

The Lucky Ones

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One year ago, nine people walked into the band room at Carter High School. Within a matter of minutes, six students and one teacher were shot and killed. Only two people walked out alive. One of them was the shooter, David Ecchles. The other was May McGintee, whose twin brother, Jordan, was one of the students that died that day. One year later, after being pulled in and out of school, and getting into countless fights, May finally ends up at Quincy Adams High School, after the failed attempts of home-schooling and therapy. Despite the efforts of many students and teachers who try to help her fight the trauma, May continues to stubbornly feel angry and guilty for being a survivor, a “lucky one”, that didn’t die that day with her brother. But things start to change for her when she meets Zach.

After Zach’s mom became the lawyer of David Ecchles, a teenager that murdered 7 people at a nearby high school, Zach’s life has fallen apart. Not only has his family stopped supporting and being there for him, but the other kids and their families have ostracized him because of his mother’s controversial decision to support a murderer. Without many other friends to turn to, Zach and May end up coincidentally forming a strange friendship. But when they find out the truth behind how their lives intertwine, suddenly their friendship is in jeopardy.

Despite their contradictory circumstances, somehow Zach and May try to search for hope for each other in order to better understand that the decisions of others don’t have to define their personal value, and that overcoming grief can be painful but possible.

This book is suitable for readers age 14-18. There are some graphic scenes of bloodshed and strong language.

I felt this was a bit of heavy book, emotionally. But I did think that the author did a good job putting research and adding depth to the plotline in a way that opened a new perspective for the reader as well as being relatable and considerate of readers who may have experienced similar traumatic events. The character development and storyline were well written, and the journey to acceptance for both Zach and May were apparent and powerful. There aren’t many books out there who tell the story of loss from the point of view of the victim’s families or friends *after* the loss. I feel that it is interesting that the author turned the perspective on to the survivors of these horrifying events, and the aftereffects and struggles they are left with, when other people move on with their lives. Zach’s personal situation is also a very unique take and point of view of the shooting, and the contrast between May and Zach’s fears and issues are intriguing. I like that the author chose two somewhat unexpected and unpredictable characters, and the stories that they both tell are equally fascinating and eye-opening.

Overall, I feel that the main message that the author really voiced, was the idea that people don’t have to be responsible or guilty for surviving and that the best thing they can do to honor their loved ones is to remember them and live life as passionately as their loved ones would have wanted for them. If you want a raw, but bittersweet novel that deals with the hard truths of death and grief but also power and hope, this would be a wonderful book.

Recommended Titles:

Girl in Pieces by Kathleen Glasgow

This is Where it Ends by Marieke Nijkamp

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven

My Heart and the Other Black Holes by Jasmine Warga

A Breath Too Late by Rocky Callen