

# **Burned Study Guide**

**Burned by Ellen Hopkins**

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# Plot Summary

Burned is a young adult novel by Ellen Hopkins, which focuses around the torturous life of Mormon teenager Pattyn von Stratten.

Pattyn is one of several daughters born to Stephen and Janice Von Stratten. Stephen is an abusive drunkard, who regularly beats his wife and drinks heavily. Janice is a slovenly, distant, and cold mother, who doesn't care for her children, leaving the primary tasks of care-giving up to Patty. Patty does as she is told. When a cute boy named Derek becomes attracted to Patty, they must date in secret. Patty also begins drinking, but is found out by her father. Derek breaks up with Patty, gets back together with his ex-girlfriend Carmen, and spreads rumors that Patty is lousy at sex. This causes Patty to punch Carmen in the face, and throw her bookbag through the library window. Stephen is incensed, and sends his daughter off to live with his sister, Jeanette, for the summer.

At Aunt Jeanette's ranch, Patty discovers family and romantic love. Her Aunt Jeanette becomes a parent, guardian, and role-model, as well as someone in whom Patty can confide. Patty meets and befriends a college sophomore, named Ethan, and the two end up falling in love, and having sex. The summer ends, and Patty must return home for her final year of school. Her father turns his fists on Patty, who calls Ethan for help, and to let Ethan know that she has discovered she is pregnant. Carmen and others at school spread the word that Patty is pregnant. At Patty's insistence, Ethan arranges to come and get Patty, but they are followed by the police, and while driving through a snowy mountain pass, Ethan wrecks his car and is killed. Patty loses the baby, and is forced home once more. The novel ends with Patty plotting to exact revenge on all of those whom have wronged her.



# Prologue to Journal Entry April 7

## Prologue to Journal Entry April 7 Summary

Prologue - Pattyn Von Stratten, or Patty, talks about wondering about doing things her parents told her not to do when she was younger. One such thing is kissing a boy, and Patty reveals that reading opened her eyes to the possibilities. She begins reading all sorts of authors at the school library, at the suggestion of Ms. Rose, the librarian. Patty begins to realize that the only way she might enjoy freedom from her supposedly God-given role as future wife and mother is by escape. Patty is supposed to keep a journal, as is required of all Mormon girls. But she doesn't want to. Ms. Rose gives her a journal, one in which Patty doesn't have to write, so therefore, she is free to write. Among the things Patty writes about is a boy named Justin Proud, whom all the girls want.

At home, Patty's mother doesn't work, usually watches television, and leaves chores up to her six children. Patty's father has named all of his children after generals. Patty is named after George Patton. Patty also relates how her church drills into her head the idea that women are inferior. Patty also knows about rampant physical and emotional abuse borne out of this system. Patty's own mother is one such victim, and Patty's father is an alcoholic.

Patty has two friends, Becca and Emily, who are upstanding Mormon girls. In her family, Patty's closest friend is her sister Jackie. Patty has been having impure dreams, but doesn't know who to talk to about them. At last she asks Brother Prior, who reads scriptures to students to remind them of who they are. Brother Prior says he can't speak for God when it comes to what people dream.

Journal Entry, March 23 - Patty wonders whether she, or anyone, truly believes that God exists. In school, Patty continues to see Justin around. Justin has an interest in Patty's lab partner, Tiffany, and Patty is jealous. Patty begins sexually daydreaming about Justin.

Patty's father, who works security for the state legislature, hides a stash of alcohol in the shed, along with enough food and water to last a year for emergencies. Patty's father is drinking one Friday afternoon when Patty goes out to get a can of spaghetti sauce, and she hears him crying for the first time ever. Patty recounts how her father's first wife, who, after one son, Dwight, is killed in Somalia, and the other is shunned for being gay, had committed suicide. Patty also explains her father is a Vietnam veteran who volunteered and went on two tours. After dinner, her father stumbles in, and all of the children hide in the bedrooms while Patty's father becomes abusive to her mother.

Patty also wonders about God's purpose for her in life. Patty's father teaches her how to shoot Dwight's old gun. Patty also recalls how shooting a gun made her feel powerful. She prefers to shoot targets alone. One day while she is out shooting, three quads come racing by. One is driven by Justin and Tiffany, one by Brent and Melina, and one



by Derek Colthorpe. Justin is impressed by Patty's shooting skills, and they all try shooting the gun, except Tiffany. Derek offers Patty a cigarette, but the others tell him Patty is a Mormon. Derek calls Patty pretty, and asks if she has anyone. Patty says she does not. The others have to leave because it is almost four, and Derek gives Patty a ride to the pavement. Patty is delighted with her afternoon. Patty also wonders what Derek has seen in her.

Journal Entry, March 26 - Patty wonders if Derek will talk to her in school on Monday. He does, and he says he would like to see her again. He invites her to Brent's party on Friday night. He then kisses her, and holds her hand, and walks her to Jackie. Jackie devises a plan to help Patty. When they are dropped off at the Ward dance by their mother, Derek can meet her there.

Journal Entry, April 1 - Patty goes to the party, and is thrilled to be with Derek. At the party, they drink, kiss and make out. Patty knows this is a violation of her faith. She cannot stop thinking or dreaming about Derek, and realizes she is in lust with him. Brent and Melina accept the relationship between Patty and Derek, Justin and Tiff ignore it, and Becca and Emily are not really interested. Saturdays become drinking days for Patty and Derek, who meet in the desert to indulge. The first Saturday in May, Patty's father comes across them, and they hide the alcohol and take breath mints, and Patty pretends to be shooting. But Patty's father knows better. Becca has told her mother, and soon, word reaches Patty's parents about Derek. Patty's father takes her gun and forbids her to leave the house.

Patty goes to counseling with Bishop Crandall, who advises her on the proper woman's role. Patty asks if it is a woman's place not to say anything if her husband hits her. Crandall says if Patty is referring to her parents that way, then she is a liar.

Journal Entry, May 7 - Patty resolves that her parents won't take Derek away from her. But Derek breaks up with her, because her father has come to his house and told him to leave her alone. Patty curses him out, and throws her bookbag, which crashes through the library window. When Patty's father hears of it, he slaps her, which prompts Patty to yell at him. At school, Derek begins dating his ex-girlfriend, Carmen, and completely ignores Patty. Carmen tells Patty that Derek said they had lousy sex, which causes Patty to punch Carmen in the face. Patty is suspended from school for the rest of the year. Patty's father is again enraged, wondering what has happened to her. Patty's mother is also enraged, and questions whether or not Patty and Derek had sex. Patty calls her mother breeding livestock, which causes her mother to lose her lunch.

Bishop Crandall comes to the Von Stratten house, during which time Patty curses him out for being two-faced.

## **Prologue to Journal Entry April 7 Analysis**

Pattyn Von Stratten is a sweet and kind girl, who is born into horrendous circumstances: a cold, uncaring mother, and a domineering, physically abusive drunk of a father. The



household is extremely religiously-conservative, and Stephen reigns supreme over his family, from word and deed to the use of his fists on his wife. Stephen's violence and Patty's love of reading prove to be a combined catalyst for Patty to rebel. She questions her faith, and is seeking true love. She falls into typical teenage pitfalls, including whirlwind romances and alcohol use. Indeed, Patty's use of alcohol is ironic and dangerous given her father's penchant for drink, and the ill-effects of drunkenness.

After Derek breaks Patty's heart, and after rumors about her being lousy at sex circulate, Patty has had enough. She lashes out physically at a library window, and at Carmen, securing for herself a world of trouble. She has meetings with Bishop Crandall, has long lectures from her parents, and her father, thankfully, does not physically break down Patty (yet).

Early on in the novel, Patty's faith takes a beating. She even questions the existence of God. Faith, which is a refuge for many, is a prison for Patty because of her family and her upbringing. Rather than seeking solace in her faith from the horrors of teenage life, Patty is only further beaten up by her faith, which offers no resolution, salvation, or safety. With no one to hold onto, or to turn to, Patty's future seems all too certain: rebellion and consequence.



# Journal Entry, May 18 - Journal Entry, June 10

## Journal Entry, May 18 - Journal Entry, June 10 Summary

Journal Entry, May 18 - Bishop Crandall advises Patty's parents to punish her. Patty's parents send her away for the summer, to her Aunt Jeanette's ranch, because Patty's mother is pregnant with a boy. Patty's father drives her. She asks her father if he will miss her. He says he doesn't even know her anymore, and he says there is enough blame to go around. Patty says she won't take all the blame, and says sometimes she feels like she doesn't even exist. She loves her father, despite everything. Her father wants to know if she respects him, and his rules. The conversation goes nowhere.

In eastern Nevada, they stop for lunch in Ely, near where Patty's father had grown up. He says he misses the quiet, and counting on people, and Patty sees her father as someone almost vulnerable. They arrive in Caliente that afternoon. The town is small and quiet, and Aunt Jeanette lives a few miles outside of it. At the gas station there, Patty sees a cute boy. She also realizes the rural beauty around her is freedom. The ranch is 160 water-fed acres and animals. Aunt Jeanette is happy to see Patty, and Patty's father (Jeanette's brother), Stephen. Jeanette insists he spend the night.

Patty recounts how she hasn't seen her Aunt Jeanette in six years, and that her husband, Stan, had died long ago. There is also some bad blood between Patty's father and aunt.

Journal Entry, May 27 - Patty realizes she won't miss her father or her family; her father leaves without saying goodbye. At first, conversation with Aunt Jeanette, who prefers Aunt J, is polite and cautious. Aunt J tells asks her some valid questions, such as whether or not Derek loved her. Aunt J has no expectations of Patty, but wouldn't mind help with chores and farm work. Patty is happy to help. Aunt J explains she has to move cattle, and teaches Patty how to ride a horse, using her horse Old Poncho.

Journal Entry, June 6 - Patty's riding needs work, but she is proud of herself, and so is Aunt J. Patty tries coffee for the first time as well, even though she knows her church forbids it. Aunt J also gives her permission to shoot her guns, and is flabbergasted that Patty is seventeen and can't drive yet. Aunt J decides to teach her. While out driving, they come across Ethan, the cute boy from the gas station. Aunt J introduces Ethan Carter to Patty.

Journal Entry, June 7 - Driving without a license is illegal, but Aunt J doesn't care. She says the government proves to be an unnecessary burden on many things. Aunt J also explains Ethan is a sophomore in college. So far, Patty's parents and family haven't even called to check up on her. Patty also wants to learn more about Aunt J. They drive



to Panaca to pick up supplies. Ethan works at the feed store, and Patty is happy to see him.

Aunt J explains Ethan is the son of old friends, and that he will be helping to move the cattle. Aunt J explains she used to be a Mormon, but not anymore. She had fallen in love with a boy named Kevin, who was not Mormon, and her family did not approve. Stephen was used as leverage against Aunt J, threatening to kill Kevin and Jeanette. Stephen then beats up Kevin. Kevin tries to press charges, but the sheriff is also the bishop, and says there is not enough evidence. Kevin moves away, and Aunt J never hears from him again. Patty hugs Aunt J, who is now sad.

Journal Entry, June 10 - Patty is shocked by the past actions of her father. Patty and Aunt J grow close, and sit outside to watch the stars nightly. One night, Ethan comes by with the reins Aunt J has ordered. Aunt J invites Ethan to stay for pie, and Ethan does. After he leaves, Aunt J tells Patty she believes Ethan is taken with her. By Friday, Patty is ready to try riding Old Bronco again. Ethan comes by again for dinner, and offers to help teach Patty, and helps her put Old Bronco back in his stall.

Patty learns that Ethan is studying to become a veterinarian at UC Davis. Ethan's mom has died recently, and he is an only child because his mother suffered many miscarriages. Patty is absolutely entranced with Ethan.

## **Journal Entry, May 18 - Journal Entry, June 10 Analysis**

Bishop Crandall advises physical punishment for Patty, but her father, Stephen, has a different idea. He will send Patty to his sister, Jeanette's, for the summer. It is apparent that Stephen really doesn't want anything to do with his daughter, and so he simply banishes her from his sight, allowing someone else to handle the problem. Yet the time away for the summer, Patty quickly realizes, will be a blessing.

Patty instantly bonds with her Aunt Jeanette, and begins helping her out around the ranch. Patty also slowly begins to learn how to ride a horse, and her Aunt Jeanette is proud of her. Indeed, Aunt J's praise is something that Patty has never before experienced from her family, and it is a wonderful thing, and begins to build her confidence up.

Patty is also instantly attracted to a local boy, a college sophomore, named Ethan. They hit it off immediately, and Patty begins to feel loved and hopeful. What was supposed to be a punishment is rather continuing to turn into the best possible thing that could happen to her. She begins even to feel hopeful, something she has never before felt. Freed from the horrific confines of her home, Patty is beginning to blossom -and Aunt Jeanette knows it.



This freedom also allows for a tremendous epoch of self-discovery, which Patty has begun. She now has a truly positive role model in Aunt J, and this relationship will prove to be invaluable in the coming chapters.



# Journal Entry, June 16 - Journal Entry, July 1

## Journal Entry, June 16 - Journal Entry, July 1 Summary

Journal Entry, June 16 - Because Ethan is older and attractive, Patty cannot imagine he is interested in her. She learns more about Aunt J. Her husband, Stan, died after almost fourteen years of marriage, of stomach cancer. Aunt J also had five miscarriages. She explains that in the 1950s, atomic weapons were tested, and people were encouraged to sit outside and watch. The wind carried radiation downwind to those watching, nicknamed "Downwinders." Cancer levels rose, women suffered miscarriages. Ethan's mother died of cancer, as did Patty's Grandma Jane. Aunt J herself survived breast cancer. Back then, people trusted the government and elected representatives. Aunt J explains that Stephen joined the military because soldiering was part of the family's tradition. Patty understands her father is indeed a killer.

Ethan shows up the next morning with his horse, Diego. Aunt J rides Paprika. Patty rides Old Poncho. They have to move ninety longhorn cattle. Patty is also absolutely entranced by the site of Ethan commanding his horse. They end up camping under an open sky. Ethan puts his arm around Patty and promises to protect her from the creatures in the wild. Ethan also talks to Patty about God, about how His presence can be felt everywhere. Ethan kisses Patty, and then he pulls her into his arms. They kiss again in the morning. The three of them then return home. Back at Aunt J's ranch, Ethan takes Patty for a ride. Patty begins to wonder if love has come for her. Ethan confesses to having fallen for Patty. He wants to know if he is moving too fast, but Patty responds by kissing him.

Journal Entry, June 19 - Patty is beside herself with happiness. She believes she may be in love. Aunt J cautions her to be careful as things heat up with Ethan, and the last thing Patty wants is to become pregnant. They haven't had sex yet, but Patty is afraid to become pregnant. The Fourth of July rolls around, and Patty officially turns seventeen. Her family does not call, but Jackie writes. For her birthday, Aunt J takes Patty on a shopping spree, and then plans on dinner and a movie with Ethan. Aunt J buys Patty everything from new clothes to books, CDs, and makeup. Aunt J helps her with the makeup for dinner and the movie. They have dinner, but then Aunt J heads home, saying she is tired, leaving Patty with Ethan.

Ethan gives Patty a gold locket with his photo inside, and confesses he loves her. She tells him she loves him, too. Patty wonders how they will manage their relationship after the summer. Ethan attends school seven hundred miles away from her Aunt's place, but only two hundred miles away from home. They decide not to worry about it for the time being.



Ethan and Aunt J help Patty learn how to ride a horse, using Paprika. They go riding around, and Ethan points out the mountain where nuclear waste is going to be stored. Ethan and Patty are just about to make love when across the river a mountain lion approaches. Patty aims at the creature with a rock, and hits it in the ribs, causing it to flee. As they head home, Ethan says he never wants to hurt Patty.

Journal Entry, July 1 - Patty reflects on how touching Ethan feels better after having declared love. Aunt J discovers the mountain lion is killing calves for fun. They decide they need to track down and kill the lion. They arm themselves with guns and head out. Patty comes across the lion, freezes, and as it is about to lunge for her, Ethan guns it down. Patty feels stupid that she didn't get the lion herself, that she froze. She also wonders if her love for Ethan means she cannot get into Heaven when she dies.

## **Journal Entry, June 16 - Journal Entry, July 1 Analysis**

The newly found freedom Patty has come into also allows her, in an Hegelian-like sense, the ability to have come away from criticizing her faith, and questioning her belief in God, to rediscovering her belief in God, and in faith without the confines of her experiences with the Latter Day Saints. Ethan's love of, and faith in God is clear and strong, and it affects Patty in incredible ways. Indeed, this spiritual connection between Ethan and Patty serves as a firm and wonderful foundation for the romance that is beginning between the two of them. With God at the center, everything else falls into place easily.

Patty's family, meanwhile, is not in touch, except for Jackie, who reveals that their mother is pregnant. Meanwhile, Patty's relationship with Ethan develops at a speed with which Patty is comfortable, and this gives her the feeling of finally being in control of her own life. Between Aunt J and Ethan, Patty feels valued, wanted, and needed — and these are things she has never felt before.

Despite Patty's happiness, she begins to wonder as well if her love of a non-Mormon, her drinking of coffee, and her indulgence of other things forbidden by her religion, mean she cannot get into Heaven. While her experiences are new, exciting, and arguably genuine and right, Patty cannot help but feel the pull of the old doctrines that have been programmed into her mind, checking her every step, and haunting her conscience. Patty nevertheless continues on in pursuit of her own future.



# Journal Entry, July 3 - Journal Entry, October 7

## Journal Entry, July 3 - Journal Entry, October 7 Summary

Journal Entry, July 2 - Aunt J explains that she believes God is no one to be feared, but loved, because God is love. Ethan brings Patty to Beaver Dam State Park, to go swimming. They have beer, swim, and kiss. Patty begins to feel as if the love with Ethan is meant to be forever. They make love twice.

Journal Entry, July 3 - When Patty returns home, she knows her Aunt J knows she and Ethan have had sex, but Patty is mainly worried about her father. Patty also explains to Aunt J she's fallen in love with Ethan, and Aunt J is happy and cautious. They head into Caliente for Independence Day the next day. Patty and Aunt J wait for Ethan and his father. It turns out that Ethan's father is Kevin.

Ethan and Patty walk around, and Patty wants to know why Ethan wanted her. Ethan explains she's pretty, but full of beautiful depth. Patty wants to know if Ethan knows about her aunt and Kevin, but are interrupted by the fireworks. The next morning, Patty talks to Aunt J about Kevin. Despite living near him, both of them were married, and never cheated, because marriage is a contract. Patty still doesn't know if Ethan knows about his father and her Aunt J. July is in full swing, and it takes a lot of effort to keep things watered. Ethan and Patty also continue making love, and Aunt J and Kevin begin seeing one another — with Ethan's blessing.

A letter arrives from Jackie, talking about how their mother is due in October, their father drinks more and is angrier, and how Jackie has had to assume responsibility for everything. August comes, bringing brush fires, which Ethan and Kevin -both volunteer firefighters- work ceaselessly to put out. Because of this, Patty doesn't see much of Ethan.

Another letter arrives from home, and Jackie reveals she is now being beaten by their father. Patty is enraged and doesn't know what to do. At last, Patty confesses to Ethan what is going on. Ethan vows to keep Patty safe, and needs time to think about what to do about Patty's sisters. Patty makes Ethan promise not to tell his father. It weighs heavily on Patty enough so that Aunt J notices something is wrong.

Journal Entry, August 14 - Patty begins having feelings of dread as the summer comes to an end. Time becomes the enemy, and they begin making love more and more. But one night, the condom breaks. A few days later, Patty's father calls, wanting her home. Aunt J tells Patty she will always have a second home with her, and that she only has a year to go before she can leave. The night before she leaves, Kevin gives her a horse riding book, Aunt J gives her a cell phone, and Ethan gives her a promise ring.



Aunt J tells Patty that she has given her life back to her. Aunt J tells Patty's father a friend will bring Patty back, and he accepts. The friend is Ethan. Ethan also gives Patty a semiautomatic handgun, telling her it is her trump card. They say goodbye fifteen minutes from home, and Ethan drops her off. Nothing has changed. Her father is still the same person, her sisters live in fear, and her mother is uncaring. School begins, and among the classes Patty takes is Introduction to Aviation. Patty talks to Ethan at lunch on the phone. At school, she is the new Pattyn; at home, she is the old Pattyn.

Yucca Mountain protests begin, and Patty's father is angry with them. Patty defies him, saying that nuclear waste is dangerous. Her father has had enough after she curses, and he physically assaults her, by throwing her onto the floor and punching her back.

Journal Entry, September 15 - Patty's father goes off hunting and returns with a deer, and the deer is brutalized. It is an omen, Patty knows. Three weeks later, a sanitary napkin clogs the toilet, and a drunken Stephen must fix the problem. Patty says it is her fault. Her father then proceeds to strike her several times. When she goes to bed, Patty realizes it has been seven weeks since her last period. Patty realizes she is pregnant.

Patty's mother goes into labor, and with her father at work, Patty must drive her mother. Patty purchases an early pregnancy test, and discovers she is pregnant.

Journal Entry, October 7 - Baby Samuel is born and brought home. Patty realizes she has to figure things out quickly. At school at lunch, she calls Ethan and confesses she is pregnant, and is overheard by Carmen and Tiffany. By the following day, almost everyone at school knows Patty is pregnant. Ethan wants to marry Patty. Ethan promises to come and get Patty on Thursday, so he can find a place for them to stay.

That night, Patty prays to God for help. Snow comes down the next day. Patty's mother soon finds out from Becca's mother. Patty denies it. Ethan picks her up the next day, but they are followed by a cop. Ethan drives faster, but skids around a curve, and the car crashes. Ethan is killed, and Patty wakes up in a hospital. The baby is also lost. Patty wants to be dead, and finds out that a boy from school, Trevor, had divulged her escape with Ethan.

Patty knows she has no place to go. She doesn't want Kevin to blame Aunt J for her niece's actions. Patty slowly formulates a plan. She believes her life is over, and wants to kill everyone who has wronged her. Patty also believes she might change her mind if her father says he loves her, while she points a gun at his head. But she knows that he won't.

## **Journal Entry, July 3 - Journal Entry, October 7 Analysis**

Apart from Ethan's reflections on God, Aunt J's reflections on God only seek to strengthen Patty's own growing faith in God, though she still wages an internecine theological war with herself over God's nature, and what her religious upbringing has



drilled into her mind. This conflict is also coupled with the knowledge that time is running out for the summer. Things are only compounded by Jackie's heartbreaking confession that their father has turned his fists on her, plaguing Patty's mind and heart even more so than it already has been.

The world that Patty has been living in ultimately comes crashing down, one step at a time. The end of the summer, her move to return home, the pregnancy, her father's continued abuse — everything conspires against her, as though wolves at the door. The school is soon ablaze with news of Patty's pregnancy, and Janice begins asking Patty about what is going on. Patty realizes she is out of time, and in desperation, begs Ethan to come and get her, which turns into a catastrophe with Ethan's untimely death.

Things, however, seem to be their bleakest. Patty feels as though she cannot return to her aunt's, and her father's penchant for beating Patty has increased. Without anyone to turn to -no friends, no family, no boyfriend- Patty begins formulating a plan for revenge, and that is how the novel ends — in uncertainty.



# Characters

## Pattyn Von Stratten

Pattyn Von Stratten, or Patty, is the main character and protagonist of the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. She is shy, sweet, kind, fiercely loyal to her sisters, and is the main caregiver in her family. She is courageous and compassionate, and knows how to fire guns. She is an avid reader, who desperately yearns to be free.

After a failed romance with Derek -one discovered and broken up by her father- Patty fights Derek's new girlfriend at school, breaks the library window, and is suspended for the rest of the year. In frustration, her father sends Patty to her Aunt Jeanette's for the summer. While there, Patty breaks out of her shell under her aunt's guidance and love, and Patty becomes happy, hopeful, and self-confident. She learns how to ride horses and work on a ranch. She is pleased with herself. She also falls in love with local college sophomore Ethan Carter, and the two become inseparable. They make love, and grow happier with each other.

At the end of the summer, Ethan must go to college and Patty back home. Back home, Patty quickly becomes the focus of her father's beatings, and he bloodies her up several times. Patty also discovers she is pregnant, and calls Ethan, who agrees to come get her, and wants to marry her. But while escaping through a snowy mountain pass, they are chased by the police, and Ethan wrecks the car. Ethan is killed, and Patty loses the baby. She wakes up in the hospital, and slowly recovers. At the end of the book, she reveals she is formulating a plan to use her handgun to exact revenge on everyone who has wronged her.

## Stephen Von Stratten

Stephen Von Stratten is the Von Stratten family patriarch, father of Patty and Jackie, husband of Janice (his second wife), and brother to Jeanette. He is a security member at the state legislature, and is a physically abusive drunk who is haunted by his past, and beats his wife and children. He is cruel, vindictive, and slovenly at home. After discovering his daughter drinking and dating, as well as punching Carmen and destroying school property, he ships Patty off to Jeanette's for the summer. While Patty is gone, and with his wife pregnant, Stephen beats up Patty's younger sister, Jackie.

In his past, Stephen destroyed a relationship between Jeanette and a non-Mormon, Kevin, by beating Kevin up and threatening to kill them both. A Vietnam veteran, Stephen is haunted by his first wife's suicide following the combat death of one son, and the coming out of a second son as gay. Stephen names his daughters after famous generals, and is desperately seeking a son.



## Janice Von Stratten

Janice Von Stratten is the mother of Patty and Jackie, and the wife of Stephen. Janice is cold, unsympathetic, lazy, and uncaring. She is habitually beaten by her husband, who only holds off when he discovers she has become pregnant with a boy. Janice does next to nothing around the house, forcing her children to fend for themselves.

## Ms. Rose

Ms. Rose is the high school librarian, who opens Patty's eyes to the world of literature. Ms. Rose is also the gift-giver of a diary to Patty.

## Aunt Jeanette

Aunt Jeanette is the aunt of Patty, and the sister of Stephen. She lives near Caliente, Nevada, where she owns a 160-acre ranch and cows. She agrees to take on Patty for the summer, during which time, she oversees a romance between Patty and Ethan, and becomes a parental figure and role model to Patty. Aunt Jeanette is a widow, whose husband has died of cancer years before.

Aunt Jeanette, like Patty, also had a romance destroyed by her father and Stephen when she was younger. The romance was with Ethan's widowed father, Kevin. At Patty's insistence, and with Ethan's blessing, Kevin and Aunt Jeanette begin their romance all over again.

## Ethan Carter

Ethan Carter is a college sophomore at UC Davis, who lives in the town of Caliente, Nevada. He is the love interest of Patty, and falls in love with her. He cares for her, protects her, understands her, talks to her, and ultimately makes love to her, getting her pregnant. When Ethan discovers that Patty's father continues to be abusive, he drives out to get Patty. But they are chased by the police, and wreck their car in a mountain pass. The wreck causes Ethan to be killed, as well as Patty to suffer a miscarriage.

## Kevin Carter

Kevin Carter is the old love interest of Aunt Jeanette, and is the father of Ethan. Kevin later reignites his relationship with Aunt Jeanette, with the blessing of Ethan and the insistence of Patty.





## Jackie Von Stratten

Jackie Von Stratten is the younger sister of Patty, and arguably, her closest friend. While Patty is away, Jackie writes to Patty, to keep her informed. Jackie, after Patty's departure, and with their mother pregnant, becomes the preferred choice of their father for physical beatings.

## Carmen

Carmen is the ex-girlfriend of Derek, with whom he gets back together after he dumps Patty. Carmen spreads rumors that Patty is lousy at sex, which compels Patty to punch Carmen in the face. Carmen later overhears that Patty is pregnant, and spreads the word to the student body.

## Derek

Derek is a brief romantic interest of Patty's. He dumps her after Patty's father discovers their relationship, and threatens to kill him if he so much looks at Patty again. Derek then goes on to tell everyone that he had lousy sex with Patty, and gets back together with his ex-girlfriend, Carmen.



# Objects/Places

## Carson City, Nevada

Carson City, Nevada, is one of two main settings for the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. It is the location of the Von Stratten household.

## The Von Stratten Household

The Von Stratten household is located in Carson City, Nevada. It is where Patty, her mother, her father, and her siblings live. It is the site of much violence and anguish, perpetrated by the family patriarch.

## School

School is the place where Patty can escape her home life, and where she uses her lunch period to call Ethan.

## Ely, Nevada

Ely, Nevada is the small town where Stephen and Jeanette grew up.

## Caliente, Nevada

Caliente, Nevada, is the small town near Aunt Jeanette's ranch. It is where Ethan, Patty, Aunt Jeanette, and Kevin see fireworks on the Fourth of July.

## Aunt Jeanette's Ranch

Aunt Jeanette's ranch is located near Caliente, Nevada, and is a source of hope, life, and love for Patty. It is at the ranch that Patty becomes a stronger, independent person, and blossoms.

## Beaver Dam State Park

Beaver Dam State Park is where Ethan brings Patty to go swimming, and where they make love for the first time.



## **Semiautomatic Handgun**

A semiautomatic handgun is a gift to Patty from Ethan. He tells Patty it is her trump card.

## **Clothing**

Clothing is what Aunt Jeanette purchases for Patty for her birthday. Patty feels more confident in her new clothing.

## **Cell Phone**

Before Patty returns to Carson City, a cell phone is purchased and paid for by Aunt Jeanette for Patty. Patty uses the cell phone to stay in touch with both her and Ethan.

# Themes

## Love

Love is a major theme in the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. It occurs in two ways in the novel -familial, and romantically- and it dramatically impacts those involved, as well as the events of the novel. There is also a lack of familial and romantic love that clearly distinguishes the presence of love.

In terms of familial love, a great deal of love exists between Patty and her sisters, especially Jackie. This love of her sisters means that Patty stands up for them and takes care of them in every possible way. Patty also experiences a tremendous amount of familial love from her Aunt Jeanette, who oversees Patty's care and well-being while at her ranch. Aunt J tells Patty that the ranch is a second home to Patty, and is willing to help her out however she may need it.

This presence of love is contrasted by the absence of love in Patty's home. Patty is, at most, a nuisance to her parents, and she is at least nonexistent to them. Her mother is more absorbed in watching television and laying around than she is in caring for her children. There is also a lack of love between Stephen and his family, for he beats his wife, and when his wife becomes pregnant, turns his fists on Jackie, and later Patty.

In terms of romantic love, the single greatest source of this love occurs between Patty and Ethan. Beyond making love to Patty, Ethan would do anything for her, and gives his life for her, trying to help her escape her home. He cares for her and protects her, tells her everything, and wants to spend his life with her, giving her a promise ring before her return home. A kindling of romantic love can also be seen between Ethan's father, Kevin, and Aunt J.

This presence of love is contrasted with the absence of romantic love between Stephen and Janice, who seem to be together for no reason other than trying to have a male child. Indeed, there is no emotional value between them, since Stephen regularly beats Janice, but holds off when he discovers she is pregnant with a boy.

## Family

Family is a major theme in the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. Family -unity, compassion, and care between members of a family- is both grossly absent, and incredibly present during different times in the novel.

The absence of family -indeed, the absolute failure of family- occurs in the Van Stratten household. A physically abusive, drunkard father who focuses his physical abuse on his wives and his teenage daughters, mean that his position is something to be feared, rather than loved and sought for protection. Janice's position as mother is likewise compromised by her utter lack of concern and care for her children, allowing her



daughters to shoulder the burden of motherhood for their siblings. Rather than being able to depend upon their parents for either love, family, or role models, the girls are left to their own devices, and must continually struggle.

Yet, the presence of family occurs in two astounding and incredible ways as well. The first way is the way in which Patty takes care of, and cares for, her sisters. She even steps forward to take the blame for accidents so that her younger sisters do not receive the brunt of their father's fists. The second way that the presence of family occurs is in the way in which Aunt Jeanette willingly opens her ranch up for Patty, whom she hasn't seen in six years. Aunt Jeanette sees to all of Patty's needs, from the emotional and the spiritual to the physical. Indeed, Aunt Jeanette becomes someone to whom Patty can look as not just a role model, but as someone to confide in, and learn from.

## Self-Discovery

Self-discovery is a major theme in the the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. Self-discovery -the process and successes of learning about oneself, and growing in terms of morals and character- is readily apparent with Patty, the main character and protagonist.

When Patty ventures to Aunt Jeanette's ranch for the summer, she is a loner, self-conscious, unsure, and perhaps even depressed. She feels as if she is a horrible person, and feels as if she will never amount to, nor experience anything special in her life. Patty notices a number of similarities in her present, and her aunt's past -including forbidden love.

Over the course of the summer, through lessons, and through experiencing love from Aunt Jeanette and Ethan, Patty embarks upon a course of self-discovery. She comes closer to God, realizes she is not an evil person, experiences freedom, responsibility, love, and becomes more courageous and independent. She also comes to find herself to be a beautiful person, not just physically, but internally. Indeed, the greatest gift from the summer at the ranch is that Patty becomes hopeful of a better future, and that she will one day be able to control her future.

# Style

## Point of View

Ellen Hopkins tells her novel *Burned* in the first-person from the perspective of protagonist and main character Pattyn von Stratten for at least two reasons. The first is because the novel concerns events directly related to, and changing, Patty's life. The second is because of the sheer force of drama and emotional turmoil Patty faces. By telling the novel in first-person from Patty's perspective, the reader is able to understand Patty's emotional distresses and thrills by reading them firsthand, as if they were being directly related by a friend. This makes Patty much more endearing to the reader, and causes an emotional connection between character and reader.

## Setting

The setting of the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins occurs in Nevada, and works well for the story for at least two reasons. The first is that the American southwest has a large population of Mormons, and Patty's family are members of the Church of Latter Day Saints. The second reason is that Nevada proves to be a location of religious zealotry and suffocation for Patty -just as much as rural Nevada is a wellspring of hope and new life for her.

## Language and Meaning

Ellen Hopkins tells her novel *Burned* in language that is simple and straightforward, with touches of poetic prose. This is done in order to make the novel more believable, as though the first-person narration is truly that of a seventeen year-old girl whose heart has been broken, healed, and soared to the greatest heights of love. The touches of poetic prose are to demonstrate that Patty is indeed a beautiful soul, who feels things on an incredibly deep level.

## Structure

Ellen Hopkins divides her novel *Burned* into sections, each section being separated by a journal entry. The structure is therefore straightforward and uncomplicated, allowing the reader to focus in on the tragedy of Patty's life rather than tying the reader down in unnecessarily chaotic or complicated structure.



## Quotes

"But this tiny piece of me kept thinking back to another, happier time, when Mom loved Dad. And me. And Dad loved Mom. And me. At least as much as he could with that dead, cold space growing inside him, that place no amount of love could ever settle into. That impenetrable arctic land where his ghosts had carried his heart."

-Journal Entry March 23, p. 53

"I'd like to tell you I'd fallen head over heels in love with Derek. I did feel something, but it wasn't the hearts and flowers kind of love in my dog-eared books."

-Journal Entry, April 1, p. 125

"East from Carson City, the road stretched long and longer toward yesterday, sculpted in distant granite hills and splintered ghost town boardwalks."

-Journal Entry, May 18, p. 171

"How many more miserable things has Dad done, things I'll never know about and don't really want to? How does he dare judge me?"

-Journal Entry, June 10, p. 232

"That may be how you see yourself, but the rest of the world would be hard put to agree. You shine brighter than the Milky Way. Now there are those who might try to take that from you, but you don't have to give it away. Keep on shining, Pattyn."

-Journal Entry, June 10, pp. 236-237

"True love finds you once, if you're lucky."

-Journal Entry, June 16, p. 293

"My very foundation shook, an earthquake in my gut. I was all new, right? So why did the old Pattyn surface now?"

-Journal Entry, July 1, p. 361

"'God is love,' she said. 'And He respects love, whether it's between a parent and a child, a man and a woman, or friends. I don't think He cares about religion one little bit.'"

-Journal Entry, July 2, p. 363

"As they talked, years and regret seemed to melt away from Aunt J's face. She was seventeen again."

-Journal Entry, July 3, p. 393

"I feel like I'm on a tightrope, barely balancing. I know it's a long way down and I'm afraid I'm destined to crash."

-Journal Entry, August 14, p. 437

"Dad had a new son. He didn't need just one more daughter, especially not one as obnoxious as I."

-Journal Entry, October 7, p. 527



## Topics for Discussion

Throughout the novel, Patty cannot go to the police, or to anyone else in her religion. Why not? What would be the consequences of this? Does Patty have a chance to escape? If so, where? Why does she not take this chance?

Discuss the theme of failure of family in the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. What is the failure of family? Why is this important? How does it affect Patty, and her siblings?

Patty enjoys a wonderful relationship with her Aunt Jeanette. What is this relationship like in comparison to Patty's relationship with her father? How does the relationship with Aunt Jeanette help Patty?

Discuss the theme of love in the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. What is love like between Patty and her father? What is love like between Patty and her Aunt Jeanette? What is love like between Patty and Ethan? Which of these forms of love proves to be strongest, and which weakest?

Discuss the theme of self-discovery in the novel *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. In what ways does Patty's character change? Is this change for the better? Why or why not? Provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss Patty's faith in, and relationship with God. How does Patty's relationship with God change over time? How does her relationship with God affect her life, both at home and at her Aunt Jeanette's ranch? What is the impact, and why is it important?