



"A wonderfully written and evocative story of a mother and daughter parted by circumstance and joined by music.

I heartily recommend it."

— IRVINE WELSH,

AUTHOR OF *TRAINSPOTTING*

I WANNA BE YOUR
JOEY RAMONE

STEPHANIE KUEHNERT

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**Praise for Stephanie Kuehnert's
brilliant debut novel
*I WANNA BE YOUR JOEY RAMONE***

"Stephanie Kuehnert has written a sucker-punch of a novel, raw and surprising and visceral, and like the best novelists who write about music, she'll convince you that a soul can indeed be saved by rock and roll."

—John McNally, author of *America's Report Card*

"Kuehnert's love of music is apparent on every page in this powerful and moving story. Her fresh voice makes this novel stand out in the genre, and she writes as authentically about coming of age as she does punk rock. She's titled the book after a great song by Sleater-Kinney, and both that band, and the iconic Joey Ramone, would be proud of this effort."

—Charles R. Cross, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*

"Some books play at trying to be 'edgy'; some books try to hit the right notes; but Kuehnert's prose doesn't notice labels. It just is—which is the purest kinda edge. Teeth. Punk. Combat boots. Attitude. Feminism. Family. Girls with guitars. Relationships that jack you up. Sharp things of the not-good kind. Friendships. Love. . . . It's all here; it's all pure and real. I loved it."

—Melissa Marr, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Ink Exchange*

“A wonderfully written and evocative story of a mother and daughter parted by circumstance and joined by music. I heartily recommend it.”

—Irvine Welsh, author of *Trainspotting*

“*I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone* is intense, raw and real; a powerful and heartbreaking weave of Emily Black’s public dream of making music and the intensely private one of finding her elusive, missing mother. Emily, a gutsy, passionate and vulnerable girl, knows exactly what she wants and strides straight into the gritty darkness after it, risking all and pulling no punches, but leaving us with the perfect ending to a fierce and wild ride.”

—Laura Wiess, author of *Such a Pretty Girl*

“Stephanie Kuehnert writes with dramatic flare and all the right beats, as she spins a story with punk rock lyrics, big dreams, and one girl not afraid to reach out to her lost mother through music, while enduring intense journeys in between. A debut like an unforgettable song, you’ll want to read *I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone* again and again.”

—Kelly Parra, author of *Graffiti Girl*

**Learn more about debut author Stephanie Kuehnert
and see her mix CD song picks for
I WANNA BE YOUR JOEY RAMONE
at www.stephaniekuehnert.com.**

This title is also available as an eBook

For Mom

I like the comfort in knowing that women are the only future in rock 'n' roll.

—Kurt Cobain

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The foundation of this book and my desire to write in general is music. This story was born of my fantasies about a rock world where girls rule, and I can only hope it pays fitting tribute to the women who've inspired me. Sure, Nirvana gave voice to millions of freaks like me and the Sex Pistols introduced me to punk rock, but the first time I heard Courtney Love scream that she was "pretty on the inside," it saved my angry, thirteen-year-old girl soul. Then, ten years later, when rock 'n' roll was suffering at the hands of macho dudes and whiny Pearl Jam knockoffs, I heard Brody Dalle of the Distillers, and she restored my faith. There's also Sleater-Kinney (one of whose songs this book is named for), Mia Zapata (gone too soon), Babes in Toyland, Patti Smith, PJ Harvey, Kim Deal, Kim Gordon, and Pink, among many others—but

my biggest rock star heroes are my friends, Heather Lynn of the Capricorns and Tamra Spivey of Lucid Nation.

Saving the best for last: Scott Lewis, love of my life, your unending encouragement and sense of humor keeps me going. And to my mom, Nancy Napp, who I admire more than any rock star, who has supported me more than anyone, and who is responsible for everything I am, this book is for you.



I'm your worn-in leather jacket
I'm the volume in your fucked-up teenage band
A pack of smokes and a six-pack
I'm the dreams you had walkin' down the railroad tracks
You and me

I'm your first taste of romance
I'm your first broken heart on a Saturday night
Guys like us ain't got no chance
But I'm the thing that keeps you and me alive
But not forever

So take me down the road
Take me to the show
It's something to believe in
That no one else knows
But don't take me for granted

—Social Distortion
"Don't Take Me for Granted"
Sex, Love and Rock 'n' Roll

Rock Gods

Altars. Saviors. Rock 'n' roll. I braved my fear of spiders, dust plumes as thick as L.A. smog, and the stench of dog piss that the last owner of the house had let permeate the basement to tirelessly search my father's record collection for my next holy grail. Sitting on that cold, dirty, painted cement floor in my blue jeans, with the Wisconsin winter creeping through the tired walls and windows of our house, I dug through crates of albums, feeling their perfect square edges poke between my fingers. The slap of plastic dust cover against plastic dust cover was so satisfying, but the best moment came when I found the record I wanted, slipped it out of its paper jacket and onto the record player. The needle skipped and skittered for a few seconds until it found its groove, the first chord scratching its way through the speakers, a catchy chorus reverberating in my ears. Earthquakes. Rock gods.

Music was in my blood. My mother left me with my father when I was four months old so she could follow the beginnings of

punk rock around the country. Detroit. New York. L.A. We never heard from her again. Neither of us was resentful. She had her reasons. At least that's what I told myself.

Two months after she disappeared, my dad moved us from our tiny apartment in Chicago to Carlisle, Wisconsin, the small farming town fifteen miles beyond the Illinois border where he and my mother had grown up. When we first returned to the land of lush fields, acres of corn, and barns that sat fat and yawning at the ends of dirt roads, people talked. It was just that kind of place, a small, tight-knit community; any deviation from the norm was grounds for discussion.

Before areas were incorporated, when land was simply land, Carlisle was born of a general store that farmers flocked to from miles away. Back then, the men talked about their work while picking up seed and parts for aging equipment. Their wives came for cloth and the foods they could not raise themselves. They exchanged advice about family matters and gossiped about the other women who had asked them for advice.

As the years passed, the government bought up land to build roads, and corporations turned family farms into giant factory farms. People moved closer together, and from the general store sprung a main street scattered with businesses. Two miles away a food-processing plant opened. The sprawling community shrunk into a town made up of the farms that remained nearby and the former farming families who took jobs at the plant or opened storefronts. Side streets attached themselves to Main Street in a neat grid near the center of town, but farther out, roads meandered around fields. From above, the layout of Carlisle looked

like straight hair—parted in the middle by Main Street—suddenly gone curly at the ends.

But everyone still knew one another. Everyone still gathered in front of the store or at the tavern to talk. No modernization would ever change that.

I don't want you thinking I'm from some completely backwoods town, though. I grew up with all the modern comforts: indoor plumbing, cable TV. What set Carlisle apart from urban areas was the way everyone clung to history. Not like this-war-started-on-this-date history, more like where-was-your-grandfather-during-the-blizzard-of-1921 history. From snippets of conversation, I knew who I was, who my family was, and how we fit into town lore. The most popular topic from the time I came to Carlisle until the day I left was the high school football team. The second most common topic was the people who didn't seem to care about normal things like football, the people who just weren't quite right.

Like Paula Collins, whose parents had both perished in a barn fire when she was sixteen. She inherited all the money they'd squirreled away and the land they lived on, and she never left, never married, never rebuilt that barn. Or Norma Lisbon, who was well on her way to being the town drunk even before her son, Eric, killed himself. After Eric died, her husband stopped speaking, became a total mute, and Norma was drunk, disorderly, and doing something gossip-worthy nearly every day.

Or like my family . . .

My parents, Michael Black and Louisa Carson, had created quite a scene in 1974, when they sped out of town on my father's motorcycle. As a teenager, I walked into many

discussions about it at the local gas station and grocery store, but my favorite version, the only one I took as gospel, was the one my mother's best friend, Molly Parker, told me.

It was an unusually warm day in April when Michael and Louisa fled, Louisa's eighteenth birthday, and she made sure all of Carlisle knew that she was an adult and finally free to leave the tiny town that had smothered her with old-fashioned morals. My father concentrated on the drive, thinking the only way to save the girl he loved from all the anger that ate away at her heart was to help her escape. His black leather jacket and wild, coffee-colored curls made him look so dark he almost blended in with the road, which was appropriate because before Michael Black was seen in the company of Louisa Carson, no one in Carlisle had ever noticed him. As she had since she arrived in the town at the age of ten, the pretty but untamed doctor's daughter, Louisa, was the one causing the ruckus. Burning down Main Street on the back of his Harley, she held on to Michael with one arm, her bleached-blond hair tangling like corn silk in the wind as she turned dangerously in her seat to shout obscenities and shake her fist at Carlisle. Outside of Carlisle Groceries and Meats, a crowd of middle-aged women doing their weekly shopping and work-worn men picking up packs of smokes on their way to the job gathered to gawk at the spectacle. Louisa tugged off her black high heels and whipped one through the window of the grocery store, the other against the Old Style sign that flickered above the doorway of JT's Tavern. With that final act of aggression, she wrapped both arms around my father's chest and never looked back.

So, when my father returned almost three years later in