutes prior that she wished she could be like her sister who was calm and in control. Claire's willingness to step up and take charge would have made her sister proud.

Things happen in the school, and he gets questioned even when it doesn't concern him at all. I hate it. It's so unfair — but at least it gives me some downtime.

-- Tomas (Chapter 5)

Importance: Because Fareed is from Afghanistan, Tomas notes that he is often blamed when things go wrong, simply because of his nationality. Tomas notes how unfair it is that people have preconceived notions of people of certain nationalities.

But what they failed to tell us is that running away and saving your own skin is only noble when you don't leave anyone behind. If I were in the auditorium, I'd want someone to come for me. I'd want there to be hope."

-- Tomas (Chapter 5)

Importance: Tomas notes that in all of their training for active shooter situations, the students had been told to run away if possible. Although he remembers these instructions, he finds that he cannot do so because he does not feel right about leaving the students trapped in the auditorium alone with no hope.

But yeah, he'd been in another pointless fight with Tomás and Fareed. Don't make my excuses for me, Chris."

-- Claire (Chapter 7)

Importance: Claire tells Chris that Tyler had just been in a fight with Tomas and Fareed when he told her that he would make sure the world remembered him. She asks Chris not to make her excuses for her because she is blaming herself for not realizing that Tyler planned to hurt others.



If he'd gone on a murdering spree, it would've been less scary. It would've been a random act of violence. The simple fact that he carefully picks out his targets, among the hundreds of students in the auditorium, makes him far more of a threat. And it terrifies me."

-- Sylv (Chapter 8)

Importance: Because Tyler appears to be intentionally picking out the people that he shoots, Sylv indicates his premeditation is even more scary than a shooting rampage might have been.

He hasn't cared about anything since junior prom, when everything started to spin out of control."

-- Sylv (Chapter 9)

Importance: Sylv has noticed that she and her twin brother have drifted apart since the night of the school's junior prom. She believes it was at that point that Tomas stopped caring about anything. In reality, Tomas realized how scared Sylv was of Tyler and could not do anything to help. He believed Sylv had withdrawn from him, wanting only to be with Autumn.

Besides, these doors are mine. If I do anything right today, it must be this. To give Sylv and everyone else that one chance in hell."

-- Tomas (Chapter 12)

Importance: Tomas wants to be the one who cuts the chains on the doors because he needs to be able to remember that he was able to do something to help the students inside the auditorium.

Across the room, Fareed catches my eye. Of course he's here with Tomás. He nods in quiet support, and for a moment, I dare to believe everything might be — not okay. It'll never be okay again — but possible."

-- Sylv (Chapter 13)

Importance: When Sylv realizes both Tomas and Fareed are helping students get out of the auditorium, she begins to feel a spark of hope for the first time since the ordeal began.

I don't want him to know Tyler raped me for the same reason I don't want Mamá to know."

-- Sylv (Chapter 19)

Importance: Sylv has not told anyone that Tyler raped her. She is afraid it would tear apart what little family that Autumn had. Additionally, Sylv does not want Tomas or her Mama to know she was raped because she wants them both to remember her as being happy.



If he stayed on this floor or if he'd gone outside, the police would have captured him and the paramedics would be here already and we wouldn't need to sneak out."

-- Autumn (Chapter 21)

Importance: Without having to ask anyone, Autumn realizes that her brother is still on the loose because students are being snuck out of the school and the EMS workers have still not been allowed inside to help those who were injured.

All those deaths. How could it happen here? Why couldn't we stop it?"

-- CJ Johnson (Chapter 24)

Importance: After she escapes from the school, CJ asks the questions that are probably on the minds of everyone there. They are some questions asked after almost every school shooting.

Ty will still win if we give up now. If we live in fear. If we let go of ourselves and each other. So I will hold on to Sylv's hand for as long as I can. Together, we can rebuild our dreams."

-- Autumn (Chapter 26)

Importance: As she is taken out of the school on a stretcher, Autumn realizes if she and the other students give into fear they will be giving Tyler what he wanted. She and Sylv kiss in public for the first time, a symbol of their devotion to one another, and their determination not to let Tyler destroy them.