

# There's Someone Inside Your House



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHANIE PERKINS

An author of Young Adult literature, Stephanie Perkins was born in South Carolina. She grew up in Arizona and later attended college in California and Georgia. She currently resides in the mountains of North Carolina with her husband and a cat, Mr. Tumnus. In addition to being an author and editor, Perkins has also worked as a bookseller and librarian. Perkins's first book, *Anna and the French Kiss*, was published in 2010. Perkins followed her debut novel with *Lola and the Boy Next Door* (2011), *Isla and the Happily Ever After* (2014), *There's Someone Inside Your House* (2017), and *The Woods Are Always Watching* (2021). Speaking about what inspired her to write *There's Someone Inside Your House*, Perkins recalls becoming a horror fan when she saw the film *Scream* in 1996.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*There's Someone Inside Your House* is based on slasher films of the 20th century—Stephanie Perkins cites 1996's *Scream* as a significant influence. The slasher film is a subgenre of horror films that follows a killer as they stalk and murder a group of characters, often youths. As examples, film critics cite the Italian *giallo* films of the 1960s and 1970s, including Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970). These films often featured highly stylized cinematography and themes of sexuality and paranoia. Many critics consider the 1970s and 1980s to be the golden age of the slasher film, beginning with the commercial success of *Halloween* (1978), which follows heroine Laurie Strode as she repeatedly dodges the attacks of a masked murderer who recently escaped from a psychiatric institution. *Halloween* exhibits many conventions considered hallmarks of the genre, such as the “final girl” trope, which refers to the (usually) female protagonist who is the sole survivor of the group of characters stalked by the killer. Conventionally, the film spares the final girl the same gruesome fate as the other characters due to her perceived moral superiority—the final girl, for instance, does not participate in promiscuous sex or recreational drugs. Horror films often reflect contemporary social fears. As such, some view the popular slasher films that arose during the genre's golden era as a conservative backlash against the culture of sexual liberation that took hold in the 1960s and 1970s. The genre saw a revival in the mid-1990s with the release of *Scream* in 1996. Many slashers released during this era, including *Scream*, are self-referential, actively mocking earlier films' formulaic, dated conventions. More recent slasher films further challenge earlier films' arguably

sexist, dated tropes. For instance, Makani Young, the teenage protagonist of *There's Someone Inside Your House* (and its 2021 film adaptation), manages to survive the killer's murderous rampage even though she drinks, has sex, and participates in other supposed vices. Ti West's *X* (2022) features a final girl, Maxine Minx, who is a sexually liberated adult film actress as its final girl.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Stephanie Perkins has written several other novels for young adults, including *Anna and the French Kiss* (2010), *Lola and the Boy Next Door* (2011) and *Isla and the Happily Ever After* (2014). Like *There's Someone Inside Your House*, Perkins's most recent book, *The Woods Are Always Watching* (2021), is a thriller. It tells the story of two best friends who set out on a camping trip in a national forest the summer before college. Their plans take a turn for the worse when they go off-trail and find themselves desperately lost. *There's Someone Inside Your House* is inspired by teen slasher films such as *Scream* (1996). A classic in the genre of young adult horror is Lois Duncan's *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1973). The book centers around a group of friends who accidentally hit and kill a young boy while driving home from a party. Duncan, hailed as the “queen of teen thrillers,” has written many other books for young adults, including *Summer of Fear* (1976) and *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978). More recent works of young adult horror include *The River Has Teeth* by Erica Waters, which follows a girl named Natasha who turns to the supernatural for answers when her sister goes missing, and *All These Bodies* by Kendare Blake, a murder mystery thriller set in the midwestern United States in the 1950s.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** There's Someone Inside Your House
- **When Written:** 2010s
- **Where Written:** North Carolina
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Literature, Horror, Romance
- **Setting:** Osborne, Nebraska
- **Climax:** Makani subdues and kills David Ware outside the corn maze, ending his reign of terror on the town of Osborne.
- **Antagonist:** David Ware (the Osborne Slayer)
- **Point of View:** Third Person—most of the book is told from Makani's perspective, but several chapters are told from the

perspective of David Ware's victims.

## EXTRA CREDIT

**From Fright to Might.** Stephanie Perkins has said that she became a fan of horror after seeing *Scream* in 1996. She had previously been “an extraordinarily frightened child” and found watching the film to be an “empower[ing]” experience. The protagonist of *There's Someone Inside Your House*, Makani Young, undergoes a similar experience, reflecting on an embittered peer's murderous rampage to learn the importance of looking inward to confront one's demons rather than outward.

**A Topical Take.** Horror films often reflect the fears and anxieties of the world out of which they are born, and the 2021 film adaptation of *There's Someone Inside Your House* is no different, touching on subjects that color the modern teenage experience, such as the prevalence of school shootings, call-out culture, and white privilege.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Haley Whitehall, the star of Osborne High's drama department, returns to an empty house and spots the egg-shaped kitchen timer lying inexplicably on the welcome mat at the front door. It's odd, but she takes a nap and tries to ignore it. Later, an unidentified killer gruesomely stabs her to death with a **knife**.

By the next morning, Haley's murder is all anybody can talk about in the small town of Osborne, Nebraska. Makani Young and her friends, fellow seniors Darby and Alex, all participate in the gossip, though Makani feels bad about sensationalizing Haley's murder. Ollie Larsson, the loner boy Makani has feelings for but hasn't talked to since they hooked up over the summer, comes to school with newly colored pink hair. Alex spreads rumors that Ollie killed Haley and used her blood to dye his hair.

When Ollie gets into an altercation with some members of the football team, Makani interferes. Later that night, she and Ollie admit to having feelings for each other and rekindle their romance. Makani's Grandma Young discovers that Makani is texting a boy and tells Makani she has to meet Ollie before she'll allow Makani to date him. Makani came to live with Grandma Young almost a year ago. She used to live in Hawaii, where she was involved in a mysterious incident that caused all her friends, including her best friend, Jasmine, to stop speaking with her.

When Makani brings Ollie home to meet Grandma Young, she's surprised by how well they hit it off. Meanwhile, Darby and Alex are less supportive of the relationship. They eagerly ask Ollie for inside information about Haley's murder, since Ollie's brother and legal guardian, Chris, is a police officer with the Osborne Police Department. But once the mysterious killer

strikes again, killing football star Matt Butler, Alex and Darby suspect that Ollie could be the culprit. Ollie's parents died in a car wreck when he was in middle school. He went through a rough patch of drinking, doing drugs, and even having a sexual relationship with a woman in her 20s. He eventually tried to die by drowning himself in a river. Though Ollie sought therapy and recovered, rumors about his past behavior, his edgy appearance (he dresses all in black and has a lip ring), and his shy, withdrawn personality lead Alex and Darby (and other students) to view him suspiciously.

Makani clashes with her friends over their suspicions about Ollie. She knows that the boy who happily bonded with her grandmother over a mutual love of jigsaw puzzles doesn't have it in him to be a killer. At the same, she agonizes over what her friends—and Ollie—would do if they found out about the questionable past she left behind in Hawaii.

That weekend, the killer strikes for a third time, murdering Rodrigo Morales, the school's resident computer whiz. Rodrigo's murder raises the tension around town. While Haley and Matt had been extremely popular, talented students, Rodrigo was totally normal. Suddenly, it seems like anybody could be the killer's next victim. Principal Stanton cancels school. Everyone is terrified. Rodrigo's murder devastates Alex, who had a crush on him. Makani goes to the Feed 'N' Seed store where Darby and Alex work to try to comfort Alex, but things are still tense between them.

When classes resume later in the week, a clinic in Omaha informs Grandma Young, who sleepwalks, that they can fit her in for a last-minute sleep study. Though she doesn't want to leave Makani alone, she doesn't want to give up the appointment either. She goes to the study but orders Makani to hang out with Darby until she returns from Omaha. Makani lies and brings Ollie home instead. They have sex. Afterward, Makani leaves Ollie upstairs to fetch a glass of water, and suddenly, the killer attacks her. Ollie runs downstairs to intervene. Grandma Young comes home during the attack and lunges at the killer, who stabs her in the abdomen. Realizing that he's outnumbered, the killer flees the scene. However, the killer's hood slipped off during the attack, revealing his identity: it's David Ware, a totally unremarkable Osborne High School student. The paramedics take Grandma Young to the hospital. She'll be okay but needs to stay in the hospital for a long time. Chris, Ollie's brother, invites Makani to stay at the Larsson house while Grandma Young recovers.

By this point, Makani's attack has made the local news. Darby and Alex come to the hospital to apologize for suspecting Ollie. Makani forgives them and finally comes clean to everyone about her traumatic past. She tells a story about a drunken hazing ritual for her old high school's swim team. Things got out of hand, and Makani viciously cut off her ex-best friend Jasmine's hair with a knife. The police charged Makani with assault, though they eventually dropped the charges. Makani's

already miserable, dismissive parents used the stress of the situation as an excuse to further ignore Makani and negotiate a divorce. When news of Makani's assault on Jasmine spread, Makani's classmates turned on her, and she received death threats on the internet. To this day, she feels that she deserves all the hate she received. She thinks she'll always be a bad person for what she did to Jasmine. To Makani's surprise, her friends respond to her story with compassion rather than judgment. They know that she's a good person who just made a mistake.

After Makani shares her story, everyone decides it's only a matter of time before David will strike again. They try to figure out how he's selecting his victims. The friends decide David could be targeting people who have bullied others or who, like Makani, are hiding a dark secret. Ollie supports this theory, revealing that Rodrigo used to harass women on the internet. The friends decide that Zachary Loup could be David's next target. Ollie forwards this information to Chris, and Alex and Darby head to the local memorial parade to warn Zachary.

At the memorial, Zachary harasses fellow classmate Katie Kurtzman after she acts uninterested in him. Makani and Ollie meet up with Darby and Alex. Zachary is stoned and initially unwilling to heed their warning, though he eventually complies. Meanwhile, Caleb Greeley, the privileged and ultra-religious son of Pastor Greeley, has misplaced his plume. Caleb is trumpet section leader for Osborne High's marching band, which is about to perform at the memorial. Not wanting to make the band look bad, he runs inside Greeley's Foods, the family supermarket he works at, to search for his bowtie. But David Ware is waiting for Caleb inside Greeley's. David murders Caleb, mutilating his body and displaying it in a gruesome fashion.

Makani and Ollie leave the parade. They talk, and Ollie confides in Makani about his past. She's touched, and they make their relationship official. They approach Greeley's Foods, where Ollie's car is parked. They find Caleb's body, but not before David makes a narrow escape.

Meanwhile, Katie Kurtzman has returned home from the memorial to look after her younger siblings and work on college applications while her mother is at work. David Ware breaks into the house and murders Katie. After giving statements to the police, Makani and Ollie spend the night at the hospital with Grandma Young. The next morning, the local news reports that David Ware has hitched a ride back to town with an unsuspecting truck driver.

Later, on the eve of Halloween, Chris takes Makani and Ollie back to the Larsson house so the three of them can get some sleep. Then Chris returns to work. Ollie and Makani are supposed to return to the hospital, but Alex calls them having a panic attack. She's supposed to play with the marching band for that day's football game, but she's terrified of David. Makani and Ollie head to the stadium to rescue Alex. They do so, then

they meet up with Darby at the hospital parking lot. The friends revise their theory about David's process for selecting victims. Now, they think David is targeting ambitious students. Rosemarie Holt has just won the barrel race at the state fair, and they suspect David might kill her next. They hop inside Ollie's car and speed toward Rosemarie's farm.

Makani and her friends reach Rosemarie's farm to find David aiming his knife at Rosemarie's throat. David leaves Rosemarie injured but mostly okay. David sprints toward the enormous Martin Family **Corn** Maze adjacent to the Holt farm, mortally wounding Alex in the process. Makani and her friends chase David into the corn maze, which is crawling with drunken college students and other tourists who have flocked to the maze due to the sensationalized coverage of the so-called "Osborne Slayer." David stabs Darby and Ollie in the chest, and they both collapse to the ground. Makani assumes they're both dead. She asks David how he could do this, and he says something cryptic about making his victims stay in Osborne forever while he gets to leave. Then David tries to stab Makani, but she escapes. He chases her out of the corn maze. Outside, Makani runs into the corn pit—a ball pit made of corn kernels. Before David can jump in after her, Darby appears behind him and pushes him in. He lands hard and doesn't move.

Makani walks toward David and grabs his knife. As she stands over him, she realizes that David killed his classmates because he was bitter that they were ambitious enough to leave Osborne while he was fated to stay there forever. He killed people because he saw imprisonment at the distant penitentiary as his only way out. Makani realizes how pathetic David's dream was. She also realizes that a person can never run away from their problems. They'll be their same, troubled self wherever they go unless they find the strength to change themselves. Makani kills David, ending his reign of terror. The police arrive. Chris runs into the corn maze to find Ollie's body while the other first responders shuffle Makani and Darby into an ambulance. Another police officer's radio buzzes: it's Chris, who reveals that Ollie is alive. Makani runs into the corn maze to find Chris and Ollie. She and Chris kneel on either side of Ollie, and everyone finally feels safe.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Makani Young** – Protagonist Makani Young is a high school senior who is still adapting to life among the **cornfields** of Osborne, Nebraska, after moving there from Hawaii midway through her junior year. Makani's biracial identity and ignorance about local town gossip often leave her feeling alienated and lonely. Then, things take a turn for the worse when an unidentified serial killer starts killing off her classmates. Makani nearly becomes one of the killer's victims,

though Grandma Young and Ollie, the boy Makani is dating, rescue her just in time. Like her peers, Makani is morbidly curious about the murders and can't resist theorizing about who could have committed them, and why. At the same time, Makani feels ashamed to spread baseless rumors about people. Makani participated in a cruel hazing ritual in Hawaii and ended up attacking her best friend, Jasmine. Though the authorities eventually dropped Makani's assault charges, Makani nevertheless became the subject of ruthless gossip which caused all her friends to abandon her, and which prompted Makani's parents to send her to Nebraska to live with Grandma Young. Makani is reluctant to confide in her new friends, Darby and Alex, about her past—she fears that they'll turn on her, too. Worse still, Makani is convinced her past behavior renders her deserving of any judgment that comes her way. When Makani finally confides in Darby, Alex, and Ollie about her past, though, they react with compassion rather than judgment—and their acceptance helps Makani see that her past doesn't define her. Makani also realizes that it's impossible to run away from one's problems—a person must choose to change. Ultimately, through the support of her friends and grandmother, Makani finds that her new life in Osborne is a far cry from the alienating, miserable “exile” she once thought it would be, and she learns to let go of her past. At the end of the novel, Makani stabs Osborne High student David Ware, the “Osborne Slayer,” with his own **knife**, thereby ending the killer's reign of terror on Osborne.

**Ollie Larsson** – A senior at Osborne High, Ollie Larsson is Makani's crush and, later, her boyfriend. He works at Greeley's Foods, the local supermarket. Like Makani, Ollie dreams of leaving Osborne, and he spends his free time reading travelogues. Many Osborne residents, including Darby and Alex, consider Ollie to be a loner and an outcast. Ollie's edgy appearance doesn't help the matter, either—he has pink hair, always wears black clothing, and sports a lip ring. Despite his tough outer shell, Ollie is a kind, smart, and thoughtful boy who treats Makani well and helps her come to terms with her past. He even bonds with Grandma Young over their mutual love of jigsaw puzzles. A lot of negative gossip about Ollie stems from the unhealthy behavior Ollie engaged in as he struggled to cope with the deaths of his parents, who died in a car wreck when Ollie was in middle school. At that time, Ollie's older brother Chris returned to Osborne to care for Ollie. When Ollie was 16 years old, he turned to drugs, alcohol, and reckless sex to numb the pain of his unresolved grief. Things got so bad that he even tried to drown himself in a river, though a passing motorist rescued him just in time. Though Ollie has since turned his life around, this doesn't stop people from assuming the worst about him. Alex and Darby even briefly suspect that Ollie is the Osborne Slayer, which creates a temporary rift in their friendship with Makani. Toward the end of the novel, David Ware, the real Osborne Slayer, stabs Ollie in the chest in the Martin Family Fun **Corn** Maze. Though Makani initially believes

that Ollie has died, he survives. The novel ends on an ambiguous but optimistic note with Makani and Chris kneeling beside Ollie, and all three finally feeling safe.

**David Ware** – Osborne High student David Ware is the Osborne Slayer—the villain responsible for the grisly murders of his fellow Osborne High seniors. David Ware's most remarkable feature is that he is entirely unremarkable. When David's hood slips off during his attack on Makani, she can't quite place who he is, though she knows she recognizes him from somewhere. Later, when the local news announces the killer's identity to the grieving town, residents express their collective disbelief that a kid who'd seemed so normal and unmemorable could be capable of such evil. Further solidifying David's forgettable face and personality is the fact that, after he flees Osborne to avoid capture, he is able to hitch rides with multiple unsuspecting truck drivers—even as his face is plastered all over the local and national news stations. David's murders follow a predictable pattern. He generally begins messing with his victims well in advance of their murders, hiding or rearranging their personal belongings to make them ill at ease and paranoid. Then he attacks them when they least expect it, killing them in a gruesome, taunting, and personalized way. After killing the ultra-religious Caleb Greeley, for instance, David severs Caleb's hands and stitches them together in a grotesque mockery of prayer. Until the very end of the novel, David's motivation for killing baffles the teenagers and authorities alike. Ultimately, though, Makani and her friends realize that David is targeting ambitious students whose drive, privilege, or skillset have afforded them a path out of Osborne and toward bigger, better things. David believes that he is fated to remain in Osborne forever, and he's jealous of those who get to leave. But what David ultimately fails to recognize is that it's his own fault he's so miserable and unfulfilled—not Osborne's. In truth, David's failure to reflect inwardly guarantees that he would live the same miserable, unremarkable, and aimless life regardless of where he might live. Ultimately, though, David never finds out that he is the cause of his misery—he dies at the end of the novel when Makani uses his own **knife** to stab him in the back.

**Darby** – Darby is a high school senior and one of Makani's best friends. He and Alex took Makani under their wing when Makani transferred to Osborne High midway through junior year. Darby is kind, subdued, and thoughtful. Like Makani, Darby knows what it's like to be different. Darby was assigned female at birth but identifies as male. Osborne is a small town, and its residents can be closed-minded; although Darby transitioned socially his freshman year of high school, he occasionally still receives judgmental looks from his peers. Darby and Alex have a brief falling-out with Makani when they use rumors about Ollie's past to fuel their suspicion that Ollie is the Osborne Slayer. Makani forgives them when they take back their accusation after the real Osborne Slayer, David Ware,

attacks Makani and Ollie. When Makani finally comes clean to Darby about her troubled past, he responds with compassion, not judgment. At the end of the novel, David stabs Darby, and Makani initially believes that Darby has died. Darby, however, survives the attack, and he comes to Makani's rescue when he subdues David by pushing him into the corn pit.

**Alex** – Alex is a high school senior and one of Makani's two best friends. She plays trumpet in the marching band. Alex and Darby took Makani under their wing after she transferred to Osborne High midway through their junior year—Alex is a “goth,” so she knows what it's like to feel different and out of place. Alex is the snarkier, more combative of Makani's two friends. She and Darby have a brief falling-out with Makani when they briefly suspect that Ollie is the Osborne Slayer. Tensions rise when Rodrigo Morales, Alex's crush, becomes the Osborne Slayer's third victim. However, Alex and Darby realize that they're wrong about Ollie when David Ware, the real Osborne Killer, attacks Makani and Ollie. Because Alex and Darby have been friends since they were young children, they share a lot of inside jokes to which Makani isn't privy. For her part, Makani only tells her friends bits and pieces about her life in Hawaii. But when Makani finally confides in Alex and Darby, they respond with compassion, not judgment. At the end of the novel, when Makani and her friends confront David Ware outside the Martin Family Fun **Corn** Maze, David mortally wounds Alex.

**Grandma Young** – Grandma Young is Makani's grandmother. Makani comes to live with Grandma Young when Grandma Young's sleepwalking worsens following the death of Granddaddy Young. However, Makani suspects that the real reason she must live with Grandma Young is that Makani's mother and Makani's father don't want to deal with her after all the stress her arrest has brought their family—and they're in the middle of a messy divorce. Though Grandma Young wants Makani to reconcile with Makani's mother, she also acknowledges that her daughter is an uncaring, narcissistic mother to Makani. Grandma Young can be strict, but this is only because she loves Makani and wants what's best for her. Makani is terrified when Grandma Young finds out that Makani is talking to a boy, Ollie. Grandma Young demands that Makani bring Ollie over to meet her if they want to continue seeing each other. To Makani's surprise, Grandma Young overlooks Ollie's edgy appearance (he has pink hair, wears black clothing, and has a lip ring) and sees him for the kind and respectful person he really is—they even bond over their mutual love of jigsaw puzzles. One afternoon, David Ware attacks Makani and Ollie while Grandma Young is in Omaha for a sleep study, as he'd thought Makani would be home alone. Grandma Young comes home in the middle of the attack and launches herself at the killer. David retaliates by stabbing Grandma Young in the abdomen, and while she's badly wounded and must stay in the hospital for a long time, her doctors promise that she'll recover.

The bravery Grandma Young exhibited by putting her life on the line to protect her granddaughter makes Makani realize how much Grandma Young cares about her.

**Chris Larsson** – Chris Larsson is Ollie's older brother; he's a police officer with the Osborne Police Department. Chris treats Makani kindly, offering to let her stay at the Larsson home while Grandma Young recovers in the hospital—though he mortifies Ollie and Makani when he implicitly reminds the teenage couple to practice safe sex. Chris moved back home to care for Ollie after their parents died in a car wreck when Ollie was in middle school. Chris and Ollie have a loving but occasionally strained relationship—it's sometimes difficult for Chris to decide whether he needs to be the protective, strict parent or the cool older sibling. When Ollie goes through a rough patch, Chris uses his connection with the police department to prevent Ollie from getting into legal trouble, but Ollie's behavior creates a temporary rift in their relationship. Ultimately, though, Chris is only concerned that his younger brother is okay, and he helps Ollie receive the treatment he needs to get better.

**Matt Butler** – Matt Butler is captain of Osborne High's football team. He's set to attend college on a football scholarship and then, ideally, play professionally. Matt is the second victim of David Ware, the Osborne Slayer. David murders Matt in the abandoned locker room after school one evening, slicing open his skull and scrambling his brains in a mocking nod toward Matt's anxieties about having chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a brain condition common among football players that's caused by repeated head injuries. At the time of Matt's murder, he struggles between making his coaches and father proud and respecting his (and his mother's) very real fears about the possibility of developing CTE. Lately, Matt's anxieties about the brain condition have worsened—he's been misplacing everyday objects, and memory loss is an early symptom of CTE. However, the novel hints that David Ware has been hiding Matt's belongings—David tends to toy with his victims before he murders them, moving around their personal belongings to make them paranoid.

**Rodrigo Morales** – Rodrigo is a student at Osborne High. He's David Ware's best friend—which makes it even more cruel when he becomes David's third murder victim. Rodrigo is an intelligent computer whiz, though he's also an underachiever and rather immature for his age. Though he used to be an internet troll (he'd harass female gamers on internet forums), he now feels ashamed of his behavior and struggles to make up for his past misogyny. The night of Rodrigo's murder, he's home alone playing video games while his parents are in Las Vegas celebrating their wedding anniversary. While Rodrigo sleeps, David Ware sneaks into the house and gaslights Rodrigo, rearranging all the furniture in Rodrigo's living room. Chillingly, after David murders Rodrigo, he sticks around for hours and plays video games next to David's corpse. Alex has a crush on

Rodrigo, and his death devastates her. Rodrigo's murder changes the town's perspective on the Osborne slayings. While the first two victims were popular, ambitious teens who stood out among their peers, Rodrigo was completely average; his murder showed people that anybody could be the Osborne Slayer's next victim.

**Caleb Greeley** – Caleb Greeley is a student at Osborne High and a victim of the Osborne Slayer (David Ware). He comes from a well-off, influential local family—his father is a pastor, and his grandfather was the first owner of Greeley's Foods. Caleb's uncle currently runs the business, and Caleb works as a supervisor on the weekends. Caleb is very concerned with appearances and a self-proclaimed overachiever—he's a youth leader at church and trumpet section leader for the marching band. He's also highly religious. His plans to do mission work abroad make him a target of David Ware, who targets ambitious students who have arranged to leave Osborne for bigger and better things. David lures Caleb inside Greeley's Foods during the memorial parade. Then he murders Caleb, mutilates Caleb's body, and assembles it on top of a mountain of school spirit wear and other Osborne High memorabilia.

**Rosemarie Holt** – Rosemarie Holt is a student at Osborne High. She's a tough, capable girl who was raised on a farm across the **cornfield** from Ollie. A talented barrel racer, Rosemarie has dreams of competing nationally. When Principal Stanton announces over the intercom that Rosemarie has won the barrel race at the Sloane County Championship Rodeo, Ollie darkly jokes that Rosemarie had better watch out—her success could attract the attention of the Osborne Slayer. By coincidence, Ollie ends up being right—on the eve of Halloween, David Ware attacks Rosemarie at her family's farm. Luckily, Makani, Ollie, Darby, and Alex arrive in time to chase away David and rescue Rosemarie.

**Katie Kurtzman** – Katie Kurtzman is one of David Ware's victims. She's a star student and president of Osborne High's student council. She's also a perfectionist to a fault—her mother, a nurse, suspects that Katie has obsessive-compulsive disorder. Inwardly, Katie acknowledges that her mother is probably correct, though she's too ashamed to admit it out loud. On the night of her murder, Katie is working tirelessly on college applications—she's determined to go to school as far away from Osborne as possible. David Ward resents Katie for having the privilege to leave Osborne, so he kills her, removes her heart, and places it on a stack of college brochures to mock her ambition.

**Creston Howard** – Creston Howard is a handsome, Black news anchor at Osborne's local news station who reports on the Osborne slayings. Grandma Young always tunes in to hear what Creston has to say. Makani feels guilty when she watches the reports, though—she hates how the news sensationalizes the very real deaths of her peers.

**Zachary Loup** – Zachary Loup is a student at Osborne High. He's constantly smoking marijuana, and he can be a bit of a bully. When Katie Kurtzman kindly but firmly rejects Zachary's attempts to hit on her, he aggressively berates her. Makani and her friends initially believe that Zachary could be one of David Ware's next victims—at this point, they erroneously believe that David is targeting bullies, though this turns out not to be the case.

**Jasmine** – Jasmine was Makani's best friend when Makani lived in Hawaii. When the girls were rookies on their high school swim team, the veteran swimmers "kidnapped" them as part of a cruel hazing ritual in which the veterans forced the rookie swimmers to drink copious amounts of alcohol while participating in a series of grueling, demeaning games. Things got out of hand, and Makani ended up turning on Jasmine, cutting off her hair with a **knife**, and accidentally leaving her to drown (though she lived). The authorities charged Makani with assault, though they later dropped the charges. However, Jasmine and all of Makani's other friends and classmates stopped speaking to her after the incident. Makani moved to Nebraska after the attack, and she's given up hope that Jasmine will ever speak to her again.

**Makani's Mother** – Makani's mother is Grandma Young's daughter. She is narcissistic and too self-involved to care about Makani. While Makani is living in Nebraska with Grandma Young, Makani's mother and Makani's father remain in Hawaii and file for divorce. Makani's mother grew up in Osborne and left the minute she graduated high school. She'd wanted to visit all 50 states before finding the perfect place to call her new home, but in Hawaii—the first place she went—she met Makani's father and never left. Makani suspects her mother resents her for her freedom—a freedom Makani's mother lost when she met Makani's father, stayed in Hawaii, and gave birth to Makani.

**Makani's Father** – Makani's father is Native Hawaiian. Makani's mother met him when she travelled to Hawaii after her high school graduation. While Makani is living in Nebraska with Grandma Young, Makani's father and mother remain in Hawaii and file for divorce. Like Makani's mother, he's largely absent from Makani's life and doesn't appear to care about her all that much. Grandma Young, a generally level-headed, fair woman, claims he's a major jerk.

**Brooke** – Brooke is Haley Whitehall's best friend and the stage manager for Osborne High. Haley talks to Brooke on the phone the night before her murder. Brooke isn't a particularly important character, but she plays a critical role toward the end of the book—she temporarily subdues David Ware in the Martin Family Fun **Corn** Maze by throwing a bucket of fake blood at him.

**Haley Whitehall** Haley Whitehall is the first murder victim in the novel. She is the star of Osborne High's drama department

and was supposed to play the lead role in the school's production of *Sweeney Todd*, but the school cancels the production in the wake her murder. Haley's murder generates gossip and public displays of mourning among the students of Osborne High.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Jason Nakamura** – Jason Nakamura was Makani's boyfriend in Hawaii. He broke up with her after she attacked her best friend, Jasmine, during a hazing ritual.

**Granddaddy Young** – Granddaddy Young is Makani's grandfather. He passed away before the events of the novel take place. Makani moves to Nebraska after Grandma Young struggles to cope with Granddaddy Young's death.

**Lauren Dixon** – Lauren Dixon is Matt Butler's girlfriend. Before Matt's murder, he is annoyed at Lauren for inserting herself into the tragedy of Haley Whitehall's death.

**Buddy** – Buddy is one of Matt Butler's teammates on the football team. He's a stereotypical "dumb jock" character.

**Officer Beverly Gage** – Officer Beverly Gage is a police officer with the Osborne Police Department. She works with Ollie's brother, Chris Larsson. She interviews Makani after David Ware attacks Makani at Grandma Young's house.

**Gabrielle Cruz** – Gabrielle Cruz is captain of the swim team at Makani's old high school in Hawaii. She and the other veteran swimmers "kidnap" Makani the other rookies as part of a cruel hazing ritual.

**Kayla Lum** – Kayla Lum is one of the veteran swimmers on the swim team at Makani's old high school in Hawaii. She and the other veteran swimmers "kidnap" Makani and the other rookie swimmers as part of a cruel hazing ritual.

**Jonathan** – Jonathan is an Osborne High student and the male lead for the school's production of *Sweeney Todd*, though he's not a talented musician.

**Coach Hooker** – Coach Hooker coaches Osborne High's football team.

**Principal Stanton** – Principal Stanton is the principal of Osborne High.



## TRAUMA, LOSS, AND GRIEF

In *There's Someone Inside Your House*, an anonymous killer (later identified as David Ware) embarks on a gruesome killing spree, murdering and mutilating the high school students of Osborne, Nebraska, in an increasingly horrific fashion. The murders leave the close-knit farming community traumatized, afraid, and grieving. Everyone struggles to understand how such evil could befall their otherwise ordinary town. Students panic as they try to identify a pattern to the killer's targets, trying desperately to discover if they could be the next victim. Outside of the ongoing murders, characters also deal with unresolved personal traumas. Makani, the protagonist, struggles to forgive herself after she participates in a traumatic high school hazing ritual that got out of hand. As a result, Makani seriously hurt her best friend Jasmine, causing Jasmine and the entire community to turn against her and forcing her to leave Hawaii to live with her Grandma Young in Osborne. Makani mourns the loss of her old life, and she struggles to understand how and why the incident unfolded the way it did. Ollie, Makani's crush, grieves the loss of his parents who died in a car wreck. Before Makani arrived in Osborne, Ollie went through a period where he turned to self-destructive behaviors to numb his grief, entering a sexual relationship with an older woman, drinking to excess, and ultimately trying to die by suicide. *There's Someone Inside Your House* is a teen slasher story that goes beyond cinematic thrillers like *Scream* or *Friday the Thirteenth*, which primarily exploit violence and trauma for entertainment. Instead, the novel draws from conventions of the slasher genre to explore the various productive, destructive, and often highly personal ways that people work through trauma, loss, and grief.



## GUILT, SHAME, AND REDEMPTION

Before moving to Osborne, Nebraska, Makani Young attacked her best friend Jasmine in a cruel hazing ritual that went awry. Afterward, Makani's friends turned on her. Their abandonment hurts, but Makani also feels that she deserves it. In Nebraska, she constantly fears that her new friends, Darby and Alex, and her crush, Ollie, will abandon her if they find out about her past. Makani isn't the only character who is hiding a shameful secret. Rodrigo Morales, Osborne High's resident computer whiz, used to be an internet troll who harassed female gamers on the internet. Even though he has since realized the error of his ways, he worries that his earlier misogyny will always define him. Matt Butler, the star football player, becomes increasingly paranoid that he has Chronic Encephalopathy (CTE) and is afraid that a diagnosis will cause him to fail at a dream his father and coaches have worked so tirelessly for him to achieve. While David Ware murders Rodrigo and Matt before they can work through their internalized feelings of shame and guilt, Makani ultimately learns that she doesn't have to let her past define



## THEMES

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

her. When she finally confides in her friends about the hazing ritual, they respond not with judgment, but with compassion and understanding. Although Makani's actions were undoubtedly wrong and hurtful, her friends are adamant that they were the actions of a good person who made a series of mistakes—not an indication of a sinister, fundamentally flawed person. In their eyes, the real Makani is the kind, thoughtful person with whom they have chosen as their friend. When Makani's friends respond to her honesty with compassion and understanding, they show her that she is capable of growth and worthy of love and forgiveness. *There's Someone Inside Your House* argues that a person's past wrongs do not define them and that everybody is worthy of forgiveness and redemption.



### ALIENATION

*There's Someone Inside Your House* explores the stereotypical teenage experience of feeling different and misunderstood. Even though it's been almost a year since she moved to Nebraska, Makani struggles to fit in with her peers at Osborne High. Her best friends, Darby and Alex, have known each other since childhood. Although they don't intentionally make Makani feel like a third wheel, it's difficult for Makani not to feel left out when they reference inside jokes and rumors that only longtime residents of Osborne would know about. Because Makani has spent most of her life in Hawaii, she hasn't shared many of the experiences that Darby and Alex have had, which has a distancing effect on their friendship. Makani's racial identity also contributes to her alienation. Osborne is a rural farming community in Nebraska, and most of its residents are white. Makani, in contrast, is biracial: Makani's mother is African American, and Makani's father is Native Hawaiian. Makani's racial background sets her apart from her peers and invites unwanted, probing questions about her heritage. For instance, when Makani first moved to Osborne, Lauren, a fellow high school student, asked Makani, "What are you?" When Makani told her the truth, Lauren deemed her "a mutt," oblivious to the hurt her attempt at a joke created in Makani. Makani's friend Darby also understands the struggle of alienation and "the concept of otherness." Darby identifies as male but was assigned female at birth. When Darby transitioned socially during his first year of high school, his gender identity attracted a great deal of negative attention. Even in his senior year of high school, he still receives subtle signs of disapproval from his peers. *There's Someone Inside Your House* presents a cast of characters who, despite their unique identities and backgrounds, share a similar experience of feeling left out and misunderstood by their peers. In this way, *There's Someone Inside Your House* portrays alienation and loneliness as fundamental parts of the human experience.



### GOSSIP VS. COMMUNICATION

Osborne, Nebraska, is a small town where word travels fast and nothing stays secret for long. When a mysterious killer starts murdering students at Osborne High, rumors about the killer's identity spread throughout the school like wildfire. Students wonder who the killer could be. They also wonder what secrets the killer's victims are hiding that may have caused the killer to target them. While gossiping about the murders feeds students' morbid curiosities, many of the rumors they spread are farfetched and untrue, and there are negative consequences for the people who gossip as well as for those who are the subjects of their rumors. After Matt Butler's murder brings the body count to two, Alex and Darby use old rumors about Ollie to convince themselves that Ollie is the so-called Osborne Slayer. They're also concerned that Ollie is taking advantage of Makani, who didn't grow up in Osborne and doesn't know about his supposedly dark past. Makani knows Ollie more intimately than Darby and Alex and refuses to entertain what she considers to be baseless speculation. The disagreement jeopardizes Makani's friendship with Darby and Alex, though Makani forgives her friends once authorities identify David Ware as the killer, prompting Darby and Alex to realize their mistake. One of the central ideas that *There's Someone Inside Your House* explores is how little people know about themselves or about others. Determined to get to the bottom of the Osborne Slayer's murderous rampage, Osborne High's students turn to gossip and speculation instead of genuine communication, hurting others and themselves as they judge people unfairly. *There's Someone Inside Your House* suggests that authentic communication, on the other hand, is a far better way to connect and empathize with others.



### INNER CHANGE

Many of Osborne's teenagers feel stuck or dissatisfied with life in small-town America. They dream of one day leaving Osborne to seek out more diverse cultural experiences and opportunities for personal growth. Ollie obsessively reads travelogues that transport him to foreign lands. Makani feels homesick for the landscape and cuisine of her native Hawaii. But leaving a place like Osborne is no easy feat; within the world of the novel, it's hard to abandon the place where one's family has lived for generations. As Makani aptly observes, "it [akes] a person with extraordinary drive and ambition to break from the pattern." Moreover, it's easy for those lacking the ambition and financial resources to leave Osborne to become jealous of the lucky few who manage to escape. David Ware, who's ultimately revealed to be the Osborne Slayer, is an unremarkable boy who lacks the ambition and resources to leave town. He resents his peers who are more ambitious, memorable, and privileged than he is, so much so that he plans and executes a murderous rampage



targeting students with plans to move on to bigger and better places. Not only does David covet the infamy and attention that being a serial killer brings, but he also sees being caught and sent to the prison outside of town as his best chance at leaving Osborne. But David's theory that fame or a change of scenery will improve his life ignores the role he plays in perpetuating his unhappiness. Similarly, when Makani first moved to Nebraska, she thought that starting over in a new town would allow her to forget her past trauma. However, she soon realizes that the shame and guilt she feels over her participation in a cruel hazing ritual has followed her to Nebraska. Ultimately, Makani can only make peace with her past through her inner desire to change and with the support of her friends and community. *There's Someone Inside Your House* suggests that real change comes from within. It takes time, inner work, and dedication to find fulfillment and become the person one wants to be, not simply a change of scenery.

“sublime” rather than suffocating. Makani's new relationship with Ollie helps her to heal and reclaim the self-worth she lost when her old friends abandoned her. Though Makani once associated Osborne with misery and shame, opening up to Ollie allows her new life in Osborne—and its surrounding cornfields—to be a restorative and positive experience.



## KNIVES

Knives symbolize guilt, shame, and personal accountability. A character's relation to knives shows where they are in their journey to overcome their demons. David Ware, the Osborne Slayer, targets ambitious peers who have the drive and privilege to escape their boring, rural hometown of Osborne, Nebraska. He uses his knife to express and externalize his inner resentment toward more fortunate, fulfilled, and driven teens like Matt Butler, the football star, or Katie Kurtzman, the student council president, whose skills have given them a ticket out of Osborne. David lashes out at others and punishes them for their successes instead of reflecting inwardly on the personal flaws contributing to his feeling stuck and miserable. His knife symbolizes his inability to do the inner work required to improve one's situation and move beyond one's demons.

Makani's associations with knives mirror her journey to move beyond the demons of her past and reclaim her life. Knives remind Makani of a cruel hazing ritual that took place back in Hawaii. In a drunken rage, Makani attacked her best friend Jasmine, cutting off Jasmine's hair with a knife and leaving her to drown in the ocean. The police ultimately charged Makani with assault, and all of Makani's friends turned on her. For much of the novel, Makani's past haunts her present. She's terrified that her new friends will discover what she did to Jasmine and abandon her as her old friends did. She also thinks her past makes her incapable of change or redemption. When Chris, Ollie's police officer brother, innocently questions Makani about her experience with knives during the police investigation into the Osborne slayings, she freaks out—she immediately assumes that Chris (and Ollie) have found out about her past and will judge her for it. Once Makani learns to forgive herself for her past mistakes, she reclaims her life and moves beyond her shame and guilt. Correspondingly, her associations with knives also change. At the end of the novel, when Makani uses a knife to kill David, she does so to avenge her murdered peers and prevent David from committing future acts of violence. She uses a knife for good instead of evil, showing the reader—and Makani herself—that she can move beyond her troubled past and choose to be the good person she longs to be.



## SYMBOLS

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



## CORN

The cornfields surrounding Osborne symbolize Makani's inner growth. Over time, Makani realizes that inner work and meaningful connections with others are the only factors that dictate a person's ability to grow and change. As Makani learns this vital lesson, her formerly negative associations with Osborne and its surrounding cornfields become more positive. Osborne is a small Nebraska farming town that “smell[s] like diesel, taste[s] like despair, and [is] surrounded by an ocean of corn.” Makani sees the stress of the legal trouble and social ostracization she faced for assaulting a friend during a cruel hazing ritual as the real reason her parents sent her to live with Grandma Young in Nebraska. At first, Makani hates Osborne's cornfields because she sees Osborne as punishment for her poor behavior in Hawaii. Osborne's cornfields—so different from the Hawaiian beaches she left behind—are a constant visual reminder that she must suffer the consequences of her past actions.

Over time, though, Makani learns that her exile from Hawaii to Osborne neither exacerbates her shame nor gives her an automatic fresh start. Ultimately, it's up to Makani to create new, meaningful connections with others and undertake the inner work required to move beyond her past and become the person she wants to be. As Makani learns to forgive herself, her attitude toward Osborne and its cornfields changes, too. For instance, when Ollie drives Makani to the middle of a remote cornfield and invites her to gaze at the endless “ocean” of corn that surrounds them, Makani suddenly sees the corn as





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dutton edition of *There's Someone Inside Your House* published in 2018.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

“This is Osborne, Nebraska.” Her friend Darby sucked up the last drops of his gas station iced coffee. “Population: twenty-six hundred. A boy with pink hair is as scandalous as the death of a beloved student.”

**Related Characters:** Darby (speaker), Makani Young, Ollie Larsson, Haley Whitehall, Alex

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 8

## Explanation and Analysis

Makani, Alex, and Darby sit in Darby's car and discuss Haley Whitehall's murder, which happened the night before. Like the rest of the town, Osborne High is abuzz with rumors about who could have committed the murder. Shockingly, though, Ollie Larsson's newly-colored pink hair generates just as much chatter as Haley's murder. In this passage, Darby explains why this is so. “This is Osborne, Nebraska,” Darby says to Makani, who only moved to Nebraska last year. In a small town like Osborne, Darby explains, “A boy with pink hair is as scandalous as the death of a beloved student.” Darby's blunt explanation for the attention Ollie's hair has generated gives the reader insight into the sort of place Osborne is and the type of news that intrigues or offends the average resident.

Darby's explanation implies that Osborne is the kind of place where subverting gender norms (Ollie has dyed his hair pink, a conventionally feminine color) is “as scandalous as the death of a beloved student.” This depicts Osborne as a small town whose residents hold traditional views that can make it challenging to be an outsider there. Though Darby's analysis of Osborne is wryly funny, it's not untrue. This passage is important because it sets the tone for the novel, establishing Osborne as a place that alienates people for being different just as readily as it spreads rumors about them.

“Makani knew better than to believe any of them outright. Rumors, even the true ones, never told a complete story. She avoided most of her classmates for that very reason. Self-preservation.”

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson, Haley Whitehall, Jasmine

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 10

## Explanation and Analysis



Makani, her friends, and the rest of Osborne High spend the morning spreading rumors about Haley Whitehall's gruesome murder, which occurred the previous night. They also talk about Makani's crush, fellow high schooler Ollie Larsson, a strange loner who is also the subject of much gossip.


This passage establishes Makani's dislike and distrust of rumors. Unlike many of her peers, who readily accept baseless rumors as verifiable facts, Makani is deeply skeptical of rumors. She “kn[ows] better than to believe any of them outright” since “even the true ones, never told a complete story.” At this point, neither the reader nor Makani's friends know anything about the hazing ritual, assault charges, and gossip-fueled social ostracization that precipitated her mid-year move from Hawaii to Nebraska. Moments like this one tease out Makani's distrust of gossip, planting seeds that ultimately come to fruition when Makani finally opens up to her friends about the hazing ritual later on.

Here, the reader can detect that Makani might have a secret, specific reason she doesn't trust rumors—and this is why she “avoid[s] most of her classmates” out of “self-preservation.” Makani participated in a cruel hazing ritual that led her to hurt her former best friend, Jasmine. As news of the attack spread throughout her school, Makani became the subject of malicious gossip that turned her friends and community against her. Makani doesn't feel comfortable believing the rumors about Ollie or Haley's murder because she knows from experience the pain that rumors can cause.

“Osborne smelled like diesel, tasted like despair, and was surrounded by an ocean of corn. Stupid corn. So much corn.”

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 13

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani, Darby, and Alex sit in Darby's car and chat. Inwardly, Makani considers Osborne, Nebraska, which has been her home for just under a year. This passage establishes Makani's negative attitude toward her new home, which she thinks "smell[s] like diesel" and "taste[s] like despair." Makani's parents sent her from Hawaii to Osborne after the stress of dealing with Makani's assault charge (following her involvement in an ill-fated hazing ritual) became too much to bear. Knowing the adverse circumstances that caused Makani's move, it's worth taking Makani's dreary description of Osborne, with its "diesel," its "despair," and the "ocean of corn" that surrounds it with a grain of salt.

Much of Makani's distaste for Osborne is due to her circumstances and emotional state rather than the town itself. Makani has just gone through the traumatic experiences of being the subject of cruel, ceaseless rumors about the hazing ritual and being abandoned by all her old friends in Hawaii. So the "despair" she tastes is perhaps less a description of how Osborne really is than a reflection of her inner unhappiness. This passage is also important because it establishes corn—Osborne's most recognizable feature—as a sort of mirror onto which Makani projects her emotional state.

### Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ As usual, there was no word from back home. At least the messages of hate had long stopped. No one there was looking for her, and the only people who still cared about it—the incident, as she self-censored that night on the beach—were people like Jasmine. The only people who mattered. Makani would have never guessed that her friends' permanent silence would be infinitely more painful than those weeks when thousands of uninformed, condescending, misogynistic strangers had spewed vitriol at her. It was.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Jasmine, Grandma Young

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 23

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani returns home to Grandma Young's house after school and scrolls through her phone. She checks to see if any of her old friends in Hawaii have reached out to her, though, "[a]s usual, there was no word from back home."

At this point, the reader doesn't know all the details of what happened to Makani back in Hawaii. Readers only know that she was involved in some kind of "incident" that has made her wary of gossip and rumors, and that she's not upfront about why she transferred to Osborne High midway through her junior year. The complete details of Makani's participation in the hazing ritual, her attack on Jasmine, and her internalized shame about her past behavior remain a mystery. So this passage, with Makani's mention of "the incident," as she cryptically refers to it, is an important moment of foreshadowing. It's one of many hints she drops that give the reader additional information about her traumatic past.


The "self-censored" term Makani has created to refer to the hazing ritual—"the incident"—also reflects the lasting impact of her past trauma. Makani's friends' abandonment and "the messages of hate" that strangers on the internet sent her after the event remain too painful for Makani to think about directly, so she must rely on murky, "self-censored" terms to protect herself.

### Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ It had been so long since Makani had felt any amount of genuine, unadulterated happiness that she'd forgotten that sometimes it could hurt as much as sadness. His declaration pierced through the muscle of her heart like a skillfully thrown knife. It was the kind of pain that made her feel alive.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson, Jasmine, David Ware

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 42

### Explanation and Analysis

After ignoring each other for months due to a mutual misunderstanding, Makani and Ollie come clean about their feelings for each other and rekindle their romance. They talk on the phone for hours, and Makani feels "genuine unadulterated happiness" for the first time in a long time. The narrative's description of Ollie's words "pierc[ing]"

through the muscle of [Makani's] heart like a skillfully thrown knife" is an ominous foreshadowing of the string of murders that will soon follow as the Osborne Slayer (David Ware) attacks his classmates at Osborne High.

Knives are an important symbol in the book. For Makani, knives evoke her violent, traumatic past back in Hawaii: last year, she cut off her ex-best friend Jasmine's hair with a knife during a hazing ritual that got out of hand. For much of the book, Makani can't forgive herself for what she did to Jasmine, and she constantly fears that her new friends and community will find out about her past and abandon her just like her old friends did. She's also afraid that her past actions prove that she is—and always will be—a bad person. By comparing her romantic feelings about Ollie to a knife stabbing her in the heart, Makani indirectly expresses how undeserving she feels. She can't enjoy the good things that happen to her because she thinks she deserves pain and rejection, not love and compassion.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☛☛ Meanwhile, Makani pretended to be upset for the same reasons as her classmates. She pretended that the local news van, parked near the flag at half-mast, hadn't broken her into a sweat. She pretended that she was cold when she put up the hood of her hoodie and angled her face away from the cameras. She pretended to belong.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Haley Whitehall

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

Haley Whitehall's murder troubles Makani and her classmates. Not knowing who murdered her, why they did it, and whether any of them could be next instills fear and panic among the high school students. However, the murder troubles Makani for reasons her classmates—and even her close friends—don't know about. At this point in the book, the reader is also unaware of what happened to Makani in Hawaii before she moved to Osborne.

Makani's unease around the local news van and camera crew makes sense when the novel finally reveals her experience in Hawaii after the swim team hazing ritual: the authorities charged her with assault, and her name was smeared all over the internet. All of her friends stopped talking to her. Makani is nervous around the local news and goes out of her way to "angle[] her face away from the

cameras" because she's still afraid that somebody from back home will find out where she relocated and spill her secret to her new friends and community. It's a paranoid fear—Makani has admitted that hardly anyone cares about the incident anymore, and the authorities ultimately dropped her assault charges. But Makani's paranoia speaks to the degree to which Makani's past has followed her to Nebraska.


Ultimately, Makani learns that the past will continue to follow a person until they begin the inner work required to forgive themselves and move on with their life. But at this early point in the book, Makani remains in the past, fearful that she is not worthy of redemption and terrified that the new life she's made for herself in Nebraska can unravel at any moment.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☛☛ The dry tassels reached for the open sky while the dead silks pointed down to the muddy earth. Slowly, ever so slowly, the wind strengthened and changed course, and the fields swayed as a single element, rippling outward in a current of mesmerizing waves. Something hidden inside Makani lifted its head and blossomed. The sensation was sublime. Makani often complained that she was drowning in corn, but she wasn't gasping below the water. She was perched on the edge of the horizon.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 68-69

### Explanation and Analysis

Ollie and Makani have just rekindled their summer romance. After school one day, they go on a drive—Ollie's only explanation is that he is taking Makani to the ocean. They eventually arrive at a remote cornfield outside of town. They turn down a rugged path and drive into the field, so corn surrounds them. Ollie instructs Makani to climb onto the hood of his car and look at the ocean of corn surrounding her.

The experience changes Makani's entire perspective on the landscape of her new home, as though "[s]omething hidden inside Makani [has] lifted its head and blossom[ed]." Despite living in Osborne for nearly a year, Makani has never managed to feel at home in the dull, rural town where the

landscape and people are so different from her old home in Hawaii. She “often complain[s] that she [is] drowning in corn,” implicitly using Osborne’s many cornfields as a metaphor for the stifling, miserable experience of living in Osborne.

But forming a connection with Ollie changes all this. Now, instead of feeling as though she is “gasping below the water” of Osborne’s surrounding cornfields, perched high above them, on the hood of Ollie’s car, she suddenly feels as though she is “perched on the edge of the horizon.” If corn symbolizes Makani’s inner growth, the “sublime,” restorative feeling she experiences in this scene suggests that her connection with Ollie will be a restorative, positive experience for Makani.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ Makani was grateful that she didn’t believe in ghosts; she only believed in the ghostlike quality of painful memories. And she was sure this house had plenty.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson, Chris Larsson, Matt Butler, Jasmine

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani and Ollie feel glum and helpless after news about Matt Butler’s murder spreads around town, so they leave school early and head to Ollie’s house. Makani has never visited Ollie’s house before, and her first impression of the old, empty farmhouse is that it’s haunted by “the ghostlike quality of painful memories.” After Ollie and Chris’s parents died, Chris returned to Osborne to take care of Ollie, and they continue to live in the house both boys grew up in.

When Makani looks at Ollie’s house, she senses not ghosts but “the ghostlike quality of painful memories.” Though it’s been years since their parents died, Makani seems to sense that the Larsson brothers’ grief keeps their parents’ memory alive. Makani’s thoughts on memory’s “ghostlike quality” fit in with her broader ideas about the past. She spends much of the book haunted by her own painful memories of the hurt she inflicted on Jasmine, her former best friend, back in Hawaii—though the reader doesn’t yet know the details about Makani’s actions, only that she has done something she feels remorseful about.

As Makani reflects on the ghostly presence of Ollie’s grief that drifts through his house, she’s also reflecting on how

her own past imposes on her present life. Not only does this scene build tension by alluding to Makani’s mysterious past, but it also further develops Makani and Ollie’s relationship. It’s clear that they both like each other, but this scene shows they are alike in how their pasts haunt their presents.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ She had to believe that the mistakes of Ollie’s past didn’t guarantee that he would make even worse mistakes in his future. She had to believe that every mistake was still a choice. She had to believe that Ollie was a good person, because she had to believe it about herself.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Darby, Alex, Ollie Larsson, Jasmine

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 113

### Explanation and Analysis

Darby calls Makani to voice his and Alex’s fears that Ollie could be the Osborne Slayer, citing rumors about Ollie’s past questionable behaviors to make his point (Ollie struggled after his parents died, and he turned to drugs, drinking, and other negative behaviors to numb the pain of his grief). Makani is furious that her friends are judging Ollie despite not knowing him. In addition, Darby’s phone call seems to validate Makani’s long-held fear that Darby and Alex will turn on her if they ever find out about her past—something she’s kept secret from them the entire year she’s lived in Osborne.

Even if Ollie did mess up in the past, Makani tries to tell herself, “Ollie’s past [doesn’t] guarantee that he w[ill] make even worse mistakes in the future.” As Makani tries to convince herself that Ollie’s past doesn’t define who he is in the present and future, she’s simultaneously trying to reconcile with her own past. Throughout the book, Makani struggles to forgive herself for attacking Jasmine, her best friend in Hawaii, during a swim team hazing ritual. She believes that her past mistakes guarantee that she will mess up again or that she’s a bad person.

When Makani tries to convince herself that Ollie can change from the person he used to be (at least, if she is to believe whatever rumors say about his past), she’s really trying “to believe it about herself,” too—to believe that she is “a good person” who, despite her past, remains worthy of redemption.

●● Makani wondered why discussing a tragedy—consuming every single story about it—was often comforting. Was it because tragedies manifested a sense of community? Here we are, all going through this terrible thing together. Or were tragedies addictive, and the small pleasures that came from them the signal of a deeper problem?

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Grandma Young, Ollie Larsson

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 115

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani hangs out at Grandma Young’s house with Grandma Young and Ollie. As usual, stories about the recent murders dominate the local news. The town’s incessant need to discuss the murders bothers Makani; she “wonder[s] why discussing a tragedy” is so “comforting” to everybody. She can’t decide whether “tragedies manifest[] a sense of community” or if society simply finds “tragedies addictive,” finding pleasure in the misfortunes of others.

Makani can see that the tragic deaths of Osborne High teenagers bring people together; for instance, she observes cliques of students who’d otherwise hate each other suddenly come together to find common ground. On the other hand, though, everybody’s supposed grief over the murders seems so disingenuous; people pretend to grieve people they’d hardly known, many people spout nonsensical, insensitive theories about the killings, and everyone seems to want to make themselves part of the tragedy.

Even though Makani fails to identify why people need to talk about tragedies, the attention the murders receive—and Makani’s inner philosophical debate about society’s fascination with tragedy—illustrates the complexity of grief and trauma. Everyone deals with grief in trauma in their own way, and nobody really knows how to react to events that are too unspeakably cruel or unjust to make sense of.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

●● He checked his favorite message board, but the usual torch-and-pitchfork crowd were still up in arms over this new company of video game developers that was run entirely by women. His insides shrank with a familiar shame as he quickly left the page. Not that long ago, he’d been one of them.

**Related Characters:** Rodrigo Morales, Makani Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 119


### Explanation and Analysis

Rodrigo is home alone on the night of his murder, playing video games and browsing the internet while his parents are away in Los Vegas. Though Rodrigo is still immature and makes insensitive or rude jokes sometimes, he used to be a lot worse—he used to be an internet troll who harassed women in online chatrooms and message boards. In this scene, Rodrigo browses a message board he used to frequent to find “the usual torch-and-pitchfork crowd” angrily complaining about a video game company “run entirely by women.” Seeing the rampant misogyny of the online community fills Rodrigo with shame, since “[n]ot that long ago, he’d been one of them,” and he now recognizes their views as sexist and wrong. Like Makani—and other Osborne High students—Rodrigo has trouble forgiving himself for his past mistakes. He struggles to move forward with his life and fears what his peers would think of him if they knew about his past misogynistic behavior. Knowing about Rodrigo’s inner struggles and insecurities shows the reader just how widespread Makani’s own feelings of inadequacy and internalized shame are among kids her age. She’s in no way the only one who feels lonely and ashamed.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

●● Their usual breakfast was whole-wheat toast or a bowl of fiber cereal. Makani didn’t need to ask why the change. Pancakes kept her grandmother occupied while they waited for information. Pancakes gave her a task to do with her hands in a world that seemed more and more out of her control. And pancakes showed Makani that, even though the world was frightening, she was loved.

**Related Characters:** Grandma Young, Makani Young, Rodrigo Morales

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 125

### Explanation and Analysis

Rumors that Rodrigo Morales is the third murder victim make their way around town before the news can announce the death officially. Everyone is sad and scared, including Grandma Young, who had been Rodrigo’s sisters’ teacher. To counteract the collective sadness, Grandma Young switches out her and Makani’s typical breakfast, making a special

meal of pumpkin pancakes instead. This passage is Makani's response to this departure from normalcy.

Makani sees the pancakes as a way for Grandma Young to cope with her grief. The possibility that Rodrigo has died leaves Grandma Young feeling frightened and out of control. Making a special breakfast for Makani "[gives] her a task to do with her hands in a world that seem[s] more and more out of her control." It also creates the feeling that she can nourish and protect her granddaughter in a world that seems increasingly threatening.

Throughout the book, characters respond to grief, trauma, and uncertainty in various ways—some healthier and more effective than others. What these coping mechanisms all have in common, though, is that people practice them to attempt to regain some of the control and comfort they lost when tragedy struck, disrupted their lives, and showed them how little say they have in the hurt the world inflicts upon them and their loved ones.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☝ Social boundaries were being crossed everywhere. Students still ate with their own kind, but each group sat a little closer to the other groups, and they weaved in and out of one another's conversations. They were all talking about the same thing, anyway. It was sad that people only got along when everybody was unhappy.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Rodrigo Morales

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

After Rodrigo's murder, the atmosphere around Osborne High changes drastically. Rodrigo had been a normal, average kid. Suddenly, everyone feels like they could be the killer's next victim. Makani observes how this collective fear has impacted students' behavior at school. "Social boundaries were being crossed everywhere," and though the school's cliques remain intact, typically disparate groups of kids "s[it] a little closer to the other groups, and they weave[] in and out of one another's conversations." Earlier in the book, Makani wondered whether tragedies imbue a sense of community in towns affected by tragic events. Now, seeing kids who'd typically have nothing in common bond over their shared feelings of fear and helplessness the murders have caused supports her earlier theory. Living in constant fear of an unidentified killer on the loose has

effectively transformed the school's social ecosystem, upending the status quo and instilling a heightened sense of solidarity in the students. Of course, Makani's take on this transformation isn't wholly positive. Though she seems to appreciate how fear has brought people together, she still thinks it's a shame that people take community for granted until tragedy strikes.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☝ The summer clothes were her old clothes. In Hawaii, the warmest items she'd needed were jeans and a hoodie. Here, she'd had to ask her grandmother to buy her a coat, hat, scarf, gloves, and sweaters. They'd made a special trip to a mall in Omaha, and she'd selected everything in black. She couldn't explain why except that when she wore it, she felt a bit more protected. A bit more hardened.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson, Grandma Young

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 146-147

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani invites Ollie back to her house while Grandma Young is out of town attending a sleep study. They head to her room for some alone time, and in reference to Makani's all-black winter wardrobe, Ollie jokes that she's a "winter goth." Makani pretends to laugh, though inwardly, she takes Ollie's observation more seriously.

Makani's winter wardrobe only exists because she now lives in Nebraska; in Hawaii's tropical climate, she hadn't needed such clothing. As such, the clothes carry extra significance—they remind Makani of the traumatic events that precipitated her move to Nebraska in the first place (a hazing ritual gone awry, facing assault charges, and the complete social ostracization that ensued). The fact that Makani selects black clothing to begin her new life in Osborne suggests that she's in a state of mourning for the life, community, and friends she left behind in Hawaii.

The clothing carries another meaning, too. Makani observes that "she fe[els] a bit more protected" beneath her black clothing. Makani's bad behavior at the swim team hazing ritual in Hawaii turns her entire community against her. To shield herself from suffering the same hurt at her new home in Osborne, she keeps her past to herself, "harden[ing]" herself to ensure that she won't be hurt and abandoned by a new set of friends. Her black clothing is an extension of this

“hardened” exterior.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ The serial killers in her imagination, the fictional centerpieces of innumerable movies and television shows, were colorful and fascinating and impossible to keep her eyes off of. But her eyes had always glossed over David. Who do you think did it? She'd looked past him, even when he'd asked her. She'd looked past him, even when he'd been sitting right in front of her.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, David Ware, Ollie Larsson, Grandma Young

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 156

### Explanation and Analysis

The Osborne Slayer attacks Makani at Grandma Young's house while Grandma Young is in Omaha undergoing a sleep study. However, the attack goes awry when Ollie and Grandma Young arrive at the scene in time to save Makani. But before the killer can flee the scene, his hood slips down from his head, revealing his identity: it's David Ware, one of Makani and Ollie's classmates at Osborne High.

Though Makani clearly sees David's face during the attack and knows that he is familiar, she can't quite place him. This is because David, unlike “the serial killers in [Makani's] imagination,” who are fearsome monsters, is a wholly unremarkable, unrecognizable person. As this passage puts it, “her eyes had always glossed over David.” Makani's ruminations on David's unmemorable appearance and demeanor lay the foundation for what the novel will eventually reveal to be David's motives for killing. For now though, his normalcy almost makes him more terrifying, as he doesn't adhere to the stereotypes about serial killers that Makani is used to.

Another critical theme the book explores is secrets. Many students have secret lives and insecurities that nobody—not even their closest friends—knows about. By emphasizing David's unremarkable exterior within the context of Makani just finding out that he is the murderer, the novel highlights the idea that it's impossible to really know anything about people. David hadn't seemed capable of killing—or capable of anything, really—and yet, he is the one terrorizing Osborne and killing its young people.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ “If they're hiding anything,” Ollie said, lifting his head to extend his own peace offering, “you'll find it.”

**Related Characters:** Ollie Larsson (speaker), Makani Young, David Ware, Chris Larsson, Alex, Darby

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 178

### Explanation and Analysis

Ollie and Makani are at the Larsson household with Chris. They're discussing the recent revelation that local high school student David Ware is responsible for the string of murders that has shocked the town of Osborne. The news about David shocks David's parents, who claim they knew nothing of David's plans to murder his classmates. In this passage, Ollie responds to David's parents' claims of ignorance, insisting that if David's parents do know more about David's plans than they're letting on, Chris and the other police officers will find out about it.

When Ollie insists that the police will find out if David's parents are hiding information, he alludes to the broader idea that nothing stays secret for long—especially not in a small town like Osborne. Though Ollie doesn't know it yet, his remark likely strikes a chord for Makani, who is afraid of this very thing. She's nervous every day that Ollie, Alex, and Darby will find out about her past in Hawaii (which she tries very hard to keep a secret) and abandon her when they find out that she's supposedly a bad person. With this remark, Ollie gestures at the broader idea that hiding or ignoring your troubles or secrets doesn't make them go away. It's impossible to run away from one's problems, since they'll always find a way to catch up, just like it's only a matter of time before a person's secrets can't stay hidden forever.

## Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ “They want you to speak,” she said. “The town. They want you to stand up in front of all those people and cameras and be their mascot.”

**Related Characters:** Grandma Young (speaker), Makani Young, David Ware, Ollie Larsson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 184

### Explanation and Analysis



Ollie and Makani visit Grandma Young in the hospital after the three of them narrowly escape David Ware's attack. Grandma Young has just ended a heated phone conversation with an unknown person. After some prodding, Grandma Young angrily admits that the person she was talking to—presumably a local reporter—wants Makani to address the town at the upcoming memorial parade scheduled to honor the murder victims. Makani's address is supposed to restore the town's confidence and bring everyone together.

But Grandma Young isn't happy about this proposition. She claims that the proposition turns Makani into a "mascot," a cog the local news can use to paint a false image of hope for a town ravaged by tragedy and confusion. Not only would such an address be mostly symbolic, but it also disregards Makani's wellbeing—she's just suffered a horrific attack. And though for the most part she's escaped physically unscathed, she bears emotional wounds from the recent trauma.

Grandma Young's remark explores the complexities of coping with the aftermath of trauma. On the one hand, having a strong sense of community can help the people of Osborne understand and start to heal in the wake of tragedy. On the other hand, Grandma Young insists that it's wrong to exploit Makani, who has hardly had a spare moment to process her very recent attack, for the welfare of others. Grandma Young's harsh words also further illuminate her relationship with Makani. Makani often feels discounted and ignored by her emotionally unavailable parents back in Hawaii. But it's clear that in Grandma Young, Makani has a fierce and empathetic protector.

her involvement in the hazing ritual back in Hawaii. This passage describes the toll the aftermath of the attack took on Makani. After she's charged with assault, rumors spread throughout her high school, and everyone she used to consider to be her friend abandons her. The rumors spread to the internet, too, and she's the victim of considerable hate mail and cyberbullying.

As a result of the social ostracization and bullying, Makani sinks into a deep depression: she sleeps too much, refuses to leave her house, and has nobody to talk to. It's a painful experience for her. And while "it hurt because everyone had the wrong idea about her," the most painful aspect of the experience is that she's afraid that she deserves all the hate she's getting: "usually it hurt because it felt like they had it right." Makani's friends' abandonment is painful, but it's even more painful for her to live with the fact that she suspects that they're right to abandon her: that she really is a bad person who's undeserving of love and friends and is also unworthy of forgiveness.

☝☝ Darby stepped in front of Alex to block her from Makani's view. "You're right. But I know what it's like to be angry—to think that everyone has it easier than you. Or that everyone is against you. And if you don't deal with those feelings, they don't go away on their own. They keep building and building until they force their way out."

**Related Characters:** Darby (speaker), Alex, David Ware, Ollie Larsson, Makani Young

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 208

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani sits in the hospital waiting room with Alex, Darby, and Ollie. After narrowly escaping an attack by David Ware—the Osborne Slayer—Makani feels especially grateful for her friends. Makani's gratitude compels her to finally confide in her friends about her involvement in the cruel hazing ritual in Hawaii. Afterward, her friends respond not with judgment—as Makani had expected them to respond—but with compassion and understanding. This is Darby's response to Makani's story.

Darby is transgender, and Osborne is a small town that can sometimes respond to difference with hostility. So Darby promises Makani that he "know[s] what it's like to be angry" but keep these feelings bottled up deep inside. But readers can assume from his words that years of dealing with

## Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ Makani slept long hours and stirred aimlessly through her house. The barrage was endless. Immeasurable. Sometimes it hurt because everyone had the wrong idea about her, but usually it hurt because it felt like they had it right.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Alex, Darby, Ollie Larsson

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 205

### Explanation and Analysis

After keeping her past a secret from Ollie, Darby, and Alex for so long, Makani finally comes clean to her friends about

judgment and bigotry have also taught him that it hurts more to keep these negative feelings inside—and it certainly doesn't make the past and one's problems go away.

Darby's advice to Makani not to ignore the bad feelings, since they'll only "keep building and building until they force their way out," is an important moment in Makani's development. It helps inform the lesson she ultimately learns by the novel's end: that a person can't run away from their problems and can only heal and move on from the past once they forgive themselves and undergo internal growth. While Makani is ultimately able to do this, David Ware, the novel's antagonist, fails to see that he—not his more successful peers, and not his boring hometown—is responsible for improving his circumstances.

## Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ Ollie stopped. His expression was serious. He waited to speak until she stopped, too. "Everybody has at least one moment they deeply regret, but that one moment . . . it doesn't define all of you."

**Related Characters:** Ollie Larsson (speaker), Makani Young, Grandma Young, David Ware, Jasmine, Chris Larsson

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 231

### Explanation and Analysis


After Makani, Ollie, and Grandma Young narrowly escape David Ware (the Osborne Slayer), Makani finally tells her friends about the troubled past she left behind in Hawaii (she attacked her former best friend Jasmine during a cruel hazing ritual.) Makani's friends reassure her that they know she's a good person who just made a mistake, but she still feels that the bad person who hurt Jasmine is the real her—not the good, reformed person her friends think she is. When Makani later expresses this fear to Ollie, he promises that "Everybody has at least one moment they deeply regret," but that this moment shouldn't "define all of you." Ollie says this to reassure Makani that she doesn't need to beat herself up or worry that her new friends will judge her for things that happened long ago. But he's also alluding to his own struggles with self-hatred. Ollie went through a rough patch following the death of his parents, and many Osborne High students spread rumors about the questionable activities Ollie engaged in during this difficult time in his life, many of which simply aren't true. Ollie spent

a long time hating himself for how his poor behavior hurt himself and his brother, Chris, a local police officer. And he still struggles with self-hatred for all he put Chris through. But ultimately, Ollie knows that his past doesn't define him any more than Makani's defines her.

## Chapter 24 Quotes

☝☝ That was it. The news rehashed the story from the top. David kept climbing into the truck, and it kept making a right turn. The killer kept going home.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, David Ware, Grandma Young, Ollie Larsson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 253

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani watches local news coverage of the "Osborne Slayings." After Ollie and Grandma Young appear and thwart David's attempt to kill Makani, David flees town, hitching rides with various truck drivers to evade capture. Curiously, though, "The killer kept going home." This passage describes the way that the repeating news story is showing the same story over and over again. Thus, the footage of David hopping into a truck and returning to Osborne plays as if on a loop. But there's a second meaning to the statement, too: each time David has an opportunity to travel further away from Osborne, he opts to hitch a ride that returns him to his hometown.

What motivates David to kill is his resentment toward peers whose skills and ambition afford them opportunities to leave Osborne for better places—to attend out-of-state colleges or play professional football, for instance. He, in contrast, feels doomed to remain in Osborne forever, since his family has lived there for generations and he has no discernable skills to give him a path out. But what David fails to realize is that Osborne—and everyone else, for that matter—aren't to blame for his problems: he is. That is, it's his failure to make something of himself and choose to be a good person with ambition that sets him back.

So, when David returns to Osborne, it symbolizes this fundamental misunderstanding: he returns to Osborne because he thinks he's fated to do so, when in reality, he's failing to see that he has the power to do anything—or run away to anywhere—he wants. And by failing to refocus his inward gaze and see how he exacerbates his own misery, he dooms himself, over and over again, like the repeating news


story.

## Chapter 25 Quotes

☞ “People are sick. They think this is all a game.”

**Related Characters:** Makani Young (speaker), David Ware, Ollie Larsson, Grandma Young

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 259

### Explanation and Analysis

Makani and Ollie head out of the Larsson house the night before Halloween to visit Grandma Young in the hospital. But they run into traffic immediately since Ollie’s house is next to the Martin Family Fun Corn Maze. The annual maze is a big hit under normal circumstances, but the recent murders have brought in swarms of tourists and drunk college kids looking for thrills. This passage is Makani’s response to the spectacle. “People are sick. They think this is all a game,” she observes of the insensitive out-of-towners who have made a mockery of her town’s real, unhealed wounds.

The insensitive tourism that David Ware’s murders has generated sheds light on the complex, varied ways people react when faced with senseless, unspeakable tragedy. Makani believes without a doubt that the people who have turned Osborne’s serial killings into a tourist attraction are in the wrong. Yet their insensitivity also reveals how ill-equipped the novel suggests people generally are to make sense of things they can’t control. Perhaps unconsciously, these people are making a spectacle of Osborne’s tragedy to pretend that it *hasn’t* happened—to will David’s murderous spree out of existence. Pretending that it’s “all a game” allows them to move forward with their lives without having to confront and work through the uncomfortable fact that people are fundamentally unable to prevent death, violence, and other evils from shattering their lives and communities.


## Chapter 27 Quotes

☞ The terror was finally spreading outward. If the corn were an ocean, the cries were its waves.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Ollie Larsson, David

Ware, Rosemarie Holt

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 279

### Explanation and Analysis

After Makani and her friends interrupt David Ware’s attempt to murder Rosemarie Holt, David takes off into the corn maze. Makani and her friends chase after him and try to warn other people in the maze to watch out for David, but it’s Halloween, the maze is filled with actors in scary costumes, and everybody assumes that Makani and her friends are playing a prank. This passage comes from the moment everyone realizes that it’s no joke—a violent killer is really in the maze with them.

Throughout the novel, the cornfields that surround Osborne mirror Makani’s inner life. She often projects her feelings about the town onto the corn. At the novel’s beginning, for instance, when she still views getting sent to Osborne as a punishment, the corn feels oppressive and stifling to her. Later, when Ollie takes her into a cornfield and they share a sweet, intimate moment, the corn takes on a more positive quality, becoming an “ocean” that can restore her instead of drowning her. At this pivotal moment, when the stakes are high as David threatens to harm even more people, Makani compares the cries that echo through the corn maze to the “waves” of the ocean. The way the corn’s meaning shifts according to Makani’s mood or circumstances illustrates one of the novel’s most important lessons: a person can’t run away from their problems; a person will just take their problems with them wherever they go. This is what’s happening with the corn: it has no meaning outside of whatever Makani projects onto it. The corn isn’t really an ocean, and it’s not in and of itself dangerous. It’s dangerous because David is in it, and it’s an ocean because Makani is using this metaphor to help her make sense of what’s happening.

## Chapter 28 Quotes

☞ David didn’t know her, but Makani knew herself. And neither of them was a monster. She was a human who had made a terrible mistake. He was a human who had planned his terrible actions.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, David Ware, Jasmine

**Related Themes:****Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 283-284**Explanation and Analysis**

Makani subdues and confronts David Ware outside the corn maze, raising his knife over his vulnerable body in preparation to kill him. David mocks Makani, claiming she won't be able to go through with the act. This is Makani's response to David's taunting. Inwardly, she thinks about how little David knows about her. Throughout the book, characters make assumptions about other people based on rumor and speculation—and they're often wrong. The book suggests that when people misjudge others instead of engaging them in authentic communication, they risk getting people wrong and inflicting unnecessary hurt. This idea comes to a head in this scene.

Another important idea here is a person's ability to shape their destiny. For much of the novel, Makani has struggled to reconcile her past and present. She got drunk at a swim team hazing ritual back in Hawaii and hurt her best friend, Jasmine, and everyone turned on her when they found out. To this day, Makani feels her mistake means she's a bad person—and always will be. But as she opens up to her new friends in Osborne about her past, they help her understand that no one mistake can define a person. People always have the freedom to choose how they'll act moving forward, and it's up to them to always strive to be the person they want to be. So while David and Makani are alike in that they've committed horrible acts, the novel suggests that David is a genuinely bad person because he continues to act on destructive, evil impulses. By contrast, Makani chooses to be a better person moving forward. Though Makani used to think she wasn't so different from David, she now sees that they're nothing alike.

Running away from home didn't change the fact that a person still had to live with themselves. Makani had learned this, though perhaps her mother never had. Change came from within, over a long period of time, and with a lot of help from people who loved you. Osborne wasn't David's problem. For Makani, Osborne had even been restorative. Being a psychopath was David's problem. David was David's problem.

**Related Characters:** Makani Young, Makani's Mother, David Ware**Related Themes:****Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 284**Explanation and Analysis**

Makani has subdued David Ware in the corn pit. As she stands over his body, she considers his seriously flawed attempt to find happiness, confidence, and fulfillment. David's insecurities mirror Makani's, but the novel makes it clear that the two of them are hardly alone in feeling unfulfilled, unhappy, and confused about their place in life. Many of the book's teenage characters feel unhappy and lonely, and they long to transition into adulthood and make something of their lives. But while Makani, through self-reflection and the support of her friends, has defeated her demons and found happiness in her new life, David has failed to be introspective. Instead, he lashes (and slashes) out at others to bring them down to his level. He's unhappy in Osborne, and he mistakenly blames everything and everyone else for his unhappiness. He thinks his hometown and circumstances are to blame for his unhappiness. In reality, and as Makani articulates in this passage, "David [is] David's problem." That is, David's problem is within himself, so looking for other people and problems to lay the blame on won't give him a solution to his problems. This is important because it's one of the book's central messages: "Running away from home" won't solve the problems a person left behind. A person carries their issues with them wherever they go, and so as long as they remain themselves (and don't do the work to try to resolve whatever's bothering them), their problems will continue to haunt them.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

## CHAPTER 1

Haley Whitehall returns home to find an egg-shaped egg timer lying on the welcome mat. Nobody's home, and she wonders who could've left it there. Haley's phone rings. It's her best friend Brooke. They gossip and complain about their high school's musical, *Sweeney Todd*. Ms. Colfax, their high school's music director, is an ambitious woman who demands a lot from her students. Haley is starring in the musical and isn't looking forward to being covered in **corn** syrup. Meanwhile, Brooke is the stage manager and has to deal with Shayna, the erratic costume designer, and the challenge of blood-removal for this particularly gory production.

Brooke asks Haley if Jonathan, Shayna's boyfriend, is doing any better today. Jonathan is playing Sweeney opposite Haley, who is playing Mrs. Lovett. Even though Haley is only a junior, her talent has earned her lead roles in school productions for the past two years. Jonathan, on the other hand, has been struggling to learn his part for weeks. Brooke commiserates with Haley's complaints about Jonathan. Haley admits to being a bit short with Jonathan in rehearsal earlier that day. Brooke tells her that it's not her fault Jonathan hasn't learned his part.

As Brooke complains about her stage manager duties, Haley eats a sandwich in the kitchen and stares out the window at the **cornfields** surrounding her house. Her cell connection goes in and out, so half of what Brooke is saying is static. Haley makes sympathetic sounds to pretend she can hear. When she places her dirty dishes in the dishwasher, the only thing inside is a butter **knife**. She notices the sink is empty, too, and she suddenly feels nervous. As she turns to head upstairs, her foot sends the egg timer spinning across the floor. Haley freezes—hadn't she placed it on the counter top when she first got home? She tries to shrug it off and decides that she must have dropped the timer on the floor and forgotten about it.

*Sweeney Todd*, a musical about a murderous butcher who starts feeding humans through his meat grinder, perhaps foreshadows the onset of future violence. Stephanie Perkins modeled *There's Someone Inside Your House* after her favorite slasher/thriller movies. Since the genre creates interest through tense and suspenseful situations, it's important to note moments in the book that build tension and alert the reader that something isn't quite right. The egg-shaped timer on the welcome mat seems to be one of these moments, but Haley ignores her instinct that something is wrong, too swept up in her gossip with Brooke to listen to her gut.



Readers learn that Haley has earned lead roles in her high school's musical productions for years, even though she isn't an upper-level student. This shows that she's a talented, notable performer who stands out among her peers. Though Haley is talented, she's humble and self-aware. She exhibits these traits in her apparent hesitancy to gossip about Jonathan's lack of talent, even though it seems like there's no doubt that Jonathan really is wholly untalented.



The cornfields that surround Haley's house establish the novel's setting. It seems to be a rural place, sparsely populated and consisting of mostly farmland as opposed to suburban sprawl. The pensiveness with which Haley assesses the surrounding cornfields shows the reader, perhaps, that corn has special meaning to the book's characters. It's impossible to know what Haley is thinking as she gazes into the corn. But readers do know that she's a talented, stand-out kid, so perhaps she's longing for something more than her rural, isolated town can offer her. The egg timer reappears, creating further tension. In the horror and thriller genres, characters whose intuitions tell them something is off tend to be correct, so the reader may guess that something bad will happen to Haley if she continues to ignore the timer.



Brooke accuses Haley of not listening to her. Haley mumbles an apology and makes an excuse about being tired to hang up with Brooke. Alone in her house, Haley can't help but feel uneasy about the egg timer, but she can't say why. Nevertheless, she walks upstairs, collapses into her bed, and immediately falls asleep. Sometime later, Haley awakens with a start to the sound of ticking. She looks at the nightstand beside her bed. Her phone is gone, and in its place rests the egg timer.

*Haley's unease distracts and alienates her from her friend. Once more, though, Haley pushes her gut feeling that there's something off about the egg timer aside. When the timer appears inexplicably beside her bed, it creates additional tension. Who placed it there, and who took Haley's phone? The scene ends abruptly, before the reader can witness whatever happens to Haley, but the tension the narrative has built up to this point implies something bad and possibly violent happens to Haley once she awakens and sees the timer.*



## CHAPTER 2

All that anybody at the high school can talk about the next morning is Haley Whitehall's gruesome murder and Ollie Larsson's new pink hair. Makani sits with her friend Darby in his car. Makani wryly notes that Ollie's hair seems a little less important than murder, but Darby reasons that in a small town like Osborne, Nebraska, a boy dying his hair pink really is as much of scandal as a murder. Makani heard that Haley's throat was slit to resemble a smiley face. Makani and Darby's friend Alex arrives and hops inside the car with her trumpet. Alex jokes that it was Ollie who killed Haley and then used her blood to color his white-blond hair pink.

*The opening of Chapter Two reveals what happened to Haley after Chapter One's abrupt end: someone—likely the person responsible for moving the egg timer—murdered her. The choice not to show Haley's apparently gruesome murder is an interesting one, and one that contrasts with typical slashers, many of which are known for their exploitive, gratuitous violence. Perkins's take on the classic teen slasher story has a more thoughtful, purposeful relationship to violence. Darby's wry remark about a boy with pink hair being as scandalous as a gruesome murder speaks to Osborne's culture. Darby is insinuating that Osborne is a place where breaking free from social norms and being different is frowned upon.*



Alex senses Makani's unease and teases her about still having a thing for Ollie. Makani has had a crush on Ollie ever since she moved to Nebraska a little under a year ago. He's a strange, skinny loner who wears the same dark clothing every day and kind of looks like a skeleton. There are many rumors about him. Some people say he only sleeps with older women—or older men. Others claim that he uses or sells opioids he steals from his brother, who works as a police officer. Makani hooked up with Ollie last summer, though the only people who know about it are Darby and Alex.

*It's unclear exactly what's causing Makani's unease—that her friends are gossiping about Ollie (Makani's crush), or the fact that they're apparently taking gossip as fact. Makani herself seems reticent about being the subject of gossip, which explains her relief that only her closet friends know about her summer fling with Ollie. From an outsider's perspective, Ollie appears odd, out of place, and perhaps even nefarious. But rumors are often exaggerated or flat-out untrue, so readers can't assume that Ollie is the person town gossip suggests he is.*



Makani is grateful for Darby and Alex, her only friends. They took her in when she moved from Hawaii to live with Grandma Young in Nebraska while her parents navigated a messy divorce—at least, this is the part of the story she tells her friends. She doesn't tell them about "the incident at the beach," which is the real reason her parents sent her to Nebraska. It's October now, and Makani has been in Nebraska for nearly a year. She and her friends are seniors, and none of them can wait for graduation. Makani is unsure of what her future holds, but she knows she wants to leave Osborne.

*Makani seems to be hiding a secret about the reason for her move to Nebraska—something involving "the incident at the beach" that she's too afraid to tell her friends about. She seems to have some unresolved issues relating to this incident, so it's possible that the incident was traumatic or unsettling in one way or another. On the one hand, that Makani and her friends' desire to leave Osborne is a common part of the typical teenage experience—it's normal to feel stifled and bored in one's hometown. Still, Osborne, with its rural location and apparently closeminded community, seems especially claustrophobic and restrictive.*



Darby brings up Haley. He can hardly believe that she's dead. Alex, the school's only goth, assembles her long, black hair into an intricate twist and accuses Darby of inserting himself into a tragedy, since he never liked Haley when she was alive. Darby was assigned female at birth but transitioned socially earlier in high school. People gave him judgmental looks at first, but now they mostly leave him alone. He adjusts the suspenders he wears every day and scowls as he protests Alex's accusation. Makani wonders whether Haley's parents or boyfriend—or maybe even a serial killer—could be responsible for her murder. All three agree that even if they didn't like Haley, what happened to her was awful. Inwardly, Makani wonders if she's no different than Haley's murderer.

*Darby and Alex both know what it's like to be an outsider. Alex dresses in an edgy, goth way that likely sets her apart from her peers, and Darby's gender identity made him the subject of cruel high school gossip and bullying. Feeling alienated and unaccepted is a typical part of high school for many teenagers, and the narrative focuses on these students who seem to suffer from more than an average degree of ridicule to really explore this element of adolescence. Makani's comparison of herself to Haley's murderer is odd. She clearly thinks ill of herself for some reason; perhaps this relates to the mysterious incident at the beach in Hawaii the narrative referenced earlier.*



By lunch time, Alex's tasteless joke about Ollie's hair has spread across the school, and everyone's gossiping about whether he's Haley's murderer. The rumors upset Makani, though she knows that they're only gossip. People are also spreading rumors about Zachary Loup, the school's underachiever, who's also a real jerk. Most students think Haley's family members are the most likely suspects. If she had a boyfriend, nobody knew about it, though it's not unheard of for girls to have secrets.

*The fact that such a clearly goofy, baseless rumor as Ollie killing Haley and using her blood to dye his hair has gained as much traction as other, more logical rumors reveals gossip's undiscerning and unreliable nature. The detail about girls having secrets recalls Makani's hang-up about the mysterious Hawaii incident. The narrative suggests that having secrets is common among high school students—many teens have secrets they don't want their peers or parents to know about.*



Makani sits with her friends on the quad and considers Osborne, a dreary town surrounded by nothing but **cornfields** for as far as the eye can see. Meanwhile, Alex and Darby continue to gossip about Haley. Alex wonders if Haley's understudy, Jessica Boyd, might have killed her, though everyone agrees that it's pretty unlikely. Alex thinks it's suspicious that Haley's best friend Brooke didn't come to school today. Darby impatiently reminds Alex that Brooke is in mourning.

*For Makani, the cornfields that surround Osborne contribute to and symbolize the town's depressing atmosphere. The fact that only Darby and Alex are participating in the gossip about Haley—Makani largely remains silent about the matter—reinforces the idea that Makani dislikes gossip. Whether this is just a matter of principle or somehow related to the mysterious "incident" in Hawaii remains unclear, though.*



Suddenly, the wind picks up, sending a flier for *Sweeney Todd* flying through the air. Makani wonders if they'll cancel the murderous musical in light of Haley's death. Alex hopes they won't since she was looking forward to getting covered in fake blood. Darby teases his goth friend's morbid sense of humor, reminding her that she used to love horses and Pixar movies when she was younger. Makani feels left out when they talk about childhood memories.

Makani shifts her attention across the quad. She's memorized Ollie's schedule and knows that he'll appear any minute now to eat his lunch in a secluded nook beside the lockers. Like clockwork, Ollie appears. Seeing him makes Makani feel empathy for the odd loner. The entrance of a rowdy group of football players interrupts Makani's musings. Matt Butler, the star player, jeers at Ollie, but Ollie ignores him. The jocks roughhouse among themselves, and somebody ends up ripping the *Sweeney Todd* banner. A fight ensues. Makani gets up to interfere, but Darby tells her she doesn't owe Ollie anything.

Makani ignores Darby and walks toward Ollie, who has just reentered the school. With her dark skin and coiled hair, Makani sticks out amongst her mostly white peers, and she walks with a false confidence to dissuade anybody from approaching her. Makani finds Ollie waiting for her inside. She tells him the jocks are idiots. Ollie acts cold and guarded, and Makani feels ashamed for being so obsessed with him. Ollie asks Makani why she's talking to him now after ignoring him all semester. Makani angrily replies that Ollie could say the same about himself. Ollie is silent. Makani angrily gives up and returns to her friends.

## CHAPTER 3

After school, Darby drops Makani off at Grandma Young's house. Makani enters the house and finds Grandma Young on the couch watching TV. Grandma Young explains that she's waiting for the local news to start so she can hear what Creston Howard, the handsome Black news anchor, has to say about Haley's murder. Makani scrolls through her phone, though she's long since given up hope that her former best friend, Jasmine, will text her. She's also stopped hoping that things would go back to the way they were before. Looking back, Makani realizes that things definitively changed the minute she changed her surname from Kanekalau to Young, her mother's maiden name—a decision she made to make herself less Google-able.

*Makani is grateful for her friends but can't help but feel left out when they talk about their early childhoods in Osborne, something that Makani, as a newer resident, has no context for. Her complicated relationship to her friends due to their different histories reinforces the novel's insistence that it's common for teens to feel lonely and alienated, in a variety of situations.*



*The social atmosphere of Osborne High seems not unlike a stereotypical high school, where the archetypal "jock" students ridicule and bully the archetypal outsiders. That Makani gets up and walks toward the fight, presumably to interfere and defend Ollie, shows the reader that she's a thoughtful, caring person who cares about the welfare of others. Makani's empathy for others could be another clue about her past. Perhaps she has a low tolerance for bullying due to something that happened to her in Hawaii.*



*Like Darby and Alex, Makani also feels like an outsider at Osborne High. Her identity as a biracial person makes her stick out in Osborne, which has a majority white population. Ollie's animosity toward Makani seems odd and unprecedented. Did something happen between them that Makani is holding back? The novel has already established her as someone who's guarded about her secrets, after all. Still, they seem mutually confused about why they're avoiding each other, so it's also possible that they've just had a misunderstanding about their feelings and intentions regarding each other.*



*This scene offers more insight into Makani's mysterious Hawaii incident. The narrative reveals that the incident has caused Makani's (former) best friend, Jasmine, to stop speaking with her. The detail about Makani changing her name from Kanekalau to Young to be less searchable on the internet also helps explain why Makani is so hesitant to gossip about Haley's murder. It seems that she was the victim of cyber-bullying of some kind, so she knows the pain that results from people attacking one's character for things they've done—or are rumored to have done.*





There are no messages from home in Makani's phone, though she prefers this to the hate messages she used to get. Only people like Jasmine still care about "the incident." Grandma Young reminds Makani not to leave the cabinets open when she leaves for school. Makani insists that she didn't. When she looks up at Grandma Young, the older woman lowers her eyes. Makani knows it's hard for her grandmother to admit her weaknesses—it's a trait they share. Makani wants to continue talking about her grandma's issue but recognizes the hypocrisy of such a request.

Another thing Makani and Grandma Young have in common is that they both committed an "unspeakable mistake." Last Thanksgiving, still grieving the loss of Granddaddy Young, Grandma Young sleepwalked to her neighbor's house and started pruning his walnut tree. When he tried to stop her, she clipped the tip of his nose off. The neighbor generously decided not to sue, but the incident scared Makani's mother, and she decided to send Makani to Nebraska to live with Grandma Young. While Grandma Young mostly can fend for herself, she's needed Makani more often the past few months. Makani likes feeling needed—though she can recall one incident where being needed backfired on her.

Makani thinks back to last July, on the one-year anniversary of Granddaddy Young's death. Slipping back into the memory, Grandma Young wants to spend the day alone, so she sends Makani out to do some shopping at Greeley's Foods, the nearby supermarket. Makani walks into the store and locks eyes with Ollie Larsson, who works there. Ollie recognizes Makani but makes no effort to say hello. He continues to do his duties as Makani wheels her shopping cart through the store and anxiously tries to think of something to say to him.

Makani completes her shopping without speaking to Ollie. She exits the store and starts loading everything into Grandma Young's early 1990s gold Taurus station wagon. Suddenly, she hears laughter coming from the alley behind the store. Ollie is there, a book in his hands. Makani slams the trunk shut, walks over to him, and demands to know if there's something funny about Grandma Young's car. Ollie smiles and gestures toward his own car—a decommissioned police cruiser he'd gotten from his brother—to show her that he's in no position to judge her embarrassing car. He was really laughing at himself for wanting to talk to her earlier but not knowing what to say. Makani smiles. She tries to remain calm, but it's been so long since she's been attracted to anyone, and she's excited.

*If Makani's "incident" caused her peers to send her hate messages, it seems likely that they believe she's guilty of some kind of betrayal or other social ill. Regardless of what, exactly, Makani did, it's clear that the aftermath of the incident brings Makani a lot of inner pain and suffering. Grandma Young's remark about the cabinets seems innocuous enough, but the narrative makes a point to draw attention to it, so it's worth keeping track of—it might be relevant to the plot down the line.*



*Again, the narrative's reference to Makani's "unspeakable mistake" teases whatever happened between Makani, Jasmine, and the rest of their friend group back in Hawaii. Readers still don't know exactly what Makani did, but whatever it was, it was traumatic to the point that Makani can't bear to mention it outright—even after a year has passed. That Grandma Young's sleepwalking worsened after the death of Granddaddy Young points to the impact of trauma, grief, and loss. Grandma Young's grief for Granddaddy Young is so great that it manifests physically, causing her to sleepwalk.*



*Makani and Ollie's mutual inability to look or interact with each other is a comically stereotypical depiction of young love. Their painful social awkwardness also gestures at the alienating experience of being a teenager, feeling misunderstood, and not being able to effectively communicate or understand one's feelings.*



*Had Makani not confronted Ollie about his laughter, she might not have known that Ollie was laughing at himself for his social ineptitude—not at Makani for driving an older car. But when Makani does confront him, forcing the two of them to communicate frankly and directly, she finds out the truth and drops her defensive shield. She and Ollie both benefit from direct communication. This is the opposite of what happens when characters rely on gossip and assumption to know about others, something the novel shows more often creates hurt and misunderstanding.*



Makani and Ollie stand close to each other. Makani asks about the book Ollie is reading. He explains that it's a travelogue—one of his favorite genres—about a man who travels by train from London to Southeast Asia. They connect over their mutual desire to be anywhere but Osborne. Ollie asks her if she's going to return to Hawaii after graduation. Makani panics for a moment but decides it's unlikely Ollie knows about "the incident." She shrugs.

*Makani and her friends aren't the only ones who long to leave Osborne—Ollie, too, longs for the day he can leave his boring, rural hometown behind him. He reads travelogues to mentally escape his stifling, unsatisfying present environment. Makani's paranoia about Ollie knowing about "the incident" again teases this mysterious part of Makani's past. It's clear that a lot of what bothers her about it is that other people will find out about it and judge her—she fears that people will abandon her all over again.*



Ollie tells her he doesn't much care where he ends up, so long as he can leave Nebraska. Right now, the only things keeping him here are his brother and lack of money. He's been working at Greeley's for four years now. Makani wishes she could have a job, but her parents insist that her only job is to take care of her grandmother. Ollie is surprised to hear this, since Grandma Young has always seemed fine to him.

*That Ollie doesn't have a clear idea of where he'll go once he leaves Nebraska—or how he'll get there—shows that his plans for leaving are half-baked and superficial. He seems to possess a youthful idealism that moving to a new place will magically make all his problems go away, when there's no guarantee this will be the case.*



Makani admits that her parents are only using Grandma Young as an excuse to send her away. She's immediately ashamed to talk badly of her parents in front of Ollie, who is an orphan. She imagines it must be hard to live in a small town where everyone knows that a drunk driver killed your parents when you were in middle school. Ollie doesn't seem to mind Makani's mention of her parents. He shrugs it off and Makani apologizes for being insensitive. Ollie apologizes for Makani's parents being awful, and Makani can't tell whether he's joking. When he grins, though, her heart flutters. They plan to see each other later.

*This interaction between Makani and Ollie sheds light on another aspect of what makes grief and mourning so difficult. At least in Western society, people are often uncomfortable around other people's grief and don't know how to address it. Here, Makani feels self-conscious for complaining about her own parents in front of Ollie, who lost his parents somewhat recently. Makani sees Ollie's grief as an elephant in the room that she must avoid, lest she misstep and offend Ollie in some way. Her inability to talk about grief creates distance between herself and Ollie.*



For a week, Makani thinks of nothing but Ollie. She begs Grandma Young to let her go shopping on her own so she might run into him again. To Makani's delight, Grandma Young agrees. When Makani arrives at the store, she sees Ollie in the alley, licking a popsicle, and she knows that he's been waiting for her. She walks over and stands close to him. He offers her the popsicle, but she leans in for a kiss instead. From then on, she and Ollie make out in the alley every Wednesday. When it rains a few weeks later, they move things to the backseat of Grandma Young's car, and things progress from there.

*Makani and Ollie are clearly into each other, yet they limit their relationship to the discrete confines of the alley behind Greeley's or the backseat of Grandma Young's car. It's unclear why this is so. Does Makani feel ashamed to associate with a loner like Ollie? Or has her traumatic so-called "incident" in Hawaii left her especially cautious about letting lots of people know about her personal life, for fear of facing their judgment and ridicule?*



On the fifth Wednesday, Ollie and Makani drive to the middle of a **cornfield** and have sex. Darby asks Makani if she's ever going to make things official with Ollie. The fling ends the next week, when the fall semester begins. When they see each other at school, their eyes meet, but Ollie's expression is blank. Ollie's rejection humiliates Makani. She wonders if he doesn't want to talk to her anymore because he found out about "the incident." Since then, they haven't spoken to each other.

Back in the present, Makani continues to check her phone for messages, though she knows there won't be any. The 5:00 news begins, and Creston Howard announces the tragic, brutal murder of Haley Madison Whitehall. The news coverage includes footage of Haley's shocked, grieving family, and of Haley performing the role of Peter Pan in last year's musical.

## CHAPTER 4

Makani feels on edge as she helps Grandma Young cook dinner that night. They're making a healthy meal of turkey meatballs and salad, but Makani longs for the rich, flavorful foods of Hawaii. Dinner time always makes her homesick. Just as she and Grandma Young sit down to eat, Makani's phone buzzes. Grandma Young sighs as Makani checks her notifications. Her heart jolts as she sees a series of texts from an unknown number: "I could say the same thing about you," and "What did you mean when you said that?" Grandma Young scolds Makani for using her phone at the table. Makani lies and says the texts are from her mother. Grandma Young relents and lets Makani excuse herself to use the phone.

Makani walks to the kitchen and asks who the sender is. She receives an instant response: "Ollie." Makani's heart races. Ollie demands to know what Makani meant. She deflects, so Ollie guesses what's on her mind: she "feel[s] slighted." If this is the case, Ollie writes, "there's been a misunderstanding." He thinks that they both mistakenly thought the other was ashamed. Ollie's directness impresses Makani—it's a rare trait in kids her age. Meanwhile, in the dining room, Grandma Young is getting impatient. Without notice, Makani's phone rings with an incoming call from Ollie. She hurriedly tells him it's not a good time to talk and promises to call him back later.

*Makani's associations with cornfields shift based on her mood. Under normal circumstances, cornfields are a reminder of the dull, stifling atmosphere of Osborne. Yet here, the cornfield resonates with this happy, exciting exercise in new, young love. The shifting association with cornfields suggests that external elements like objects and place have little significance on their own—it's a person's inner state and perspective that gives them meaning.*



*There's something unfeeling and exploitative about the way the news showcases the private details of Haley's life in the aftermath of her murder. The news coverage is harmful much in the way that gossip is harmful: both prioritize sensationalized content and entertainment over truthful, effective communication.*



*Makani's struggle to adapt to a new, unfamiliar cuisine in Nebraska further illustrates what an alienating experience the move from Hawaii has been for her. Further, it also seems like Makani is struggling to adapt to new rules at Grandma Young's house, such as Grandma Young's rule that Makani shouldn't use her phone at the table (unless, of course, she's communicating with a family member). The texts Makani receives are cryptic and this creates some tension—it could be Ollie referencing his and Makani's conversation earlier, but this isn't clear yet.*



*Ollie's frankness impresses Makani because in her experience, being forthright and honest is something that most kids their age—including Makani herself—struggle with. For instance, Makani can't even bring herself to be frank with herself about the mysterious Hawaii "incident." This exchange between Ollie and Makani also gives additional context for the circumstances of their pseudo-breakup—it's apparent at this point that they broke things off due to a mutual misunderstanding rather than some dramatic falling out.*



Makani returns to the dining room table, but Grandma Young isn't fooled: she knows Makani wasn't talking to her mother and demands to see her phone. After some resistance, Makani reluctantly admits that she was talking to a boy. Grandma Young demands to know his name, and Makani has no choice but to tell her. Grandma considers the name "Ollie Larsson" silently. She remembers Ollie's older brother, Chris, as one of her former students. Then she tells Makani that she'll have to meet Ollie if Makani wants to continue seeing him.

Later that night, after Grandma Young has gone to sleep, Makani retires to her bedroom and texts Ollie to see if he can talk. She's nervous but excited, too: talking to Ollie will be the most exciting thing that's happened to her since they hooked up over the summer. As she waits for Ollie's response, Makani considers her surroundings. She's in her mother's childhood bedroom, and it's full of old, mismatched wooden furniture. It's the opposite of Makani's mother's house today, which is all stainless steel and impersonal furniture. Makani has contributed a few of her own things to the room: some pieces of coral and cowrie shells from back home, a few stuffed animals, and some jewelry. Most things she keeps hidden, though.

Makani checks her phone again. There's still no response from Ollie, and it's getting late. Just then, she hears a rustling outside her window. She peers outside and expects to see the neighbor's cat, which often hunts in their yard. When she looks outside, though, the cat is nowhere in sight. Makani returns to her bed but continues to look toward the window. She's growing increasingly uneasy, but she doesn't understand why. She gets up and closes her curtains before returning, once more, to her bed. She tries to study but can't focus. All she can do is dream about Ollie. She wonders if they'll go on a real date. She also wonders how he got her number, since she never gave it to him.

Suddenly Makani's phone dings. She lunges toward it but groans when she sees it's only Alex, who has made a game out of sending her friends pictures of "hairy butts" she finds on Google Images. Finally, at 11:11, Ollie texts back. He'd been working, but he's home now—is she still awake? Makani wonders if she should wait a bit before responding in order to seem not desperate. Then she decides this is stupid and calls him back. Ollie picks up immediately.

*It's framed as a perfectly reasonable request that Grandma Young wants to meet the boy with whom her granddaughter is romantically involved. At the same time, Grandma Young's mention of Ollie's brother Chris shows that she is clearly aware of who Ollie is. This, though, creates some tension: she may also be aware of the negative rumors about Ollie, and this may increase her desire to meet and assess Ollie in person before giving Makani her blessing.*



*Makani sees her mother's furnishings—new and old—as symbols for her mother's inner psyche. The impersonal furnishings of Makani's mother's adulthood dwelling reflect her aloof, withholding personality. And Makani seems to have inherited this trait from her mother, a fact that comes through in Makani's failure to furnish her bedroom with her personal effects. Like her mother, Makani copes with her struggles (or avoids coping with them) by keeping everything bottled up inside.*



*The rustling Makani hears coming from outside could be real or imagined. Either way, it builds tension. One can imagine how such a scene would play out in a typical slasher movie, too. Perkins makes repeated nods to conventional elements of the horror genre throughout the book, and this scene is an example of this tactic. This scene also resonates with the opening scene with Haley Whitehall and the egg timer—Haley, too, felt uneasy but discounted her feelings as unfounded and irrational. Might something violent and sudden happen to Makani as it did to Haley? Makani's anxiety about how Ollie got her number seems to call back to her overarching anxiety about people knowing too much about her personal life and her past. She's wary that if Ollie has found some way to get her number, he can just as easily find out about her past—and judge or reject her for it.*



*Makani wants to wait to respond to Ollie because she doesn't want to appear overeager or needy. But the positive impact that Ollie's earlier frankness had on their budding romance seems to have taught Makani that it's better to be direct and honest. As a result, she disregards her self-consciousness and acts on her desire to call Ollie immediately. It's clear this was the right decision, too, since Ollie's immediate answer shows that he was just as eager to talk to Makani as Makani was to talk to him.*



Makani asks Ollie how he got her number. He sounds embarrassed as he admits that his brother, a police officer, has ways of getting information. Makani smiles, thinking about Ollie talking to his brother about her. They chat back and forth, and Makani gleams at the effortless banter. They both admit that it was dumb to mutually assume that they were mad at each other. They admit that they like each other, and Makani feels the first genuine bit of happiness she's had in a long time.

## CHAPTER 5

Makani and Ollie talk on the phone for hours. She's relieved that he hasn't found out about her past. Ollie tells Makani about his parents, who were farmers, and the strained but loving relationship he has with his brother Chris. Makani talks about the similar relationship she has with Grandma Young. She asks why Ollie's grandparents didn't take him in after his parents' deaths. Ollie explains that half of his grandparents are dead, while the other half are alcoholics. Given that their parents were killed by a drunk driver, Ollie explains, it's no wonder why Chris insisted on taking care of his kid brother.

Ollie asks how Makani's mother ended up in Hawaii. Makani explains that her mother left Nebraska the day after graduation with plans to travel to all 50 states before picking a new home. She went to Hawaii, met Makani's father, and never left. Ollie thinks maybe he needs to make a big plan, too. He notes that he "always follow[s] through with [his] plans."

At school the next day, Makani sits with Alex and Darby in Darby's car and talk about the new developments with Ollie. But Makani's friends aren't taking the relationship as seriously as Makani wants them to. Alex and Darby both think it was creepy how Ollie got Makani's number and flatly refuse to see it as a romantic gesture. Makani looks out the window and waits for Ollie's car to appear. There's a makeshift memorial for Haley in the corner of the lot where students have placed old playbills and candles. Makani changes the subject to express concern about Grandma Young, who has been sleepwalking again. She's recently left the kitchen cabinets open multiple nights in a row. She needs to go to the sleep clinic, but Makani doesn't know how to tell her.

*If Ollie's brother has ways of getting private information like Makani's cell phone number, he might have ways of getting information about whatever happened to Makani in Hawaii, as well. Perhaps Ollie's unconventional method of acquiring Makani's number foreshadows him finding out other private details about Makani later on.*



*Makani and Ollie engage in direct, frank communication, and they grow closer as a result. While rumors about Ollie caused Makani to cast doubt on Ollie and his feelings for her, interacting with Ollie honestly and personally does the opposite. Once more, the book suggests that direct communication can counteract the negative consequences of spreading gossip and making assumptions about people.*



*Makani's mother's failure to reinvent herself and make a happier life in Hawaii suggests that running away from one's problems does little to make those problems go away—in the end, a person's problems follow them wherever they go. Ollie's remark about "always follow[ing] through with [his] plans" is kind of odd and out of place. What kind of plans is he talking about? Note that readers still have no clue who the person who killed Haley Whitehall. Could Alex's absurd rumor that Ollie is the killer be true?*



*Makani feels alienated from her friends when they refuse to see her rekindled romance with Ollie as a positive, sweet thing. The makeshift memorial for Haley physically embodies the human need to grieve and work through traumatic events. The suddenness and violence of Haley's death leaves students who didn't even know her reeling in confusion, and desperate to make sense of the horror of her murder. Finally, this is the second time Makani has thought about the seemingly innocuous detail of Grandma Young leaving the cabinets open, so it's a detail that's worth paying attention to.*



A sudden knock on the window makes everyone shriek, but it's only Ollie. They let him in. Everyone stares, and Ollie starts to blush. For the first time, Makani realizes that Ollie's loner personality isn't an act of rebellion—it's an attempt to hide his shyness. She softens and tells Ollie she's glad to see him. Darby, a kind and thoughtful person, agrees. Alex tells Ollie he should bring doughnuts next time.

After the air settles, Alex gets down to business. She asks Ollie about Haley's murder, assuming he must know more than the others because his brother is a police officer. Ollie explains that his brother doesn't discuss work with him, but Alex won't back off. Ollie finally relents. Cautiously, he explains that the murder occurred in the sheriff's jurisdiction. However, because Haley's father is friends with Chief Pilger, the whole department was at the scene of the crime only an hour later. Makani cringes at Alex's tastelessness as she asks if the rumors about the smiley face slashes are true. Ollie confirms that the smiley face rumor is true. Darby and Makani are both torn between curiosity and shame over their fixation on the murder.

Ollie explains that Haley was found in her bed. There was no trace of the killer besides the slashes—no bruises, nothing under her fingernails, and no sign that she'd put up a fight. It's unclear whether Haley's killer was a stranger or someone she knew. Makani asks Ollie how he knows so much about the case if Chris doesn't discuss work with him. Ollie admits to reading Chris's case files while Chris is asleep. The car falls quiet as they look out toward Haley's memorial site. Darby, the reliable one, fishes out a card he made for Haley last night. Everyone signs the card. Makani feels like a faker signing it, since she'd never spoken to Haley when she was alive. Then everyone exits the car to join the crowd gathered around Haley's memorial. Makani struggles to relate to the mourning people, but she keeps it to herself and pretends to fit in.

*This scene is another nod to typical genre conventions of the teen slasher film—it's something of a "jump scare" when Ollie appears beside the car without notice, catching everyone off-guard, but it's ultimately a fake-out, since Ollie poses no threat to Makani and her friends—at least, not obviously. On the other hand, could this be another hint that Ollie is actually more nefarious than he seems? After all, Makani still doesn't know much about Ollie, beyond what rumors say about him and what she was able to glean from her phone call last night.*



*Alex is Makani's polar opposite—she feels no shame for gossiping about Haley's murder, nor about using Ollie's connection to the Osborne Police Department (through his police officer brother, Chris) to find out inside details about the crime scene. This is another scene that could potentially plant seeds of doubt in readers about Ollie. Yes, there's a logical explanation for why Ollie knows so much about Haley's murder—his brother is a police officer—but could this be a red herring that distracts from the possibility that Ollie knows so much about Haley's death because he's actually the killer? There's nothing solid to suggest this, but in a book that so far has focused on how little people tend to know about others, it's a possibility that's worth considering.*



*The fact that there's no sign that Haley tried to fight her killer points to the possibility that she knew her attacker. She'd be less likely to respond violently to someone she knew than a total stranger—certainly she'd feel less threatened by someone she knew. That Makani feels compelled to ask Ollie how he knows so much about Haley's case suggests that Makani might have doubts about Ollie—maybe she even wonders if he was involved in Haley's murder. Makani's reticence to go through the motions of mourning when she doesn't feel them sincerely suggests a certain distrust of going along with the crowd. The narrative has already established that whatever happened in Hawaii caused Makani's friends to turn on her, so she has reason to be wary of mob psychology and conformity.*



Ollie joins Makani and her friends at lunch, prompting curious looks from the other students in the cafeteria. Makani is glad for Ollie's presence, since it helps her not to feel like a third wheel around Darby and Alex. But Ollie mumbles something incoherent and leaves early. Makani chases after him. He looks apologetic, and Makani understands. She, too, knows that sometimes a person gets overwhelmed and just needs to run. Ollie smiles and offers to drive Makani home that afternoon, and she accepts. Rodrigo Morales, who is sitting nearby, makes a crude joke about giving Makani a ride home. His female friends scoff. Another boy, David, a skinny senior wearing a Minecraft t-shirt, observes that walking would be preferable to having to ride with Rodrigo. Everyone laughs. Rodrigo is embarrassed.

Makani parts ways with Ollie and rejoins her friends. She asks Alex, who has a crush on Rodrigo, what she can possibly see in him. Rodrigo is smart, Alex insists. And while he might be immature, she can force him not to be. Darby makes fun of Alex for going off on Rodrigo for getting one answer wrong in physics yesterday. Makani tells her friends that Ollie is driving her home from school today. Suddenly, the mood between them shifts, and nobody speaks—even Alex. Darby cautiously tells Makani that they've lived in Osborne a lot longer than she has and know that there's been something "off" about Ollie ever since his parents died, even if many of the rumors about him aren't true. They urge Makani to be careful around Ollie.

Makani angrily defends Ollie. She says it's unfair to judge someone who suffered a tragedy and made a few mistakes in life. Makani's sudden rage is out of character and shocks her friends. She storms off before her friends can reply.

## CHAPTER 6

After school, Ollie holds open the door of the Crown Vic for Makani. She jokes about feeling like she's done something bad. Ollie jokes back that this is how he always feels, but there's truth to both of their words—it's why they're connected to each other, even if Ollie doesn't know about Makani's past. Makani feels on edge being in the old cruiser—she hasn't had good experiences with the police.

*Makani's sympathy for Ollie shows that she's learned from past mistakes never to assume she knows what another person is thinking. She and Ollie spent the first few months of the school year not talking to each other because they mistakenly assumed that each was romantically uninterested in the other. Now, she's sure to give Ollie the benefit of the doubt and talk to him directly before assuming that he's feeling a certain way. Rodrigo Morales, in contrast, seems to lack interpersonal communication skills. While the novel is mostly a thriller intended for entertainment, it also turns a thoughtful eye toward what it means to interact with the world and be misunderstood as a teenager.*



*Alex and Darby will accept Makani's relationship with Ollie—but only to a point. While they'll let him sit at their lunch table and hang out in their car, their alarmed response to learning that Ollie will be driving Makani home shows that they remain suspicious of Ollie. Darby's remark about there being something "off" about Ollie since his parents' deaths shows that he and Alex place stock in the local rumors about Ollie. This is likely concerning to Makani, since she's constantly paranoid that her new friends will judge her for her past mistakes, whatever they may be.*



*Makani's sudden rage is about more than her friends judging Ollie—it's also a projection of her fear that they will judge her just as quickly, should they become aware of her past.*



*By defying her friends' concerns and accepting a ride from Ollie, Makani positions herself as someone who fights back against rumor and speculation. She's siding with someone who's been the victim of rumor, giving them the benefit of the doubt instead of going along with the crowd who judges them. Makani's remark insinuates that she knows what it's like to have done something bad—though it remains unclear how literal she's being. Does she know what it's like to transgress generally, or does she know what it feels like to be inside a police car?*



Attempting to flirt, Makani asks Ollie if he *has* done something bad. He says he has. She says that she has, too, but neither elaborates. Makani compliments Ollie's pink hair and means it. He happily recounts how angry the hair made Chris when he first saw it. Makani laughs. Ollie tells her nobody from Osborne has a laugh like hers—that she stands out. Makani tells Ollie she stands out because she's not white. Ollie admits that this is true, too. To Makani's relief, Ollie doesn't follow up with an invasive question about her ethnicity. So far, only Darby, who is trans and understands the discomfort of invasive questions, has managed not to ask Makani, who is half African American and half Native Hawaiian, prying questions about her multiracial background.

Makani and Ollie are both free that afternoon, so Ollie asks if Makani wants to hang out. She does, but she hesitates. Then she reluctantly admits that Ollie will have to meet Grandma Young first. To Makani's surprise, Ollie is fine with this. He explains that this is just how people do things in the Midwest. When they arrive at Grandma Young's house, Ollie is impressed. It's the most beautiful street in town, and he'd always wished he could live there when he was a kid. Ollie explains that he still lives on his parents' old farm, though they've sold most of their land to the neighbors, who have added it to an enormous **corn** maze. Everybody knows about the Martin Family Fun Corn Maze. Billboards advertise it all around town.

Just then, Grandma Young's booming, angry voice interrupts Ollie and Makani's conversation. She's standing on the porch, hands on her hips. Makani exits the car. Grandma Young looks like she's about to cry. She saw the car pull up and thought the police had escorted Makani home from school. Makani explains herself and Ollie gets out of the car. Makani inwardly imagines how horrifying Ollie, with his pink hair and lip piercing, must seem to Grandma Young. But Ollie introduces himself, shakes Grandma Young's hand, and doesn't flinch as she looks him up and down. Grandma Young briefly interrogates Ollie about his age (he's 18), job, and car. Then she scolds Makani for not inviting Ollie inside.

*Makani and Ollie want to know more about each other, yet they both choose to remain silent when the other attempts to find out more about their past. This suggests that Ollie is just as ashamed and guilty about whatever misdeeds he's done as Makani is about her mysterious Hawaii incident. At the same time, Makani respects Ollie's restraint; she'd rather he respect her privacy, since it means he's less likely to find out about whatever unsavory incident she was involved in back in Hawaii.*



*So far, Ollie is a far cry from the deviant, sketchy person Alex and Darby—and the many rumors floating around Osborne—have made him out to be. If he's half as bad as people claim he is, would he really be so open to meeting Grandma Young? Ollie's willingness to meet Grandma Young seems to put Makani at ease, reassuring her that she's right to trust Ollie, and her friends' decision to believe rumors rather than let Ollie speak on his own behalf is wrong and judgmental.*



*Grandma Young demonstrates a degree of thoughtfulness and maturity that is uncommon among Makani's peers by refraining from judging Ollie based on his outward appearance. The novel suggests, perhaps, that while everyone can fall victim to placing too much weight on baseless rumors, it's far more common for young people, who have less life experience, to do this, than people who've had more exposure to different kinds of people.*





Inside, Grandma Young's old-fashioned kitchen and hospitality mortify Makani, but Ollie seems to get along with Grandma Young just fine. They move to the living room. The atmosphere remains formal as Grandma Young and Ollie get to know each other. Ollie points to Grandma Young's jigsaw puzzle on the coffee table. His mother had liked puzzles, he explains. Although his dad and Chris always found them boring, Ollie likes how each puzzle piece has an assigned place. Finally, Makani can't take it anymore. She gets up and says they have to go. Ollie explains that they're going to go to Sonic for slushes. Grandma Young tells Ollie it was nice meeting him and says he's welcome to come over and help out on the puzzle any time he wants.

Outside, Makani compliments Ollie on his ability to lie. She asks where they're really going. Ollie says he's taking Makani to the ocean. They drive through Osborne and exit the city limits. They don't talk, but the silence feels comfortable. They drive past flat, golden countryside and old farmhouses. Finally, Ollie turns down a dirt road surrounded by **cornfields**. It feels secluded. Makani's friends would kill her if they knew. Makani tries to send a text to apologize to them for her behavior earlier, but there's no signal. Ollie cuts the engine and they get out of the car. The ground is wet and muddy, and the air is brisk.

Makani is confused—she thought they were going to the beach. “The ocean,” Ollie corrects. He knows that she misses Hawaii. He hops on top of the car and offers his hand to Makani, then he invites her to look again. This time, Makani sees the beauty of the “ocean” of **corn** that surrounds her. She thanks Ollie for bringing her here. They make out for a bit until Ollie's phone rings. Ollie hops inside the car to take the call. Makani thinks this is strange. Ollie ends the call and stares out at Makani, looking disappointed.

Makani joins Ollie in the car. Ollie says his manager called to say they need him to come in to work early to cover for a girl who was fired after being caught stealing. Out of nowhere, Haley's school photo flashes through Makani's head. Ollie apologizes for having to cut their plans short. Makani asks him why he went inside the car to take the call. He explains that he gets better service inside. Makani argues that she couldn't even send a text, but Ollie just shrugs. They kiss, and Makani forgets about Haley.

*Ollie's interest in jigsaw puzzles seems to stem from the fact that they remind him of a time when his mother was alive. This points to the idea of grief and loss, emphasizing the importance of keeping memories of the deceased alive as a means of working through grief. In general, Ollie seems to have a better grasp than Makani on handling personal hardship and loss; Makani wants to avoid and deny whatever traumatic thing happened to her in Hawaii, whereas Ollie has learned to confront and accept the loss of his parents in small ways.*



*Driving Makani out to a cornfield certainly doesn't inspire much confidence that Ollie doesn't have nefarious intentions for Makani (like her friends think he does). But Makani's flashback to her summer fling with Ollie recalled the time they drove to a cornfield to have a private, intimate moment, so it's possible that he's more interested in romancing Makani than murdering her.*



*This is a sweet moment between Ollie and Makani, and one that advances their relationship. Ollie has seen how Makani feels alienated and homesick in Osborne, so he's taken her to this “ocean” of corn to remind her of the beloved hometown she left behind. This is another example of how Makani's relationship to cornfields changes according to her mood and the people she's with. Normally the corn is stifling and a reminder of her exile, but with Ollie, the cornfields take on a romantic, beautiful connotation. Again, place doesn't make a person happy or miserable: their attitude and relationships to others are what determines their satisfaction with life.*



*That Makani asks Ollie about taking the phone call in his car—where she couldn't hear his conversation—shows that she's somewhat suspicious of him. Does Makani—like Darby and Alex—suspect that Ollie is capable of something as terrible as murder? Does she really trust him? Though she wants to—as evidenced by her willingness to brush aside her disconcerted feeling—it's important to note that Makani isn't totally without doubts about Ollie.*



## CHAPTER 7

The high school football team has remained undefeated all season, and they're playing one of the worst teams in the league tomorrow night. So why, Matt Butler wonders, is Hooker is being such a jerk? Matt stands in the locker room. It's dark outside. Practice is over, and everyone's gone home for the night. Between the approaching playoffs, the pressure of recruiters, dealing with his parents, and Haley's murder, Matt's had a hard week. And Principal Stanton and Coach Hooker are on his case about the fight on the quad he was involved in. Lauren's getting on his nerves, too. She's been acting like Haley was her best friend when they'd never even hung out when Haley was alive. Matt resents Lauren for making the tragedy all about herself.

Matt's still annoyed at Buddy for ripping down the *Sweeney Todd* banner, too. Hooker is constantly nagging him about the importance of keeping up appearances, and Buddy's actions made the whole team look bad. The stress of everything is clearly getting to Matt, since he's been misplacing his personal items—his phone, his keys, his wallet—and finding them in places he doesn't remember putting them. He wonders if he's dealing with something more serious. Football players are at high risk of developing chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a disease caused by repetitive head injuries. Memory loss is one of the early symptoms. Everyone loves football, so nobody wants to talk about its dangers. But Matt thinks about CTE constantly.

Matt has only ever dreamed of playing professional football. Lately, however, Matt's mother has started printing out news stories about CTE and placing them at Matt's spot at the breakfast table. Matt crumples up the papers when his father is around, knowing how hard they've worked to make Matt's football dreams a reality. In secret, though, Matt pockets and reads the stories, and he grows increasingly paranoid each time he misplaces something.

Matt decides to join his teammates at Sonic. He turns off the water, dries himself, and exits the shower. When he reaches his locker, he freezes: his combination lock is gone. Matt's frustration mounts as he scours the locker room for his missing lock. When he returns to his locker, his practice clothes are missing, too. Matt calls out to his teammates, assuming he must be the victim of some practical joke. "Hello?" he calls out. There's no response. Matt can hear the muted sounds of the crowd gathered outside for Haley's candlelight vigil. To Matt's dismay, he realizes he'll have to walk past them to get to his truck. He can't walk past a vigil in nothing but a towel.

*The only other time the narrative has shifted to the perspective of someone other than Makani was in Chapter One, which followed Haley Whitehall the afternoon before her murder. So it's likely not great news for Matt Butler that Chapter Seven is told from his perspective—it seems possible, if not very likely, that he won't make it out of this creepy abandoned locker room alive. Finally, Matt's annoyance with Lauren for making Haley's death all about her points to the novel's exploration of how people deal with trauma, grief, and loss. Lauren, like other Osborne High students, doesn't quite know how to respond to the shock of Haley's death, so she inserts herself into the tragedy to cope.*



*Matt's recent habit of misplacing personal items mirrors Grandma Young's recent complaints about someone leaving the kitchen cabinets open—and Haley's uneasiness about the egg timer reappearing in odd, unexpected places. While Matt writes his forgetfulness off as possible early symptoms of CTE, it's possible the killer is to blame. Another thing that Matt has in common with Makani is that he's keeping a secret he's ashamed of and doesn't want others to know about. Just as Makani conceals her traumatic past, Matt anguishes over the possibility that he might have a neurological illness—and how such a weakness (in Matt's eyes) might change everyone's opinion of him.*



*Matt keeps his anxieties about CTE bottled up because he doesn't want to disappoint his father or his coach. He's ashamed of his anxiety because it doesn't cohere with the tough, strong football player persona he projects to the world, and he's worried that if people knew about his true, vulnerable self, they might think badly of him.*



*Again, before Haley died, the egg timer reappeared in places where she least expected to see it. So Matt's missing lock isn't a great sign for Matt—it's possible that the killer is lurking somewhere nearby, waiting to strike. Another thing to consider is the killer's motives for disturbing their victims by moving around their personal effects. The killer seems to find pleasure in watching their victims doubt their intuitions and become increasingly paranoid. The killer relies on the idea that high schoolers are too concerned about what others think about—about being the subject of cruel gossip, perhaps—to trust their intuition.*



Matt tries to calm himself. Maybe the guys took his practice clothes before he even got in the shower. Maybe this is all just in his head. Matt's composure vanishes once he remembers that his car keys were in his pockets. He's furious. He calls his parents' landline and screams expletives when nobody picks up. Suddenly, a distant whimper cuts through the silence. Matt freezes, on high alert. He senses the other person's presence in the locker room. At the far end of the room, a thin figure sits, their back to Matt. "Hey," Matt calls out angrily. He tries to soften his tone and asks if the person is okay. The figure snuffles. Matt thinks it might be a special-needs student and approaches them carefully.

Matt kneels before the figure. They raise their head slowly. Just as Matt recognizes the person, they stab a **knife** through his stomach. Matt falls to the floor. The figure stabs Matt through the skull. The figure kneels above Matt, holding out one of his mother's CTE articles, which had recently gone missing. The last thing Matt registers is the figure carving around his skull. Then they pop off the top like a jack-o'-lantern and scramble Matt's brains with the knife.

## CHAPTER 8

The day after Matt's murder, the police pull students out of class and question each of them individually. The football team forfeits tonight's game, and students wear school colors to grieve Matt. Now, the body count is up to two: Haley, the drama star; and Matt, the football star.

The police officers are interviewing kids alphabetically, so Makani Young will be one of the last. When Darby returns to physics class after his interview, Makani grills him about what kind of questions they asked. Darby shrugs. It's hard to focus on Friday under normal circumstances, but today isn't a normal Friday, and teachers aren't even attempting to teach lessons. Makani worries that a police officer will have looked at her record and learned about her past in Hawaii. She thinks it's only a matter of time before her friends find out the kind of person she really is.

*Matt ignores his gut instinct that something is wrong because he's too concerned about being the butt of his friends' jokes. He's too concerned about his image and reputation to protect his best interests, and the unidentified killer—whoever they might be—is weaponizing this insecurity against Matt. It's obvious to the reader that the slender figure on the bench is the killer, yet Matt continues to doubt himself, determined to convince himself that he has nothing to be concerned about.*



*The killer's strategy—messing with their victims, making them paranoid, before killing and mutilating them with a knife—is similar enough to Haley's killer's strategy that readers can safely assume it's the same person. When the killer scrambles Matt's brains, they're making a dark joke, messing with Matt's head so that his brain is literally damaged—just as Matt had feared his brain was due to CTE.*



*Matt's murder heightens the tension around Osborne, transforming Haley's murder from an isolated incident to, perhaps, the beginning of an unhinged killer's rampage. By isolating the fact that the killer has murdered two stand-out students—Haley, the drama star; and Matt, the football star—the narrative suggests a possible theory for how the killer is targeting their victims: exceptional students that stand out among their peers.*



*Makani's anxieties about the police officers in Osborne discovering her record is another hint about the so-called "incident" that happened back in Hawaii. It seems that she was involved in some sort of legal trouble. Again, Makani continues to dwell on the past, fearful and anxious that her past actions—whatever they were—will follow her into the present and make her ineligible for love and forgiveness. She's not been able to abandon her problems in Hawaii; they've followed her to Nebraska in the form of internalized anxiety and shame.*



Darby shares a rumor he heard about the coaches being suspended for breaking policy—they'd gone home immediately after practice when they were supposed to wait until all the students left. If someone had been there, Matt might not be dead. Then Darby speculates about the connection between the murders—is it true that Haley and Matt were secretly dating? This is the latest rumor to develop. It's especially intriguing, since Matt's been dating Lauren Dixon for two years. Maybe, Alex offers mischievously, Lauren found out and killed them both. Makani thinks about Lauren. When she'd first moved to Nebraska, Lauren asked "what" Makani was, then she laughed and called Makani a "mutt" when Makani told her. Even though Makani isn't a huge fan of Lauren, she's glad Lauren opted to stay home so she won't have to hear all the cruel rumors people are spreading about her.

Rodrigo turns around to join the discussion. David, who is sitting next to Rodrigo, rolls his eyes at all the gossip. Darby wonders if Buddy, another football player, could be involved in a love triangle with the victims. Alex thinks Buddy is too dumb to be a killer. Makani wants to leave the room and notices David staring at her. He asks if she's going to be sick, noting her arms clutching her stomach. Makani says she just wishes they could talk about something else. Meanwhile, rumors about Ollie and Zachary have gained traction, given that both boys had gotten into altercations involving Matt in the past few weeks.

Makani wonders aloud whether there's no secret reason why the killer chose Haley and Matt. Maybe they didn't have any secrets—maybe the killer only chose them because they were popular. Everyone stares. Rodrigo prompts Makani to unpack her theory—is she saying an unpopular kid killed them out of jealousy? Makani corrects Rodrigo; she doesn't have a theory—it was just a passing thought.

*Makani's friends continue to discuss the murders as though they were fantasy—an ongoing TV series, perhaps, rather than the real, ongoing slaughter of their peers. Perhaps this is evidence of the teens' insensitivity toward violence. Or, perhaps, the novel is suggesting that making light is one way that people cope with traumatic events that evade reason and logic. Makani's recollection about Lauren's insensitive comments about Makani's biracial identity is further evidence of how life in white, conservative Osborne has been an alienating, uncomfortable experience for her in many regards.*



*It's unclear why exactly Makani feels physically ill—because she resents gossip broadly, or because she doesn't like that Ollie is being wrongfully accused of dubious behavior, or because she might believe the rumors about Ollie a bit. At any rate, hearing her peers gossip about the serious subject of murder with no regard for the victims or the seriousness of the subject alienates Makani. She seems unwilling to participate, but also unable to feign interest.*



*Again, Makani's reticence to believe the killer targeted their victims because they have secrets is a projection of her internalized anxieties about her own secret; she's anxious that this is in fact exactly why the killer is targeting victims—and that it means that she might be next. Still, her impulse to correct Rodrigo when he calls Makani's observation a "theory," which implies that she's put a lot of thought and energy into her contribution to the school's rumor mill, suggests that she's ashamed of participating in the gossip at all. Again, Makani's inability to join in on her peers' ceaseless gossip suggests that whatever happened to her in Hawaii has given her reason to be wary of gossip and the real consequences it can have on its victims.*



The police call for Makani during the last period of the day. Makani meets the police officer in the hallway. His name tag reads *Larsson*—it's Chris, Ollie's brother. Makani is worried that Chris will be able to hear her nervousness in her voice. Chris leads Makani to an empty keyboarding classroom. They sit down. Chris looks at her kindly and asks how she's doing. She admits that she's not doing too well. He empathizes—Osborne's a small town, and crimes like this just don't happen. Makani can barely speak. She thinks about how great Ollie had been talking with Grandma Young and feels like she's making a bad first impression with Chris.

Chris gets down to business, asking Makani if she knew the victims or had witnessed any altercations they'd had with other students. Makani answers no to every question. Chris smiles and asks Makani where she was between 6:00 and 7:00 last night. Makani blushes. She was with Ollie. Chris asks her where they went. Makani groans. She realizes that Chris is teasing her. They both laugh. Makani tries to get up to leave, but Chris motions for her to sit back down. He asks her if she has any hunting experience, has ever gutted a fish, or had much experience using a **knife**. Makani freezes; why is he asking her about a knife? Chris tells her the person who killed Matt knew about knives and anatomy. Makani sputters a negative response and is relieved when Chris seems to disregard her odd behavior.

Chris dismisses Makani. Makani leaves the interview room, runs to the bathroom, and breaks down in tears. He wishes she could have a normal life and that Ollie was her boyfriend. Then she feels bad about being so selfish when two people are dead. She dries her tears and exits the bathroom. Ollie is in the hallway next to the drinking fountains. He has dark circles under his eyes. Makani's backpack is by his side. Ollie explains that he grabbed the backpack on his way to the bathroom. Their Spanish teacher, Señora Washington, didn't even notice him take it. Ollie and Makani are both feeling out of sorts from the recent events. Ollie says doesn't feel like sticking around for the rest of the day. He offers Makani a ride, which she accepts.

*Makani's unease around Chris reflects her inner turmoil. She seems to believe that her inner shame and guilt about whatever she was involved in back in Hawaii is so obvious that anyone—and especially a member of law enforcement like Chris—can read her guilt on her face. The intensity of Makani's paranoia shows how she's remained trapped in her past, unable to work through and move past her trauma. This trauma also makes her feel unworthy of love and respect from supposedly better people like Ollie, who are psychologically well-adjusted and able to interact with their romantic partner's family members (as evidenced by the ease with which Ollie connected with Grandma Young).*



*Makani and Chris are clearly on different pages about the seriousness of the interrogation. While Makani continues to feel on edge and threatened, Chris makes lighthearted banter, gently teasing Makani about hanging out with Ollie the night before. Makani's guilt and shame over her past literally transforms the reality of her present, making her unable to assess her surroundings and atmosphere objectively. Her paranoia and anxiety are too great. This is further evidenced by her inappropriately nervous reaction to Chris's largely innocent question about her experience with knives. The inappropriately intense response Chris's question triggers in Makani suggests that a knife was involved in whatever happened back in Hawaii.*



*Makani's tears are genuine. Whatever unresolved trauma she's dealing with from "the incident" in Hawaii has left her convinced that she is doomed never to have a happy life. She believes that whatever bad thing she did has left her undeserving of love and forgiveness and redemption. The detail about the dark circles Ollie has under his eyes may be interpreted a number of ways. On one hand, Ollie—like everyone else at Osborne High—could simply be exhausted from receiving more bad, shocking news about the death of a classmate. On the other hand, could it be that Ollie is so exhausted because he was busy last night committing Matt's murder? The novel continues to offer conflicting evidence that, at times, heightens Makani's—and the reader's—suspicions about Ollie.*



## CHAPTER 9

The reporters gathered outside the school pounce on Makani and Ollie as they exit the building, demanding to know if they knew the victims and how they're handling the tragedies. A woman touches Makani's shoulder, and Ollie shouts at everyone to leave her alone. Finally, Ollie and Makani reach Ollie's car. Makani sniffles, trying to hold back her tears. Makani tells Ollie she wants to go somewhere quiet. Ollie takes her to his house, about a 20-minute drive out of town. They pass by endless **cornfields** and cattle ranches. Endless billboards for the Martin Family Fun Corn Maze dot the way.

Ollie's house is an old Victorian Gothic Revival. If Makani believed in ghosts, she'd think it was haunted. She can feel the weight of painful memories that the house carries. Ollie leads Makani inside the house, which is dark and filled with antiques. The floors creak. Ollie's dog, an old blue heeler named Squidward, after the SpongeBob character, stumbles into the room to greet them. Ollie has a cat, too: Raven, named after his childhood crush, Raven-Symoné. He shakes his head at his parents for letting him name their pets. Makani tells him his parents sound awesome. She worries that Ollie might not like talking about his parents, but he seems to appreciate that she's acknowledged their existence.

Ollie offers Makani a frozen burrito. She longs for a bowl of saimin, a noodle dish popular in Hawaii, but decides a burrito isn't bad either. She nods, and Ollie places the burritos in the microwave. Makani looks at old family photos tacked to the refrigerator. She teases Ollie about the stringy green hair he sports in one of the photos. She promises him that she has embarrassing photos, too, from her time on the swim team. Then she freezes, realizing she's disclosed something about her past. She mumbles that she used to swim, and Ollie doesn't press her for more details.

Makani notices a thick, brown envelope on the table and knows that it's one of Chris's case files. Ollie tells her she can look if she wants. Makani gives in to her curiosity and pulls out a gruesome photo of Haley's dead body. She sees the neck with the dead smiley face carved into it. There's blood everywhere. Makani shudders and thinks about how different a real dead body looks from the ones on TV. Ollie says the police think that the killer must be someone smaller than Matt, since they had to subdue him by stabbing him in the abdomen first before going for his head.

*In the reporters' drive to capture the story of the killings, they disregard the real trauma the students have suffered. Ollie's violent reaction may be interpreted a number of ways. His sudden eruption of violence could be seen as suspicious—as evidence that he's capable of murder even. However, it's just as compelling as evidence that he genuinely cares enough about Makani and her psychological state to protect her against the exploitative, unfeeling reporters.*



*Makani's perceptiveness to the painful memories that Ollie's house holds reflects her own preoccupation with the past. In the sad atmosphere of Ollie's house, Makani recognizes the pain that keeps her tied to her past and unable to move forward in her life and forgive herself. Maybe this is one of the things that draw her and Ollie to each other: they both recognize someone who's deserving of love but too burdened by guilt, shame, and unresolved past traumas to make themselves vulnerable to love and interpersonal connection.*



*Once more, Makani's longing for the Hawaiian cuisine of her home shows what an alienating experience life in Nebraska is for her. Not only does she not fit in with her peers, but the small details of her culture—what she wears, and what she eats, for instance—are so blatantly different than what her new peers have grown up experiencing. Makani's sudden shyness upon Ollie's showing curiosity in her being on the swim team seems to be another clue about Makani's past. Maybe "the incident" involves her membership on the swim team in some capacity.*



*Makani isn't immune to the morbid curiosities that would otherwise alienate her from her peers; she, too, has no idea how to make sense of the trauma of her peers' murders, so she gives in to morbid curiosities. Ollie's remark about the killer being a small person is interesting. Based on Matt's murder in Chapter Seven, readers know that the killer has a slender physique—not unlike Ollie. Is it possible that Ollie is the killer and only baiting Makani, daring her to suspect him of murder, toying with her, as readers already know the killer is in the habit of doing?*



Ollie hands Makani the burrito on a plate and invites her upstairs to his bedroom. Unlike the rest of his house, Ollie's room is bright and full of life. There are stacks of paperbacks everywhere. Makani is impressed. She mentions that her last boyfriend liked to read a lot, too. Then she realizes her mistake: she and Ollie barely know each other, and they haven't made anything official. Makani initially thinks Ollie hasn't paid her comment any mind. But once they settle down to eat their burritos, he asks her to tell him more about the reader-boyfriend. Makani smiles at Ollie's obvious jealousy. She makes a deal: she'll tell Ollie about her ex if Ollie tells her about his. Ollie agrees. Makani tells Ollie about Jason Nakamura, a fellow swimmer whom she dated for seven months, leaving out the part about Jason cutting off contact.

Ollie tells Makani that he's never had a girlfriend before her, though he has had sex before. He'll tell her about his previous partners some other time, but not today. He smiles. They lunge at each other and begin to hook up. Then, they both become aware that another person is in the room.

## CHAPTER 10

Chris stands in the doorway. He's angry about Ollie ditching school again, not to mention doing so when there's an unidentified killer on the loose. Ollie doesn't seem to want to understand the gravity of the situation. Haley and Matt were popular, he argues, and he's the opposite of that. Chris is unamused. He asks Makani if her grandmother knows that she's here. Makani wants to lie, but Chris is a police officer, so she tells the truth. Chris orders Ollie to drive Makani home. When Ollie drops Makani off at home, they make plans to hang out tomorrow.

Later that night, Makani is finishing up loading the dishwasher. Grandma Young doesn't know that Makani was at Ollie's house. Ollie doesn't think Chris will tell—even though he's Ollie's legal guardian, he still wants to be the cool older brother. That night, Darby texts Makani: "Can we talk?" Then he texts again: "I mean, phone-talk?" Concerned, Makani retreats to her bedroom to call Darby. Darby hesitates, clearly not wanting to say what he's about to say. He and Alex have been talking. They think that Ollie's alibis for the nights of the murders aren't solid. Also, Matt and his friends have bullied Ollie for years, and Haley rejected him when he asked her out in the eighth grade. Darby and Alex think that Ollie is taking advantage of Makani, and they're worried about her.

*Ollie's bright, lively room clashes with the rest of his house, which memories of his dead parents makes gloomy and uninviting. It's also a huge contrast to Makani's room, which is gloomy and devoid of personality. The lively quality of Ollie's room reflects, perhaps, his mental balance. Unlike Makani, who remains tied to her past and is mentally unwell because of it, Ollie seems to have made peace—as much as anybody can—with his parents' deaths, and he's managed to make a life for himself in the aftermath of unspeakable tragedy.*



*Ollie's coy remark about having had sex before neither confirms nor denies the rumors floating around town about him having sexual relationships with older women. The other person in the room is a tricky little cliffhanger designed to entice the reader to continue treading to the next chapter. Are Makani and Ollie in danger? Is the third person the killer?*



*The tension Perkins has established at the end of the previous chapter turns out to be a false alarm. Ollie's seeming inability to take the ongoing murders seriously might be another attempt to plant doubt about Ollie. Is Ollie unconcerned because he's the killer? It's uncertain, at this point, but it's worth keeping in mind that the book has repeatedly presented opportunities that place Ollie's veracity in question without providing a clear answer, so it's not yet possible to rule him out as a suspect.*



*Darby presents a compelling—if largely circumstantial—case against Ollie, reasoning that his behavior and lack of a solid alibi mean he could plausibly be the killer. Whether Makani has witnessed enough suspicious actions to heed Darby and Alex's concerns or not remains unclear at this point.*



Makani is angry and insulted by her friends talking about her behind her back. She also thinks their suspicions about Ollie are baseless. Still, she knows Darby is just trying to be a good friend. Some of the things Darby said about Ollie might be odd, but Ollie's just not a murderer, and Makani is sad that Darby is the friend making these claims when he's normally the thoughtful one. Makani hangs up.

Makani has trouble sleeping that night. The next morning, she ignores apology texts from Alex and Darby. Later, she finds the shoes she wore yesterday at the foot of the stairs, which is odd. Yesterday's socks are lying next to her closet. This is odd, too, but Makani doesn't think anything of it at the time. She anguishes over Ollie. She tries to convince herself that the mistakes he's rumored to have made long ago aren't proof that he'll make worse mistakes later. She wants to think Ollie is a good person, because she wants to think the same thing about herself.

Ollie comes over that afternoon. They hang out in the living room, since Grandma Young won't let Makani hang out with boys in her bedroom. Ollie and Grandma Young work on the jigsaw puzzle. Makani tries to join them, but she gets bored and goes to the kitchen to fetch some snacks instead. Eventually, the news comes on. A reporter is interviewing Caleb Greeley, a boy with a country accent and a cross around his neck, about the recent murders. Caleb says he and his family have been praying for the families. Ollie mentions that Caleb is a weekend supervisor at Greeley's Foods. He's the grandson of the original owner, and his uncle runs the store now. Makani wonders if it upsets Ollie that Caleb is a supervisor when Ollie has put in more hours than him.

The news station is calling Caleb a "friend of the victims," but Ollie scoffs and admits that Caleb hardly knew them. Makani tells Grandma Young that she should turn off the news, since it's not even telling her the truth. Grandma Young tells Makani to let her grieve the way she wants to grieve. Makani wonders why it comforts people to talk about tragedy. Is it because tragedies bring people together, or is it because tragedies are addictive? Makani watches Ollie and her grandmother high-five when they finally find a tricky puzzle piece, and she knows in her heart that Ollie can't possibly be a murderer.

*Makani's motivations for defending Ollie are complicated and ambiguous. On one hand, her romantic feelings for Ollie could inhibit her from entertaining the logical doubts that Darby suggested. On the other hand, Makani could also be reacting defensively, upset that her friends would ostracize somebody based on rumor and gossip, which is what happened to Makani back in Hawaii.*



*Makani's misplaced shoes mirrors Haley finding the egg timer at the foot of the stairs in Chapter One. The parallel between these two scenes could foreshadow a future attack on Makani by the killer. Finally, this scene proves that Makani's drive to defend Ollie is motivated, at least in part, by self-preservation; she wants to believe in the best of Ollie because she wants to believe the best in herself. She wants to believe that Ollie is undeserving of all the negative rumors kids spread about him because she wants to believe that she, too, was undeserving of whatever bad rumors kids back home spread about her.*



*Makani's brief contemplation that Ollie might harbor resentment over nepotism getting Caleb a leadership position suggests that she's perhaps internalized Darby and Alex's concerns about Ollie. To a degree, Makani has allowed herself to consider that Ollie could feel resentment and anger that he simply hides from outsiders, keeping it bottled up inside until he cracks. Has Makani fallen victim to the allure of gossip? Is she contemplating that Ollie is hiding secret resentment now because she has started to believe in the rumors about him? At any rate, Makani's doubts about Ollie point to one of the book's broader ideas, which is that humans—even those people think they're close to—are fundamentally unknowable. A person will never be able to fully know what others are thinking and hiding from them.*



*Caleb's disingenuous concern for the families echoes some of the other showy displays of sympathy the book has presented. For instance, in Chapter Seven, Matt Butler griped about his girlfriend Lauren inserting herself into the tragedy of Haley's death by pretending she was good friends with Haley when, in reality, the girls hardly knew each other. In all these situations, the novel highlights a tendency for kids to want to be a part of the tragedy. This raises the question of whether the kids are trying to connect to each other through their shared grief.*





## CHAPTER 11

Rodrigo Morales pauses the violent video game he's been playing and takes off his headphones. It's midnight. His parents are away in Las Vegas to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary, and he's spent nearly every moment of his precious freedom playing *Battleground Apocalypse*. Rodrigo is the youngest of four children and the only boy. His last sister moved out earlier in the year, and this weekend is the first time he's been truly alone. He loves it.

Rodrigo moves from the living room to the kitchen to grab an energy drink. He chugs the can and finishes off the pizza he made earlier in the evening. He gets a text from David: "Kevin still uses Ubuntu lol." David is watching anime with their friend Kevin. Rodrigo hates anime, so he doesn't feel left out. Rodrigo and David joke about the operating system. David knows a little more about operating than their other friends, but Rodrigo is a whiz. He made money jailbreaking iPhones and Kindles in elementary school. Now he has multiple PAYware games on app stores. His latest game is making lots of money.

Rodrigo gets on his favorite message board and recoils in shame when he sees that everyone is still angry about a new video game-developing company run by women. He used to be one of those guys, but he's not anymore. He feels bad about giving Makani a hard time the other day. He was being stupid.

Rodrigo returns to the living room. His gaming chair is facing the wrong direction, which is odd. Rodrigo turns the chair around and puts his headphones back on. He wonders if Makani told Alex what he'd said. He thinks she's smart and sexy and great, if not a bit mean—but he's all those things too. He thinks maybe she likes him back. Rodrigo's body buzzes. He thinks it's from thinking about Alex, but then he remembers the energy drink he chugged in the kitchen. Rodrigo falls asleep an hour later, somehow remembering to pause the game before he loses consciousness.

*The only other chapters told from a point of view other than Makani's were chapters that featured murders—so it seems likely that Rodrigo isn't going to make it out of Chapter Eleven alive. The fact that he just so happens to be home alone in his house this weekend—and probably too distracted by his games to notice much else going on around him—further supports this prediction.*



*Another hint that suggests that Rodrigo is likely about to become the killer's next victim is this detail that he's something of a computer whiz, having been able to complete complex repairs on electronics since elementary school. So far, the killer has targeted students who stand out among their peers. If Rodrigo is something of a computer whiz, then, this puts him in a dangerous position, since he resembles the killer's typical victim: someone whose skills make them stand out amongst their more average, unremarkable peers.*



*Another thing that ties Rodrigo to the killer's previous victims is that he suffers from internalized shame about a secret he's too ashamed to let his peers know about. Just as Matt was too afraid to go public about his fears of CTE, Rodrigo is ashamed by the past misogynistic behavior he engaged in on the internet.*



*Another of the killer's calling cards appears in this scene: Rodrigo's gaming chair is facing the wrong way. In Haley's and Matt's attacks, the killer tampered with their personal items prior to their murders. Another important detail in this scene is Rodrigo's anxiety about whether Makani told Alex about his crude joke—like Makani and many other Osborne High students, Rodrigo cares a lot about what others think of him.*



Rodrigo wakes up to sunlight pouring in through the glass door. He knocks over a full energy drink, and the brown-green liquid has spilled all over his mother's Mexican rug. He's furious at his carelessness, though he doesn't remember grabbing a second energy drink. Then he realizes that his head is killing him. Rodrigo looks around the room. Something doesn't feel right. All the furniture in the living room is rearranged. The TV is in the exact center of the room. Rodrigo calls out to his sister Sophia and to David, thinking that one of them must have played a prank on him. When nobody responds, he starts to second guess himself.

Rodrigo checks all the doors around the house. They're all locked. Then he notices that the window in the guest bathroom is open. The prankster can't be Sophia, since she still has a key. Rodrigo swears at his "dumb friends" for messing with him. But he can't shake the feeling that something isn't right. He sends a group text to his friends: "LOL you got me. Who did it?" He hears a ding behind him as the message goes through. Rodrigo turns around and sees a slender figure. He slowly moves toward the figure. "David?" Rodrigo asks. But the figure doesn't respond. Suddenly, the figure lunges at Rodrigo, plunging a **knife** directly through Rodrigo's heart.

The killer drags Rodrigo's crumpled, lifeless body into the living room and places it in the gaming chair. Then they saw off Rodrigo's ears, place them in Rodrigo's headphones, and put the headphones back on Rodrigo's head. Then they sit on the floor and resume Rodrigo's paused game; after all, nobody will be home for hours.

## CHAPTER 12

Everything changes after Rodrigo's murder. Osborne High cancels class. A mass of official communications—texts, emails, and voicemails—give impersonal statements about the tragedy. The whole town watches the story unfold on the local news over breakfast the next morning. None of it makes any sense. Grandma Young makes pumpkin pancakes for breakfast that morning, which is a more elaborate breakfast than she usually makes. Makani knows it's because it occupies her mind in a world that feels increasingly uncontrollable.

*It should stick out to Rodrigo that the furniture is rearranged and that it likely wasn't he who placed the second energy drink in his hand, but, as his murdered peers did before him, he ignores his gut instincts and tries to find a logical explanation for these oddities. He doesn't want to risk the possibility that his friends are pranking him and will tell everyone about his foolishness if he loses his cool.*



*The figure's slender body and quiet demeanor heavily implies that Rodrigo's killer is the same person who killed Matt Butler (and, likely, Haley Whitehall, too). When Rodrigo's text elicits a ding from the killer's phone, it suggests that the killer is one of Rodrigo's friends—possibly David Ware, as Rodrigo apparently suspects. That someone so close to Rodrigo would kill Rodrigo—without Rodrigo suspecting it up to the end—reinforces the idea that people are inherently unknowable.*



*That Rodrigo's killer feels comfortable enough to sit inside Rodrigo's house for hours playing video games suggests his killer is well-acquainted with Rodrigo's schedule—they seem to know that Rodrigo's parents are out of town and won't be back for some time. This reinforces that Rodrigo's killer is someone close to him—perhaps even David Ware, the friend Rodrigo was texting before his death.*



*The third slaying ramps up the tension—in the book, and around Osborne. Grandma Young making pancakes for breakfast to try to assert control over an otherwise uncontrollable situation is just one way the book reinforces the necessity of working through trauma and grief. Traumatic events often happen with no notice and too quickly for the victim to take ownership of that event. By asserting control over her life in small ways, Grandma Young fights back against the helplessness.*



Makani thinks about Rodrigo. There are rumors that he was the latest victim, but nobody knows anything for sure. Makani has tried to reach out to Alex, but she hasn't received a response. Now she feels bad about ignoring her apology texts over the weekend. Just then, Creston Howard announces the victim's identity: Rodrigo Ramón Morales Ontiveros. It's his full name, so that makes it official. Creston talks about Rodrigo's family discovering his lifeless body when they returned home from Las Vegas. Grandma Young is beside herself with grief; she'd taught Rodrigo's sisters years ago.

All around town, businesses close early. Parents stay home from work to look after their children. Everyone locks their doors. Everyone is scared. Rodrigo's murder scares people because he was so average—not popular, like Matt and Haley had been. His murder means anyone could be a victim. Now that Osborne's body count is up to three, the town is officially dealing with a serial killer. The story makes the national news.

Ollie calls Makani around noon. Chris is making him help out at the police station until his afternoon shift at Greeley's. Makani asks him if he knows of any leads. He says the killer left a partial boot print and a partial print of the seat of his jeans, along with some fibers. After the murder, the killer stuck around and played video games next to Rodrigo's dead body—for five hours. Makani and Ollie both shudder at this sick detail. However, this detail also reveals that the killer knew Rodrigo enough to know that nobody in Rodrigo's family would be home to interrupt the attack. Somebody on Ollie's end of the line tells him to get back to work. Ollie and Makani admit to missing each other before hanging up.

Makani's phone buzzes. It's Darby. He tells Makani that he and Alex are going in to work at the Feed 'N' Seed. He'll let Makani know how Alex is holding up. Darby and Makani have been acting like their fight last night didn't happen; it's more important to make sure that Alex is okay. Grandma Young comes down from her bedroom, where she's been on the phone with a church friend. She asks Makani if she's spoken with her parents yet. Makani hasn't but promises that she will, though she doesn't want to.

Makani wonders if anyone back home has heard about the murders. Then she thinks about Jasmine. Makani knows from experience that even the strongest friendships can fall apart, and she resolves to make things right with Alex before it's too late. Makani asks Grandma Young if she can borrow her car to go to the Feed 'N' Seed. Grandma Young is concerned about Makani's safety and insists that they go together.

*Makani's comment about Rodrigo's murder feeling more real once the news announces his full name is a nod to the way the news had earlier called Haley and Matt by their full names. It's a nod to the idea that there are certain rituals society adopts to acknowledge and cope with death—particularly death of a horrific, traumatic sort, like these gruesome murders.*



*If Rodrigo is more average than Haley and Matt, then what is the killer's motive for killing these three students? Is there a pattern at all, or are they simply selecting students at random? It seems that trying to find a pattern or reason for the killings is yet another way that Osborne tries to work through its trauma and explain the unexplainable violence the killer has forced upon the formerly safe, quiet community.*



*That the killer was careless enough to leave behind a seat print and boot print reinforces the idea that they felt at home in Rodrigo's house—that they were close with him and his family, perhaps. It's becoming more likely that the killer was Rodrigo's friend, perhaps even that Rodrigo's guess was correct—that the killer is David Ware, though nobody besides Rodrigo has access to this information. This possibility is so shocking and upsetting because it reinforces the novel's insistence that people have no way of knowing how well or accurately they know the people they're close to.*



*Darby's call functions as something of a peace offering—it's an invitation for Makani to set aside her differences with Darby and Alex and be there for Alex as she mourns the death of the boy she liked. In times of hardship, the novel suggests that people are more willing to set aside their differences to come together to weather the storm.*



*Makani's casual remark about knowing how easily friendships can fall apart is another hint at what happened between her and Jasmine. Whatever "incident" Makani is too ashamed to talk about aloud, it's clear that it played a central role in the dissolution of Makani's relationship with her best friend.*



The sky is overcast when Grandma Young and Makani reach the Feed 'N' Seed. People speak to each other in low voices, but it's obvious what they're talking about. Makani and Grandma Young approach Darby and Alex. Alex's eyes are streaked black; she's not doing well. Suddenly, Grandma Young asks Makani if Ollie is okay. Oblivious to Alex and Darby's feelings about Ollie, Grandma Young goes on about what a nice boy Ollie is—even if he does have a lip ring. The atmosphere is tense, but Grandma Young fails to notice. Alex says they should cancel classes until the police arrest someone, giving Makani a dark look as she speaks. Before Makani can respond, the store manager approaches them to make sure Alex and Darby aren't distracted from their work. Makani and her grandmother leave the store.

The day turns to evening, and it begins to snow. Because school is cancelled, nobody has left any mementos for Rodrigo at the memorial. Makani thinks this is awful. Later that evening, everyone receives another round of messages informing them that school will be cancelled tomorrow, too. The school will reopen on Wednesday. Grandma Young thinks the killer won't strike tonight since they would leave their tracks behind in the snow. But she and Makani double-check all the locks just in case.

## CHAPTER 13

When Osborne High reopens, only half the students attend class. Grandma Young didn't want to send Makani, but she received a last-minute appointment to see a sleep specialist in Omaha and doesn't want Makani to be home alone while she's away. But Makani wants to go to school—she thinks it would be “cowardly” not to. She thinks she might have made the wrong choice, though, when she arrives and Darby and Alex aren't there. Darby's parents made him stay home, and Alex asked to. The atmosphere on campus is depressing.

That morning, Principal Stanton makes an announcement that *Sweeney Todd* has been cancelled out of respect for the victims and their families. Makani fixates on Rodrigo's empty seat in physics class. David sits beside the empty seat, looking distant. Everyone handles Rodrigo's death differently. The football team upholds their tradition of wearing formal clothing on game days, but even this can't disguise their inner anguish. Suddenly, students from different cliques can relate to each other, each having this tragic October in common. Everyone sits closer together in the cafeteria. Makani thinks about what a shame it is that it takes a tragedy to bring people together.

*The murders bring the town together. Suddenly, everyone is united in their shared, secondhand exposure to trauma. Grandma Young's gushing about Ollie makes the atmosphere tense because Alex and Darby still suspect that Ollie has had something to do with the murders. Rodrigo's death likely heightens their suspicions, since Rodrigo made a joke at Makani's expense when Ollie offered to drive Makani home from school—right before Rodrigo's murder. The store manager interrupts before Makani can try to talk things through with her friends, though, and the situation remains unresolved.*



*Grandma Young's logic that the killer won't strike since he'd be too wary of leaving behind footprints in the snow is yet another of her attempts to create the illusion that she and Makani are in control of their situation. It's an attempt to cope with trauma and hardship.*



*The narrative has offered numerous hints that the killer is targeting—or at least, messing with—Makani over the past few weeks (the opened kitchen cabinets and the misplaced shoes at the foot of the stairs, for instance). This, in combination with the fact of the book's title (There's Someone Inside Your House) leads the reader to reasonably suspect that the killer could attack Makani while Grandma Young is away in Omaha. Finally, the depressing atmosphere on campus reflects the town's collective state of mourning for the deceased students.*



*Cancelling Sweeney Todd makes sense—it's certainly in poor taste if not downright traumatic to perform a musical about murder for a town that has been the target of a ruthless killer. That students from different cliques set aside their differences to mourn their fallen peers points to the idea that community and empathy are essential to working through traumatic experiences. It's worth noting David's ambiguous reaction to Rodrigo's death. Is his distant stare a symptom of grief, guilt, or apathy? Is he the killer, as Rodrigo suspected he was in his final moments, or is this a red herring Perkins inserts into the plot to mislead the reader?*



Makani and Ollie sit together at lunch. Nobody sits with them. Makani thinks about the sensationalized news coverage of the murders. It feels scummy to see reporters attack grieving families with endless, probing questions. Makani tries to engage Ollie in conversation to make themselves appear normal to their gossiping peers. She asks him about his work at the police station, as Chris is still making him stay there while he's at work. Makani offers to let Ollie hang out at her house the next time they have the day off school.

Just then, Makani receives a text. Hearing the notification ding reminds Ollie of something Chris said about Rodrigo's murder. At the crime scene, Rodrigo's phone was blowing up with notifications from friends checking in on him once rumors of this death made their way across town. Makani agrees that this is very dark.

Across the cafeteria, Caleb Greeley and a few others lead the student body in a group prayer—a common occurrence here in Osborne, but something that never happened back in Hawaii. Makani hates the group prayers. She thinks Caleb and his friends are preachy. And while Makani sincerely hopes that prayer helps people like Grandma Young find peace with their lives, Makani is irreligious and doesn't like people forcing prayer on her. Also, Caleb seems to be relishing the attention a little too much—which is a little suspicious. But Makani's thoughts disgust her; she realizes that she's speculating about Caleb the same way people are speculating about Ollie.

Toward the end of the school day, Principal Stanton makes an announcement to thank the students who attended class. He also shares some good news: Rosemarie Holt won the barrel race at last weekend's Sloane County Championship Rodeo. Ollie thinks Rosemarie should watch her back—the killer seems to target talented students. Ollie's observation upsets Makani, but only because she doesn't want other students to overhear and judge him. Just then, Makani gets a text from Grandma Young: she's still in Omaha and won't be back when school gets out. She asks Makani to hang out with Darby until she returns from the sleep clinic. Makani texts her grandmother back and invites Ollie to come over instead.

*Makani's disdain for the sensationalized news coverage is understandable—she seems to believe that that exploiting a community and interfering in their grieving process is immoral or ill-advised. At the same time, Makani's negativity might also offer insight into her mysterious past in Hawaii. Was she, too, hassled by news reporters following “the incident,” and this is why she is so opposed to sensationalizing tragedy?*



*There's something rather macabre and darkly humorous about the rumor mill working so intensely that even Rodrigo, the murder victim and the subject of the latest gossip, can't help but become involved. Word spreads so quickly in Osborne that even it reaches even the dead.*



*Makani's issue with Caleb is similar to her gripe with the sensationalized local news coverage. She feels like such public displays of grief and solidarity are more for show than they are a legitimate exercise in mourning. When Makani considers that Caleb's attempt to grieve the dead so publicly and obviously could be viewed as suspicious (maybe Caleb is the murderer and wants to appear overly mournful to prevent people from suspecting him of wrongdoing). She's ashamed to have such a thought since she thinks it makes her no better than the exploitative local news, or the friends she's feuding with over their distrust of Ollie.*



*Does Makani dislike Ollie's dark joke because she's worried that it might fuel more rumors about him, or because she, too, has begun to take stock in these negative rumors about Ollie? Makani clearly trusts Ollie—she wouldn't invite him over to her empty house if she didn't—but, at the same time, the book has repeatedly shown how little people can know of other people, so it's worth keeping an open mind and not being too quick to eliminate anybody as a suspect in the crime.*



## CHAPTER 14

Makani and Ollie leave Ollie's car at school so he can make a sneaky exit if Grandma Young returns early. Then they walk home. It's only three days until Halloween, and decorations line the streets. Makani and Ollie arrive at Grandma Young's house and instinctively whisper to each other, though they know Grandma Young isn't home. They retreat to Makani's bedroom, turn on some music, and have sex. A little while later, Makani lies in bed next to Ollie and watches him sleep. She feels happy and content. Grandma Young texts her that she's still in traffic, but things have begun to move—she'll be home in about an hour.

Makani goes downstairs to get a drink of water. She freezes when she notices that the flatware drawer is open. "Grandma?" she calls out—but there's no response. Other than the steady tick of the grandfather clock, the house is silent. Makani closes the drawer and decides it must have been open when she got home. She leaves to use the bathroom. When she returns to the kitchen, her stomach drops: the drawer is open again. Makani tries to calm herself and checks the back door. It's locked. She wonders if she's leaving the drawers open herself and forgetting about it. Maybe she's losing her mind and her forgetfulness is a manifestation of her traumatic past. Makani walks to the living room. She drops her cup of water when she sees her grandmother's jigsaw puzzle: it's filled in, and it wasn't before.

Makani returns to the kitchen. She places her water cup on the counter and grabs a towel to clean up the spill in the other room. When she returns to the kitchen, the water cup is gone. Makani freezes, suddenly remembering that the killer had rearranged Rodrigo's living room furniture. She thinks about how many times the cabinets and drawers had been left open over the past few months. Has the killer been messing with their victims before the murders? Before Makani can react, a hooded figure emerges from behind the grandfather clock.

*In a conventional (and arguably sexist) slasher film, characters who engage in transgressive behaviors that subvert traditional (western, Christian) social values often end up the targets of the killer's attack. Makani and Ollie have just had sex, which many conventional slasher films view as a transgressive behavior. Does this mean they'll be the killer's next victims? Yet, the book has repeatedly subverted as many genre conventions as it adheres to (it contains far less gratuitous violence, for instance) so it's not a given that Makani and Ollie's sexuality seals their fate as it would in a typical slasher film.*



*The open flatware drawer mirrors the opened kitchen cabinets that Grandma Young has been complaining about for some time. Readers already know that the killer tends to mess with their victims' belongings before they attack, so it seems a safe guess that the killer is in the house with Makani, poised to attack. Tension rises as Makani second-guesses herself, wondering if she has been leaving the cabinets open herself. And, of course, the reader is privy to information about the killer's habits that Makani is not, which lends the scene an element of dramatic irony. Finally, when Makani sees the completed jigsaw puzzle, she's no longer able to deny that something isn't right—someone is in the house who shouldn't be there.*



*Makani connects the dots when she realizes her water cup is missing, recalling the information Ollie passed along from Chris's police reports about the killer rearranging Rodrigo's living room furniture—there's no longer a doubt that the killer has been in the house. Her horrific realization gets scarier once she thinks back and realizes the killer has been messing with her and Grandma Young for months, violating their privacy and sense of safety by opening the kitchen cabinets and drawers. In what has become a recurring technique in the book, Chapter Fourteen ends with a major cliffhanger, as an unidentified hooded figure—presumably the killer—appears from behind the grandfather clock.*



## CHAPTER 15

Makani screams. The killer drops his large, double-edged **knife** to the floor. Makani can't make out his face but sees that he's white and male. The killer beats Makani to the knife and slashes her arm. Ollie, naked, sprints toward them. The killer looks surprised, and Makani realizes that he must have thought she'd be alone. Makani throws herself at the distracted killer, knocking him to the floor. His hoodie falls back, revealing a familiar but unplaceable face. He wriggles out from underneath Makani and grabs his knife. Just then, Grandma Young runs through the door and attacks the killer. He stabs her in the abdomen, and she collapses. Ollie pursues the killer, and Makani examines her grandmother. The killer realizes that he's outnumbered, runs out the front door, and escapes down the street. Ollie calls the police and states the killer's name to the dispatcher: David Ware.

Ollie hangs up the phone. The police are on their way. He and Makani tend to Grandma Young. Makani wraps a towel around her arm, which is bleeding badly. They hear the emergency sirens approaching. In this moment of calm Makani considers the killer, David Ware. He'd been Rodrigo's best friend. He'd asked her in class who she thought the killer was, and she'd never suspected a thing.

The paramedics and police officers arrive. Makani and Grandma Young ride to the hospital in an ambulance. At the hospital, Grandma Young immediately enters surgery. Meanwhile, Officer Beverly Gage, a young woman with long hair and a friendly face, interviews Makani about the attack. She tells Makani to call her Bev. Makani blushes as she recounts her and Ollie's activities prior to the attack. She tells Bev she doesn't know why David would target her. Inside, however, Makani knows that the universe is punishing her for the incident in Hawaii.

*That the killer drops his knife when Makani screams suggests that he's not a seasoned, undistracted villain—rather, he lacks the experience and reserve of someone older. When Ollie runs downstairs to Makani's aid (rather humorously, naked) it proves that whatever doubts Makani's friends (and Makani for that matter) had about his culpability were incorrect and merely the effect of baseless gossip. Makani evades the gruesome death her classmates suffered by mere coincidence—the killer clearly anticipated she'd be home alone. Finally, it's important to note that though Makani registers that the killer is familiar, it's not until Ollie speaks the killer's name—David Ware—that she realizes this is who the killer is. Her inability to recognize David speaks to his unremarkable nature. It's likely that even the reader has to refresh their memory to recall who David Ware is. He's not a student who has been on their—or any of the other characters'—radars.*



*That David Ware is the killer reinforces how little people know of others. David was Rodrigo's best friend, yet Rodrigo—or anyone else at Osborne High—had never seen anything suspicious in David's behavior; indeed, of the many rumors that have traveled around the high school in the days since Haley's murder, David Ware has never come up as a possible suspect.*



*Makani thinks that David has targeted her because he knows about the incident in Hawaii and wants to punish her. On a certain level, she feels she deserves the attack for whatever she did back home. This reinforces the reality that Makani's move hasn't given her a fresh start, despite being thousands of miles away from her past, her old community, and her old trauma in Hawaii. In short, Makani's past continues to haunt her present.*



## CHAPTER 16

Officer Bev leaves for the night, and Makani stays behind and waits for Grandma Young to get out of surgery. Makani doesn't have her phone, so she can't contact anyone. She turns on the TV. The news is showing coverage of the attack. Creston Howard announces the suspect's identity: David Thurston Ware. Hearing the middle name makes Makani sick—she thinks it's wrong for the news to treat David the same way it treated his victims. David's school photo flashes across the screen. He looks boyish, normal, and innocent. Makani wants to change the channel, but her fear keeps her fixated on the news coverage. Just then, the nice red-haired nurse who's been checking on Makani all night appears and tells Makani that Grandma Young is out of surgery.

The surgeon tells Makani that Grandma Young will be okay. Luckily, David's **knife** missed her aorta. However, she'll have to stay in the hospital for at least three weeks. Makani panics and wonders who she can stay with while Grandma Young recovers. After what seems like an eternity, a nurse leads Makani to the ICU where Grandma Young is waking up from anesthesia. She's weak, but she's cogent. Ollie and Chris arrive. Chris brought Grandma Young and Makani flowers, though he wasn't allowed to bring them into the ICU. Ollie won't look at Makani, and Makani worries that he found out about her past during his police interrogation. Makani asks Chris if the police have caught David yet. They haven't, but Chris promises it won't be long.

Ollie and Makani retreat to the waiting room while Chris stays behind to ask Grandma Young some questions. Ollie gives Makani her phone, and she's met with a stream of texts from Darby and Alex asking if she's okay and apologizing for suspecting Ollie. Ollie urges Makani to call her parents to let them know she's okay, and she reluctantly complies, heading to a secluded spot by the elevators for privacy. But when she calls, neither parent picks up their phone. Makani walks back to Ollie and slumps down in a chair.

*By focusing on the normalcy of David's school photo, the narrative pits David against his victims, who were largely stand-out students in their chosen fields (drama for Haley, football for Matt, and computers for Rodrigo). Could this offer insight into David's motives for killing his victims, perhaps? Might he resent their success? Finally, alone in the hospital room with not even her phone, Makani is completely isolated, unable to connect her to the outside world, and left painfully alone to make sense of the trauma of her recent attack.*



*Grandma Young's long recovery period will leave Makani alone and unprotected in the house in which she very recently was nearly killed. The recent trauma of this experience will make returning to the scene of the attack no easy feat for Makani, who had already been suffering from the unresolved trauma of the Hawaii incident prior to tonight's attack.*



*This scene further illuminates the poor relationship Makani has with her parents. Thus far, Grandma Young has hinted at the strain between Makani and her mother. Makani has also mentioned, in passing, how she thinks her parents sent her away to Nebraska to avoid having to deal with her. But when Makani's parents don't reach out to her after they likely heard of her recent attack—and when they fail to answer their phones—it really underscores how absent and uncaring they are. This helps explain why Makani may struggle with unresolved guilty and feelings of unworthiness—she has neither the support of her old community nor her parents.*





Ollie reflects on David Ware. He's known him his whole life: their families attended church together, and he and David were both on the middle school wrestling team. David never seemed like a killer. In fact, he was totally unremarkable. Ollie wonders if that's why he turned to killing: because he resented feeling invisible. What still troubles Ollie, though, is why David would target Makani. Makani panics. She knows she needs to tell Ollie about the incident in Hawaii. But before she can say anything, Chris appears in the waiting room to take Ollie and Makani back to the Larsson home—Grandma Young gave her permission for Makani to stay there while she recovers in the hospital.

## CHAPTER 17

Chris and Ollie turn on all the lights in their large, Victorian house. The light creates only the illusion of safety, but it's better than nothing. Later, Makani lies in Ollie's bed, struggling to fall asleep. Chris gave Ollie the choice of sleeping on the floor of his room or on the couch downstairs. Ollie opted to set up a sleeping bag in the upstairs hallway outside Makani's room. Every time Makani falls asleep, she starts dreaming about the hooded figure lunging at her. Ollie comes into the room and lies beside her. He sets an alarm so he can sneak back into the hallway before Chris wakes up.

Ollie and Makani head down to the kitchen the next morning. Chris is making breakfast. They sit down at the table, and Chris brings them coffee. He pauses before awkwardly insinuating that he knows Ollie and Makani slept in the same room last night. He tells Ollie that the brothers will share Chris's room from now on and reminds Ollie and Makani to use protection. Makani blushes and changes the subject. She asks Chris if there are any updates about David's whereabouts. Chris says the tracker dogs followed David into the fields near the school but lost his scent at the river. Everyone reaffirms how shocked they are to learn that David is the killer. Rodrigo's parents had always found their son's best friend to be polite and mild-mannered. David's parents were also surprised.

Chris makes plans to drive Ollie and Makani to Grandma Young's house so Makani can pick up some clothes and other essentials. After that, Chris will go to work, and Ollie will drive Makani to the hospital. Makani has received a new slew of texts from concerned friends, but she's too distraught to reply just yet. There's also missed call and voicemail from Makani's father, though neither he nor Makani's mother seem particularly concerned about Makani.

*Again, the book is emphasizing that David Ware was totally unremarkable, so this detail is clearly important (though the reason is still ambiguous). Maybe it has something to do with my David is choosing to kill or how he's selecting his victims. For her part, Makani remains paranoid that David chose her because he somehow found out about the bad thing she was involved in in Hawaii. Once more, we see that guilt and paranoia about this period of her life totally consumes Makani's life and manipulates her sense of reality.*



*Though the bright lights will do little to protect Chris, Ollie, and Makani against a murderous villain like David, having even the illusion of safety helps them cope with the overwhelming terror of their present situation. Makani tries to sleep and recover from that evening, but nightmares about the attack keep her up all night; it's clear that the attack has had a significant psychological influence on her.*



*The book intersperses the horror plot with banal elements of the teenage experience, such as this mortifying encounter in which Chris awkwardly tries to counsel young teens about having safe sex. Once more, the book emphasizes how normal David is, and how this surprises people who knew him—they never suspected that he could be capable of such evil. In so doing, the narrative advances the premise that it's impossible to fully know other people. It's also interesting that the real explanation for who has been committing the murders is far less sensational than the town gossip had made it out to be—this just goes to show how far off-base gossip can be.*



*This scene offers additional insight into what Makani's relationship with her parents is like. Makani's father has called but only puts in minimal effort, while Makani's mother doesn't call at all—all while their daughter has almost become the victim of a serial killer. In their emotional unavailability, the novel highlights one way that Makani's big move from Hawaii has done little to change her life. Her family relationships are just as flawed, and her emotional well-being is just as compromised.*



When Chris, Makani, and Ollie arrive at Grandma Young's house, the yard is swarming with news crews. Makani is apprehensive about reentering the house, but Ollie holds her hand and they enter through the front door together. Still, it's impossible not to relive the horrific attack as she walks through the house.

*Ollie's supportive presence helps Makani find the strength to revisit the scene where she recently suffered. With this, the novel suggests that it's emotional work and supporting relationships that have the power to alter a person's life (rather than simply changing location).*



## CHAPTER 18

Ollie and Makani return to the hospital, where Grandma Young is arguing with somebody on the phone. Grandma Young makes an excuse to hang up when she sees Ollie and Makani in the doorway. She tells them the town will hold a big memorial for the victims this afternoon. It's supposed to show that the town is done being afraid of David and is ready to regain control of their lives. Makani thinks the gesture is admirable and brave. Grandma Young agrees, though she wishes people would put as much effort into finding David so they could end this nightmare once and for all. She also reveals the main reason the phone call upset her: apparently, the person on the other line wanted Makani to address the town at the memorial event to lift everyone's spirits—though Grandma Young vehemently opposes this proposition.

*Grandma Young's critical attitude toward the memorial parade and the town's general response to the attacks marks a distinction between symbolic displays of solidarity and actional solidarity. The idea of a parade to honor the victims and pledge commitment to the town's welfare is nice in theory. But ultimately, it can't take back the murders that have already occurred, and in terms of preventing future murders, it would be more effective (as Grandma Young suggests) for the town to redirect energy toward enacting actual change—toward funneling resources toward finding David Ware and ending his violent spree once and for all. Still, the parade gestures toward the important role that community plays in the process of healing from traumatic events.*



Makani's mother calls her at noon. She reacts defensively when Makani asks her where she was when she tried to call her yesterday. Makani's mother explains that she and Makani's father were in court. She tells Makani that she has important work commitments to deal with first and can't leave for Osborne any earlier than next week. She's also frustrated to have to travel at all: "Look what you're doing to me," she moans to Makani. "I can't deal with you right now." Makani can't believe it. A serial killer almost murdered her, and all her mom can think about is herself.

*This scene is important because it's the first exposure the reader has had to Makani's relationship with her mother. This phone call alone is highly telling. It perhaps explains why Makani is so quick to blame and shame herself for the past mistakes she apparently made in Hawaii—her mother makes it abundantly clear that Makani's pain is a burden and she doesn't deserve sympathy and compassion. This call also may explain why Makani is so anxious to keep her new friends in Osborne in the dark about her past—she's only ever known people to judge and belittle her for her mistakes, so she expects that her new friends will also judge, belittle, and reject her if they find out what happened.*



Ollie and Grandma Young have been listening in on Makani's conversation. Grandma Young gives Ollie some cash and tells him to get them some food from the cafeteria. Once Ollie leaves, Grandma Young apologizes for Makani's mother. Grandma Young might love her daughter, but that doesn't change the fact that she's a horrible, self-centered person. Grandma Young assures Makani that none of this her fault. She also reminds Makani that they'll eventually have to address how Makani lied her about having Ollie over. She's not too upset, though. She hugs Makani and reminds her and Ollie to "be safe.". She trusts Makani to be honest with her moving forward. Makani is embarrassed and ashamed. She wishes she could be the honest, good person her grandmother thinks she is.

Makani hears Alex and Darby in the hallway, applauding Ollie for saving Makani. They run into Grandma Young's room and hug Makani. Makani hasn't realized how much she needs her friends until now. Alex presents Makani with a box of doughnuts. They've gotten a chocolate frosting for Ollie—his favorite. Makani thinks it's a peace offering for accusing him of being the murderer. A nurse walks in and informs them that ICU patients can only have two visitors at a time, so Grandma Young urges Makani to go and be with her friends. Makani promises to return later with Ollie.

In the waiting room, Makani and her friends eat their doughnuts and catch up. They keep getting into giggling fits over inappropriately dark subjects, but it feels good to laugh. Nobody can understand how David could possibly be the killer. He's unremarkable, and he comes from a long line of normal, unremarkable people who just "fade into the landscape." Ollie thinks this just goes to show that you can never truly know what's going on in another person's head. Nobody understands why David targeted Makani. Although Makani hadn't wanted to tell her friends about her past in Hawaii, she realizes she must, since it might have something to do with David targeting her. After a pause, she begins to tell them her story.

*The way Grandma Young responds to Makani's emotional pain is the complete opposite of the way Makani's mother reacted. Grandma Young responds with compassion and understanding, attempting to build up Makani's sense of self-worth instead of beating it down. Still, despite Grandma Young's support, all Makani feels is shame and embarrassment—she feels that she doesn't deserve Grandma Young's support, and that Grandma Young is only offering this support because she has misjudged Makani's character. This shows the extent to which Makani has internalized the shame and guilt her mother and peers back in Hawaii have imposed on her. It's completely warped her sense of self, making her believe she doesn't deserve good things because of mistakes she made in the past.*



*Makani's happiness about seeing Alex and Darby suggests that she's forgiven her friends for misjudging Ollie based on misleading rumors. In a state of crisis, she seems to recognize the necessity of having a caring, supportive community. Interestingly, while Makani readily forgives her friends for their mistake, she remains unable to direct the same compassionate, understanding attitude toward herself; she believes others can be more than their flaws—can overcome and grow from their mistakes—but doesn't believe she is capable (or deserving of) this herself.*



*Once more, the narrative emphasizes David's ordinariness, making it even clearer that this is an important detail that will likely become relevant to the plot later on. Ollie's choice to describe the Wares as people who "fade into the landscape" is interesting. It indirectly establishes a connection between their ordinariness and their ties to the physical land of Osborne, Nebraska—as though one has caused the other. Finally, this scene marks a significant moment in Makani's character development: she's decided to make herself vulnerable and come clean to her friends about her past. Though she risks judgment and abandonment by doing so, getting this heavy burden off her chest is vital to her ability to grow and heal from her past.*



## CHAPTER 19

The story flashes back to Makani's traumatic experience in Hawaii. Makani is fast asleep when Gabrielle Cruz and Kayla Lum enter her bedroom, blindfold her, and "kidnap" her as part of a hazing ritual for the school swim team. The hazing rituals are notoriously cruel, with each new class of seniors striving to outdo the class that came before them. One convention of the hazing ritual is that veteran swimmers tell rookie swimmers' parents about the date of the hazing ahead of time. Parents are supposed to play along and surrender their daughters to the "kidnappers," and they usually warn their daughters in advance. That way, the rookie swimmers know to wear their cute pajamas and do their hair before they go to sleep. But Makani's parents haven't warned her, so Makani isn't expecting visitors. She smells bad, her hair is dirty, and she's wearing old, ragged pajamas.

Makani's kidnappers force her into the swim captain's open-air Jeep. Gabrielle drives, swerving intentionally as Makani struggles to latch her seatbelt. Makani asks where they're going, but the girls ignore her. Makani discretely lifts her blindfold to see where they are. Palm trees line the road. Makani recognizes the Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway. They reach their destination only a few minutes later. Makani can hear the ocean. The girls grab Makani by her arms and drag her down to the beach. Something scrapes against Makani's foot, and she cries out in pain. She hears the crackling flames of a bonfire. People jeer and laugh at Makani as she approaches.

Makani's kidnappers remove her blindfold, and she sees the whole team assembled before her. Jasmine is there. She and the other rookies clearly knew about the kidnapping in advance: they're all wearing bikini tops with shorts, and they've styled their hair. Some are wearing makeup. Makani is furious. She and Jasmine are supposed to be best friends—why didn't she Makani about the hazing? Gabrielle commands Makani to remove her shorts. Makani freezes. All the girls start chant: "Strip! Strip! Strip!" Makani removes her shorts, feeling as though she'll cry at any moment.

The "games" begin. The veterans take markers and write insults on the rookies' foreheads: "SLUT, NYMPHO, WHORE." Makani is "BITCH." The veterans tell the rookies that if they respond to a different name than the one on their forehead, they have to take a shot of vodka. Makani almost immediately messes up by responding to "Makani," and Gabrielle makes her take a big shot. Afterward, Makani goes to her assigned spot next to Jasmine.

*Readers finally see why Makani reacted strangely earlier in the book when she accidentally let it slip to Ollie that she was on the swim team back in Hawaii—"the incident" involves something that happened with her swim team, presumably during the cruel hazing ritual. Makani's parents' failure to let her know about the "kidnapping" in advance is further evidence of their emotional unavailability. They're not looking out for her, and the novel attributes the horrors to come to the fact that Makani's parents didn't prepare her properly. Furthermore, not giving Makani a heads-up contributes to Makani's inability to fit in with her peers (she's in ratty pajamas, unlike everyone else).*



*This cruelty Makani experiences during this hazing ritual helps explain why she's on such high alert in Osborne. She's seen how easily people who are supposed to support and care about her (her swim team) can turn on her, standing idly by, ridiculing her, and even causing her pain (by not watching where Makani's feet are and protecting her from sharp objects).*



*Makani views Jasmine's failure to mention the hazing ritual as a huge betrayal. Suffering at the hands of the senior swim team members is one thing, but experiencing cruelty from someone who's supposed to be her best friend hurts so much more. Again, knowing these details about Makani's past helps explain why she has such little faith her friends in Osborne will remain loyal to her; Jasmine's careless betrayal has taught her not to take anybody's kindness or sympathy for granted.*



*The addition of alcohol to an already cruel, emotionally abusive hazing ritual almost guarantees that the situation will escalate. It helps readers sympathize with Makani, though. Readers still don't know exactly what she did, but the fact that she did it under the influence of alcohol (that others forced her to drink) makes her a more sympathetic character.*



Jasmine grabs Makani's arm and asks if she's okay. But Makani is still furious with Jasmine for betraying her. She ignores Jasmine's question and glares at her. Makani's anger confuses Jasmine. Inwardly, Makani vows to beat Jasmine at whatever games the veterans have in store of them tonight, most of which involve intense physical activity, humiliation, and excessive drinking. Each rookie must take a shot between games, but the veterans can drink as much or as little as they want. The loser must take two shots.

Makani's determination to beat Jasmine motivates her to push through all the humiliating games. She hears some of the veterans talk about how the winner of the hazing could become the new team captain, a position Makani has always wanted, and this further motivates her. She endures the veterans throwing mayonnaise and Spam at her as she does jumping jacks. Meanwhile, she imagines pulling out locks of Jasmine's perfect hair and drowning her in the ocean. Next, the veterans throw wet, meaty dog food at the rookies as they do pushups. A glob lands directly in Makani's face and flies up her nostrils. When Gabrielle tricks her into responding to "Makani," the veterans force a shot down Makani's throat. The vodka mixes with the dog food and makes Makani vomit.

Makani sees that Jasmine is also sick to her stomach. Determined not to lose, Makani tricks Jasmine into responding to "Jasmine," and the veterans force Jasmine to take a drink. Jasmine looks hurt and betrayed.

During the final round of games, someone splashes an open bottle of Tabasco at Makani's eyes. The pain is excruciating. Makani spots a bottle of water in the sand nearby, lying next to a **knife** and some empty cans. Makani runs to the bottle, desperate to stop the searing pain. But Jasmine gets there first and snatches the bottle. In a fit of blind rage, Makani picks up the knife and slashes at Jasmine's hair.

*Throughout the novel, Makani has insinuated that her actions during "the incident" impacted Jasmine to the degree that Jasmine no longer has any interest in being Makani's friend. So perhaps Makani's mistake involves getting back at Jasmine in some way. Certainly, Makani's anger in this scene supports the idea that she'll retaliate—she's acting like a pressure cooker that will burst any minute now.*



*Note that this chapter is Makani's memory of the events on the beach—it's the story she's telling Ollie, Alex, and Darby as they sit in the hospital waiting room together. Knowing this, the vivid details the narration employs to talk about the hazing ritual takes on a special meaning. That Makani holds nothing back as she confides in her friends shows that she is committed to being forthcoming with them and taking the steps she needs to take to move forward in her life.*



*Makani gets back at Jasmine for not warning her about the hazing ritual. This helps explain why Makani feels so ashamed in the novel's present: she sees herself as someone who readily resorted to cruelty.*



*This scene helps explain Makani's oddly intense reaction to Chris asking her if she's ever used a knife during his investigation into the Osborne Slayings—she assumed he somehow found out about Makani's attack on Jasmine and was testing her. Readers also see why Makani nurses so much self-hatred: she sees herself as not much better than David Ware, since both of them express their anger with knives.*



## CHAPTER 20

Back in the present, Makani finishes telling her story. She describes the immense shame she felt holding Jasmine's detached ponytail in her hand. She remembers how Jasmine was so drunk that she nearly drowned—and it was all Makani's fault. She recalls how Jasmine ran to the ocean after Makani cut off her hair. Unable to face what she'd just done, Makani turned her back on Jasmine as Jasmine waded into the water. She didn't notice when Jasmine started drowning. Jasmine had stopped breathing and needed CPR. By this point, everybody understood what Makani had done. When police arrived on the scene later, they escorted Makani to the station and charged her with public intoxication and third-degree assault.

The police eventually dropped the charges, but Makani's school suspended her and all her friends stopped talking to her, including her then-boyfriend, Jason, and Jasmine. Makani shudders as she thinks about the death and rape threats she received in the aftermath of the incident. It was hard to feel like people were wrong about her, but it was hard to think that people were right about her, too. Makani turns toward Ollie. He looks sympathetic, not judgmental. Darby and Alex are also understanding. What Makani did to Jasmine was awful, they admit, but she doesn't deserve to feel ashamed for the rest of her life. She's not a sociopath like David Ware. She's a good person who made a mistake.

Makani is convinced that David Ware is targeting her because he found out about the incident. Ollie thinks this is unlikely. He admits to Googling Makani extensively and being unable to find out much about her on the internet. Makani's friends smirk at Ollie's admission. For the sake of argument, Ollie considers Makani's theory about David. If he's targeting people for being bullies or for having secrets, what were the other victims hiding? Ollie pauses. He admits to knowing something a secret about Rodrigo—he used to be a “troll” who threatened women on the internet. Alex stiffens. Everyone wonders who else could be on David's list—who else has a secret they're ashamed of. They decide that Zachary Loup might be a target, since he can be a real jerk. Ollie calls Chris to let him in on their suspicions about Zachary. Chris is skeptical but promises to check on Zachary anyway.

Just then, Ollie gets a text from Greeley's informing him that his shift has been cancelled—the store is closing early so that everyone can attend the memorial. Alex springs up, suddenly remembering that she needs to meet up with the marching band, which is leading the memorial procession. Darby goes with Alex to make sure she's safe.

*Makani's story illustrates the extent to which her internalized guilt and shame warp her sense of reality. She views Jasmine's drunkenness as sympathetic—as a weakness that Makani exploited to violate Jasmine—but fails to see that she, like Jasmine, was intoxicated and put in a compromised position through no fault of her own. Rather than acknowledging how the cruel, violent atmosphere of the hazing ritual put her in a bad position, she sees her violence toward Jasmine as indicative of some inner character flaw.*



*Makani's friends in Hawaii shut her out, thereby making it impossible for them to hear her side of the story. They judge her based on gossip alone; the poor treatment she received from her friends in Hawaii helps explain why Makani is so reticent to gossip about the Osborne slayings—she's seen the real harm and injustice gossip can bring about and wants no part in making others suffer the way she did. Finally, Makani's current friends' sympathetic response to her story is an important moment for her character development. That they haven't judged her the way her old friends did might help Makani learn to forgive herself for her past.*



*This scene sheds more light on a mystery that has so far eluded everyone in Osborne: why is David Ware killing, and how is he selecting his victims? The detail about Rodrigo being a former internet troll lends some credence to Makani's theory that David is targeting people with secrets—with past behaviors or current anxieties they're ashamed of. Each of David's victims is alike in their desire to appear a certain way in front of their peers, to be accepted, liked, and valued. They all struggle with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, just as Makani does.*



*Just as the community in Osborne comes together to mourn and cope with the recent tragedies that have struck their town, so too do individual people try to support and protect each other, as when Darby insists on accompanying Alex to marching band practice to make sure she's safe.*



Makani and Ollie return to Grandma Young's room. Grandma Young is out having some tests done, so Makani and Ollie go to the cafeteria instead. Makani wants to talk one-on-one with Ollie about her past, but Ollie's mind is elsewhere. His phone rings again. It's Chris. Ollie walks off to take the call. When he comes back, he tells Makani that the police can't do anything with their theory about David, since they don't want the town to panic. They did have an officer confirm that Zachary is safe at home with his mom's boyfriend. Makani texts Darby and Alex the news. Darby responds immediately: Zachary can't be home, since they just saw him at the memorial. Makani tells Darby to wait—she and Ollie will be right over, and they'll warn Zachary about their theory together.

*It's unclear why Ollie is being so distant. One possibility is that Makani's story about her past may have caused some of Ollie's personal demons to surface. Local rumors claim that he went through something of a tumultuous time following his parents' deaths, and perhaps he, like Makani, struggles to reconcile his flawed past self with his present self. Finally, that Makani and her friends combat David's murderous rampage by banding together and helping others points to the book's overarching insistence that community and solidarity can be helpful tools for working through trauma and coping with hardship.*



## CHAPTER 21

Zachary Loup is stoned. He's only at the memorial to avoid being with his mom's boyfriend. Black satin ribbons adorn the telephone poles along Main Street. The marching band warms up outside Greeley's. Police officers monitor the crowds. The memorial is supposed to honor the murder victims, but it's more of a rally. When Principal Stanton hops onto the bed of a pickup truck that functions as a makeshift stage to address the murders, the crowd's rage is palpable. Zachary thinks to himself: "Which came first, the outrage or the fear?" Zachary wanders through the street. Everyone around him is whispering rumors about David. Zachary texts his friends to see if anyone is there, but nobody can make it.

*The narrative hasn't revealed much about Zachary Loup yet, though readers know from Makani and her friends' discussions about him that he's a bully. Still, in keeping with the book's theme about the unknowability of others, this chapter reveals that Zachary has a complex inner life he doesn't share with the world. In this scene, for instance, Zachary thinks critically about the impact the murders have had on the town, and the potential meaning—or meaninglessness—of symbolic displays of solidarity like the memorial parade.*



Zachary considers David. He and David had been neighbors and playmates when they were young children. Zachary remembers that David was quiet most of the time, except for when he snapped. Zach has anger management problems, too, but even he knows that holding in one's rage isn't healthy. One altercation with David sticks out in Zachary's mind. He'd borrowed David's bike without asking, as he had done many times before. This time, however, David ran toward Zachary and pushed him into the street, breaking Zachary's arm. David's "unbridled rage" still haunts him.

*Zachary's more intimate exposure to David gives him an opinion about David that is different from most people's. While most can't see beyond David's unremarkable appearance and quietness, Zachary has seen the anger and violence that lies beneath. David—like everyone else in the novel—is more than he seems at first glance.*



Zachary gets a text from his mother, Amber. One of Amber's coworkers saw Zachary at the memorial and told on him. Amber orders Zachary to go home immediately. Zachary ignores his mom. Caleb Greeley, whose wealthy, religious family owns practically half the town, is on stage speaking about the victims. He's using generic language he probably pulled from the news coverage. In truth, Caleb had hardly known his murdered peers. Zachary resents Caleb for his privilege and fakeness. Zachary is about to leave when he spots an attractive girl walking toward him.

Caleb finishes his speech and hops down off the pickup truck. He's first trumpet and wants to return to then marching band as quickly as possible. They're supposed to lead the memorial attendants in a march down Main Street. A news station has donated candles for the marchers to hold. Caleb doesn't think the gesture is generous, though—he assumes a wealthy person must've thought the candles would look better on TV. Caleb can appreciate the effort. He's an "overachiever," himself: he aces his classes and volunteers. He worked to have the term "evolution" removed from class textbooks. He also has mission work lined up in Papua New Guinea, which will make him the first Greeley to leave Nebraska in many generations.

Right before the marching band's performance is supposed to begin, Caleb realizes he's misplaced his plume. He asks several of his band mates if anyone has seen it, but nobody has, and nobody cares. Alex rolls her eyes and accuses Caleb of only wanting to look good on TV. But this isn't at all what Caleb is thinking: he's really concerned that if the band looks sloppy, it'll seem like they don't care about the victims. Assuming he left the plume at Greeley's, he rummages through his pocket for his key, pushes the back door open, and steps inside.

Meanwhile, Zachary walks through the procession. Katie Kurtzman, the pretty girl from earlier, walks in front of him. Not only is she pretty, but she's also nice to everyone. Suddenly, a man bumps into Katie and spills his blue slushie all over her shirt. Zachary jumps in and aggressively confronts the guy about his carelessness, even as Katie insists that everything is fine. Katie tells Zachary she needs to go home and take care of her siblings. He offers to drive her, but she insists on walking. Zachary tries to keep the conversation going.

*Zachary's feelings about Caleb are similar to Makani's, in that they both see Caleb's grief for the murder victims as attention-seeking and disingenuous. Other students have exhibited this fakeness, too—Matt Butler's girlfriend Lauren, for example, pretended that she and Haley were close friends after Haley's death. It's not totally clear why students feel compelled to perform displays of grief they might not feel inside. At any rate, the phenomenon of public grief comments on the role community plays in getting through periods of strife and confusion—there's something about the presence or opinion of others that comforts people in uncertain, confusing times.*



*Caleb has a very different take than Zachary on the town's outward displays of grief. He doesn't see these displays as fake—he sees them as going above and beyond, or "overachieving." Whether or not Caleb is correct that outward appearances can determine the quality or correctness of a person's grief, knowing Caleb's insight complicates readers' understanding of him as a character. One might even have more sympathy for him, since it's clear his fixation on outside appearances comes from a sense of duty rather than something nefarious. At any rate, the juxtaposition between the way others see Caleb and the way Caleb sees himself reaffirms the fact that it's difficult to know much about others.*



*Alex—like Zachary before her—misjudges Caleb. She assumes he wants his plume because he's afraid of looking bad on TV. In reality, though, he's more concerned about disgracing the victims' memories. Caleb's logic doesn't totally track—and to a degree, he's ultimately more concerned with appearances than maybe he ought to be. Nevertheless, this scene shows how common it is to misjudge people when a person doesn't know anything about their inner thoughts and feelings.*



*This uncomfortable scene between Zachary, Katie, and the slushie man shows a new side to Zachary's character—others' assessment that he's a huge jerk is at least somewhat true. This scene also shows how much miscommunication and misunderstanding can happen when a person is more concerned about appearing a certain way than listening to others. Zachary berates the man for spilling his drink on Katie because he wants to seem macho and strong; in so doing, he totally misses that Katie doesn't want him to do this and is even embarrassed by it.*





When Zachary senses Katie's not interested, he says "fuck you," loudly. Maybe Katie isn't as nice as he thought. Or maybe *he's* the problem. Suddenly, Zach sees a camouflage jacket—the clothing the news had reported David was last seen wearing—in the window across the street. He tries to find Katie, but it's too late: she's gone, and the camouflage is gone, too. Meanwhile, Caleb is looking for his plume in the Greeley's break room. He can't find it anywhere and starts to panic about looking bad. Then he chides himself for making the memorial about himself.

Outside, Makani, Darby, and Ollie catch up with Zachary. They try to tell Zachary that he might be in danger, but Zachary's having none of it. If their theory about David targeting people who have bullied or hurt others is true, Zachary argues, wouldn't Ollie be a victim, too? Zachary suggests that Ollie hurt Chris, and Ollie falls silent. Zachary smirks, realizing that he's struck a nerve. He finally relents, though, and agrees to go home after the rally. Meanwhile, inside Greeley's, Caleb has come face to face with David.

Back at the memorial, the marching band is playing "Pomp and Circumstance," a piece best-known for its use in graduation processions. Darby assumes the band doesn't have any funeral repertoire. The music is awkward and awful; Makani thinks it would have been better if the band played nothing. The crowd moves forward, along with Makani, her friends, and Zachary.

Meanwhile, inside Greeley's, David chases Caleb through the store. Caleb screams, but nobody outside can hear him over the marching band. David catches Caleb and stabs him through the back. Caleb thinks about the mutilations David performed on the other victims: slashing Haley's throat, scrambling Matt's brain, cutting off Rodrigo's ears. He pleads with David to tell him what he's going to do to him. David stares blankly back and silently finishes his task.

*Zachary lashes out at Katie because her rejection embarrasses him. He's too concerned about suffering the public humiliation of rejection to think about the way his poor behavior impacts Katie. This scene is important, too, since it reveals a potential David Ware sighting. It's possible that another murder will soon take place. Finally, this passage further develops Caleb as a sympathetic character. Everyone judges him for being overly concerned with outward appearances, and Caleb worries about these things, too. Like all the other teens at Osborne High, Caleb suffers from self-doubt and guilt that he's not trying hard enough to be a good person.*



*Ollie's silence is telling—Zachary's comment about Chris was meant to hurt Ollie, and it worked. Ollie, like many of the other teens at Osborne High, keeps things he's ashamed about buried inside and suffers from feelings of inadequacy. Ollie's silence could also explain his earlier distance toward Makani. Maybe her story about hurting Jasmine has made him consider the way his own past actions have hurt someone he was close to, as well. So far, hardly anybody has escaped a David Ware attack alive, so it seems likely that Caleb isn't going to make it out of Greeley's.*



*The book intersperses episodes of intense violence with moments of comic relief. The marching band's questionable decision to play "Pomp and Circumstance" at a memorial also devalues the whole idea of the memorial in the first place. It reveals the memorial to be a disingenuous display put on so the town can appear caring instead of a thoughtful, genuine display of mourning and solidarity for the murder victims.*



*Grandma Young complained that the (largely symbolic) parade would misdirect the town's energy away from practical efforts that could stop the killings. Caleb's death—which nobody can hear over the parade—tragically, literally, and rather ironically shows that she was right. In this way, the book suggests that public displays of mourning or solidarity serve little purpose besides making participants feel good. They don't actually help the victims they are supposedly for.*



## CHAPTER 22

After the memorial is over, Makani and Ollie part ways with Darby and Alex. The sun is setting. Ollie seems distant. As he and Makani walk to Greeley's to pick up Ollie's car, Makani asks Ollie if he's judging her for the incident in Hawaii. He's not. He tells her she doesn't need to suffer for a mistake she made a long time ago; he knows she's a good friend and granddaughter. Of all people, Ollie suggests, he should know that regrets can change a person for the better.

As they walk, Ollie shares his side of the rumors that their peers have spread about him. After Ollie's parents died, he was a wreck. He started drinking alcohol and going to the Red Spot, a seedy burger joint and bar where you can buy illicit drugs and sex. He liked going to there because the regulars knew about his parents and understood his sadness. Even though Ollie was only 16, he started a sexual relationship with a 23-year-old woman who worked there, Erika. He even thought he loved her, though he now sees this as youthful foolishness. When Chris found out about the relationship, he tried to press charges. He and Ollie got into a huge fight. Chris didn't follow through with his threat, but he forbade Ollie from seeing Erika again.

A few days later, Ollie got drunk, waded into the river, and tried to drown himself. As soon as he started to struggle, he realized he didn't actually want to die. The manager of Sonic happened to drive by just in time to save Ollie. This, Ollie explains, is why he hates Sonic. Afterward, Ollie got psychiatric help. He stopped drinking and doing drugs. Makani asks Ollie if he's ever used or sold any harder drugs. He hasn't—that rumor isn't true. After Ollie finishes his story, he and Makani hold hands. Referencing Ollie's earlier promise that Makani is a good friend and granddaughter, Makani asks Ollie if he thinks she'd make a good girlfriend, too. Ollie smiles. She's *already* a good girlfriend, he says.

Ollie and Makani kiss as they wait for Chris in the Greeley's parking lot. It feels strange but good to share a public display of affection. When they come up for air, Makani notices blood in the Greeley's front window. They cautiously make their way toward the entrance. Ollie peers inside and sees that the place is totally trashed. Makani uses Ollie's phone to call Chris. The phone rings and rings. Meanwhile, they see a shadow move inside. Ollie uses his employee key to open the front door. There's blood everywhere. Then they turn toward the checkout aisles and see something truly horrifying: Caleb Greeley's mutilated body lies on top of a pile of school sweatshirts, flags, and other memorabilia. His torso is mutilated. Worst of all, Caleb's severed hands are sewn together and placed over his heart, as though in prayer.

*Ollie's distant demeanor suggests that he's still thinking about Zachary's cruel comment about Ollie's past. Indeed, he confirms that his past is on his mind when he tells Makani that he knows better than most how much a person's past—and choosing to let go of it—can impact their present and future.*



*After only hearing rumors about the bad time Ollie went through after his parents died, Makani finally gets to hear about it from Ollie's perspective. Hearing Ollie's perspective paints a fuller, likely more accurate picture of his situation. It's important to Makani to let Ollie defend himself before she passes judgment on him because her friends in Hawaii deprived her of this privilege—and it had terrible consequences for her mental health and self-confidence.*



*That Makani and Ollie make their relationship official after Ollie confide in Makani about his past suggests that authentic communication and vulnerability can heal and bring people closer together. By contrast, the gossip that Ollie's peers have used to judge him has only alienated and harmed him.*



*As the reader already knew, Caleb Greeley is David's latest victim. The way that David has chosen to display Caleb's body offers insight into David's motives for killing Caleb—and for killing in general. David has placed Caleb atop a pile of school memorabilia—a mocking nod, perhaps, to Caleb's overachieving, overinvolved personality. Like David's other victims, Caleb was a well-known (if not always well-liked) student destined for success and recognition. Could this be why David murdered him? Is he jealous of Caleb's public recognition—recognition that David hasn't been able to achieve despite becoming a serial killer?*



Makani and Ollie remember the moving shadow. They realize that if Caleb is dead, it means somebody else—David—is still in the store. They hold each other close as they walk carefully down the cereal aisle. Makani finally gets ahold of Chris, who barks orders at them over speakerphone. Just then, they hear the swish of the back door open and close: David Ware just left the building.

*Once more, the novel builds tension by ending many of its chapters with a cliffhanger that entices the reader to read on. Here, Perkins builds tension by having Makani and Ollie narrowly escape David once more. Finally, the fact that David stuck around to watch people discover his latest victim sheds some light on his motives; he seems to enjoy getting a response out of people—something he wasn't able to do before he started killing.*



## CHAPTER 23

Katie Kurtzman is doing laundry and staring at an empty can of tuna fish on the sill of her basement's only window. The window is broken and won't latch properly, leaving a gap wide enough for a thin body to slip through. Her twin siblings claimed they had nothing to do with the can. Her mom doesn't know where it came from, either. Katie feels paranoid. She can't help but feel that somebody has been in the basement. Upstairs, the twins, Leigh and Clark, are reading comics. Katie prepares mac and cheese for their dinner. Katie's mom, a nurse, leaves for her 12-hour shift at the hospital. She makes Katie promise not to open the door for anybody while she's gone.

*The empty tuna fish can should stick out to the reader—David Ware taunts his victims before he attacks them, rearranging their belongings and leaving things in unexpected places. Thus, it seems likely that David left the can at the window to confuse Katie—suggesting that another slaying will happen shortly. Katie Kurtzman seems to be a nice, friendly, and responsible kid, so David's reason for messing with her could be to destroy the sense of control Katie thinks she has over her life. It's not yet clear if Katie has secrets, or is an overachiever like the other victims.*



After Katie's mom leaves for work, Katie goes into the bathroom and discovers that all the toiletries are in the wrong place. She's scared, having heard rumors that David would mess with his victims' personal belongings before he attacked them. This time, Katie knows it's not in her head. Katie's mom has claimed that Katie has obsessive compulsive disorder. Katie denies it, but she knows it's true. She has a busy, stressful life between work, school, volunteering, and college applications—all geared toward getting out of Osborne. Cleaning and organizing make her feel more in control. As Katie reorganizes the bathroom, she hears a thud downstairs. She calls down to the twins, but they have no idea what it could have been.

*If Katie has heard rumors that David messes with his victims' personal belongings before he attacks them, it raises the question of why she doesn't trust her gut feeling that somebody has been in her basement. Katie has multiple traits in common with David's other victims. First, she's concealing something that she's ashamed about (her obsessive-compulsive traits), seemingly out of fear that people will judge her for them. Interestingly, Katie doesn't quite fit with Makani's theory that David is targeting bullies, so perhaps this isn't quite the right angle. Another way that Katie is like David's other victims is that she's ambitious, driven by a fierce desire to leave Osborne. If Katie does end up becoming David's next victim, then, it's more evidence that David's motives for killing have something to do with kids who want to leave Osborne.*



The evening passes without any additional oddities. Katie tucks the twins into bed and heads downstairs to work on her University of Southern California entrance essay. She thinks about Zachary. He's a jerk, but she has a soft spot for him and thinks he's smart. She wishes he'd apply himself, but he'll probably end up staying in Osborne forever. Suddenly, Katie hears a creak from the basement, followed by sound of heavy footsteps stomping up the stairs. Katie calls 911 and tries to block the door, but she's too late. David Ware emerges from the basement. He lunges at Katie. There's a brief struggle, but David overpowers and kills Katie. He saws through her ribcage, rips out her heart, and places it on top of Katie's college brochures—"because Katie's heart had been set on college." David laughs at his joke, since nobody else seems to appreciate his humor.

*Katie's ruminations about how sad it is that Zachary will likely remain in Osborne forever seems to implicitly explain why David has selected Katie, not Zachary, as his next victim: he picks Katie because she's slated to leave Osborne, whereas Zachary likely will remain there forever. So this scene further establishes that resentment or hatred for people trying to leave the community is what drives David to kill. Furthermore, David's light grievance about nobody appreciating his witty, dark humor suggests that he's bitter about people underappreciating him. So perhaps it's jealousy or some kind of internalized inferiority that leads him to hunt down and slaughter his peers who receive more recognition for their achievements and personalities.*



## CHAPTER 24

After Makani and Ollie give statements to the police at Greeley's, Chris drives them back to the Larsson house. He leaves them alone to take a call in the other room. Makani can't believe they were wrong about David going after Caleb instead of Zachary. Ollie's beginning to think David isn't targeting bullies. Makani agrees, but neither of them can figure out what David's angle is. Chris returns and tells Ollie and Makani that David has just killed Katie Kurtzman. Chris has to return to work, so he drives Ollie and Makani to the hospital to be with Grandma Young.

*That David Ware attacked Caleb instead of Makani forces Makani to rethink her previous theory about David's motives for killing. One of Caleb's most distinctive features is his status as an overachiever, and David's other victims have been stand-out students as well. By contrast, David is completely forgettable and untalented. So it's possible that he's targeting students out of jealousy.*



On the way to the hospital, Makani remembers something: Katie Kurtzman had texted her this morning wanting to talk. Makani had thought it was odd, since Katie and her had never talked before. Chris thinks it's weird, too, but Ollie thinks it was just Katie being her usual nice self. Ollie asks Chris what the police know about David's movements. Chris tells them that after attacking Makani's house, David went upriver and back into town. Then he hid out in Greeley's, assuming correctly that everyone would be busy searching for him in the countryside. After attacking Katie, David stole her Ford Fiesta and left town. Ollie, Makani, and Chris tense and release every time a similar-looking car passes by.

*David has had numerous opportunities to leave Osborne and travel far away where he could likely evade capture, yet he continues to return home. This tells readers, perhaps, that his killing spree isn't over. It also suggests that the town of Osborne itself is somehow significant to David's murderous plans—he wants to kill people in Osborne, not anywhere else.*



Ollie and Makani arrive at Grandma Young's room hospital room. She's asleep and heavily sedated. A TV in the room is airing more news coverage about the attacks. Finally, at daybreak, the TV announces breaking news in the Osborne Slayer case: security footage has placed David at a truck stop outside Boys Town, Nebraska, at 11:00 last night. He hitched a ride with an unidentified truck driver headed back toward Osborne. The trucker hadn't recognized him. "The killer ke[eps] going home," thinks Makani.

*Once more, we see that David "ke[eps] going home." That Makani explicitly spells out this fact is further evidence that this is an important detail to keep in mind as she—and the reader—try to get to the bottom of why David has chosen to kill.*



## CHAPTER 25

It's the eve of All Hallows' Eve. Chris picks up Makani and Ollie from the hospital early in the morning to drive them back to the Larsson house. Ollie and Makani hold hands in the back of the police cruiser as Chris gives them the latest scoop: David hitched a ride with a second truck driver who took him as far as Troy, a town just outside of Osborne. This driver didn't recognize David, either. Makani is worried—Alex lives near Troy.

Back at the Larsson house, Makani and Ollie seek shelter from the cold autumn air by bundling in sleeping bags on Chris's bedroom floor. Makani finally feels secure enough to sleep. But her dreams are haunted by memories of David's recent attack on her. While Chris, Makani, and Ollie sleep, tourists and drunk college students pour into town to visit the Martin family's **corn** maze. The *Sweeney Todd* cast make up for their cancelled show by performing as monsters in the now "haunted" maze. One college student excitedly tells a reporter that knowing David is on the loose makes the maze experience scarier. Meanwhile, the National Guard arrives to patrol over the football game.

Chris's phone rings that evening and wakes everyone up. It's work. There hasn't been another attack, but Chris will need to go in soon. He needs to go to Troy, where David was last seen, so he and Ollie and Makani leave in separate cars. Later, when Ollie turns on to the highway to drive to the hospital, he and Makani are shocked to see bumper-to-bumper traffic. The street is packed with out-of-towners eager to experience this year's *particularly* frightening **corn** maze. Makani is disgusted that people would make a game out of their tragedy.

Just then, Makani gets a call from Alex. Her parents are making her play with the marching band for today's football game, and she's having a panic attack. David was less than a mile from her house last night, and she's scared he's after her. Ollie and Makani head to the stadium to pick up Alex.

*All Hallows' Eve is just a fancy way of saying Halloween. This is a horror/thriller book, so it follows that things will ramp up on this especially spooky night. Note that David Ware fled town—but he never ventures too far outside Osborne. Something continues to draw him back to his hometown. Another important detail here is David's ability to fool truck drivers into giving him rides: he can get these rides because he's so unremarkable and ordinary that nobody recognizes him, even though his photo has been plastered all over the news.*



*While the support of one's community can be a positive thing (like when Makani's friends helped her forgive herself for mistakes she made in Hawaii), community can also be a negative thing. Here, the crowds of tourists who travel to Osborne in search of chills and thrills devalue and mock Osborne's very real, painful trauma. Additionally, the tourists' glib attitude toward the murders looks critically at society's inability to confront painful subjects like death and trauma directly—it shows that often, people make light of and mock the things they're perhaps too scared of or uncomfortable with to confront seriously.*



*The bumper-to-bumper traffic visually underscores how disrespectful these tourists are being to the community of Osborne. Suddenly, what ought to be a mournful and contemplative time for the town has become a spectacle that resembles a tailgate or carnival. The book frequently uses corn to gauge Makani's emotions, in that the corn reflects how she's feeling about her life in Osborne at that given moment. Here, she looks at the corn maze and feels disgust and disappointment at the way people's gossip and morbid fascination with David Ware have made a mockery of the real tragedies her town has suffered.*



*This scene is a great example of just how good of a friend Makani really is, despite her doubts after the Hawaii incident. She doesn't hesitate before rushing to save Alex from a scary situation, and it's obvious that Makani is not the bad friend she's long considered herself to be.*



Makani and Ollie reach the football stadium around dusk. It's packed. Bright lights illuminate the stands and field, while children dressed in Halloween costumes squeal and run around. Alex spots Ollie and Makani. She hops into the car and orders them to move—*now*. Makani asks if Alex will get in trouble for ditching the marching band, but Alex says that nothing like that matters anymore. Makani's phone starts to ring. It's Darby, calling them on speakerphone—he'd been on his way to the stadium to get Alex. Makani tells Darby to meet them in the hospital parking lot.

The friends meet at the hospital parking lot and thoroughly investigate their surroundings. Once they're satisfied that the coast is clear, Makani breaks the silence to say that she's tired of waiting around for David. They need to do something. She doesn't share what she's really thinking: "*he might be looking for me.*" Alex agrees with Makani: the time between David's killings has diminished each time. He's likely going to strike again, and soon. For the millionth time, they wrack their brains for some pattern to David's brutality. Each of the victims had belonged to a different clique. Had David felt left out?

Alex thinks that David is picking the school's most ambitious students—"people who stand out." In contrast to them, David is "inferior and invisible." Everyone agrees with Alex's theory. They brainstorm other exceptional students who could be David's next victim. Then Ollie remembers the tasteless joke he made yesterday, about Rosemarie Holt needing to watch out after winning the barrel race at the state fair. Everyone realizes that Ollie was probably right.

Ollie calls Chris and tells him his theory. Chris listens but then hangs up abruptly—apparently, the police just received a call from another trucker who picked up David and only recognized him in hindsight, once he returned home and turned on the local news. The trucker told the police that he'd dropped David off on the opposite side of Osborne. They think he's headed to the stadium to conduct a "blitz attack." Makani doesn't think that sounds like something David would do. The group decides to take things into their own hands and drive to Rosemarie's house, which is located near the Larsson house, on the opposite side of the **cornfield**. They get into Ollie's cruiser and speed into the night.

*By and large, Osborne has decided to continue on as though there isn't a vicious killer on the loose: kids dress up for Halloween as they would any other year, and the town assembles at the stadium to watch football like it's just another game night. The town's decision to pretend everything is fine speaks to the difficulty of handling difficult situations like death and trauma. It suggests that people don't really know how to make sense of senseless things like violence and suffering, so they pretend these things don't exist.*



*Makani's call to action contradicts the stance Osborne has taken toward the murders up to now—basically doing nothing outside of symbolic (but ultimately meaningless) displays of solidarity. Her proactive attitude reflects her character's journey: she now knows that a person can't run away from their problems—they have to face them if they want the problems to go away.*



*It seems, perhaps, that David resents students who are more successful and who "stand out" more than him and thinks that killing them will make him feel better about himself. But eliminating other people doesn't address whatever personal insecurities have led David to resort to violence.*



*That the truck driver only recognized David after he returned home and watched the local news reaffirms how truly forgettable and normal David is. It also shows how ineffective his killing spree has been at making a name for himself. Even as a full-fledged serial killer, people continue to overlook and forget him. Cornfields function as an important symbol for emotions and drama throughout the book, so it's fair to guess that something big will happen as Makani and her friends make their way toward the cornfield.*



## CHAPTER 26

Rosemarie is in the stables brushing her horse, Moonlight. She hears the commotion of the **corn** maze in the distance and scowls at the drunken college students who've made this year's corn maze a nightmare. She hates how people have transformed David Ware into an urban legend. Rosemarie finishes brushing Moonlight and goes to fetch the hay. She places the bucket full of grooming tools on the floor on her way out. She reaches into the darkness for the pitchfork, but it's not there. After a moment, she finds it further back along the wall. She grabs the pitchfork and heads back to collect the bucket, but it's gone. Then Rosemarie smells the unfamiliar scent of an unwashed human.

Meanwhile, Makani and her friends speed down the highway toward Rosemarie's farm. Back at the farm, a slender body emerges from the darkness. It's David Ware. He's holding the grooming bucket, and he's covered in dried blood. He removes his **knife** from its sheath and steps toward Rosemarie. Rosemarie grasps her pitchfork and attacks David.

Meanwhile, Makani and her friends finally see the faint outline of Rosemarie's farm in the distance. Ollie picks up speed, merging into the opposite lane to pass a car and nearly colliding with an oncoming semi-truck. Back on the farm, Rosemarie manages to drive the pitchfork into David's side. He's momentarily stunned. Rosemarie is too, and she pulls the sharp prongs out of David's flesh. He stumbles and runs out of the stall. Uncertain of whether David has run away or decided to linger, Rosemarie emerges from the stables cautiously. She gets as far as the door before David's hand emerges and grabs the pitchfork. He throws Rosemarie to the ground, but Rosemarie overpowers him. They see a pair of headlights coming straight toward them: Makani's crew has arrived.

*One idea the book poses repeatedly is the stark difference between the way people appear when they're in a group and the way they are when they're alone or in their own head. The collective town of Osborne either makes light of David's murders or puts on public, superficial displays of mourning to cope with the murders. But as individuals, the townspeople tend to adopt a critical stance toward such superficial displays of grief. One of the reasons that people are so unknowable is because they often modify their outward behavior to fit in with the group. Finally, the moved pitchfork is a bad sign for Rosemarie, since by now the reader is well aware that David Ware messes with his victims' belongings before he attacks them. The unwashed human Rosemarie smells is most likely David.*



*Switching between Makani and her friends' rapid dash to reach Rosemarie and Rosemarie's encounter with David in the barn builds tension. As has been the case in David's previous murders, his knife symbolizes his inability to work through his feelings of resentment toward Osborne's more ambitious, impressive students. Unable to reflect inwardly on his lack of fulfillment, David turns to external methods—violent attacks on others—to cope with his feelings.*



*Tension ramps up as Rosemarie and David vie for control, and as it remains unclear whether Makani and her friends will arrive in time to save Rosemarie's life. As was the case when David tried to attack Makani, the arrival of a crowd stops David in his tracks. It's logical that being outnumbered stops David—it's simply harder to attack somebody when you have a crowd of people ganging up on you. On the other hand, that large groups of people appear to be the only thing that can thwart David supports the book's central theme that community and solidarity can be antidotes to personal suffering.*



## CHAPTER 27

Ollie's police cruiser shines a bright spotlight on David and Rosemarie. Makani jumps out of the car as David aims his **knife** at Rosemarie's throat. Alex screams, distracting David, while Makani jumps on him. They struggle, but David frees himself and recognizes Makani. Realizing he's outnumbered, he flees. Rosemarie is okay, but her leg is injured. The group hears Darby's anguished moan coming from the edge of the **corn** maze. There, they find him hyperventilating over Alex's limp body. Alex's vertebrae are exposed: David slashed her neck so deeply that he nearly decapitated her. Ollie sprints into the maze after David. Meanwhile, Makani orders someone to call the police. Rosemarie tries but can't get a signal. Makani doesn't want Ollie to face David on his own; there are too many people in the maze whose safeties are at risk. Makani and her friends sprint into the maze. Rosemarie stays with Alex.

Makani and her friends encounter some maze goers. For a startled moment, she thinks she sees David. Then she realizes it's only a college student wearing a David costume. Makani urges everyone to leave the maze for their own safety, but nobody takes her seriously. Meanwhile, she's completely lost track of Ollie. Darby looks at the ground and sees David and Ollie's muddy footprints. The group sets off down the path.

Just when it seems that Makani and Darby have lost track of David and Ollie, Makani finds them in the middle of a scuffle on the muddy ground. David is on top of Ollie, but Ollie has pinned David's dominant hand to the ground. They struggle, and Ollie manages to escape. Makani runs forward and stands between David and Ollie. David tackles her to the ground and raises the **knife** above his head. Just as he's about to plunge the knife into Makani's heart, Makani feels a wave of blood crash into her face. She licks her lips—**corn** syrup. She looks behind her and sees Brooke holding an empty bucket.

*One comically senseless trope of horror movies is that the central cast of characters inevitably splits up at some point in the movie, all but ensuring that the killer finds and kills off each of them one by one. Perkins subverts this trope in her book, allowing her characters to embrace safety in numbers. In this way, the novel shows that a strong sense of community is vital to a person's emotional and physical welfare—it's what will (hopefully) allow them to survive David Ware's murderous rampage.*



*The college student's tasteless costume is yet another instance of a person who's unable to confront violence and trauma. Unable to comprehend the horrific reality of murder and suffering, they turn to humor or avoidance, making light of a serious situation to reassert control over a situation that makes them feel unsafe, threatened, and decidedly out of control. It's cringeworthy that a person would make light of the murder of innocent kids, but it does say something about the complexity of grief and trauma, and how ill-equipped people sometimes are to confront these complex issues.*



*This scene offers another brief moment of comic relief, as Makani finds herself dripping not with real blood, but with corn syrup. It also imposes a nice symmetry on the story, since the opening scene in Chapter One featured Brooke complaining to Haley about the fake blood involved in the school's production of Sweeney Todd. Finally, when Brooke swoops in to distract David from stabbing Makani, it's another instance of people banding together for survival. Once more, the novel shows how important having a strong, supportive community is good for one's inner—and physical—welfare.*





Ollie appears behind Makani and hugs her close. Darby steps between David and Makani and Ollie, while David looks at Darby in disgust. He tells Darby that he'd almost picked him as a victim, but he changed his mind once he realized that Darby's connections to Osborne are too strong for him to leave the town. It was then that David decided to target Makani. Darby is confused. "You don't want us to leave?" he asks. David doesn't respond. He charges Darby, knocks him to the ground, and stabs him in the chest. Then he goes for Ollie. David stabs Ollie in the chest, too, and Ollie falls to the ground.

Makani screams. A group of tweens emerge from around the corner, but Brooke herds them back the way they came before David can get to them. David sets his hateful eyes on Makani and walks toward her until they're standing face to face. She looks toward Darby and Ollie, whose bodies have stopped twitching. Makani knows they're dead and starts to cry. What has David done, and why? David's angry. He tells Makani it wasn't supposed to happen this way—she was supposed to die two days ago, and his spree was supposed to last another week. Nevertheless, everything has worked out anyway, David explains. "You'll be here forever," David says. "And I get to leave." Makani still doesn't understand. David stands before Makani and raises his **knife** about his head.

## CHAPTER 28

Makani ducks, and David's **knife** hits a pumpkin behind her. She runs, and David chases her. Makani emerges from the maze. The area around her looks like a creepy abandoned carnival. She spots the **corn** pit—a ball pit made of corn kernels—before her. The parking lot lies just beyond the pit. Makani dives into the pit. The kernels are as high as her pelvis. She wades through them as fast as she can. She tries to signal for a car, but nobody notices her above the shouting and honking of the crowd.

*David's comment about opting not to kill Darby because he thought Darby wouldn't leave town is confusing, but it does shed more light on why David is killing his classmates. It's not just that he's targeting ambitious students—he's targeting ambitious students who have plans or dreams of leaving town.*



*This scene reveals that, apparently, David has put considerable effort into planning his spree—it even has a designated end date, though thankfully Makani and her friends have prevented it from lasting that long. Despite all his planning, though, David's plan makes little sense. It's totally unclear what he thinks he'll accomplish by killing. The senselessness of David's plan shows how significantly his inner demons warp his sense of reality. They've driven him to believe that violence is the only way to solve his problems—that he can evade his personal issues by lashing out at others. The knife symbolizes David's inability to be introspective.*



*It's rather poetic that Makani's struggle begins and ends with a knife. At the beginning of the book, she struggles to forgive herself for cutting off Jasmine's hair with a knife. Now, she must run for her life to escape a knife-wielding killer. Symbolically, overcoming David—or better yet, seizing his knife and reclaiming control over this weapon that has been a symbol of her shame and regret for the entire novel—could be the thing she needs to move on from her past.*



Makani turns around and sees David poised at the edge of the pit, waiting to see what Makani will do. But David doesn't see Darby behind him. With all his might, Darby pushes David into the pit. David's face hits the **corn** hard, and his body lies motionless. Makani cries that Darby isn't dead. "I'm not," confirms Darby. But they both wonder if David is dead. They look at his motionless body. Makani thinks about all the people David has hurt. She knows that David will kill again, and it's up to her to stop him. Makani wades through the kernels. When she reaches David, she grabs his **knife** out of his limp hand and kneels over him. David regains consciousness and looks at Makani. He doesn't believe she's capable of killing. Makani assures David that he doesn't know her at all.

As Makani stands above David, she finally understands his motive. All of David's victims were preparing to leave Osborne for bigger and better things. People born in Osborne often find it hard to leave—they have too many connections to the land and community. But David's victims were different. They were ambitious. David hadn't picked Ollie or Darby as his victims because he didn't realize that they had dreams and ambitions.

Makani thinks about Makani's mother. She used to be ambitious and had plans to see the world, but she got stuck in Hawaii when she met Makani's father and had Makani. Maybe this is why she resents Makani so much: because she sees in Makani all the freedom that she has lost.

Makani realizes that David has wanted to get caught all along because he knows they'll take him to Tecumseh State Correctional Institution, which is a two-and-a-half-hour drive away. His prison sentence would be his ticket out of Osborne. Makani feels pity for David, whose dream was so pathetic and small. At the end of the day, Makani realizes, a person still has to live with themselves. Inner transformation takes more time than a temporary change of scenery. Osborne wasn't David's problem: "David was David's problem."

*Makani seems poised to defeat David once and for all—but not without Darby's help. So much of Makani's journey has focused on the personal, inner work she undertakes to forgive herself for her past mistakes. But this forgiveness—and the healing process that preceded it—couldn't have happened without a supportive community. Finally, Makani's remark about David not knowing her reinforces one of the book's central ideas: that people are often too quick to judge others, and, as a result, misjudge them. David's underestimation of Makani will likely not bode well for him, as she insinuates that she's more than capable of killing him. He also doesn't know the knife's symbolic resonance for Makani—how killing him with the knife could allow her to find empowerment in an object that she has for so long associated with shame.*



*Unlike Makani, who has realized that it takes inner growth—forgiveness and introspection—to overcome her demons, David seems to think that external factors (like place and reputation) can fulfill him. He's apparently bitter about staying behind in Osborne while his peers move on to more exciting places, yet instead of pushing himself to work through these feelings or find his own means of escaping, he takes his frustrations out on others.*



*Makani's mother is not unlike David. Both of them failed to look inside of themselves to understand the root of their unhappiness, choosing instead to believe that Osborne was the root of all their problems. As a result, their issues remain unresolved, and they remain as un-self-aware and miserable as ever.*



*David's denial and lack of self-awareness is so extreme that he can't even imagine a practical means of escaping Osborne. Makani realizes how misguided David's logic is. He doesn't even know what he wants. He thinks he's trying to run away from Osborne, when all he's actually doing is running away from himself: from all the problems and insecurities he's too ashamed and unprepared to confront directly.*



Suddenly, David interrupts Makani's thoughts, violently grabbing at her legs. But Makani is too fast. She stabs David in the back, killing him and ensuring that he will never leave Osborne.

*When Makani kills David, it's a symbolic depiction of self-awareness and inner transformation defeating bitterness and stasis. By stabbing David, Makani reclaims ownership of the knife (an object that has symbolized her inner shame about her past demons), wielding it this time as the hero of her story rather than the villain.*



## CHAPTER 29

Chris and Officer Bev run toward Makani. Chris asks where Ollie is, and Makani points toward where she left his body. Darby sobs as the paramedics load him and Makani into the ambulance. Makani knows he's thinking about Alex. The clock strikes midnight, and it's officially Halloween. Just then, Makani hears fuzz coming from Officer Bev's shoulder radio. It's Chris shouting, "My brother is alive!" Darby motions for Makani to go. Makani barrels out of the ambulance and into the maze. She reaches Ollie and crouches beside him. His eyes open as he says her name. They smile at each other. Makani laughs and kisses his warm skin. Makani holds one of Ollie's hands, and Chris holds the other. Beneath the warm glow of the autumn moon, they finally feel safe.

*That the book ends in the corn maze symbolizes Makani's completed transformation. When she first came to Osborne, she saw its cornfields as a constant reminder of the mistakes she made in Hawaii, which caused her exile to Nebraska. But after she undergoes a long, introspective process of healing—through inner work, and through the help of her supportive community—the narrative repositions corn to be a symbol of closure, happiness, and safety. In the end, it's not place or circumstance that shapes a person's life, but the self-work they engage in and the connections they form.*





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