

PREVIEW PAGES

Flashes and Shadows

by Champlin Michaels
with Cade Watters

A Coming-of-age
Young Adult Detective Novel



Newport, Maine

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For those who urged me to tell this story, I thank you

– I think.

DEDICATION

To the child in all of us who wants to stay a child

Chapter One

How many sins can a thirteen-year-old boy have? I couldn't count them all as they sprang across my memory when I fell to the hard, cold earth with a searing pain in my shoulder that somehow spun me around allowing me to see sky and cloud and sun before I hit the ground and darkness claimed me; allowing me to forget those sins for a while.

I awoke to a somewhat distant memory of sins – mine – and something wet on my face. I tried to move my left arm but the pain was too great to move it; besides it was trapped beneath my body, behind me. I screamed. It hurt! My face got wetter. I felt something sliding along it. I tried to open my eyes. All I could see was yellow fuzz – fur? Bandlely, my Labrador companion was licking me.

I think I finally gained a consciousness to the point

where I could function, so I raised up and then my shoulder really hurt. I moved my right hand and ran it over the torn cloth and it, too, came away wet. I looked at my hand and it was red. I looked at my shoulder and it oozed blood. My blood?

I sat up and agonizingly repositioned my arm so that it hung in front of me as I cradled it to my stomach. I almost screamed at the pain. Bandlely was still licking my face. I looked at him and his tongue was red. I ran my good hand over the fur on his muzzle. He whined.

“I’m all right, boy,” I hoped.

My arm hurt like crazy. I took inventory and found that everything else but my arm was working so I stood up. The pain from my shoulder just about took me to the ground again as I reeled and almost blacked out. While I was still standing, wobbly, but at least on my feet, I lurched forward to a large rock. My good arm caught hold of it and lowered me to a seated position. I guess I wasn’t ready to start home yet.

I sat there ... wondering how, what, who, why? The only thing I knew was where. I remembered leaving home this morning – I hoped it was this morning – for a short hike along the Camel’s Back, a mountain west of where we live. I always took Bandlely when I hiked into the hills. Was it still Saturday? It was mid-afternoon

'cause the sun was high. Then I looked at my watch: 12:30.

Bandley had come over to me and laid his muzzle across my knees. I let my hand roam over his head and neck before I saw the blood from my hand smear across his golden coat. I stopped and wiped my hand on my jeans, then returned to petting my companion. He'd been with me on almost every adventure since I was eight. I wondered what miracle he had worked this time.

“Should we go home, Band?”

His tongue lolled happily, now that I was awake and talking to him. He whined and looked around as if saying to me, “Let's go!”

I positioned my feet and stood, slowly this time. I steadied myself and took a step. I saw the dust poof up from under my foot. But I wasn't laying on the ground so I took another step. Bandley was beginning to run away, then come back as if to fetch me. I laughed and my shoulder hurt all over again.

I stopped and looked out over the valley below me as a thought struck me. I knew that everything I had ever done wrong had flashed before my eyes before I fell to the ground, but right now I couldn't remember a single one of the images. I smiled as Bandley barked at me, as if saying, “Hurry up! Let's get you off this mountain.”

I agreed with him. I had to get home. So I took one step after another and made my way down the trail that led to my backyard. The house was quiet. I saw no one; my little brother and sister were not screaming and tearing around. The tractor wasn't running somewhere in the fields on the other side of the house. No sounds of TV came through the open window.

I realized I was in deep crap – hip deep. Chest deep. I'd been gone all morning and they had all gone looking for me. Ooh! Up to the neck deep!

I tromped up the steps to the deck and pushed the sliding door aside and entered the kitchen. It was a mess. The drawers of the desk were removed and overturned on the floor. Dishes were smashed. I peeked around the corner into the living room and saw furniture upended and photo albums strewn across the floor as I reached for the phone. I dialed 911. They answered.

“Hello, this is Cade Watters. I'd like to report a robbery and I need an ambulance.”

“Cade Watters, as in Police Chief Watters' son?”

“Yes, Julie.” I knew her and all the others at dispatch.

“They've been looking for you all morning!”

“What happened to my house?”

“I don't know. I'll send someone right over. Why do you need an ambulance?”

“I think I’ve been shot.” *Really? How did I know that?*

“Holy (expletive deleted)! Oh, Sorry, Cade.”

“S’all right.” I felt a little weak. “I’m gonna sit down.”

“They’ll be right there...”

I didn’t make it to the couch. I fell again. I saw the floor coming at me and there was nothing I could do about it. I crashed into the wall and thudded onto the tile floor. Images came to me of paws and a tongue, and tiles way too close to my face. I rolled and moaned. I’d never seen the kitchen from this angle before. I heard barking and whining. I laid there, not able to move, kind of in a half-dream. I heard distant sirens approaching. I was kind of glad that my sins hadn’t made me lose consciousness this time. It was weird – freaky. Is this what a drunk feels like on the morning after? I sure didn’t want to ever go through that! Not after this.

I heard cars pulling up outside and footsteps running into the house. I saw boots and the beams of flashlights and felt myself lifted onto something. Then I saw the front room flash by me as I went out the door, out under the blinding sunshine and into the back of, well, I guess it was the ambulance. I heard a door slam and felt an oxygen mask cover my mouth. I felt pain as

something touched my shoulder. That did it! Darkness again.

When I awoke everything was white around me. My shoulder ached, but it was not the sharp pains I had felt earlier. I found myself in a small room, on one of those foldy-uppy type beds and I was dressed in a hospital robe. *Who had...?* The thought of someone undressing me weighed heavily on my mind. It distracted me for what seemed like quite a while. My shoulder paled in comparison to the fact that someone – some nurse! – had possibly seen me naked. I don't care if they were nurses, or doctors, or EMTs...

Then I felt a hand on my cheek, I turned my head and saw the face of my mom. Her face was wet with tears.

"I'm okay, Mom." I mumbled. *Did I really know that? Well, I was awake. And my shoulder didn't hurt. Much.*

"I know, but..." her face was joined by Dad's.

"Hey, Cade..."

"Hey..."

"They said you'd be a little drowsy from the anesthesia. Looks like it's wearing off."

I pushed my tongue against the roof of my mouth. I felt like I'd swallowed all the sand up on the Camel's

Back. It tasted like I'd fallen open-mouthed into the manure pile by the barn, but I hadn't been near the barn today. *Was it today? Well, of course it was, but Saturday – the same day as ... as when? Man this anesthesia stuff is trippy.*

I don't think it was wearing off. I heard the scuffle of feet as Callan and Cassie lurped up to my bed. I looked over as they jostled into the side, smiling at me.

“Hi, guys.”

“You ‘kay, Cade?”

“Think so, Cal.”

“Do you hurt all over?” Cassie asked.

“Yeah, the doctor said you'd hurt all over,” added Callan.

“I don't think so. Not yet.”

“Well, well, well, awake at last, I see. Let me take a look here.”

My whole body tensed as whoever this rude person was pressed his fingers around my shoulder.

“Does that hurt?”

I thought, *Does rain fall from the clouds?* All I could do was nod my head.

This maniac kept poking all around my shoulder. “Are you my doctor?”

“Yes.”

“Then you should know if it hurts me or not, shouldn’t you?”

“Cade!”

He chuckled at me. “The bullet was whole when we took it out, Mrs. Watters. He’ll be sore and tender for a few weeks, but there was no infection. We gave him a tetanus shot anyway.”

Why wasn’t this moron talking to me? Why do doctors always pretend that their patient/kid is not in the room so they talk to the parents?

“What was the bullet?” That was Dad.

“22. Your forensics people have it already.”

I saw my Dad nod his head. “Thanks, Doc.”

“Excuse me,” I heard myself say, “I am here and I’m sort of involved.”

I guess there was a real attitude to my voice. The doctor laughed.

“Yes, you are and I’m sorry. But if you are still experiencing the after-effects of the operation, your parents need to hear what I’m saying.”

“So do I.” I have always been a little too outspoken. Comes from having a Cop for a father and a Drama Teacher for a mother.

“Again, I’m sorry.”

He didn’t act like he was sorry at all because he kept

talking to my parents. I sucked my tongue against my teeth and all the heads in the room turned to me. "Sorry." And I did it again.

The doctor droned on about medications and rest and care for the wound. I counted to 643 and then said, "When do I get to go home?"

"Tomorrow morning."

There it was, in my mouth, that tongue against the teeth sound again. The doctor looked down at me, as if I wasn't worthy of his attention and had been interrupted. Well, I did interrupt him. I was worthy of his attention.

"Cool." I said it with enough oil and derision that I knew no one took the word seriously.

"Well, I'll check in on you later."

"Swell." More oil.

The doctor turned and left. I looked at the wall, anywhere except at my parents. I knew that they wouldn't approve of my treatment of the doctor, but I didn't approve of his treatment of me.

"You could try to be nice." It was Mom.

"Yeah, like that would work."

"Cade." It was Dad's voice and he was not happy.

"I know, Dad. But it really burns me when I'm not treated like ..."

“An adult?”

“I was going to say, ‘like I’m important,’ but whatever.”

“Sorry, Son. Not everyone knows you like we do.”

Boy, did my Dad have that one right. My parents knew me inside and out. They had created me, moulded me, shaped me – taught me. I was now thirteen. It was like suddenly there were bits of me coming out that were never there before; like their careful creation was going south. It got to me sometimes, over the last two years of all the changes and stuff, but I’m sure that it bewildered my parents, too.

“You want one of us to stay the night?”

“ME! ME!” was promptly voiced by my younger siblings.

“Sorry, you two, but it has to be an adult.”

I heard the ‘aww!’ that came from two pouty voices. And I loved them for it.

“Tell you what,” I said to them, “we’ll have a sleep-over in my room after I get home.”

They were all smiles. So were Mom and Dad. Maybe I had learned what they had tried to teach me – at least some of it.

“I’ll be all right.” I knew I wouldn’t, but they shouldn’t know that. I was growing up, after all, and I

should be able to spend the night alone in a hospital bed where there were strange noises, and funny people dressed in funnier clothing who poked at you and didn't talk to you. "But you can stay if you want."

Mom smiled. She didn't have a play going and since Dad was on call tomorrow, she decided to stay. I was glad that I kind of let them make the decision. That way it wouldn't look like I was a wimp who needed his mommy and daddy. I mean, I needed them – probably always would need them. I just couldn't let them or anyone else know that. It just wouldn't be cool.

They stayed until the little ones fell asleep. When I turned the TV off, Dad took them home. The nurse came in and made up the chair for my mother. Maybe it wasn't a nurse, it was a guy who dressed like a nurse. A male nurse! The last thing I remember seeing was Mom settling into that little chair/bed/thingie.



14 chapters later the book has an ending that we
hope you won't forget.