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I reading

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CHAPTER ONE

The lesson was Personal Development.

I was glad about that. Not glad it was that particular subject, I mean, but glad that because it was, the boys weren't in with us. In our school, when we have PD, the boys have extra sport. Maybe they don't need to be developed personally, or maybe they've developed enough. Anyhow, they weren't there and, because of what happened, I was glad.

Miss Springer, who takes us for it, isn't quite a teacher, but a sort of pastoral person who we're supposed to go and talk to if we've got any problems that aren't school problems. To my living knowledge, no one has ever been.

Her lessons are a bit of a doss; Claire and I use them to send notes to each other or do Top Tens: top ten most luscious boys we know or top ten gorgeous TV soap stars and so on. The other thing we do in Miss Springer's lessons is try and make her go red: she's got ginger hair and a pale skin and she blushes

really easily, so we set someone up to ask a question: 'Miss Springer, what's oral sex?' or 'Miss Springer, what's an orgasm?' and you get points on how red she goes.

What she was talking about in this particular lesson was female reproduction: periods and the pill and how it affects your body and so on. She was rambling on and I wasn't taking all of it in and then she said, 'Of course, it is possible to be pregnant and still have periods.'

I didn't hear what she went on to after that, I was just stuck on that: *Of course, it is possible to be pregnant and still have periods.*

Claire passed me a note but I didn't look down, just sat staring to the front of the class, where Miss Springer stood, smiling and chatting away, trying to be your favourite auntie. I stared so hard her red hair blurred into a mist: *Of course, it is possible to be pregnant and still have periods.*

Claire nudged me and impatiently jiggled the note up and down on my desk to make me take notice of it.

I looked down. *Top Ten of Records with the Word Love in the Title* I read, but it didn't mean a thing.

Without thinking, my hand moved onto my stomach. It didn't feel any different. But was that because I

didn't want it to? Was it just a bit bigger? Rounder? More wobbly?

'There are many different versions of the Pill now and if you do start taking one particular brand and later find that it doesn't agree with you, then do go back to your doctor or clinic,' Miss Springer went on cheerfully.

'I can only think of *five*,' Claire said in a whisper. 'Do you know any more?'

I looked down at the Top Ten again, then back to Miss Springer. Her hair was so frizzy and bright that it almost made me feel sick.

Of course, it is possible to be pregnant and still have periods.

I'd missed one period, last month. I was due on again next week, and I'd decided to go to the doctor or at least mention it to someone if it didn't happen. I wasn't worried, though (that is, I hadn't been worried) because I thought there was no way I could *possibly* be pregnant. How could I be?

It wasn't that I hadn't ever slept with someone: I had, but months ago. I'd slept with someone twice. Not two different boys, I mean, just Luke. But that had been way back in November. We'd split up just after that: I'd seen him snogging with someone else at a Christmas party and we'd had an awful row and I'd

finished with him. The whole of January, February and March, Luke and I hadn't spoken to each other, let alone anything else, and I hadn't thought much about when *it* had happened, other than to wish it had been a bit more exciting and to think what a waste of the big occasion – the losing of the virginity occasion – when what we had between us wasn't strong enough or important enough to survive the first row.

I picked up my pen and began to write on the Top Ten list. *November*, *December*, *January*, *February* I wrote down the page, and then I added, *March* and circled it.

'It' had happened in November, and I'd had periods as usual in December, January and February. I'd missed the March one and if I missed this month's as well I'd be . . . I totted it up . . . five months pregnant! My heart began to beat terribly fast and I started to breathe funny: as if I'd just run a race.

Claire peered over my shoulder at the piece of paper. 'What are you doing?' she hissed.

'Miss Springer?' Naomi called from further down the room.

The vague murmurings and noises in the class stopped suddenly, and everyone sat up and looked to the front.

'Yes, Naomi?' Miss Springer asked, sounding wary. 'What is it?'

'What happens when a man changes sex?' Naomi asked, frowning intently. 'How does he actually do it afterwards?'

There were several giggles round the class.

'Well, I . . . er . . . I don't think I've got enough actual information on the er . . . subject to . . . er . . . ' Miss Springer said, going scarlet.

Five months pregnant.

I didn't believe it. Just didn't believe it.

And yet . . . and yet . . .

I thought about the way I'd been feeling – not exactly sick, but sort of groggy in the mornings. And the way I'd completely and utterly gone off greasy food. And the way my bust had gone up a whole cup size, so that I now I actually had a Wonderbra style cleavage without needing the Wonderbra. And there was something else, too . . .

Claire nudged me again, harder. 'What's up with you?' she asked, as Miss Springer, failing to tell us what transsexuals did in bed, moved quickly onto another subject and wrote on the board: *Hormones: Oestrogen and Progesterone.*

I looked at Claire blankly.

'You're supposed to be writing titles with love in them,' she said, scribbling out my own list of months. 'Are you coming along to the square tonight?'

'Dunno,' I muttered.

The something else – well, I'd tried not to think about it, but when I'd had a period in December I'd been *so* relieved. The something else was: when we'd done it the first time, *we hadn't used anything*. Luke had said that he'd withdraw in time, that it would be all right, nothing would happen, none of the little wriggly tadpole things would get in and make me pregnant. That's what he'd said, and I'd believed him.

All those things, though, added together, came to one *big* thing. If I didn't come on next week, then it was true.

I tried to work it out in my head, counting on my fingers under cover of the desk: if I was five months pregnant now, in April, then I'd have a baby in August.

My heart felt as if it was about to go into overdrive.

A baby.

It couldn't really be true.

I wanted to back-track and ask Miss Springer more about this having periods and still being pregnant

business, but I couldn't do that now we'd moved on to other things. Everyone would think I was weird. Everyone would start thinking things.

But they were going to think things anyway. In a couple more months, when I was the size of an elephant, they'd not only think things, they'd know things. Everyone in the world would know that I, Megan Warrell, was an unmarried mother. Claire, Luke, Mum and my sister Ellie, the girls at school, relations, the teachers, the doctors, the people in the shops, the neighbours, people in the street, the whole world would know.

And I was taking my GCSEs in June, as well. And Claire and I had planned to go away together this summer, and it was my 16th birthday at the beginning of September and I was supposed to be having a big party in the garden of the flats where we lived, with lights in the trees and everything.

I put my head on my hands and closed my eyes. Maybe I was dreaming. Maybe it wasn't really happening.

Claire shook me. 'Don't go to sleep!' she hissed. 'What's up with you this morning, anyway?'

I did *not* want a baby. I hated babies. My friend Emily's mum had a baby and it cried and dribbled all

the time and there was a little crease in its fat neck where bits of food collected.

If the baby knew I didn't want it, maybe it would go away.

The bell for Break went and Miss Springer carefully rubbed the words *Hormones: Oestrogen and Progesterone* off the board, said we were to look after ourselves and that she'd see us next week.

Naomi came over. 'Did you see how red she went?! Even her ears were blushing.'

'So what *do* they do, anyway?' someone said, and Claire and everyone started laughing.

'They haven't got anything there, have they?' Vinny said. 'They have it all taken away. Every bit of it.'

'But they've got to wee,' Claire said. 'They must have something there to wee with!'

She sounded so indignant about it that I started laughing.

'Well, maybe they have a little something left,' Josie said.

'Yeah!' Naomi said eagerly, 'a teeny, weeny little something!'

I laughed and laughed, doubled over with hysterics, and then I found that there were tears running down my face and I was crying.

'It's not that funny,' said Josie.

Claire leant towards me and looked at me closely. 'You're crying!'

'No, I'm not! Don't be stupid!' I shouted, and I picked up my bag and ran out of the room.