



# Heart Burn

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[Ruth Taylor](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This taut, edgy thriller about teenage life in East London evokes the spirit of Raymond Chandler. Anne Cassidy presents us with drug-dealing, debts owed to smooth gangsters who entrap their victims, criminal beatings and crooked policemen. The events unfold in December, when the shops' decorations and glitter seemed at odds with the grey streets'. Such descriptive passages establish a moody, dark ambiance which reflects a changing, restless city. Canary Wharf is 'half-a-dozen skyscrapers' like some futuristic castle', glimpsed on a day that 'was grey with dark puffy clouds'. In place of Philip Marlowe, we have a working-class sixth-former, Ashley (Ashe), whose investigations into the drug-dealing underworld are tempered by the need to avoid her parents and to complete her next school-assignment.

As Ashe investigates why her friend Tyler ended up in hospital after being beaten up and thrown into the canal, she thinks back 12 months, 'with pleasure tinged with bitterness', to her crazy three weeks as Tyler's girl-friend. Tyler has left school but reads George Orwell: 'If we'd done more stuff like that at school, I might have turned up.' Ashe dropped Tyler because she thought he was dealing in drugs. But now Tyler gives Ashe an envelope containing various items, clues that will help the police arrest the gang. This is no fantasy-adventure, however 'there is a ring of truth about the second-hand furniture-shop and mobile-phone business run by gang-members and their associates. Ashe may, at one point, be jokingly likened to Sherlock Holmes, but towards the end, her confidence crumbling, she ironically realises that she is 'grasping at straws, imagining [her]self as some kind of hero-figure'.

Ashe is the kind of girl who sneaks drinks of vodka and who can go to bed 'a little worse for the cans of beer (she's) drunk'. Nevertheless, she is a strong, attractive heroine who dominates the weak male characters. The novel provides a contemporary, evocative and largely realistic version of the young person's life. Although some of the denouements are too easily foreseen, the pace of the action and depth of descriptive detail make this a superior read for a wide range of young readers from 13 upwards.

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