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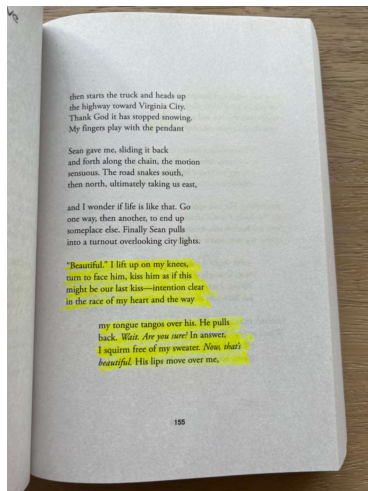
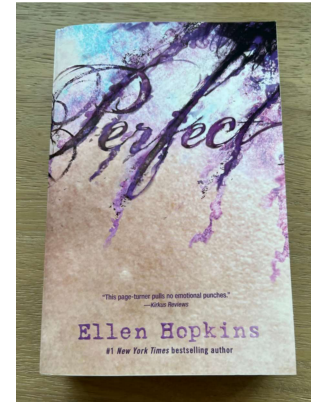
Ellen Hopkins

ISBN 978-1-41698-324-8

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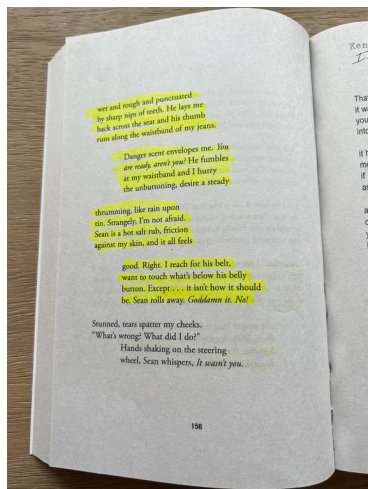
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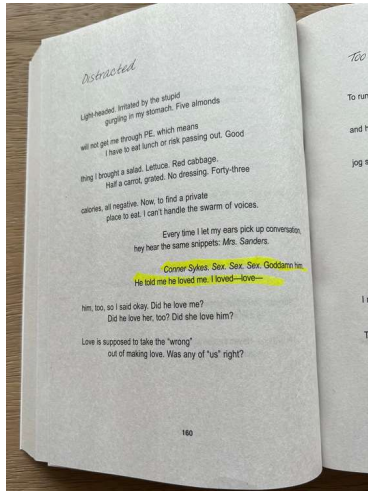
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"Beautiful." I lift up on my knees, turn to face him, kiss him as if this might be our last kiss- intention clear in the race of my heart and the way my tongue tangos over his. He pulls back. Wait. Are you sure? In answer, I squirm free of my sweater. Now, that's beautiful. His lips move over me,... (Con't on page 156)



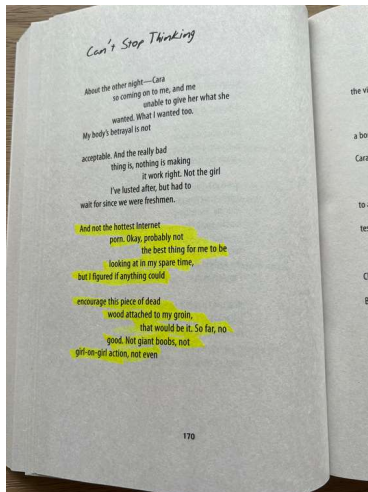
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...wet and rough and punctuated by sharp nips of teeth. He lays me back across the seat and his thumb runs along the waistband of my jeans. Danger scent envelopes me. You are ready, aren't you? He fumbles at my waistband and I hurry the unbuttoning, desire a steady thrumming, like rain upon tin. Strangely, I'm not afraid. Sean is a hot salt rub, friction against my skin, and it all feels good. Right. I reach for his belt, want to touch what's below his belly button. Except...it isn't how it should be. Sean rolls away. Goddamn it. No!



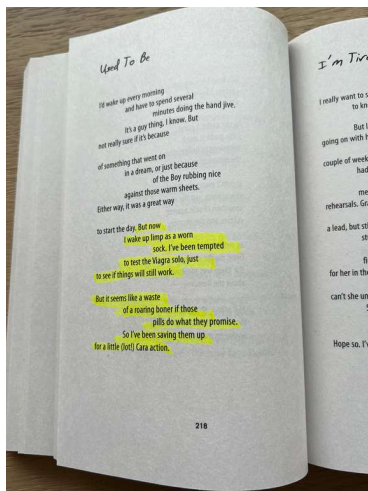
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Conner Sykes. Sex. Sex. Sex. Goddamn him.



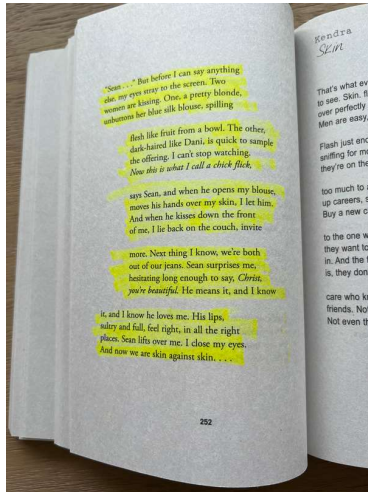
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And not the hottest internet porn. Okay, probably not the best thing for me to be looking at in my spare time, but I figured anything could encourage this piece of dead wood attached to my groin, that would be it. So far, no good. No giant boobs, not girl-on-girl action, not even the vilest three-way romp I've ever been not-quite-disgusted to view. The damn thing just lays there, like a bored housewife.



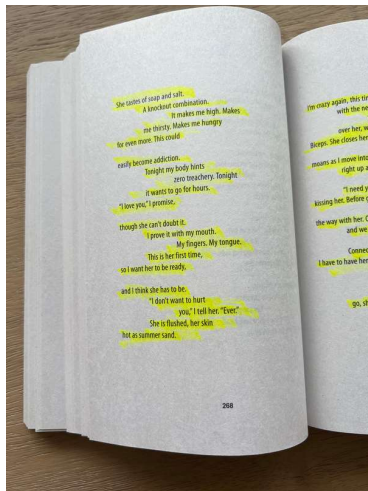
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But it seems like a waste roaring boner if those pills do what they promise. So I've been saving them up for a little (lot!) Cara action.



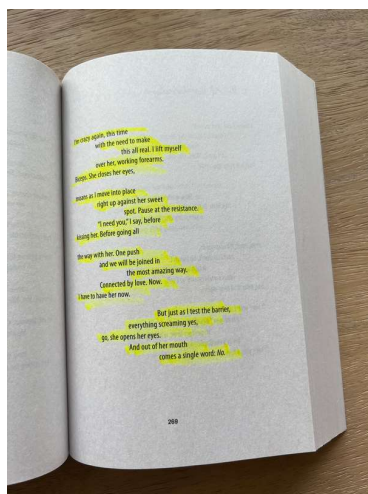
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"Sean..." But before I can say anything else, my eyes stray to the screen. Two women are kissing. Once, a pretty blonde, unbuttons her blue silk blouse, spilling flesh like fruit from a bowl. The other, dark-haired like Dani, is quick to sample the offering. I can't stop watching. Now she is what I call a chick flick, says Sean, and when he opens my blouse, moves his hand over my skin, I let him. And when he kisses down the front of me, I like back on the couch, invite more. Next thing I know, we're both out of our jeans. Sean surprises me, hesitating long enough to say, Christ, you're beautiful. He means it, and I know it, and I know he loves me. His lips, sultry and full, feel right, in all the right places. Sean lifts over me. I close my eyes. And now we are skin against skin...



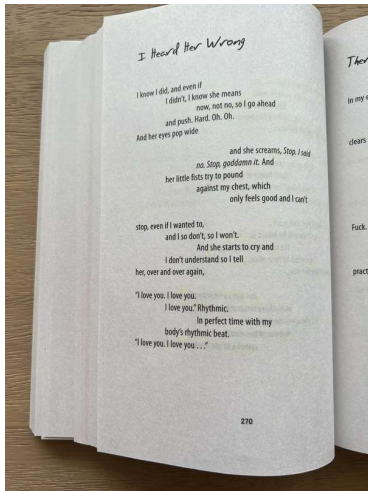
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She tastes of soap and salt. A knockout combination. It makes me high. Makes me thirsty. Makes me hungry for even more. This could easily become addiction. ...I prove it with my mouth. My fingers. My tongue. This is her first time, so I want her to be ready, and I think she has to be. "I don't want to hurt you," I tell her. "Ever." She is flushed, her skin hot as summer sand.



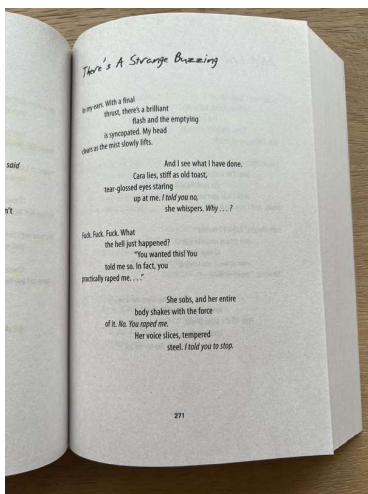
PAGE 269

I'm crazy again, this time with the need to make this all real. I lift myself over her, working forearms. Biceps. She closes her eyes, moans as I move into place right up against her sweet spot. Pause at the resistance. "I need you," I say, before kissing her. Before going all the way with her. One push and we will be joined in the most amazing way. Connected by love. Now. I have to have her now. But just as I test the barrier, everything screaming yes, go, she opens her eyes. And out of her mouth comes a single word: No.



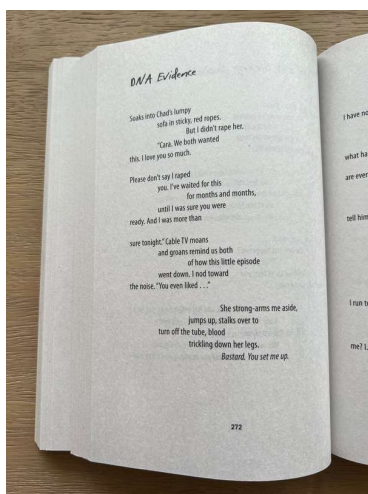
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I heard her wrong I know I did, and even if I didn't, I know she means now, not no, so I go ahead and push. Hard. Oh. Oh. And her eyes pop wide and she screams, Stop. I said no. Stop, goddamn it. And her little fists try to pound against my chest, which only feels good and I can't stop, even if I wanted to, and I so don't, so I won't. And she starts to cry and I don't understand so I tell her, over and over again, "I love you. I love you. I love you." Rhythmic. In perfect time with my body's rhythmic beat. "I love you. I love you..."



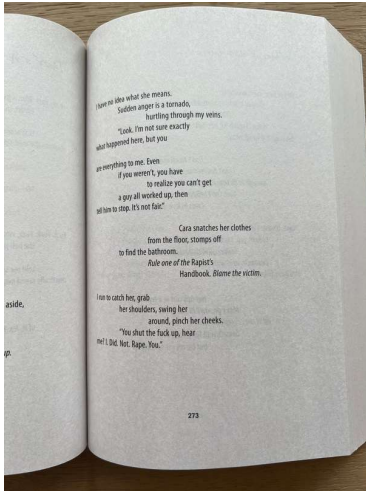
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There's a strange buzzing in my ears. With a final thrust, there's a brilliant flash and the emptying is syncopated. My head clears as the mist slowly lifts. And I see what I have done. Cara lies, stiff as old toast, tear-glossed eyes staring up at me. I told you no, she whispers. Why...? Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. What the hell just happened? "You wanted this! You told me so. In fact, you practically raped me..." She sobs, and her entire body shakes with the force of it. No. You raped me. Her voice slices, tempered steel. I told you to stop.



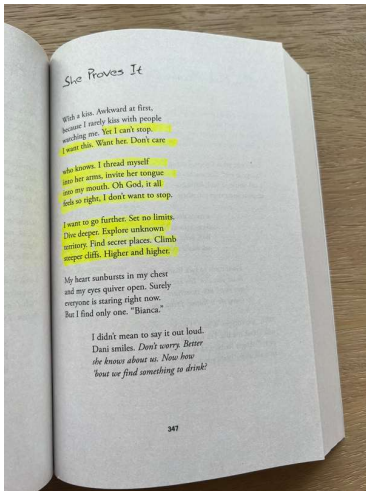
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DNA evidence soaked into Chad's lumpy sofa in sticky, red ropes. But I didn't rape her. "Cara. We both wanted this. I love you so much. Please don't say I raped you. I've waited for this for months and months, until I was sure you were ready. And I was more than sure tonight." Cable TV moans and groans remind us both of how this little episode went down. I nod toward the noise. "You even liked..." She strong-arms me aside, jumps up, stalks over to turn off the tube, blood trickling down her legs. Bastard. You set me up.



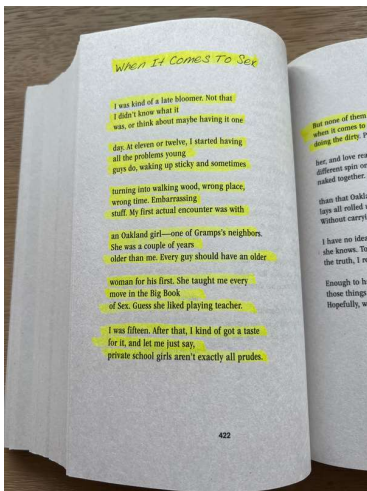
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I have no idea what she means. Sudden anger is a tornado, hurtling through my veins. "Look. I'm not sure exactly what happened here, but you are everything to me. Even if you weren't, you have to realize you can't get a guy all worked up, then tell him to stop. It's not fair." Cara snatches her clothes from the floor, stomps off to find the bathroom. Rule one of the Rapist's handbook. Blame the victim. I run to catch her, grab her shoulders, swing her around, pinch her cheeks. "You shut the fuck up, hear me? I. Did. Not. Rape. You."



PAGE 347

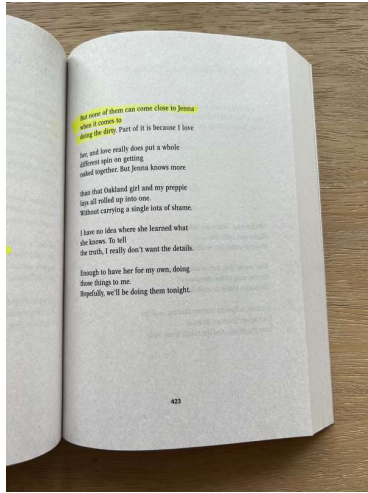
Yet I can't stop. I want this. Want her. Don't care who knows. I thread myself into her arms, invite her tongue into my mouth. Oh God, it all feels so right, I don't want to stop. I want to go further. Set no limits. Dive deeper. Explore unknown territory. Find secret places. Climb steeper cliffs. Higher and higher.



PAGE 422

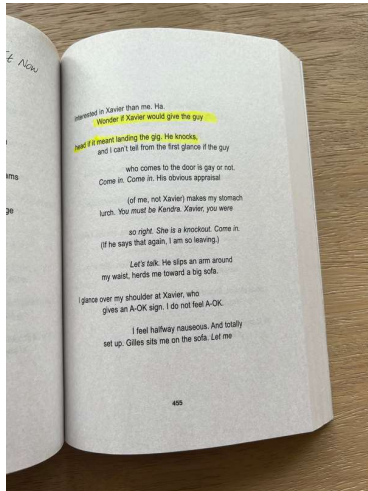
When it comes to sex I was kind of a late bloomer. Not that I didn't know what it was, or think about maybe it one day. At eleven or twelve, I started having all the problems young guys do, waking up sticky and sometimes turning into walking wood, wrong place, wrong time.

...My first actual encounter was with an Oakland girl- one of Gramps's neighbors. She was a couple of years older than me. Every guy should have an older woman for his first. She taught me every move in the Big Book of Sex. Guess she liked playing teacher. I was fifteen. After that, I kind of got a taste for it, and let me just say, private school girls aren't exactly all prudes.



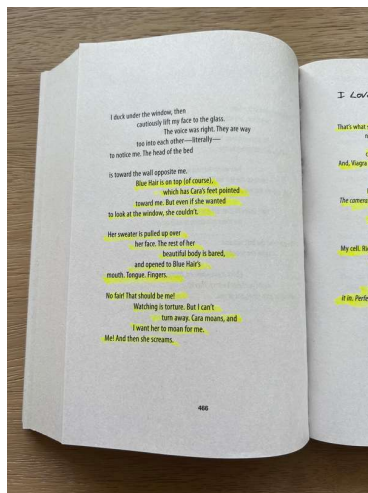
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But none of them can come close to Jenna when it comes to doing the dirty.



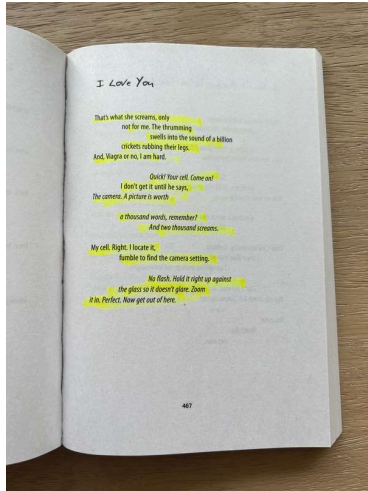
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Wonder if Xavier would give the guy head if it meant landing the gig.



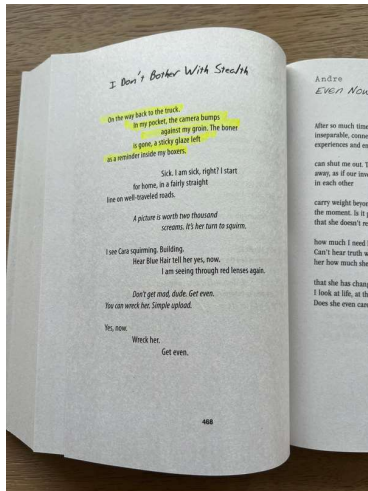
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Blue Hair is on top (of course), which has Cara's feet pointed toward me. But even if she wanted to look at the window, she couldn't. Her sweater is pulled up over her face. The rest of her beautiful body is bared, and opened to Blue Hair's mouth. Tongue. Fingers. No fair? That should be me! Watching is torture. But I can't turn away. Cara moans, and I want her to moan for me. Me! And then she screams.



PAGE 467

I love you that's what she screams, only not for me.
...And, Viagra or no, I am hard. Quick! Your cell. Come on! I don't get it until he says, The camera. A picture is worth a thousand words, remember? And two thousand screams.



PAGE 468

In my pocket, the camera bumps against my groin. The boner is gone, a sticky glaze left as a reminder inside my boxers.

PAGE 3

I never would have expected Conner to attempt the coward's way out, though. Some consider suicide an act of honor.

PAGE 6

I mean, by putting a gun to his chest, he made an overt, if obscene, statement- I will no longer force myself inside your prefab boxes. I'd much rather check out of here than let you decide the rest of my life. "Your," meaning Mom and Dad.

PAGE 35

...Guess you're right about the piss test. But after that, I still want the good shit. I know you've got a line on them. Get me some, I'll make it worth your trouble.

PAGE 65

You know. The gun. The hospital... Okay, she's the one who's dense. "Why would Conner shooting himself have anything to do with 'us'? Accidents hap- Wait. Are you saying it wasn't an accident?" ... It was not an accident, Kendra. Conner tried to kill himself.

PAGE 72

Rumor had it her stepdad liked her a little too much. She coped with his "bad, bad touch" by binge-and-puking. Bulimia is nasty. Hanging your head in the toilet after every meal? Sticking your fingers down your throat? ...Real control is not putting in more than you can work off. Knowing the exact count and keeping track. Shaving off every extra caloric unit you can without passing out. And the most important thing of all- keeping everyone else in the dark.

PAGE 77

...if you're really thinking forever, you'd better take a test-drive. What if she sucks in bed? I've test-driven four or five. And the thing is, there wasn't a helluva lot of difference in the way they handled.

PAGE 78

Kendra and I had a short, sweet, ten thousand RPM fling before she and Conner hooked up. Kind of incestuous, I guess.

PAGE 135

There are a few, and yeah, I've had some casual sex with one or two. (Okay, maybe three.)

PAGE 146

Twin number one: a warped sex addict, filled with enough self-hate to try and end it all. Twin number two: unclear about her sexuality. In love (?) with a guy. In lust (!) with a girl. I have zero doubt about the lust.

PAGE 147

Not once has he ever tried to force me to give him more than hot make-out sessions.

PAGE 154

I run my hand along the meaty muscle of his thigh.

PAGE 165

But here in the medicine chest, between the ibuprofen and the Benadryl, is a little amber bottle, with Jenna's name on the prescription label. Percocet.

PAGE 166

I don't know what it is exactly but I do remember that Jenna got it after oral surgery. Some kind of painkiller. And I also remember it made her really giggly. I could use a good laugh. I read the label. ...But I'm only going to take one. I wash it down with a huge glass of water. And by the time if finish my makeup-... I feel better. By the time I get in my car and drive halfway to the studio, I'm feeling great. No worry, no pain at all. And, in fact, my empty stomach doesn't bother me either. This stuff rocks, except it does make my eyelids heavy.

PAGE 177

Chad, steroid expert is also my supplier.

...Still, "So I can't have sex until I quit, or what?" What about all those pro athletes and their hot women? Well I wouldn't say that exactly. Haven't you heard of Viagra? He's got to be kidding, Viagra is definitely for eighty-year-old dicks, right? I leave Chad's with a pretty good beer buzz, one more round of muscle enhancers, plus a penis fixer.

PAGE 179

I have to admit I'm curious to see if the "little blue pill" can fix me. If it can make me some kind of sex superstar. None of the times I've had sex before were what you might call memorable. Easy. Fast. Not much in the way of intensive foreplay. Nothing like what you see in movies.

PAGE 182

We have gotten naked a time or two, and Lord help me, that girl has shown me things most grown women would blush at.

PAGE 203

My mom left us for heroin when I was six. She OD'd a couple of years ago. In between, she was turning tricks, and got pregnant with my little brother. She came crawling back. Dad was great. He took her in, and when she left us for smack again, he raised Caleb like his own. ...Anyway, he fried his brain on ecstasy.

PAGE 204

She nods, parts her lips, and when our mouths meet, it is with urgency. Need. Lust.

...We feed on each other.

...Her tongue, butter melting on mine. She smells of ginger. Tastes of mint and strawberry. She is angle. I am curve. Together, we are geometric sculpture, and we make perfect sense. But just how far am I willing to go?

PAGE 205

Who knew so many answers might be found inside little amber bottles? Sad? Pop a pill. Fat? Run screaming for the medicine chest. Calorie counting becomes obsolete when all you want to swallow is water and Mommy's Little Helper makes that happen for you.

PAGE 206

I don't know why it took me so long to find my way to Pharmaceuitcalville. I guess I thought pill popping was for losers.

PAGE 207

I was only going to take one Percocet. I needed it the day I found out about Conner and his skank. ...But even if did, all I would have to do is down another Percocet. Sheesh, if I did two, I'd probably ask her to prom. Except, now the pills are gone. There were only four to start. After the first one, I waited a couple of days. Then Dad decided to show up drunk at our spring honor choir performance.

PAGE 211

I headed straight for my room, and the little bottle of dysfunction stashed in a sock in my dresser. And down went one more Percocet. Two left.

PAGE 212

I popped the last Percocet three days ago, when I was passed over for a Teen Vogue fashion shoot.

PAGE 216

He slips a small bottle into my hand. The label say Meridia.

PAGE 242

And maybe, just maybe, not belong to the right gender club. I'm also afraid of that possible truth. Can a girl fall in love with a girl and not be gay? Can she dream of silken skin, perfumed with female musk, yet joyfully submit to a man's callused touch?

PAGE 249

Cold? I can fix that. Sean pulls me into overbuilt arms. God, I've missed you. His mouth covers mine. I should wilt. Instead, I feel stiff as cardboard. Sean doesn't seem to notice, or attributes it to the cold. I've got a little surprise for you. His voice odd. Quivery.

PAGE 254

Skin two skin that's want I'm currently wearing. Fifteen-milligram Meridia is one magic little pill. You don't even want to look at food.

PAGE 266

I have never insisted on Cara having sex with me. She didn't seem ready for the longest time, and being in love with her meant more than getting off with her.

PAGE 290

Three days since the night Sean had sex with me.

PAGE 296

Because we finally had sex?

..."Not just because we finally had sex."

PAGE 314

Best of all, after waiting for a year, after finding a way to make sure performance would not be an issue, being right there with Cara, both of us naked and hot and ready to go, finally having sex with the girl I love more than life, only to be accused of rape? Check. And check!!

PAGE 319

And she's saying yes, touch me there, all wet...Strike two.

PAGE 342

"A Queer Spring Break Bash" is how it's been billed. Booze. Beer. Drugs (?). And gay people. Going with Dani means it will be my "coming out" party, so to speak.

PAGE 355

Have you been in our medicine cabinet? Your mother is missing some of her prescription pills. I could get snotty, but what good would that do? I won't even mention that I know they're Xanax, and that he was the one who did the prescribing.

PAGE 380

Considering she's sitting here, sucking down alcohol, maybe he's got a point. "Did you take your mom's Xanax?" Maybe a couple, she admits. Just to get me through the wedding stuff. Who knew Mom'd actually keep track?

PAGE 381

But the bigger question is, did you take one tonight? Xanax and schnapps don't mix well."

PAGE 384

But, not quite forty minutes into the program, I look over to find Jenna asleep. Xanax and alcohol. A knockout combination.

PAGE 389

Hard enough coming to terms with the label "lesbian," without somehow proving that you are "lesbian enough." ...We drove to a far corner of the Rancho San Rafael parking lot, and as dime-size flakes turned to quarter-size, curtaining the glass, Dani showed me what it takes to make love to a girl.

PAGE 435

Never, ever before did having sex mean anything to me.

PAGE 437

I want to know when you went all gay. Not only a whore, but a lezbo whore? Just when the fuck did that happen? No wonder you didn't want dick. Then again, some lezs like dildos. Do you and your little butch girl use those? Because I'd pay to watch. In fact, I bet I could round up a few friends. What do you think?

PAGE 453

"You're saying I should have sex with him?" Xavier grins. Only if he asks you to. Look, it's not unheard-of in this business.

PAGE 454

Sex in exchange for cash makes you a whore. What does sex in exchange for a shortcut to your dreams make you? Is there any difference? ...My little sister, as Xavier noticed, uses her body to get what she wants.

PAGE 456

His hand makes a statement, starting a slow crawl up my leg. Teens who are innocent, yet bold. It reaches my inner thigh. Girls who want to look exactly like you... I could protest. Should protest. Xavier should protest. But when I glance at him, he is smiling. Fingers play at the thin strip of fabric between my legs. And I let them.

PAGE 462

Remember that night with Cara. It was a girl-on-girl scene that got her all turned on.

PAGE 463

Are they naked right now? Playing naked lez games?

PAGE 465

Yeah, listen to that. Lord, what are those two doing to each other? From behind the first window come the sounds of nasty girls.

PAGE 491

The rest of me is stripped to skin. My mouth is a perfect O, as I give myself to Dani's lips, below my belly button and in between my opened legs. And tiny spot of glare or no, the camera caught everything. As if that isn't enough, another text. Another photo, this is when she has pulled my sweater all the way off, ducked to kiss the inside of my knee, leaving my most intimate places, plus my face, for the camera to see- and capture.

PAGE 529

Kiss meets kiss, a mist of eloquence, a gathering of storm clouds. The rain begins to fall. A lift of hips, upwelling in the belly. A torrent in the V of opened thighs.

PAGE 533

"I know this is not on your Top Ten Qualities In A Daughter list. But I am a lesbian."
...Lots of adolescents experiment with same-sex play.

PAGE 552

Your sister was raped.
...And all because she asked the wrong guy to buy her booze.

PAGE 588

"Did you ever want to die enough to think about suicide?" I think everyone considers it at some point.

PAGE 608

A suit is not Conner. I'd rather remember him naked. Next to me.