

Flash Burnout Study Guide

Flash Burnout by L. K. Madigan

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Contents

Flash Burnout Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
chapters 1 - 7.....	4
chapters 8 - 16.....	6
chapter 17 - 24.....	9
chapters 25 - 32.....	11
chapters 33 - 41.....	13
Characters.....	15
Objects/Places.....	20
Themes.....	23
Style.....	25
Quotes.....	28
Topics for Discussion.....	30



Plot Summary

"Flash Burnout" by L.K. Madigan is a story about a 15-year-old boy named Blake who is dealing with high school issues. Blake is navigating through life with the help of his supportive parents and an older brother. Shannon is his first girlfriend and he deeply cares for her. At school, Blake takes Photo II with his friend Marissa. For a photography assignment, Blake takes a photo of a street woman who had passed out. Marissa soon realizes however that the woman is her mom and is able to track her down, but does not return to school for a few days. Worried, Blake is relieved to find out that Marissa's mom will begin rehab for her meth addiction.

Back at school, Marissa shows up to school with a black eye, which further alarms Blake. He wants to take photos of her eye and she agrees if she can take photos of flowers in his garden. Marissa intrigues Blake with her angel charm that has mysterious initials "KAT" on them. She worries him by getting drunk at a football game because her beloved cat got ran over by a car. On a Friday night, Marissa takes Blake to the Hurtle where he takes photos of the bikers and meets her brother Gus. Blake is interested in Gus' angel tattoo that also has unexplained initials.

His brother, Garrett, teases Blake about having two girlfriends. He tries to explain that Shannon is his girlfriend and that Marissa is a friend that happens to be a girl. Trouble is stirred up during lunch when the school radio DJ Cappie insinuates on the air that Shannon is jealous of Blake's friendship with Marissa.

Now that Marissa's mom has become clean again, Marissa wants Blake to take another photograph of her mom. Reluctantly, Blake goes over to Marissa's house and does so with her anxious mom.

Right before Blake goes to his grandparents' house for Christmas break, he exchanges gifts with Shannon. A surprise visit from Marissa and her mom is in store after being disappointed in realizing he got Shannon the wrong necklace for Christmas.

After the break, Marissa is missing from school for several days. Blake calls her grandma and discovers that Marissa is again out looking for her run-away mom. Blake's mom helps to find Marissa and they take her home. While at dinner, Dr. Hewson takes a work phone call about a transient woman that was shot. Curiosity peaks about the possibility of the woman being Marissa's mom. Garrett, Blake, and Marissa go early the next morning to see if they can identify the body at the morgue. Fortunately, it is not her mom! Blake and Marissa spend time together; passion and intimacy develop as he ignores calls from Shannon.

Marissa disappears and Blake heads over to her grandma's house. It's for sale. Stunned, the only thing Blake knows is that Gus will be at the hurtle. Gus explains that Marissa left with her mom after she was kicked out of her grandma's house. Finding out who KAT is, listening to Cappie's heartbroken play list, showing Mr. Malloy his photo series, and going on the hurtle appease Blake.



chapters 1 - 7

chapters 1 - 7 Summary

The book begins by giving the reader a glimpse into a typical morning at the Hewson's house. There are four people that live in the Hewson's house: Blake, a high school sophomore; Garrett, his older brother; mom, a hospital chaplain; and dad, a medical examiner. Blake and his brother Garrett go to West Park high school together. On the car ride to school, the brothers listen to the school radio with a new DJ. Once they get to school, Blake's girlfriend, Shannon, is upset with him. She seeks the company of her friends, leaving Blake bewildered. Later, Shannon is able to tell Blake why she is upset with him - he had forgotten to call her after dinner.

Blake and his friend Marissa share their photography homework with each other. His last photo surprises her because it is a photo of her mom. Marissa questions Blake as to where he was when he took the photo. She leaves school to go downtown in search of her mom.

Blake and Shannon enjoy milkshakes at Ottomans, a snack shop near school, because Shannon's soccer practice was canceled. Shannon leaves after her mom calls with news that Shannon's grandmother is in the hospital. Blake decides to go downtown in search of Marissa. He is unable to find her and returns home, thankful for his family.

Marissa does not come back to school for the next 2 days. Out of concern for her, Blake finds her address and takes a bus to her house. There, Blake meets Marissa's grandmother and mother, who will start rehab in a few days. Blake returns home and asks his dad about people who use meth and their missing teeth.

Riley informs Blake that Garrett is dating Cappie, a new school radio DJ. Blake tries to bring up the subject with Garrett in their commute to school. In photography class, Mr. Malloy informs his students about a photo contest which Blake and Marissa agree to enter.

Back at home, Cappie makes herself comfortable at the Hewson's house and eats his popcorn, which startles Blake. She made it clear that it was just a play date and she is not dating his brother.

On Sunday, Dr. Hewson takes his sons to his workplace. Blake continues to read his book, "Dracula," while Garrett helps his dad examining a corpse from a boating accident.

Back at school on Monday, Blake notices Marissa's black eye.



chapters 1 - 7 Analysis

The story begins with Blake, a normal, 15 year-old boy, who is distraught over seeing photos from his dad's work. The bullet wounded victims does not help Blake's appetite and sets him up to deal with more trouble that will ensue at school with Shannon. Shannon is upset with Blake and he is worried because it's his first official girlfriend. He wants to do everything right and be the best boyfriend that he can be.

Blake and his girlfriend Shannon are finding ways to communicate their wants and needs in their relationship. Blake is forgetful and got distracted from calling Shannon after dinner because of his friends. They went to the skate park. Blake is finding the balance between spending time with his girlfriend, which takes priority, and spending time with his guy friends.

Blake finds out new information: meth addicts and their dental problems, a photo contest, his brother is dating, and Marissa's black eye. By taking a photo of a passed out woman downtown, Blake discovers that it is his friend Marissa's mom. Blake's parents are both working parents and are supportive of Blake. He does not know how to relate to Marissa's situation with her mom missing and being addicted to meth. Both Blake and Marissa enjoy photography class, but Blake was not happy with the teacher who gave him a "C" last year. The photo contest interests Blake and Marissa because it is a chance to get their work displayed in a gallery. Although Blake is officially dating Shannon, his brother Garrett is not in a relationship. Blake is surprised that his brother is dating Cappie because Garrett had made some harsh statements about her on the way to school. "Garrett grunts. 'She's probably a dog...Why else would she be on the radio? Hot chicks don't go sit in a little studio and hide their hotness behind a microphone. They do cheerleading of the drama club or the dance team' (p. 6)." Blake foreshadows that she could be attractive and be fond of music. It is Cappie that gives Blake two playlists of songs after she finds out that he is no longer dating Shannon. Marissa's black eye is alarming to Blake because he is not a risk-taker. He has not even heard of the hurtle and that's where Marissa got her black eye. Blake's brother Garrett plays football and enjoys taking risks, like jumping off bridges and helping in the medical examiner's office. However, Blake likes to play it safe. The nearest thing to risk-taking for him is going downtown and taking photos of the homeless people.



chapters 8 - 16

chapters 8 - 16 Summary

The mystery about Marissa's black eye is solved - a fellow biker had elbowed her before they were going to hurtle, race down on their bikes from Tower Hill. Marissa mentions that she had an older brother, named Gus, that goes to the Hurtle every Friday night. Blake wants to take pictures of Marissa's black eye and she agrees if she can take pictures of Blake's garden behind his house. This is upsetting to Shannon because she has only been to Blake's house one time, but she has soccer practice so she cannot join them.

At Blake's house, Marissa and Blake share snacks. Marissa asks if she can take some of the cookies home and Blake agrees. After Blake takes photos of Marissa's black eye, they go outside so Marissa can take her photos. She climbs a ladder and finds a bird nest. She asks Blake for little figurines like the ones her grandma gets from Red Rose tea. He gets a little ceramic angel that he gave his mom years ago, which surprises Marissa as she pulls out a pewter angel from her pocket. It had the initials "KAT" but Marissa doesn't want to explain what they mean to Blake. Blake's mom, Benita, comes home and shows Marissa family photos in the hallway.

Shannon tells Blake that she loves him and he proceeds to do the same. Blake is unsure when he is supposed to say those words and tries to ask his mom while he helps her in the kitchen. Benita is wrapped up in making dinner and asks about Marissa's black eye. Could it be from her boyfriend? Blake reassures her that it was an accident and she would not lie.

On the way to find Shannon at a football game, Blake finds Marissa unhappy. Bree, Marissa's friend, informs him that Marissa's cat had been run over. Blake heads over to Shannon and his friends and feels possessive that a strange guy is sitting next to Shannon.

Blake and Marissa talk on the phone. Marissa states that she misses her mom and her cat. On Friday night, they go to the Hurtle. Blake takes photos of the bikers and meets Marissa's brother, Gus. Blake stares at Gus' tattoo of an angel on his forearm with the initials "KAT" on one of the wings. Blake wants to ask about the initials, but does not. The Hurtle starts and Marissa joins in. Before Blake leaves, he spots Cappie with blue feathers in her hair.

Dr. Hewson tells an interesting story at dinner about one of his dead patients that died from hanging. The sons clean the dishes after dinner and Blake questions Garrett about seeing Cappie at the Hurtle. Garrett annoyingly jokes that Blake has 2 girlfriends: Shannon and Marissa.



Marissa asks Blake to photograph her mom after she gets out of rehab after looking at Blake's motion photography assignment. Blake had taken a photo of his mom's hair. Blake arrives home to find Cappie eating pie and his brother sleeping on the couch. Instantly Blake tries to cash in while his parents are out and invite Shannon over, but they have transportation problems. Cappie capriciously asks Blake about his 2 girlfriends, Shannon and Marissa.

At school, over lunch, Cappie makes a deceptive song request going out to Blake from Shannon, which everyone hears over the radio. The song infers that Shannon is jealous of Blake's friendship with Marissa. Upset and confused, Blake and Shannon decide to go over to talk with Marissa. The girls understand that it was erroneous, but Blake is still upset when he talks to his brother. Garrett tells him not to mess with Cappie. When Blake walks away from him, his brother hits him.

Shannon and Blake go to Juke's after a football game. Shannon is upset because Blake is concerned about Marissa. Marissa got drunk during the game, again. Garrett is unable to go to the medical examiner's office on Saturday morning because he broke curfew. Marissa and Blake talk on the phone and Blake gets up the nerve to ask about her dad. She responds that he is in jail.

Blake and Shannon are able to spend time together. His dad drives them to the Meriwether Mall where they walk around holding hands. They go to a movie and then back to Blake's house. Shannon looks at things in his room and his mom takes her home. In the garage, Blake and his dad awkwardly talk about sex and protection.

chapters 8 - 16 Analysis

Blake continues to learn new things about Marissa - she tried to hurtle, she has an older brother and a mysterious pewter angel charm that she carries in her pocket. Additionally, her cat died and her dad is in jail. Blake is concerned with Marissa's drinking. He had only been drunk one time before and does not like seeing Marissa in pain from not living with her parents and her cat dying. Blake's stable family has a dog and Marissa's unstable family has a cat. They are opposites and contrast.

Blake and Shannon have told each other that they love each other, which is a new thing for Blake. He is unsure when he should tell Shannon that he loves her. Should it be everyday? This is a new step in growing up for Blake and he tries to tell his mom about it. Not even Houston can help him. "I'm up to my elbows in soapsuds and wet dog when I suddenly think, Ohmygod, I said I love you to a girl! Houston seems to have been shocked into silence. Then my mom forces me to help her fix Nonna's famous minestrone for dinner. While I'm chopping carrots and green beans and leeks (heh ...leeks), I'm thinking, Ohmygod, I told Shannon I love her! Oblivious to my inner turmoil, Mom is frying bacon" (p. 79).

Blake is curious about the Hurtle, where he takes photographs of the bikers. Upon meeting Gus, he is even more interested about Gus' angel tattoo. Blake looks forward to



inflicting some brotherly jabs about seeing Cappie at the Hurtle. Garrett quickly jabs back.

Blake is hindered by not being old enough to drive and isn't able to have the same luck that his brother enjoys by being able to have his non-girlfriend over while their parents are out. At school, Cappie enjoys stirring up trouble between Shannon, Marissa, and Blake.

Marissa's drinking causes trouble between Blake and his girlfriend. Marissa is in awe of Blake's parents' marriage and stability. Eventually, Shannon and Blake enjoy spending time together. Blake's dad discusses sex and protection with Blake.



chapter 17 - 24

chapter 17 - 24 Summary

Back at school, in photography class, Marissa tells Blake that her mom is home from rehab and asks him to take another photo of her since she's clean now. Mr. Malloy says that Blake's photos are gritty and Marissa's are pretty. Reluctantly, Blake goes over and takes pictures of Marissa's mom, who loathes having her picture taken.

Blake is unsure if he should tell Shannon that he went to Marissa's house. He doesn't tell her, but she finds out later when they are at Ottomans and one of their friends asks Blake how it went. Shannon feels like she cannot trust Blake. However, Blake saves the day by reminding Shannon that he loves her.

Blake and Riley talk about the upcoming Homecoming dance and whom Riley should take as a date. They decide on Kaylee, Shannon's friend, which makes Shannon happy because Kaylee secretly likes Riley. Waiting for a ride home with Garrett, Blake sees how his brother lights up when he sees Cappie.

Marissa has another bruise, this time it is on her arm. She was in the wrong place at the wrong time at the hurtle when a skateboarder accidentally ran into her. Blake wants to take a photo of this bruise too, but is not interested in the bruises on her leg and backside.

Shannon and Blake dress up for the Homecoming dance and enjoy their time there. Blake is counting the weeks until he can get his driver's license and actually drive to pick up Shannon.

Back in photography class, Blake and Marissa talk about the hurtle. Marissa is making some good friends there. Later at Ottomans, Blake and Shannon talk about having sex because Shannon shares that Ellie and Manny are doing it. Shannon says she is not ready and Blake respects her.

Back at home; Cappie is sitting at the kitchen table while Garrett makes them milkshakes. She tries to extend the olive branch to Blake by asking if they are at peace. Cappie tries to make Blake a milkshake, but unfortunately leaves off the lid and creates a disaster.

The photography class goes to the beach for a field trip. It is cold, rainy, and miserable. Mr. Malloy buys hot chocolate for his students to their delight. On the bus ride back to school, Marissa is tired because she has been staying up late talking with her mom after her mom gets back from work.

Riley and Kaylee are the new couple! Shannon misses her grandma, who is in the hospital again. She is going to be missed as Shannon goes shopping without her on Black Friday.



Blake is unsure about what to get Shannon for Christmas. After asking each of his family members, Blake nervously calls Shannon's mom. She suggests a necklace from the store called Metals, but does not tell him which one exactly. Blake goes over the Shannon's house to exchange presents before his family leaves to go to New York for Christmas break. Shannon made a scrapbook about their relationship. Unfortunately, Blake got her the wrong necklace and this upsets Blake so much that he breaks down and cries in front of his mom on the way home.

Upon arriving home, Blake and his mom are greeted with a surprise visit from Marissa and her anxious mom. Marissa gives Blake a gift, a book called "Earth from Above." Blake tells Marissa about the nightmare experience he just had with giving Shannon the wrong necklace.

Blake and his family have a nice time in New York visiting his grandparents. He is very excited to get back to school where he sees Shannon wearing a new piano necklace that she got from her parents for Christmas instead of the one he bought.

chapter 17 - 24 Analysis

Blake is learning about his boundaries in his relationship with Shannon. Does he have to tell her if he goes to another girl's house? Blake is able to squelch her fears by telling her that he loves her.

Blake and Shannon deal with their feelings about sex. Shannon states that she is not ready and Blake is respectful of her choice. Blake is still trying to figure out what is going on between his brother and his non-girlfriend Cappie.

Blake and Marissa are dealing with criticism of their photography work by their teacher. Mr. Malloy wants Blake to not play it so safe in his assignments. "He notes my blank expression and says, 'Gritty as usual, Blake. I get that. You've mastered stark and startling. These subjects are easy to shoot. They're interesting in themselves. You don't have to work at setting up the shot or layering the elements. I'd like to see you take bigger risks with your work'" (p. 131). Remember that Blake is not a risk-taker. He does not want to go outside his comfort zone.

Exchanging Christmas gifts is taxing for Blake, as he does not know what to get Shannon. He feels deflated after buying her the wrong necklace. Spending time away from Shannon during Christmas break challenges Blake, too.



chapters 25 - 32

chapters 25 - 32 Summary

Back in English class, Mr. Hamilton asks his students to get out their journals because he wants to check them. Shannon and Blake exchange their journals and read them. Shannon wrote a lot about her relationship with Blake. To her dismay, Blake only merely and methodically wrote down what they did. Both Mr. Hamilton and Shannon describe Blake's journal as "eclectic."

In photography class, Mr. Malloy is not wearing his usual beret, seems to be distracted, and assigns a free study class. Marissa has been missing for a few days so Blake decides to call her grandma, Mary. Reluctantly, Mary divulges that Anne has run away again and Marissa has been out looking for her. The police have not been called because of her history with drug abuse. Blake takes his concern about the situation to his mom, who is willing to go out and look for them. They decide to look in Old Town first. Next is Pioneer Park, which scares Blake because it is a well-known spot to buy drugs. They find Marissa there.

Upon returning to the Hewson's house, Blake's mom makes the kids soup to warm up. Marissa gets in touch with her worried grandmother. Before Marissa is driven home, Blake's mom tells her not to go looking for her mother again because it is too dangerous.

The next morning on the way to school, Garrett asks what happened with Marissa and tries to insinuate that Blake slept with her. Blake drops the subject because he doesn't feel like talking about it and reiterates that they are just friends. Blake catches Marissa up on her absent work. While looking at his portfolio, Marissa spots one of her with her mom. Due to the fact that Blake had been in a hurry, had not framed his subjects, and was too close to them, he caused a flash burnout. Marissa asks Blake if she can work on his laptop because he has Photoshop.

Blake decides this time that he will be upfront with Shannon about Marissa coming over. He makes plans spend time with Shannon after her piano recital on Saturday. In order to celebrate Blake's obtaining his temporary driver's license, Blake's mom buys a chocolate cake and makes Indian food for dinner. Dr. Hewson receives a work call during dinner and announces that his next victim is a transient female with gun shot wounds. He is unaware of the situation with Marissa's mom and this news causes fear to Marissa, Blake, and his mom. Garrett is asked to help in the morning with the case. Blake takes a chance by telling Garrett about Marissa's mom and asks if he can see the body before they start working on her. At first, Garrett denies that Blake can see the body, but during the middle of the night, Garrett wakes him up to take him there.

On the way to the medical examiner's office, Garrett and Blake stop to get Marissa so that she can help to identify the body. Garrett has difficulty getting into the office. He



tells them to go around to the back door while he checks to see if anyone else is there. Upon seeing the body, Marissa starts to cry and keeps saying, "I'm sorry." Blake tries to comfort her by putting his arm around her. As Garrett keeps driving and driving, Marissa says that it wasn't her mom. The trio goes to Coffee Jones where Garrett treats them to coffee. Marissa and Blake are woken up when Garrett asks where he can drop them off because he has to go to work. Marissa pipes up that she wants to go see a movie. Since the mall is not open yet, Garrett gives them money to buy breakfast, tells them to loiter, and tip well. Blake and Marissa go to Sherri's Shoppe and have breakfast and dessert. They are about to go to the mall when Blake's cell phone rings. It's Shannon, but Blake lets it go to voicemail.

After watching a comedy, they take the bus to Marissa's house. She does not want to go home, so they take another bus to Blake's empty house. After reading a note from Blake's mom stating that she was not happy about the boys leaving during the night without any notice, Blake proceeds to kiss Marissa. Through a series of events, they find themselves asleep in his bedroom after having intercourse. Later that afternoon, Blake arises from taking a nap and takes photos of sleeping Marissa. She wakes up and says that she'll pose for more photos. After getting dressed and watching a movie, Blake's mom comes home and takes Marissa home.

His dad telling him that Shannon is on the phone and that he should take her call interrupts Blake's shower. Her grandma died. She asks him where he's been all day as she's tried calling several times. His response is that he was helping a friend and that it was a private matter.

chapters 25 - 32 Analysis

Shannon is disappointed that Blake did not write much about her and their relationship in his journal. Marissa and her grandmother face hardship and worry when Marissa's mother runs away again. It is a vicious cycle that Mary is tired of dealing with. Fortunately Blake's mom is capable of dealing with difficult situations and promptly goes to look for missing Marissa. Dr. Hewson divulges confidential information that should not be shared at the dinner table with a guest present.

Unexpectedly, Garrett helps his brother with trying to identify the transient's body. He does not even call Blake "Studly," but calls him by his real name, which adds to the reality of the situation. Blake tries to comfort Marissa, which leads to having passion for her. The two engage in intercourse and there will be consequences even as Blake tries to hide this from Shannon. "I stare into the mirror, shivering in my towel. 'What's going on?' My eyes are guilty. I've never seen myself look that way before" (p. 259).



chapters 33 - 41

chapters 33 - 41 Summary

Blake explains to his mom that Marissa had a bad day and he asks to use the car to see Shannon, who is also having a bad day because her grandma died. Mrs. Hewson drives him over to her house on the way to visit one of her dying patients at the hospital. Shannon grieves and tells Blake about her grandma. Before Blake leaves, he tells Shannon that he loves her. Shannon misses a few days of school because of the funeral. Blake and Marissa are mostly back to being just friends at school.

Unfortunately, Blake forgot to delete Marissa's nude body photos from his camera and Shannon finds them three weeks later. Shannon realizes that this was the same day that her grandma died. She bolts out of the house and runs faster than Blake, who cannot find her anywhere.

Back at home, Blake tries to write an explanatory letter to Shannon, but is unable. Surprisingly, Garrett invites him into his room where Blake watches 2 seasons of Dr. Who. Blake reveals what went on with Marissa and Shannon to his brother. Garrett leaves on a date with Aracely. Mr. Hewson tries to talk to Blake about why Shannon fled the house, but Blake is not willing to share.

Blake wakes up early and eats breakfast. He drafts several letters to Shannon and then seals one in an envelope. His parents try to talk to him, but wait for him downstairs. Garrett enters without saying a word and plops down his beloved car keys for Blake. Marissa calls unexpectedly because Shannon called her to say that Marissa could have him. Marissa cannot believe that Blake left the photos of her on his camera. Blake drives over to Shannon's house but her mom will not let him see her. He gives her the letter to give to Shannon. Shannon responds in an email saying not to call or write to her anymore.

The next day at school, Shannon is not in English class. News spreads even though she was not there. Marissa's mom interrupts photography class and Marissa runs to her. They have a heated conversation. Marissa abruptly leaves school and Blake wants to help, but he cannot seem to get out of his seat. Shannon comes back to school the next day looking crushed.

Cappie made Blake 2 playlists of songs for him to listen to about heartbreak. Blake remembers his mom's angel out in the bird nest. One wing is chipped and paint is missing. He fetches his camera.

A whole week has gone by and there is still swirling gossip about Blake, Marissa, and Shannon. At lunch, in front of everyone, Shannon gives humiliated Blake back the necklace he gave her for Christmas. Marissa tries to talk to Blake, but he gets upsets and leaves her confused.



Four days go by and no word from Marissa although he texted to apologize. Another week goes by, so Blake goes over to Marissa's house. It's for sale. He searches for Gus at the hurtle who tells him that Marissa left with their mom. Blake asks who KAT is. She was their 2 year-old little sister who died of dehydration and that is why their dad is in jail. Blake and Gus exchange phone numbers in case either hears from Marissa.

Blake shows Mr. Malloy his photo series of Marissa for the photo contest. He cannot enter them officially without her permission. Mr. Malloy is pleased with the series and comments that Blake is showing his heart. Mr. Malloy invites Blake and his parents to a private viewing of Blake's photos. His series is titled "Hurtle." Blake is drawn to a series of photos that were surprisingly done by his teacher.

Blake timidly goes to the hurtle with his bike and chats with Gus. Gus gives him pointers and off they go! Blake feels like he is flying and he's not going to crash!

chapters 33 - 41 Analysis

Blake is able to deceive Shannon about his relationship with Marissa until she finds the photos of Marissa. Fortunately, Shannon is a fast runner and flees the Hewson's house, leaving Blake in her dust. Surprisingly, Garrett is empathetic toward Blake and allows his brother to spend time in his room. Blake shares what has happened with his brother, but not with his parents.

Blake is able to find contentment with his photo series of Marissa and becoming a risk-taker by going down the hurtle. Cappie provided unexpected support and understanding by giving him heartbreak songs. The story is not neatly tied up because Marissa and her mom are still missing. That is how true life is, sometimes.



Characters

Blake Hewson

The narrator is Blake Hewson, a 15-year-old sophomore in high school. Shannon is his first official girlfriend. His best friend, Riley, calls him "Flake." Blake's older brother Garrett calls him "Studly." Blake wants to become a comedian when he grows up and keeps track of how many times he is able to crack jokes that make others around him laugh. Blake is compassionate and shows concern for those around him. He is kind to people on the streets and freely gives them any extra money that he has.

Blake's birthday is the day after Christmas and he is looking forward to getting his driver's license. He is teased for not being a risk-taker. However, Blake is willing to make mistakes and he wants to learn from those mistakes so he does not repeat them. Blake's photography teacher calls his photos "gritty," and encourages him to polish his skills by showing emotions.

Shannon DeWinter

Shannon DeWinter is Blake's girlfriend. They started dating after they worked together during the summer at the Community Center. Shannon is also a sophomore in high school. She has long, blond hair and plays soccer. Shannon does not wear much makeup. Blake is attracted to her and wants to touch her soft skin, especially her shoulders. She has a good sense of humor, which appeals to Blake, too. Shannon enjoys imitating Mr. Burns from the TV show, "The Simpsons."

Her blue eyes remind Blake about summer. Shannon is a tough girl deep inside. Her behavior is confusing to Blake and she has mood swings. Blake was baffled as to what to buy her for Christmas and her mother was a bit helpful in telling him to get her a necklace. Unfortunately, her mother did not specify which exact necklace and Shannon was only mildly pleased with his gift. Shannon becomes wary of Blake's relationship with Marissa, especially after finding things out that Blake could have told her about before they happened.

Marissa Fairbairn

Marissa Fairbairn is Blake's friend whom Blake finds easy to talk to. They are in the same grade and took photography together last year as the only freshmen in the class. Marissa has a little jeweled stud in her nose and she has heartbroken eyes, according to Blake. Marissa likes to take photos of flowers and is usually smiling. She is sympathetic to Blake when their photography teacher tells the class to improve and polish their skills, but looks directly at Blake when he said that.



Marissa's mom had been missing for about a year. Her mom is a meth addict and her dad is in jail. Marissa lives with her grandmother. She loves cats and took photographs of her beloved cat, Wizard Kitty. Marissa is numb at the football game after her cherished cat is run over by a car. Marissa goes out to find her mom when her mom goes missing again. She worries her grandma by doing this because she does not have a cell phone and does not contact her grandma for a few days.

Dr. Russell Hewson

Dr. Russell Hewson is Blake's dad. He is a medical examiner who sometimes works late into the night. Dr. Hewson likes to tinker with engines and helps out a neighbor with his lawn tractor. Russell is a supportive parent to his sons.

Mrs. Benita Hewson

Mrs. Benita Hewson is Blake's mom. She is the hospital chaplain and is usually very calm, except in the mornings when she is intense. Mrs. Hewson can calmly speak to families when they have loved ones that are dying. She enjoys playing the piano and practicing yoga. Mrs. Hewson has hot flashes as she is going through the change of life. Benita is a supportive parent to her sons.

Garrett Hewson

Garrett Hewson is Blake's older brother who is a scholar-jock. He has a car, but will not let Blake eat in it. The family dog favors Garrett. Garrett is usually gets up late and is late in the mornings. He plays football and enjoys helping out in the medical examiner's office. Garrett enjoys ribbing his younger brother, but is supportive of Blake when Blake least suspects it.

The Dog Formerly Known as Prince

The Dog Formerly Known as Prince is the family dog. He favors Garrett.

Mr. Malloy

Mr. Connor Mallory is the photography teacher at school. He gave Blake a "C" last year. He wears a beret to cover his baldhead and has a goatee. He bought hot chocolate drinks for his students after taking them out to the beach for a field trip on a cold, rainy day.



Cappie

Chick Trickster's real name is Cappie. She is new in town, having just moved from Oklahoma. Cappie is the radio DJ at the high school and hooks up with Garrett. The radio station where she works is KWST.

Kaylee

Kaylee is Shannon's friend. Kaylee begins dating Riley after the Homecoming dance.

Jasmine

Jasmine is Shannon's friend.

Riley

Riley is Blake's best friend. Blake calls him "Viley." Riley begins to date Kaylee after asking her to the Homecoming dance. He has a black belt in tae kwon do.

Ms. B

Ms. B is a teacher at the U.S. history teacher at the high school. Blake does not know her real last name and finds her class boring.

Mr. Hamilton

Mr. Hamilton is the English teacher at the high school. Blake enjoys his class and thinks he is a cool teacher. They are reading the book "Dracula" in English class. Mr. Hamilton has a tattoo and enjoys listening to music.

George

George is another student in Mr. Hamilton's English class who is called on to answer a question.

Ellie

Ellie is Mr. Hamilton's daughter and a consoling friend to Shannon. Ellie is a trendsetter at the school. She is dating Manny.



Manny

Manny is Ellie's boyfriend.

Dez

Dez Hayes is an attractive girl at school. She is also in the 10th grade. Blake thinks that she would be a great Homecoming date for Riley.

Wizard Kitty

Wizard Kitty is Marissa's black cat. Marissa took photos of the cat for her photography homework. She thinks that her cat is almost like a person. Wizard Kitty is old and gets run over by a car, which upsets Marissa.

Anne

Anne is Marissa's mom and a meth addict. She is very skinny and has missing teeth due to her addictions. Anne has a tattoo of a snake on her arm and she usually has color streaks in her hair. Although she goes to rehab for a month to overcome her addiction, she struggles to break free. It is going to take time, according to Marissa. She is very anxious.

Mrs. Faraci

Mrs. Faraci is Shannon's soccer coach.

Shannon's grandma

Shannon's grandma is in the hospital and eventually dies. Her grandma is in the hospital, again, over Thanksgiving break and she is not able to go shopping with Shannon on Black Friday. Shannon is heartbroken.

Bree

Bree is Marissa's friend. She tells Blake that she is going to get Marissa drunk at the football game after Marissa's beloved cat died.



Mary Stanmore

Mary Stanmore is Marissa's grandma. She is raising Marissa because Marissa's mom is addicted to drugs and runs away. Mary has the same heartbroken eyes like Marissa.

Carter

Carter is Riley's brother. He is in the radio club at school with Cappie.

Mr. DeWinter and Mrs. DeWinter.

Mr. DeWinter and Mrs. DeWinter are Shannon's parents. They put on a friendly show toward Blake. They are worried that Blake and Shannon will have sex. Blake is uneasy around them.

Nonna and Poppy

Nonna and Poppy are Blake's maternal grandparents. They live in New York City. They are of Italian decent.

Aracely

Aracely is a high school girl who goes on a date with Garrett. She is very attractive and was the Homecoming queen.



Objects/Places

The Hewson's house

The Hewson's house is where the Hewson family lives. It is in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon.

West Park High School

West Park High School is the high school that the students attend.

Radio station KWST 88.1

Radio station KWST 88.1 is the high school radio station where Cappie is one of the DJs.

Skate park

Skate park is where Blake went with his friends and forgot to call Shannon.

Washington Park

Washington Park is where Blake and Marissa went last year and timidly took photos of each other for photography class.

Flink's

Flink's is a club in Old Town.

Old Town

Old Town is where there are a lot of drugs deals. Dr. Hewson calls it "Tweaker Town" because at least once a month a person dies from a drug overdose there.

Burnside and Third streets

Burnside and Third are streets in Old Town where Blake took the photo of Marissa's mom.



Ottomans

Ottomans is a snack shop close to the high school where the kids go for milkshakes, smoothies, and snacks. It has a soccer beanbag that Blake likes to sit on with Shannon.

Community Center

The Community Center is where Blake and Shannon worked for the summer.

521 Azalea Road

521 Azalea Road is where Marissa and her grandmother live. Blake takes a bus from Ottomans to there and it is about a mile and half away.

Third Thursday Gallery

Third Thursday Gallery is a gallery that is sponsoring a photo contest, which is on March 12th.

The Hurlte

The Hurtle is the place where bikers gather and race down a winding road with hairpin turns. It starts at the top of Tower Hill.

Juke's

Juke's is a place where teenagers go after football games and hang out.

Meriwether mall

Meriwether mall is a mall that Blake and Shannon walk around. There is a movie theater at the mall.

New York City

New York City is where Blake's grandparents live. The Hewson family visits them during Christmas break.

Metals

Metals is a jewelry store in the mall where Blake buys Shannon a necklace for Christmas.

Sherri's Shoppe

Sherri's Shoppe is where Blake and Marissa eat breakfast after going to the medical examiner's office early in the morning. It is near the mall.



Themes

Love and friendship

Balancing relationships between love and friendship is a theme in the book. Blake has a girlfriend, Shannon, and a friend that is a girl, Marissa. Blake tries to maintain his desire to be with Shannon, his first official girlfriend, and wanting to be a supportive, stable friend to Marissa. He wants to be a loyal and trustworthy boyfriend. His brother's non-girlfriend publically teases Blake about having 2 girlfriends, which upsets him.

Blake is attracted to Shannon and desires to have an intimate relationship with her. He tries to disregard the advice from his brother about paying too much attention to his girlfriend. Blake truly enjoys spending time with Shannon and cannot wait until he can have an easier way to get around with a driver's license. He deeply cares for her and would not try to intentionally hurt her. Blake and Shannon have a connection that they have not previously had with others. This is his first relationship and they have told each other that they love the other.

Blake is trying to find his identity and how he interacts with the people he cares about. He wants to do the right thing, but he cannot betray Marissa's trust by telling others about her mom. This puts Blake in awkward situations with his girlfriend Shannon because he cannot explain where he has been and why he has been with Marissa. Marissa needs him as a friend because she knows that he is dating Shannon. Blake and Marissa bonded during their 9th grade photography class, as they were the youngest in the class.

Actions have consequences

Blake's mom often says that "actions have consequences," which drive Blake and Garrett crazy. "We hate that phrase. We are allergic to that phrase. We have vowed to each other never to use it on our own kids" (117). However, as in real life, the characters have to face consequences of their actions.

After Garrett broke curfew and stayed out until 2 in the morning, his mom told him that he should expect ramifications. Garrett's punishment was that he was not allowed to go observe at the medical examiner's office.

As a result of Garrett and Blake going to the morgue without telling their parents where they went, his mother grounded Blake. In her note to Blake, she wrote, "You may not disappear from the house in the middle of the night without repercussions. Actions have consequences" (250). In reaction to reading the letter, Blake groans.

Blake did not intentionally try to hurt Shannon while he was spending time with Marissa. Unfortunately, Blake and Marissa got involved in a sexual relationship and the consequences are that Blake and Shannon were no longer boyfriend and girlfriend. The



truth came out a little at a time, but Blake was nervous that Shannon would find out even though Marissa said that she would not say anything to anybody about what happened. Blake's pictures of Marissa while she was sleeping without clothes on and then her posed picture of her leaving his bed were all the evidence that Shannon needed to see to know what had happened between Marissa and Blake.

Photography

The third theme is about photography. Marissa and Blake are taking their second class in photography. It is woven into the book throughout, especially with the quotes at the beginning of each chapter. The sources of the epigraphs vary from chapter to chapter. They parallel Blake's life. "Aside from being a guitar player or an athlete, there's no better profession than that of photographer for attracting women. -Spike McLernon's Law of Photography (77).

The title of the book is called "Flash Burnout" which means that the photography subjects are too close to the camera. Marissa explains it to Blake after seeing the photographs of her with her mom. "The flash burnout. You got too close to the subject. So the flash overexposed her" (213). When the subject is overexposed, it is bright and blurry.

Familiarity with photography terms is not essential while reading this book. The reader can understand photography vocabulary within the text. Words like chiaroscuro and saturation are defined in Blake's homework assignments. Blake does not only know what these words mean, he applies them to real life. After Garrett, Blake, and Marissa go to the medical examiner's office early in the morning, Blake notices the way Marissa is lit up in the car. "She is illuminated each time we pass a streetlamp; then her huddled figure is hidden in the shadows again. Light. Dark. Chiaroscuro. (240)" The reader feels like he/she is in the car and can feel the intensity and clarity of the streetlamps and then the gloominess and obscurity without the light.

Style

Point of View

The point of view is from the narrator, Blake. He shares his thoughts, fears, bewilderments, awkwardness, torments, and other emotions with the reader. His ability to communicate his what is on his heart is remarkable for a first person narrative. Blake's voice is outstandingly authentic sounding. He speaks and thinks exactly like a 15-year-old boy. Due to the fact that it is written in the point of view of a boy, this book is appealing to both girls and boys who enjoy reading about real life with humor added in as a bonus.

Since Blake is a high school boy, he shares his lustful thoughts about Shannon with the reader. He enjoys seeing and touching her shoulders and her body. "I am full of Shannon after lunch. Her sweet, round shoulders and her thin, freckled arms that break out in goose bumps when I stroke them and her ohmygod luscious lips that I could just stay attached to her for hours, and man, did I want to get her into the back seat of Garrett's car. But (a) I know Garrett would punish me repeatedly if he found out, and (b) we had to go back to class, and (c) no way would Shannon agree to it" (17).

Sometimes Blake talks to himself like he is communicating with NASA's Houston, especially if he's in trouble. At times, Houston delivers instructions, while other times Houston is silent. "I feel my eyes wanting to roll wildly, like a spooked horse, because I know I'm trapped. 'Uh-' Houston, we have a problem. Please advise ... The Houston in my head reminds me that the best defense is an offense" (77, 78).

It is interesting to note that the author is a female writer. Her knack of successfully writing in a teenage boy's perspective is a testament to her writing ability.

Setting

The story takes place in the current day. It is September and still very warm, like summer. The book is an account of the action from September through March. In the ending chapters, The Third Thursday Gallery photo contest takes place on March 12th. The scene is Portland, Oregon and the author mentions several real local references. For example, Blake and Marissa went to Washington Park when they were in 9th grade. It is actually one of the oldest parks in Portland.

The Hewson's house is in the suburbs. The kitchen, family room, and bedrooms are mentioned in the book. The high school students attend West Park High School. Near the high school is a snack shop called Ottomans where the kids enjoy getting milkshakes and smoothies. Blake describes it well. "Not many adults want to sit on beanbags, footstools, or ottomans. All of the tables are low to the ground, too" (23).



Marissa finds her mom in Old Town. Blake's dad refers to it as Tweaker Town because of all the drug deals that go on there and at least once a month a person overdoses there. Street names, such as Burnside and Third, are actual real streets in Portland. It takes about 30 minutes to get to downtown from Ottomans.

Other places that are mentioned in the book are Seattle and New York City. Marissa's mom had been living in Seattle for a while before she came back to Portland. The Hewson family goes to New York to visit their relatives over Christmas break.

Language and Meaning

Blake's language is informal and slang is evident. Blake enjoys describing Shannon and what she is wearing. "She's sooo luscious in her little white top - it barely reaches the waistband of her baggy shorts. ... I want to touch her like a junkie wants his drug" (6,7).

Sometimes Blake talks to himself like he is communicating with NASA's Houston. He finds comfort in thinking about communicating with NASA's Houston to help him navigate through tricky life complications. "Houston, a little help here? I think. Crashing and burning is imminent. Over? The Houston in my head yells, Abort, abort!" (7) At times, Houston is silent which forces Blake to decide what to do on his own. Blake incorporates the NASA theme with everyday life such as the time when Cappie was going to make a milkshake for him. "She steps over to the blender and examines it as if it's a NASA control panel" (155).

There are photography vocabulary words that are used in the book, like chiaroscuro, pixels, contrast, and saturation. At the beginning of each chapter, there are epigraphs dealing with photography that help unify the book. The sources vary from chapter to chapter. Sometimes the quote is from a famous photographer, like Ansel Adams; other times it is a quote from a camera guidebook. Blake's photography homework assignments are also quoted in some chapters. "Chiaroscuro: It's an Italian word, so I plan to use it casually in a sentence next time I talk to my grandparents. It literally means "lightdark," and in photography it means using both elements in one composition. I plan to experiment with darkened rooms and directed angles of light to achieve chiaroscuro. I would also like to try shooting a photo of the full white moon through black tree branches on a clear night, if I can figure out the shutter speed. - Blake Hewson, homework, Photo II" (45)

There are references to movies, such as "This is Spinal Tap" and "Wallace and Gromit." TV shows, like "The Simpsons" and "Doctor Who" are mentioned. Blake refers to the Apple Store's "Genius Bar" where they fix computers and give help or support to Apple products.

Shannon likes to imitate Mr. Burns from the TV show, "The Simpsons." She does not do it all the time and it must be warranted for her to do it. Blake enjoys this humorous aspect of Shannon. " She cracks up then - be still, my heart - she hunches over. She



pulls her upper lip above her front teeth and twiddles her fingers together. She says, very quietly, just for me, 'Ex-cellent, Smithers'" (149).

Structure

The book is broken down into 41 chapters. The author is able to hook the reader in the first chapter by setting up a typical morning scene at the Hewson's house. Dr. Hewson had left some photos from his work of bullet wounds on the kitchen table. Blake comes down to breakfast and is disturbed by the images as he tries to eat his breakfast. His dad's snoring gives him clues that his dad worked late last night and slept on the couch. The next person to be introduced is Blake's mom, Benita, who is getting after Garrett for getting up late. Comedy sets in when Benita takes off her blouse because she's got hot flashes. This all happens before Blake gets to school, which will bring further trouble and humor.

Spending time with Marissa after going to the medical examiner's office changes Blake and his relationship with her. He started out by being a supportive and comforting friend. Then the relationship turned into having a breakfast and movie date. Having an intimate relationship and a photography session followed it.

The ending of the book leaves the reader with unanswered questions as to what happens to the characters. Gus is going to look for his missing sister, but nothing is said about Blake's future plans. At the end of the book, the author lists the songs that Cappie gave to Blake to listen to. Under each song, there are funny commentaries by Blake.

This book deals a lot about photography and the author learned a lot about photography while writing the book. The author lists some of her favorite photography books at the end of the book.



Quotes

"I can hear her muttering, 'He will rue the day' as she disappears down the hall" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"He's the only teacher at West Park High who has a modicum of cool. I learned that word from him, by the way, when he told me that I had a modicum of comedic talent. He's wrong, of course. I have a maximum of comedic talent" (Chapter 2, p. 12).

"She takes off her sunglasses, and I see that her eye have big shadows under them and the same heartbroken look that Marissa's eyes have. Must be hereditary" (Chapter 4, p. 35).

"Just then Riley bumps into my shoulder as he jogs past, calling, 'Flake, you in? It's the Texas hold'em finals today. Or do you need to join the little woman'" (Chapter 8, p. 63).

"Cool. I can't wait to get my pixels on her face" (Chapter 8, p. 67).

"I examine it more closely. Engraved on the back of the angel's wings is a word: KAT" (Chapter 9, p. 73).

"I'm surrounded by bikers. Not the ponytailed, leather pants-wearing, Harley-driver kind. The kind who ride flimsy, naked-looking bicycles and, for some reason that is still not clear to me, want to go kamikaze-ing down this steep, winding hill so fast that if anything goes even the slightest bit wrong, they will end up as red smears on the pavement" (Chapter 12, p. 89).

"I flee the kitchen like my hair is on fire. I do not want to see my brother and his not-girlfriend hooked up like a circuit" (Chapter 14, p. 106).

"I hold her while she talks, until words like 'spaghetti straps' and 'matching cummerbund' and 'boutonniere' all run together in a soothing hum of foreign words" (Chapter 19, p. 145).

"He's so buzzed he's practically making honey" (Chapter 28, p. 224).

"Marissa is shuddering and crying. I balance on my corner of the seat, looking down at her. She is illuminated each time we pass a streetlamp; then her huddled figure is hidden in the shadows again. Light. Dark. Chiaroscuro" (Chapter 30, p. 240).

"Mr. Malloy studies each photo thoroughly while I wait and watch. He turns from the last one and walks back to me. He puts his hand on my shoulder. 'There's the heart,' he says" (Chapter 40, p. 312).



Topics for Discussion

What is meth? How can one become addicted? What happens to a meth-addict's teeth? How else is it harmful?

What information should be kept confidential? Why didn't Blake ask Marissa's friends if they knew about Marissa's mom? What information do you think should be held confidential? Why?

Why does Blake's mom say, "Actions have consequences?" Do you think actions have consequences? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Blake's parents with Marissa's parents. How is the suburban middle class contrasted with the homeless, addicted, and jailed?

Can you be a "good person" and hurt others? Are "good people" allowed to make mistakes? What about people pleasers?

Do you talk to yourself? What does your inner voice say? Do you think Blake should continue to communicate with Houston?

How does Blake's relationship with his brother change? What is sibling rivalry? Do you have siblings and can you relate?