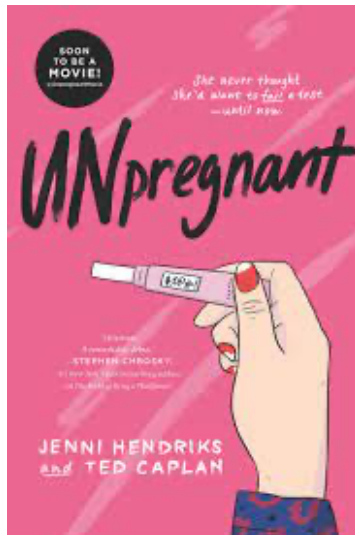


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“It’s true,” Bailey pointed out.

“Just leaving out a few details,” I said.

Bailey nodded. “You’re right.” She typed something else and showed me the screen.

“His **dick** smells like cheddar cheese,” I read. “Bailey!”

“You said you wanted to be truthful!”

“Take it out.”

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Bailey squinted, examining my shoes. “Well, there’s always longtime subscriber to the Penis of the Month Club, Olivia Blume . . .”

Twin thin wires, arcing gracefully through the air, a nearly invisible promise of pain.

His jaw clenching, muscles standing out on his neck.

Probes piercing his polo shirt, two sharp little kisses.

The jerk of the Taser.

Mr. Butler on the floor, his eyes wide and staring.

Then it was over. The B-52s played over the store’s sound system, mingling with Mr. Butler’s groans.

I waited for regret. For a sense of horror at the crime I’d just committed. It didn’t come.

I stepped closer and leaned over him as he flopped on the ground like a balding, pathetic fish. I pulled the probes from his chest.

“Having a kid makes you ‘parent material,’ asshole.”

I stumbled outside on numb legs, the rush of adrenaline dissipated. My whole body was bathed in a clammy sheen of sweat and my hands wouldn’t stop shaking. I wasn’t sure if I was going to throw up or start laughing. I bent over and tried to do both but only a weird choking sound came out. When I finally stood back up, Bailey was staring at me, her eyes wide and a little frightened.

“Ho. Lee. Shit,” she whispered. I looked away, suddenly embarrassed.

“Sorry, I, uh, don’t know what came over me—”

“You tased my dad.”

“Yeah.”

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Bailey crossed her arms. "Go ahead, try to make yourself feel better by thinking I'm an evil asshole with secret motives. But I meant what I said last night. All of it. Remember, I don't need perfect friends. Just one who's there."

"You're infuriating."

"You're a **slut** who should have kept your pants on."

I froze, then cautiously turned my eyes to look at our reflections in the bathroom mirror. Bailey was holding a black plastic box against my neck. It took a moment to register what the thing was, since up until now I'd only seen them on cop shows. It was a **Taser**. She had a flippin' **Taser**.

"Oh my God. How did you get that into school? You could be expelled! And, like, less than a month before graduation!"

Bailey snorted. "Of course that would be your first thought when someone pulls a **Taser** on you." I released her wrist. Bailey lowered the thing and stepped

I turned to Bailey, surprised. She was blushing, looking away, then directly at the waitress's **breasts**. I'd seen that expression on Kevin's face the first time I'd taken off my bra. Something clicked in my brain.

"Hmmm." The waitress pretended to think while leaning closer to Bailey, her boobs nearly grazing her face. "You look like a Dr Pepper girl to me." She smiled a flirty smile at Bailey, who had completely stopped breathing.

"Yeah. Okay. Good," she choked out. The waitress's smile grew even bigger at Bailey's reaction. Clearly the woman had the same suspicions I did. She slid into

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the booth next to Bailey and draped an arm over her.

"Just one song, huh? Better make it a good one. You want a dance?"

"Um, no, thank you," Bailey managed to sputter while the waitress nuzzled her ear. "You're very pretty, but, um, no."

"You sure? I'm good." The waitress stood reluctantly.

"Yeah. Uh. Thanks, though."

"Well, think about it. I'll be right back with those drinks." She walked off. Bailey followed her leather-clad rear end with her eyes.

"Bailey?" I asked. But her eyes were still glued on the waitress. "Bailey?" No reaction. "BAILEY!"

and stood between them, draping her arms over Bailey's shoulders.

"Hi, Sapphire," Bailey managed to splutter before the song began and the stripper reached for the zipper of her skirt.

Two seconds in, I dove back into my textbook, knowing down to my bones that I was definitely not a lesbian. But judging by the nervous titters I heard, Bailey was at least enjoying herself a little bit.

The song ended. I looked over at Bailey. Her face had a fine dusting of body glitter and a stunned expression on it.

"Whoa."

Sapphire smiled and straightened her skirt. "Aw, thanks. I love first timers. Care for another? I can bring a friend."

"For someone who's never even kissed a girl, you sure caught on to the lap dance thing quick," I muttered.

Bailey shrugged. "What can I say? I must be some sort of lady-lovin' genius."

Sapphire spun toward us, jerking the wheel.

"Hold on. You've never been kissed?"

I was still adjusting to how she looked, now that she wasn't in her work uniform. Dressed in sweats and a tank top, without the layers of makeup, she was less sex goddess and more like a cool older sister type. At least how I imagined a cool

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what you're doing? Driving a friend halfway across the country? That's a special sort of person. That's a person who deserves to be kissed."

Bailey was frozen, her eyes wide. She looked ready to run, but being in the middle seat of a pickup, had nowhere to go. She opened her mouth to speak.

"Grrhhuuuugh."

Sapphire smiled, as if she was totally used to people losing the ability to speak when they were around her.

"Also, I thought you were cute since the moment you walked in tonight."

"Eeeerp," Bailey responded.

"I'm gonna take that as 'I thought you were cute, too.'" Unbuckling her seat belt, she leaned over, gently placing her hands on Bailey's thighs. I looked away to give them privacy, though out of the corner of my eye I could still see Bailey and Sapphire dimly reflected in the glass of the windshield. Bailey was doing her best impression of a goldfish out of water, but that didn't seem to bother Sapphire. She parted her lips and softly placed them on Bailey's. At the contact, Bailey's eyes closed. She shuddered. And then her whole body sort of melted. Sapphire pulled back. Bailey's lips were shiny with the gloss from Sapphire's and she wore a dazed expression. Sapphire wore a satisfied one.

"You were right."

"I was?" Bailey asked, confused.

"Yep. You are a lady-lovin' genius." And with that, Sapphire flipped the headlights back on, threw the truck into gear, and pulled back onto the road.

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"I love your hair," Sapphire purred, playing with a strand of turquoise.

"Thanks," Bailey replied. "I do it myself. Your eyes are really sparkly."

"Thanks. And you have the cutest lips—"

I couldn't take it anymore. "So, Sapphire, is that your real name?" I blurted. For the first time in what seemed like hours, the other two people in the cab noticed I was there.

"Yeah. Can you believe it? It's like my mom wanted me to grind on truckers for a living," she laughed.

"Well, you're good at it. Really good at it," Bailey breathed. I barely kept my eyes from rolling out of my head.

"Thanks, babe," Sapphire said rubbing Bailey's thigh. "Where are your parents? You still live with them?"

"My parents think I'm studying for finals at my friend's lake house," I answered.

"Sup," he drawled, exhaling a cloud of pot smoke as he spoke. "Name's Dwayne. You must be Sapphire's new little buddies." He stroked the ferret on his shoulder and grinned. "So glad you could dine with us in our humble abode. Ganja?" He offered his joint, thick smoke wafting toward us from its smoldering tip. Bailey looked from Dwayne to Sapphire then back, confused.

I could see whatever fantasy Bailey had constructed of Sapphire was crumbling under the combined weight of the dingy, smelly house and Dwayne's poor dental hygiene. "Are you guys . . . together?"

"Can anyone really be together in this world? We all walk alone, little one."

"We've been with each other since high school," Sapphire added from where she was stirring the eggs, "but we've evolved past labeling ourselves."

"Oh." That single syllable was all Bailey could manage. She sat down heavily on one of the cheap plastic chairs around the kitchen table. I wanted to get out of this place for Bailey's sake, but suddenly the combined smell of cooking eggs, weed, and ferret was too much. A wave of nausea washed over me.

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"We can walk—"

Bailey started giggling. "But . . . I can't feel my feet—"

"Or get a taxi—"

Bailey laughed harder. "Yellow is a funny color."

"We don't want to be a bother. Let's go." I stepped into the kitchen and tugged on her arm. Bailey looked at me, then at her joint.

"But I want more."

"We can get more later. Lots more," I promised desperately.

Dwayne stood up, gathering his ferret off the table, stroking it gently. "You ain't a bother." Dwayne's friendly voice sent shivers down my spine.

Sapphire nodded, agreeing. "Not a bother at all."

"See. They say we aren't a bother," Bailey whined.

"Not cool!" He stopped chasing us, dropped to his knees, and began to scrape up the scattered leaves of cannabis.

"Dwayne!" I heard Sapphire shriek from behind him. Bailey paused, distracted by the joints rolling on the linoleum. She bent down to reach for one.

"Step the fuck back, crunch nuts."

Kevin jerked his hand away. I opened my eyes to find Bailey standing on the front porch of the house. In one hand she held the ferret by the scruff of its neck, its tiny legs kicking ineffectually. In the other hand she held her mom's Taser.

"Malachi!" Dwayne wailed. Bailey's smile bordered on feral.

"That's right," she confirmed. "Now everyone needs to step away from my friend, or the ferret gets it." No one on the lawn moved. We were rooted to the spot as we stared at Bailey in astonishment. She glared at us all. With a flick of her finger, she turned on the Taser, letting it spark. That warm glow I'd felt toward her when we arrived reignited.

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"Get out of here, freak," he spat, then turned to me, his expression earnest. "If you do this, you may not be able to have babies, babe."

I stared at him, transfixed by the horrible absurdity of it all. "What are you talking about?"

"Are you seriously getting medical advice from Dr. Stripper and Nurse Ferret?" Bailey asked. But Kevin ignored her.

"I'm here to save you, Veronica." He opened his arms. He was so proud of himself. So confident. I took a step back to stand beside Bailey.

"Bailey's the one that's saving me, you idiot." From beside me, I felt Bailey's smile.

"Awww," she said. Then she pushed me to the side. "To the rescue!" And she swung her combat boot into his groin. Kevin crumpled, clutching his balls and mewling like a kitten. She held out her hand to me. "Let's go, Veronica."

We jogged to the front yard.

"I've been wanting to do that all night," Bailey said. "Actually, to be honest, ever since I saw his stupid face. God, did you have to keep your eyes shut when you slept with—"

"Bailey!" I warned. "I kinda love you for destroying Kevin's nuts right now. Don't ruin it."

"I don't know. But I'm really regretting not grabbing that weed when we ran through the kitchen. That was the best stuff I've ever had."

"I don't really care about the weed right now."

"That's because you didn't have it."

"Two whole nights away from Kevin," she continued. I relaxed. I was the only one in the group with a boyfriend and they always teased me about it. But I was also their only direct source of sexual information, so they never took the teasing too far.

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"Hannah Ballard got caught selling Adderall to some juniors," Emily blurted, her voice an octave higher than normal from her barely contained delight. The girls clustered around me, eager to give the details.

"She tried to say it was the first time she's ever done something like that—"

"—like it was just the pressure of senior year or something—"

"But, like, please, you know she's probably been sneaking that stuff for years—"

"So now she's totally expelled—"

"And her parents are sending her to rehab—"

Kevin's van. Bailey revved the engine. "All right. Let's do this 'procedure'!"

I was slammed against my seat as we peeled out with a squeal of rubber. We rocketed down the quiet suburban street. Dogs barked. Car alarms wailed. Bailey's voice rose above the growl of the engine as she began to sing.

"Abortion friend, abortion friend. Wouldn't have to do this if you'd let him stick it in your end!"

I closed my eyes and prayed I'd survive the next nine hundred and ninety-four miles.

I turned to see the pawnshop woman aiming a giant 12-gauge shotgun at Kevin's face. Her eyes were cool and her hands were rock steady.

"What? I . . ."

"Did you get this girl pregnant on purpose?"

I turned to see the pawnshop woman aiming a giant 12-gauge shotgun at Kevin's face. Her eyes were cool and her hands were rock steady.

"What? I . . ."

"Did you. Get this girl. Pregnant on purpose?" she repeated.

Kevin swallowed. "No, ma'am! I was drunk!"

In response she cocked the gun. "Get the fuck out of here."

"Damn, Kevin's a baller," Bailey said, impressed.

"Please," the woman said. "I'm being generous since you managed to find yourself the biggest asshole in all of Missouri."

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"Bailey, you were right. Kevin is a skeezewad."

"Louder."

"Seriously?"

"Louder. I want the whole world to hear this. Roll down your window and stick your head out." Rolling my eyes, I cranked the glass down. "Make sure you really scream it," she added. I leaned out the window.

The wind whipped my hair, my eyes teared up, and I screamed into the night, "BAILEY IS RIGHT! KEVIN IS A SKEEZEWAD!" As I sat back down in my seat, breathless, my hair in tangles, I was surprised to find I had a huge grin on my face.

"See, was that so hard?"

"That felt good. I'm going to do it again." I leaned out my window again. "KEVIN IS A FUCKING SKEEZEWAD!" The wind ripped the words from my mouth. "DICKLESS BUTTHOLE FUCKBURGLAR!"

"Woo! Yes! That's my girl. Hold on. I got one." Bailey rolled down her window and leaned out. The car swerved back and forth as she tried to steer with one hand.

"ASSTASTIC DOUCHE-GUZZLER!"

I laughed and shouted out the window. "URINE-DRIPPING PENIS DRAGGER!"

"UNCONTROLLED SCROTUM FIRE!"

"SPONGEDICK SHITPANTS!"

"SPONGEDICK SHITPANTS . . . THE MOVIE!"

We gulped for air between bursts of silent laughter. "One more. Together," Bailey managed to wheeze. We stuck our heads out the window again.

"SKEEZEWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAD!" we screamed into the night, then tumbled

"Bailey . . ."

"Fine. He and my mom broke up. He was creepin' college girls on Tinder. Ass-hole is on call at the fire department all weekend and hasn't moved his stuff out yet and this is a little payback."

"You stole his car."

I shrugged, then grinned diabolically. "My backup plan was messing up my hair and pinching my cheeks a lot to fake that post-orgasm glow."

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"Did you think this was like going to McDonald's? Just order an abortion off the value menu and have it served right up? Were you planning to use the drive-through?"

"Thank you. That's so nice of you. My last period? Um . . ." Bailey looked at me, waiting for an answer. I held up some fingers, then shrugged. Her eyes widened slightly. I burned with shame. My period wasn't super regular, so it took me a while to realize something was wrong. And we *had* used condoms. Or so I had thought. "Eight weeks. Ish." Bailey nodded her head as she listened to the person on the other end. "Okay. Yes. That's fine. Say, are there any waxing options? It's like the Amazon jungle down there." At this, one of the truckers listening to our conversation eyed Bailey with interest. I buried my head in my hands, willing this to be over.

"Right. Sorry," Bailey continued, "I'm not making light. I'm just a bit nervous, you know? First time and everything. Not first time having sex. I should've been pregnant like a hundred times by now, just going by the odds. Or maybe my boyfriend's sperm are stalkers, like he is." I held back a snort of laughter. I hated what she was doing, but I kind of loved it, too. "So, do you have anything? I'm sorry I didn't call before. I was just really, really nervous. Tomorrow is the only day I can do this. I'm driving from way out of town and my parents can't find out." She

Strewn across the road were the contents of my duffel bag and backpack. Everything had obviously been run over several times. My clothes were marked with black tire tracks; my textbooks' spines lay cracked and broken. A scattering of calc notes flapped dejectedly in the gutter. I rushed over to gather them, desperate to salvage what I could. But as I got closer, I crinkled my nose. So did Bailey.

"Yeah. They peed on it." Then a glint of moonlight caught Bailey's attention. She waded through my clothes, bent over, and emerged with her phone. The screen was shattered. She pushed the power button. A few bars of color flashed across the screen before it went black.

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have found out about my other thing. And about the stolen car. So compared to a felony and pregnancy, going to a strip club wasn't that bad. Probably. I closed my eyes. Right now at the lake, my friends were dreaming about Ryan Gosling and the second law of thermodynamics. I tried to imagine I was there, too, cuddled under an old quilt. I almost had the image fixed in my mind when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"AARRGH!" I yelped and leaped away. I turned to see a cocktail waitress smirking at me. She wore a leather miniskirt and a pair of blue clamshell pasties. Momentarily stunned by her nearly naked and very ample chest, I quickly looked for somewhere else to focus. I settled on her earring. This only made the waitress's smile grow wider.

Rage.

"I should not be here." I stood and kicked the embankment. "I . . ." Kick. ". . . SHOULD . . ." Kick. ". . . NOT . . ." Kick. "BE HERE!" I stopped kicking and began to pace, arms flailing wildly. "I should be able to just walk down the street and say, 'Hello, my name is Veronica, my boyfriend is an asshole, here is my five hundred dollars, oh yes, I'd love a cup of water, thanks so much, ten-minute wait? No problem.'" I spun around to face Bailey. "But nooooooooooooo! I have to drive one thooooooooousand miles, have my ride stolen, have a stripper kidnap me, lose my homework, and now I'm in the middle of a fuuuuucking field, and the fuuuucking train won't fuuuuucking slow down . . . so FUUUUUUUUCK YOU-UUU, MISSOURI STATE LEGISLATURE!!!" I rushed up the embankment to the tracks and tried to pry them up with my bare hands. "ARRRRRRGGGGGGHHHH!"

Five minutes later, Bailey was running out of a liquor store, paper-bag-wrapped bottle in hand and huge smile on her face. She climbed into the limo and tossed me the bag. I pulled out the bottle.

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Bailey shrugged. "Didn't say anything about escorts." She slammed it back, then hissed, "Burns so good!" Bailey pulled a magazine out of the bag. "Okay! Quiz time! Let's discover what sexual position matches our zodiac signs!" I laughed. We quizzed each other while Bailey continued taking swigs from the bottle. Soon her words were slurring and I was yawning. Bailey laid her head down on my lap.

"So what if I am. Am I not worthy to judge Perfect Veronica? We both know why you're doing this. Not because you don't want to raise a baby. Not because you couldn't support it. Because you're embarrassed what other people would think about you." Waves of heat and ice were rolling through my body. Was she right? Was that what all this was about? Embarrassment? I looked away so I could piece my fractured thoughts back together, but Bailey held my gaze. She smiled ruefully when she read the emotions in my eyes. "Not so perfect, are you, Veronica?"

Fury flashed through me. "You've been waiting for this for years, haven't you? A chance to feel superior to me. That's why you agreed to drive. So you could secretly gloat. That whole 'last chance to be friends again' thing was bullshit."

Bailey crossed her arms. "Go ahead, try to make yourself feel better by thinking I'm an evil asshole with secret motives. But I meant what I said last night. All of it. Remember, I don't need perfect friends. Just one who's there."

"You're infuriating."

"You're a slut who should have kept your pants on."

"I can't believe you're judging me for this! You're a lesbian!" Even as I said the words I wanted to take them back. I needed to explain—

She opened the car door and climbed out. She took a wad of cash from her wallet, all that was left over, and threw it at my face. As the bills floated to the floor of the limo, she stepped away from the car. "Have an awesome abortion, you fucking baby killer," she said, and slammed the door.

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It looked like any other building until I noticed the scattering of people on the sidewalk. People with signs. Protesters. Why hadn't I realized they would be there?

CHOOSE LIFE

ABORTION IS MURDER

PRAY TO END THE KILLINGS

CHOP SHOP

This one was done in bloody red letters like a horror movie poster. One girl, who was probably my age or a little younger, held up a giant poster of what looked like mutilated body parts with the words "12 Weeks."

I'm splayed open on a table, my feet in stirrups. The technician tells me to scoot lower. Lower. I'm shown the equipment that will be inside me. Told there will be some pressure. It's bigger than I expected. All the monitors are turned away from me, their beeps and whirs muted. I stare at the ceiling, counting the tiles. A warm squirt of gel and it begins. The ultrasound hurts less and more than I was expecting. Stretching and pressure and invasion. I keep counting tiles. I breathe. I'm told I'm doing well, that it's almost over, but it keeps going. I lose track of my counting. I start over. My eyes sting with tears.

"Is it going to hurt?" I asked before I could stop myself.

"There will be some discomfort, but we have medication that will help you relax. Afterward you'll likely feel something similar to strong menstrual cramps."

Okay. I can handle cramps, I thought. But there was still that trickle of sweat down my neck.

"You'll need to wear a pad and can expect something like a heavy period for up to three weeks. If you experience more severe bleeding, you will need to go to a doctor."

Severe bleeding. I'd forgotten about that. What if it happened?

Dr. Rivera noticed the frantic look on my face. She smiled. "Don't worry. We'll give you a printout with all this information. It's normal to be nervous right now. We don't expect you to remember everything."

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"Please, you think he wants to be known as 'Kevin the Condom Popper'? And even if he does talk, you're no worse off than you are now. Plus, you're forgetting one important thing."

"What?"

"He deserves it." I was startled by the ice-cold hatred in her voice. "You know it. A kick in the balls and a single punch isn't nearly enough." As she said the

"Bailey, I will recite every sexual encounter I had with Kevin *in a*

"Bailey, I will recite every sexual encounter I had with Kevin *in detail!*"

"Yeah, well, she doesn't know everything." Bailey threw the car in gear and pulled back onto the highway. "She doesn't know about the weed in my Hello Kitty dolls, or that I try to catfish all her boyfriends to see if they're pedos—only one so

"Hey." The girls surrounded me and I was engulfed in a cacophony of concern.

"Oh my God. You poor thing! We need more detail! Those texts were not enough." "Did Kevin cry?" "Did you cry?" "Was there breakup sex?" "What are you going to do now?"

"Look, I don't care what you do with Kevin." Emily opened her mouth to protest, but I held up my hand. She quieted. "Seriously. I don't care. We broke up. It's over. But you should know, he poked holes in our condoms to get me pregnant so I wouldn't go away to college. I spent the last three days driving to Albuquerque with Bailey Butler to get an abortion because that's the closest place to get that done around here. So public service announcement: if you're gonna let him stick it in you, I'd recommend birth control."

When you tell people you're going to write a funny book about abortion, most of the time what you get is a blank stare and a few cautious steps backward, so it's really important that we thank everyone who not only didn't do that, but instead cheered us on.

PROFANITY COUNT (and other sensitive words)

Douchebags 1

Douchebag 2

Jesus 3

*sshole 11

F*ck or f*cking 19

Vaginal 2

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God 20	Cannabis 1	Skeezewad 4
Dipsh*t 1	Druggie 1	Scrotum 1
D*ckless 1	*sswipe 1	Felony 3
Sponged*ck 1	Weed 3	Arrested 4
D*ck 2	Polyamory 1	Amaretto 1
P*nis 3	Abortion 54	B*tch 2
D*mn 10	Adderall 1	Bumblef*ck 2
Taser 23	Condom(s) 12	Devil whores 1
Slut 3	Impregnator 1	Cunt 1
Joint 4	Ho. Lee. Sh*t 1	

RED FLAGS

Sexual Content

Violence

Language

Drugs, Drinking, Smoking

Crude

CONCLUSION

Not appropriate literary content for K-12 schools