

FLASH BURNOUT Deleted Scenes

There was a sub-plot in the original manuscript about Blake's Uncle Chuck, Aunt Karyn, and his cousins Max and Jonah. I wanted Blake to be as confused as possible about love and friendship; Uncle Chuck added to his confusion.

This first scene occurs after the football game, where Marissa is drunk, and Blake's heart does a "trembly thing" when he sees Shannon.

My uncle is bugging the shit out of me.

I've never noticed it before, but Uncle Chuck pays a lot of attention to my mom. Has he always been like this?

My mom doesn't act like anything is weird – neither does my dad or Aunt Karyn. Can they not *see*?

My parents dragged me home after the football game to spend time with the visiting fam. Shannon kissed me goodbye and went to Juke's with the rest of the gang. Freaking family! Why did they have to show up on Friday? If they had just come tomorrow, like normal relatives, I would be on my way to Juke's right now. But *nooo*. They had to see Scholar Jock Boy in action on the football field.

The only thing making me feel any better is seeing that Garrett is as bent as I am. He didn't want to come home like a whipped puppy, either – he wanted to roll with his jock buddies. I saw Cappie go flouncing off by herself after the game, too. Maybe Garrett was hoping to tap that Trickster.

And now! I'm stuck here watching my uncle turn the charm-dial to eleven around my mom. WTF?

“Charles, would you like any more soup?” asks my mom.

Uncle Chuck leans back and stretches hugely. I remember reading once that when a guy does that big-chest-sticking-out-stretching thing, he’s asserting his dominance. “Benita, you know I could always eat another bowl of your minestrone!”

Ew. Why does that sound kind of dirty?

My mom passes him the soup tureen, smiling. “Blake helped me make it.”

“You already told everyone,” I remind her. How many times do we have to hammer that point? She might as well announce, “Blake is a *girl*, and Garrett is a studly football star. Blake is going to make a good wife for some woman someday, while Garrett is going to nail hundreds of cheerleaders before going on to be the next Bill Gates, except better-looking.”

“It’s terrific,” rumbles Uncle Chuck. “Maybe you’re going to become a famous chef someday, Blake.”

Please. Kill me now.

“And what’s this I hear about you, Garrett?” says Uncle Chuck.

Garrett jumps. He was trying to sneak a peek at his watch. I know he’s itching to head for his room so he can climb out the window onto the roof.

“Your dad tells me you’re going to train as a morgue assistant after football season.”

“What?!” That gets Aunt Karyn’s attention. She makes a face. “What does that mean? You’ll help with filing and answering phones and stuff? Or you’ll be around the dead bodies?”

“All of it,” says Garrett.

“Cool!” chorus the twins.

“Not just *around* the bodies,” says my dad helpfully, pushing his glasses up his nose. “He’ll be learning to take tissue samples.”

“You mean he’ll *touch* them?” Aunt Karyn continues to be horrified.

What exactly does she think medical examiners do? *Look* at the bodies and figure out how they died?

The twins are disturbingly impressed with Garrett's next endeavor, and start peppering him with questions, talking over each other, louder and louder. My mom and Aunt Karyn lean their heads closer to chat, while my dad and Uncle Chuck start a discussion about the economy. A snoozer of a topic if I ever heard one. But it gives me an idea.

I yawn and give a big old fake stretch. Trying to assert dominance over my boredom. (Heh.)

"Tired, honey?" asks my mom. "You can head off to bed, if you like. You don't have to help with the dishes, since you helped with the cooking."

"Thanks, Mom," I say, edging toward the door. I nod at Garrett, who grimaces. I tip him a "See ya" gesture as I exit.

"Good soup, bro!" he yells after me.

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"Dudes, why you gotta be so stupid? Did you guys have to split one brain while you were in the womb?!"

"Blake!" says my mom.

Aaghhh! Mom, why you gotta be so stealth?

"Sorry," I mutter.

"Why don't you let the twins play on your Mindbender by themselves?"

"Fine." *Since they're such idiots they can't keep their guys from crashing every twelve seconds.*

“Come here. I want to talk to you.” She heads for the kitchen.

I hitch up my pajama bottoms and slouch after her. It’s way too early for lectures about politeness. I haven’t even finished my coffee yet – which, for me, is a good Mindbender session.

Mom hands me a bowl; I pour some Cheerios and Frosted Flakes into it. She sits down at the table while I get the milk out of the fridge.

“I was wondering,” she says. “How your friend is doing. Marissa.”

“Marissa?” I say warily. “Fine.” I pour the milk and grab a spoon, sitting down across from her. Did she find out somehow that Marissa was drunk last night?

“How’s her eye?”

“Oh! Cool!” I say, brightening. “It’s all healed now, but I got some amazing shots of it. Wait till you see.” I crunch my cereal.

A look of professional patience comes over her face and she says, “I was wondering if you think she’s really okay, Blake. She doesn’t have a boyfriend, does she?”

Blink. Blink.

“Someone who might have a temper? I was wondering if you *believe* her when she says she got that black eye from someone bumping into her.”

Ohhhhh.

“Mom,” I say, relieved. “Yes. She wouldn’t lie to me. She went to that Hurtle biking thing. Even Mr. Malloy said it’s a rough crowd there.”

My mom’s expression remains skeptical.

“Really. Don’t worry. She doesn’t even have a boyfriend.”

“All right,” she says. “That’s good to know. I’m glad she’s got *you* for a friend. I’m sure you would know if things weren’t right with her.”

“Um. Sure,” I say. Is now the time to tell my mom about Marissa’s tweaker mom? Or would that be breaking my promise to Marissa?

“We’re going to the Art Bazaar today,” says my mom.

Thoughts of Marissa scatter as I think to myself, *No we are not*. “Oh mom, I’ve got a ton a homework today,” I say, making a *sorry* face. I power down the rest of my cereal, so I can escape to my room.

“Morning,” says Uncle Chuck, wandering into the kitchen. He’s wearing Dad’s spare robe, and his chest hair is peeking out the top.

Jeez, man, I think. Put a shirt on. I shudder to think what else might be missing under the robe.

Uncle Chuck yawns and shuffles over to the coffee maker. He pours himself a cup and sits down at the table.

My mom slides the front page of the newspaper over to him.

“Ahh,” says Uncle Chuck. “This is great coffee, Ben.”

Don’t call her Ben, I think.

“Thanks,” Mom answers. “It’s pure Kona. Some friends brought it from Hawaii for us.”

“You make it just the way I like it – good and strong.”

Standing at the sink, I feel a flush creeping up my neck. I turn around to look at them. They’re smiling at each other.

Suddenly I feel like I should sit down at the table again instead of escaping to my room. But I can’t face Uncle Chuck’s chest hair.

I manage to bail on the Art Bazaar, but it's a close one. For a minute or two, it looks like the grown-ups might be trying to rope me into some kind of hellish babysitting deal for the twins. Garrett is safe, because he's going to spend half the day at dad's work, observing the *dieners*. He's Morbid McMorbison.

With my most serious face, I remind my mom about my homework. She agrees that I should stay home from the outing. Then she winks. I wonder if I'll ever be able to put one over on my mom.

After they finally finally *finally* leave, I settle down to chat with Shannon on the phone. She tells me about Juke's after the game last night, and we bemoan the fact that we can't see each other today. When it's time to hang up, she says, "I'll talk to you later."

No 'I love you.' Whew. I wasn't sure if we were supposed to say it every five minutes now, or what.

I slump at my desk, flipping through my homework assignments. Biology ... *so* don't care ... History ... *zzzz* ... Photo ... hey. I wonder how Marissa feels today after getting tanked at the game last night. I pull out my cell phone and scroll through the names, looking for her phone number. She doesn't have her own cell yet, she uses her grandma's land line, like some kind of pioneer girl trapped in the 1990's.

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[This scene takes place Thanksgiving day.]

Garrett stands at the sink, washing lettuce and spinach, and muttering under his breath about a football game.

Mom drafted both of us to help with Thanksgiving dinner. It's eight o'clock in the horrifying morning, and she's got the turkey waiting with its legs splayed out, ready to be stuffed. (Heh.) Quite an appetite-destroying sight. No breakfast for me, thanks.

Uncle Chuck and Aunt Karyn and the twins are here for the holiday weekend. So of course, good old Uncle Chuck is yawning and stretching at the kitchen table. At least this time he's wearing clothes, instead of (shudder) just a *robe*.

Max and Jonah are happily playing Splattercrash on my Mindbender while I chop carrots and celery. Must be nice to be ten years old, not forced to do menial labor. Then again if I were ten, I wouldn't have these X-rated Shan-tasies running through my head.

Mom pours coffee and flirts with Uncle Chuck. "Of course I made biscotti, Charles. Especially for *you!*"

I may heave. Or hurl. Spew. Shout at my shoes. Drive the Buick.

"The chocolate-almond biscotti?" groans Uncle Chuck.

My mom doesn't answer, just smiles at him. She walks over to where he's sitting at the kitchen table and puts a hand on his shoulder. In the other hand she holds a plate of biscotti. She's the Goddess of Biscotti.

More groaning from Uncle Chuck. "Oh, Benita ..."

Good God! This is not right!

"Mom," I say loudly.

"Coffee's ready," she say to him, then turns to me. "What, Blake? No need to shout."

"Is this enough?" I indicate the mound of carrots and celery.

She walks over to me and purses her lips. "One more carrot. Then that should do it." She peers around Garrett to the bowl full of wet lettuce and spinach. "Hmm. One more head of

romaine should make enough salad.” She takes more lettuce from the fridge and hands it to Garrett.

“Why didn’t we do this last night?” asks Garrett.

“Now why didn’t I think of that?” murmurs Mom.

Uncle Chuck shuffles up to the counter and adds cream and sugar to his coffee. “Want me to fix your cup, Ben?” he asks Mom.

“Yes, thanks.”

I stop what I’m doing and watch him: half a teaspoon of sugar and a splash of milk. How the fuck does he know how Mom takes her coffee?

Only someone paying way too much attention to her would know that.

“Benita, why don’t you go relax in the living room with your coffee?” says Uncle Chuck.

“I can wrangle the kitchen help. Hell, I can even stuff the turkey if you like.”

Ewwwww!

“Chuck, that’s sweet. But no, I don’t have time for relaxing today,” says mom, accepting her cup of coffee from him. “Thank you.” She sips the coffee, smiling.

“You sure?” Uncle Chuck aims a big smile at her and says, “Hey! What did the turkey say before it was roasted?” Before anyone can answer, he leans over near the headless end of the turkey and says in a high-pitched voice, “Boy, I’m stuffed!”

Mom cracks up.

Wow: a point for Uncle Chuck. He took a joke so old it probably came over on the Mayflower – literally – and made it work. As I tell everyone: it’s all in the delivery.

Mom’s turning red. *Damn, Mom, I think, it wasn’t **that** funny.*

Then I see sweat beading on her upper lip. She’s having a hot flash.

Ohpleasegod, nooo!!!! Don’t let her take off her shirt in front of Uncle Chuck!

“You know, I think I *will* go take a quick shower if you think you guys are all right on your own,” she says.

“Sure, sure,” I say. “Go ahead.”

Garrett mumbles something, and Mom leaves.

“Listen up, guys,” says Uncle Chuck.

Garrett and I turn around to look at him.

“Your mom got home pretty late last night,” he says.

I give a pretend-sigh. “I’ve begged her to give up bar-hopping,” I say, shaking my head.

Uncle Chuck slides his gaze over to me, and tightens his lips.

Dude, it’s my turn, I think. Share the stage.

“Your mom was working late because a family at the hospital lost a son to drunk driving,” he says. “A kid your age.”

Pounding silence.

“So it would be nice if both of you guys were incredibly helpful and thoughtful today.”

“Was it a local guy?” I ask.

“I don’t know. I don’t think it was anyone you know, or she would have told you.”

Garrett and I turn back to our food prep.

I’m thinking that we’ll be hugging mom a lot today.

“God’s finger touched him, and he slept,” says Garrett.

I look over at him. “What?”

“Nothing,” he says. “Tennyson.”

[After Blake and Shannon break up, he talks to his dad.]

“Aww. C’mere, bud,” says my dad.

I thought I was all cried out, but when Dad bear-hugs me, I discover a bunch more tears I had overlooked.

“It’s okay,” he murmurs. “It’s okay.”

A question bursts out of me before I even know I’m going to ask it. “Why is Uncle Chuck all over Mom when he comes to visit?”

My dad stops hugging me. He pulls back to look me in the eye. He doesn’t say anything, just tilts his head in puzzlement. “Uncle Chuck?”

I look back at him, dismayed. Where did *that* come from? But it’s out there now. I have to keep going. “Yeah.”

Dad studies me for a long minute. He opens his mouth to answer, then closes it again, absent-mindedly patting my shoulder. Finally he says, “Bud, I’ve been married to your mom for almost twenty years.”

“I know! I’m not asking about Mom. I’m asking about Uncle Chuck.”

“I understand. I’m trying to explain.”

I shut up.

“Think about it,” he says. “If I’ve been married to Mom for almost twenty years, that means that my brother has known her that long, too. Right?”

“Right.”

“Mom and Chuck have always liked each other. From the minute I introduced them. It wasn’t just plain old politeness. They had a connection. It’s like —” He releases me and waves his hands around. “Like their souls recognized each other from some other life.”

I raise my eyebrows.

“Do you understand?”

“No.” I shake my head. “Um, Dad? I’m saying that Uncle Chuck *flirts* with mom.”

I’m appalled when Dad laughs. “Yes, I guess he does. But Blake, that doesn’t mean anything inappropriate is going on. They just like each other. Listen.” He puts a hand on my shoulder again. “Mom loves *me*. She would never do anything to hurt me. Or our family. Neither would Uncle Chuck, for that matter. That’s something I know in here.” He pats his chest over his heart.

I feel like I’ve wandered into a sappy movie. And I’m skeptical. I want to ask, *How do you know for sure?*

Dad keeps looking at me, and it’s almost like he can read my mind, because he adds, “I would *know*, Blake. Now don’t give it another thought.” He looks a little stern.

I nod. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay, bud.” He studies me for a moment. “Does this have something to do with Shannon?”

How am I supposed to answer that? *Yes, I’m a cheater? A lying, cheating bastard?*

I shake my head. “Not really.”