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ROCK MY WORLD

LIZA CONRAD

a novel of thongs, spandex,
and love in g minor

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NOT YOUR DADDY'S ROCK AND ROLL



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and Love in G-String

藏书章

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ROCK MY WORLD

Dedicated to

Alexa Milo,
Isabella Diaz,
and Nicholas Diaz

And to Olivia Berryman—
who let me use her first name

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Chapter One

"Rock 'n' Roll Lifestyle"

—Cake

And on the sixth day, God created Nick Hoffman's voice, Liz Phair's lyrics, Kurt Cobain's angst, and Lenny Kravitz's guitar licks. And he saw that it was good. So He just said, "Screw it . . . tomorrow I'm resting."

I looked across the table at Carl Erikson, *Rock On* magazine's editor in chief, as he put down my essay called "The Creation of Rock and Roll" that had run in my high school newspaper. I held my breath.

"This is really quite clever, Livy," he said.

I relaxed a little. "Clever" is a lot better than "What were you thinking, slacker?" or "Cheesy"—and I so wanted this summer gig. I tried to picture Carl forty pounds lighter. With hair. And an earring. In tight jeans. With eyeliner. Back when he was cool, or at least not bald and "pleasantly plump," back when he and my father used to hang out after Babydolls' concerts and smoke an ungodly amount of pot. And Lord knows what else. Trying not to laugh at the image, I simply said, "Thanks."

One time, my father said, when I was four years old, Carl stripped naked and played air guitar in our living room during a party. I don't remember that, which is just as

well. If I'd been able to recall Carl's flaccid—my father remembers that detail perfectly—penis, I was quite positive I would have fallen on the floor in hysterics and wouldn't have been able to do the interview.

"You know what we're asking you to do, right?" Carl raised an eyebrow, his reading glasses perched on the end of his nose.

I nodded.

"Good," he said. "I like the way you write. At seventeen, you're better than half of my staff, and I mean that—though don't tell them or I'll have a mutiny on my hands. *Rock On* is for the MTV set. We're not like *Rolling Stone*. They cover the whole spectrum, and they're oh-so-self-important." He took his glasses off and laid them on his desk. "We want readers mostly your age . . . and into their twenties. We've got gossip and lots of photos. Backstage candid. Interviews with actors. Do you read *Rock On*?"

I nodded, even though I didn't. I thought most of it was crap.

"Of course you do. All teens in your age bracket do."

"Sure," I said convincingly.

"Well . . ." Carl leaned back in his enormous leather chair, a view of the New York skyline behind him. "I don't have to tell you what the Babydolls mean to rock-and-roll history. I'm sure you meet people all the time who tell you what an amazing musician and singer your father was—and is. And the reunion tour is going to be the hottest summer stadium ticket both here and in Europe."

"And Japan," I said. "That's where the tour starts."

"Yeah. The Japanese love them. And now he's got that

American Express commercial. Hysterical. Comes across as über-hip. And with the Wolves opening for the Babydolls on the tour . . . Jesus, I wish I was twenty again.” He smiled, and for a split second I could see the twenty-year-old Carl. His eyes were less tired, and his dimples showed.

“Well, Livy, I’m sold. What I want is a series of . . . you could make them like journal entries . . . from the road. Places like Madison Square Garden, L.A., London. Wherever they are—wherever you are. And then mingled with that, I’d love to read the story of the Babydolls, your life with your parents and the band and so on. I’d love to connect this tour with readers your age—they’ll be able to relate to you.”

“Like Kelly Osbourne without the pink hair. And the foul mouth—most of the time.”

“Yeah. Minus the pink hair and the F-word.” He smiled at me. “I like how you think. You’re quick—like your old man. I’ll give you my e-mail, and Rob’s—he’s a very sharp editor. He’s good, and he’s excited about this.”

“Great.”

“I’d also like you to take digital pictures—candid—of the tour bus, the jet, the crowds, the band, the Wolves.”

The Wolves were opening for my father’s band. Nick Hoffman was so good-looking that grown women got wolf-paw tattoos on their breasts. I remember being five or six and seeing women throwing baby-doll pajamas on the stage at my father. Though tossing underwear and pajamas, and permanently inking your body seem like two entirely different brands of fan obsession.

“Sure.” Photograph Nick Hoffman? I could just imag-

ine my best friend, Cammie, when she heard that: *Can we take his picture with his shirt off?*

"One story a week for the summer tour. Put you on the payroll for two hundred a week; fifty bucks for every photo we use."

"Deal." I said it calmly, but I would have done the stories for free—just to start building up press clippings. My dream was to someday start my own rock magazine. Getting *paid* to write? That meant I could actually *say* I was a writer. For real.

Carl stood and shook my hand, then came out from behind the desk. Suddenly, and without warning, he enveloped me in a bear hug. "God, I remember when you used to toddle around the house in your diapers. Can't believe it. You look like a model, and you're taller than I am."

"That's not hard, Carl," I said, looking down at the top of his bald head. I'm five-foot-eleven. He had to be five-foot-five.

He laughed and put his arm around me.

"So you think if I was as tall as your dad, *I* would have gotten all the groupies?"

"Not unless you put on some spandex back then."

"Oh, I had spandex."

"Well, you know how girls dig musicians. And you can't play anything," I teased.

"I once played the tambourine onstage with the Babydolls. At Wembley."

We left his office in search of my father.

"Tambourines don't count."

"Yeah, well, I had hair then, too." He looked over at me and winked.

Down the hall, I heard females giggling. Lots of them. Along with a cooing sort of fawning noise. It could only be my dad—women still fall all over him. He says it's because he kicked hard drugs, so he didn't age like Keith Richards, the walking cadaver—though that's giving cadavers a bad name. They don't make the corpses on *CSI* appear that bad. My father still looks young. He wears his hair to his shoulders, and it's as thick and dirty blond as when he was twenty-one. He has blue eyes and a lanky build, and he speaks with a raspy voice, like some late-night deejay who's chain-smoking through his night shift. He wears boot-cut jeans, custom-made lizard-skin cowboy boots, and tight black T-shirts that show off his body. He looks, all the time, like what he is: a rock star. All my life, girls tried to be friends with me because of him. It's beyond creepy to go to a friend's house and see a poster of your father in her bedroom—when you know in her fifth-grade mind she's fantasizing about kissing him. *Gross!*

Carl opened the door to *Rock On's* conference room. And there was my dad, Paul James, black Sharpie pen in hand, signing the left breast of some woman, her top unbuttoned to her belly button. She blushed and covered up. The other women were laughing. Not just women my dad's age either. There were interns who looked just a couple of years older than I am—college girls. I rolled my eyes, and Dad came over and kissed me.

“Well, baby?”

Carl smiled. “She's hired. We worked it all out. Have some paperwork to fill out, but it's all set.”

“Cool. That's my girl.”

We hung around the office, took care of the paperwork, and then Dad and I went downstairs, where our limousine waited. My father got his fifth DUI before I was even in junior high. After that, he never bothered to get his license back again. It's kind of pathetic when you have to drive your own parents around. My mother's from England, and she never did learn to operate a car on our side of the road. What a pair they are. At least, however, I have a convertible. I mean, if you have to chauffeur your father around, you might as well drive something you're not embarrassed by. And when I'm not at the wheel, then it's the limo. Toby is our driver/bodyguard. He used to take me to school every day until I got my license. He also keeps all the liquor in the house under lock and key.

In the back of the limousine, Dad grinned. He has this lopsided smile women have been swooning over forever. I think that's half the reason Mom married him.

"You're all grown-up, Livy."

I rolled my eyes. "*Please* don't get all mushy on me."

"Well, it seems like yesterday. I mean, holy shit, I can barely remember you when you were small. And now you've got your first job as a real writer. Next thing it'll be college. One year to you going off to school. Just one more year. Then next thing you know you'll be hosting *Total Request Live*."

"Dad, I'm a writer, not a TV host. They read cue cards."

"Well . . . where did the time go? You make me feel damn old, Liv."

"The time went down the sucking vortex of drugs, Dad. You can't remember stuff because you pretty much went through the 1990s in a blackout."

"Ahh, yes. Because we can't have a conversation without you reminding me of that. And now, unfortunately, I'm constantly aware that you're way too clever with words, courtesy of that very expensive private school you go to. Lucky me . . . now you can mouth off, and I get to remember it all because I have no blackouts to help me forget you're a pain-in-the-ass teenager instead of the sweet little girl I used to carry around backstage." He sighed. "Anyway, I'm sober now."

"Yes. Now."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Dad, sometimes it seems as though you don't really think things through. Have you thought about this tour, Dad? About going back out on the road? I mean, really thought about it?"

"Yeah. At least I think so. Why?"

"Sex, drugs, and rock and roll, Dad. You're going back on tour with Greg Essex and Steve Zane, neither of whom has ever met a drug he didn't like. And you and Charlie have been trying to go to AA. I mean, it's just getting so Mom and I don't have to worry about you. Have you thought about what the tour bus is going to be like? What backstage is going to be like? Not to mention the whole Paris incident. The stuff of legend, Dad. Are you sure you can handle this?"

"Who's the parent here?"

"That's debatable."

"Well, since when did you get so smart?"

"Since I raised myself. Toby went to more of my school events than you did."

He leaned his head back, shut his eyes, and pretended to sleep. I could see Toby's expression in the rearview mirror and knew he was hoping I'd let it drop. I watched my dad fake-sleeping, trying to remember a time when he was responsible, and pretty much recalling none. We rode back to Nyack in silence, and Toby pulled into the gate and up our long driveway. Dad next pretended to wake up. As we got out of the car, he grabbed my hand.

"I love you, Livy. You're my girl and always have been. I hate fighting."

"I know."

Dad let go of my hand and went into the house. I got my purse, feeling aggravated. I was one of those big "surprises" in life. Mom was a backup singer who had fallen in love—like the whole world—with Greg Essex, lead guitarist of the Babydolls, who had the biceps and forearms of a sex god. They were together first; then he broke her heart when he suggested a threesome with another woman. She ran into the arms of his best friend, my father and the band's lead singer, and five months later—just starting to show—my mother married my dad. There was some question about my paternity, but I happen to have my father's blue eyes. They are this weird icy blue. And I'm his. Much as I sometimes wish I weren't.

Our house—for a couple who never had any other children—is way too big. Rock-star big. Eight bedrooms. Which is okay, I guess, since there always seems to be *someone* crashing—usually a musician. I once spent three months down the hall from David Drake, the bassist from the Kung-fu Cowboys. He had a nervous breakdown and spent the

entire summer building model airplanes in one of our guest rooms. Whatever.

Our house is on the Hudson River in Nyack, New York. Kind of trendy. A perky talk-show host who never ceases gabbing about her children on the air lives next door. Guess what? The kids are raised entirely by nannies. I'm surprised Ms. Perky Talk-show Host even knows their names. But we can barely see their house through the big pines that surround our property. Our house is pretty, with an immense back lawn that touches the water. I live on the third floor, in what used to be the attic. My parents finished it off so I now have my own living room and bedroom. And that means no more sharing the bathroom with musician houseguests.

I shut the car door and started to head up to the front porch. Toby cleared his throat. "Liv?"

I turned around. Toby weighs a good 280—all muscle—and he shaves his head, but he has this enormous handlebar mustache that curls around his mouth and makes him look like some kind of weird Kewpie doll.

"Yeah?"

"He's trying."

"I know."

"Cut him some slack. He's going to need a lot of support on this tour." I nodded. Toby was in AA too, but unlike Dad, Toby had been sober for twenty years or something like that. My father pretty much fell off the wagon about every six months. Now he had nearly a year under his belt. I hoped he could stay out of trouble on the tour—no women, no drugs, no alcohol. The last tour ended with him in rehab. The tour before that with two nights in jail.

"I know, Toby. We're all worried." I turned and climbed up the steps and into the house, and then kept on going—all the way up to my room. When I was little, in my mind I used to pretend Toby was my father.

When I got upstairs I turned on my stereo and popped a CD in—one I burned myself. I make a CD every week of all my favorites. That changes from day to day, song to song. Sometimes I can get into a "phase"—like only Nine Inch Nails for a week—usually when I have PMS. Sometimes I hear an old song—from my parents' generation, like the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil," or music from the Seattle grunge era—and I can literally listen to the same song two hundred times. It's in me, part of me. I put on my current set of favorites and started jumping up and down on my bed, thinking about the assignment I had just scored. *Holy shit! I got it! I got it! Rock On!*

I called Cammie, my best friend, who had begged for two whole weeks and talked her parents into letting her go on tour with us for the summer. They thought it would be a great opportunity for her to see the world. I wasn't sure what they thought of my father's reputation, but I also knew they were so close to a divorce that maybe it didn't matter—just having Cammie away while they tried to work things out would be good. They were letting her older brother live in Boston that summer. He's going to college there. Anyway, her father could never say no to her. She had him twisted around her little pinkie.

"I got it, Cam!" I screamed into my cell phone. I had stopped jumping and flopped straight backward down on my bed. For some weird reason, I love doing that—except

for the one time I hit my head on the wall and had to get stitches.

“Oh, my God! That’s so awesome!”

“They’re even *paying* me.”

“Wow! Money is good. Next thing you know, you’ll have your own reality show. Paul James’s daughter as rock-star critic. You could call it *Livy’s Real World*.”

“No, I think my life has enough reality it in already.”

“I’m so happy for you.”

“I can’t believe it. My name in print . . . in a real magazine.”

“You’ll get into NYU’s journalism program for sure.”

For as long as I can remember, Cammie and I have been planning to go to New York University together. She has always wanted to study filmmaking. She used to wander around with a camcorder all the time. We have visions of sharing an apartment in Greenwich Village.

“You excited?” I asked her. We’d been planning this summer tour together as soon as the Babydolls announced their concert dates.

“Two days and counting!” She sounded like she was hyperventilating.

“I know. I am so psyched. And remember, Cam, *one* suitcase. You can’t get nuts.” I was picturing clothes from one end of her room to the other.

“I know. One *big* suitcase.”

“Yes, one big suitcase and one carry-on. But it’s not like the suitcase can be the size of your closet, so I don’t know how you’re whittling down all your crap into one bag.”

“I’ll manage.”