

Episode 10

Dear Young Rocker

Wow it almost feels wrong to call you that now since you are *technically* an adult. But I know you still feel like a kid, and hey so do I. Anyway, congratulations for getting out of high school alive, first of all. The next few years will be a strange period in your life - the period where you are between bands and at this very moment you are entirely music-less. I know you couldn't decide if you should bother to bring your bass to your dorm room but I'm glad you did as a reminder even though you'll just throw it in the closet and try not to look at it. Sorry but that won't stop music from pulling at you. You'll feel a deep painful longing this entire freshman year and you won't know why. It will be so intense you'll reach for whatever you can near you to stop it but it will always be the wrong thing and it will never make you feel better.

You don't know that what you are longing for the two things a band gave you - connection with other humans in the one way that really works for you, and a feeling of self-confidence the only self-confidence you've ever had in fact. Even if you didn't let yourself enjoy your confidence or admit that you were proud of yourself when you played, you still got up there in front of people and played parts you wrote and even sang words you wrote, so that's saying something. So now without that you have a hole in you that you don't know how to fill. You think you just want to just be normal, but you aren't and as I've said before that's OK. Making friends in the way you are supposed to is still a completely mysterious process to you that always seems frustratingly easy for others. Not being great at starting conversations means your only chance for connection is with those who make an effort to engage with *you* and since you are one of the few girls at a mostly male school, well, that means....the boys are coming to get you. Even though that's not the kind of connection you're seeking, you'll try to fill that hole you feel with it. Spoiler alert but when we try to soothe what's missing in our lives with other people we stand to lose and feel pretty crummy. You're going to struggle out there on your own for a while until you realize the real problem, but it's just one more thing to do wrong before you realize how to do it right.

February 14, 2008

I'm sitting on a crummy broken futon in a dorm room. The right half of it is all the way on the ground. My lower back is hurting because i've been leaning to the side to compensate. I look around the room. It's really dark in here except for some colored christmas lights hanging around the ceiling. A Yes song is playing and i'm feeling myself rise and fall with the chord changes. A skinny boy with reddish hair is sitting next to me. James. He's my friend. He put on the Yes song and I'm surprised that I like it. James is my first real friend here at this depressing college in this depressing city. One of his roommate's is shuffling around putting stuff in his backpack. He's a sophomore and has giant poofy black hair and thick black glasses and always

has something funny to say but he's smart so it's not annoying. I think he's going to see his girlfriend. As he steps out the door he says *Happy Valentine's Day kids*. James snorts at that and I roll my eyes and think like *yeah right obvious that we're just best friends duh*. We decide to make the lumpy futon flat to see if it will get more comfortable that way and we lay down next to each other. Laying next to James, I feel connected to someone for the first time in a while. I feel like he gets me as *me* and not just a girl to makeout with - we're both going to be music majors next year and play bass. We sit in here and talk for hours at a time about our high school bands or how we're gonna practice for the music audition we'll have to take over the summer to get into the major - or sometimes we just put on songs on youtube for each other or mess around on his bass or guitar. I remember the day we met in our College Writing I class. The class is so easy I can hardly believe it. Our homework reminds me of freshman year high school English. How could anyone seriously still not know how to write a topic sentence or how to use periods and commas? Five paragraph essays? Oh my God. I've gotten an A plus on everything I turn in. I feel like a genius in there, there's even a kid who sits to my left, he tears his notebook paper into little tiny pieces and puts them in his mouth and swallows them right down. I try not to see it or hear it. Anyway, one day it was like seventy five degrees out and we were sitting outside on the stairs in the sun before class started and James was telling another kid that he plays the bass and I said "I play bass too."
"What! YOU play BASS?" He said. We started hanging out and soon enough showing each other songs that always make us cry. I finally found someone who gets it.

Right now even though we're laying like this and it seems like if this were a movie something would have to happen between us, I don't think I want him to touch me. It would screw up this one connection I finally have, and I just don't think I want to be touched at all right now anyway, I've let too many people I'm not that into kiss me just because I never think it will actually happen until it does, right up to the last second when it's too late to say no. I'd probably just let that happen again now too before I'd even have a chance to figure out whether I want to or not. For some reason I don't even know whether I want it to happen or not until it does happen. So I'm glad at least this one guy can control himself while I figure all this stuff out. He must just really like me as a friend too. But still, I think I want him to *want to* to touch me - I think - I guess so I can know I'm good enough - wantable. Is that like totally messed up? I realize we haven't been talking for a while. I'm still not sure if I like college, it's been a strange few months.

When I open the door to my first ever dorm room my parents say "they must have given you a single." The hideous pale yellow painted cinder block walls are way too close together to have two people in here at once. The dark brown fake wood paneling on the closets and crappy vinyl flooring, even the musty smell - it all makes me feel like I'm in a hospital room. My first thought is that I probably won't last a week in this place without feeling depressed. All the campus buildings are hideous blocky concrete slabs from the early 60's or imposing yellow brick from the early 1900's when the school was a textile college. There's nothing cute or collegey here,

it's just some ugly buildings in the middle of a crumbling mill city on a stinky river. When we drove around the campus, the streets reminded me of Worcester with all the crappy loud cars with fins on them and sketchy looking triple deckers with trash on the porch. Right as we finish loading all of my boxes of stuff into the room a big blonde girl walks in. So I don't have a single. My dad insists on taking a picture of the two of us together with his dorky digital camera even though he has a new Razr phone which takes pretty good pictures and even though I could tell right away my roommate is not the kind of person I am going to be friends with. When my parents leave, me and my new roommate start putting our clothes away in the creepy closets. I've purposely been dressing way preppier than I did in high school to hopefully fit in more but it feels fake. She asks me if I like Abercrombie and I say "Oh, I have some pieces from there" - my mom had gotten me some stuff off the clearance rack - I wouldn't actually step foot in an Abercrombie store, they smell gross. My roommate laughs at me and says "pieces" like it's a stupid word. I feel dorky - I probably got that from watching What Not to Wear, like I thought that's what girls who actually care about shopping say. I guess that's what you get for faking it.

September 2007:

The shuttle bus which is just an old bumpy school bus always makes me car sick but I still feel like i'll get lost or mugged if I try to walk from one campus to another so here I am bumping along in the back. It's so grossly hot in here. I'm with a couple other bio major girls. They smell like smelly perfume stuff which makes me more sick. It's Friday. We're all coming back from South Campus and i'm trying to be friends with these people even though i've already kind of given up on them a few weeks into the semester. The girls are talking about how they like Victoria's Secret underwear. One of them says she likes to surprise her boyfriend with new lingerie and thinks he'll propose to her as soon as she graduates. Ew. The group talks about going to the mall this weekend to shop and then if they can find someone to get them wine and how they like Cabernet or something. Only pieces of this are getting into my brain because it's so irrelevant and stupid to me. I wonder if I'll ever make friends with girls if I have to talk about crap like this. I can't even pay attention to it. I doubt any of them listen to any good bands. I am a girl though, shouldn't I know how to talk to them?

Sometimes I really can't tell if i'm better than everyone or the worst person who's ever lived. Am I just doing all of it all wrong all the time?

When we get off the bus at East Campus where we all live, I go straight to the cafeteria. I decide to try the chicken again because it has a different name but it's the same grayish brownish sauce on grisly dark meat full of fat and tendony stuff so I throw it away and get a slice of pizza. This cafeteria is like 10 times bigger than my high school. I had hoped in college I could be more of an inconspicuous loner. I mean no one seems to notice if I sit alone but I still feel like looked at by the groups of people happily yelling about beer or whatever around me. I see some blonde curly hair across the room - it's the guy I made out with. The guy I cheated on Dan with. The guy who has a girlfriend himself. He's laughing with friends too. Because he's a normal

college human, unlike. I've met most of the people at his table but I decide to get out of there before he sees me so I don't have to go through the hell of trying to talk to a group of people who I feel like don't speak my language for the second time today.

I decide to take a walk down the river path before going back to my room. As I'm walking, I think about the guy I saw in there... Matt. He looks kind of like if, uh, McCauly Culkin had grown up to be cute instead of kind of weird looking. The same pale eyes and hair and skin. We met because I had noticed at an opening ceremony thing that he was wearing an Incubus shirt and my heart started pounding when I saw it because I knew it was a chance to meet someone. *I'm going to initiate contact with another human*, I thought. I did it. I somehow said normal get to know you things and he said them back to me. To make a long story short we played air hockey at the gym a bunch of times, we listened to music in his quad room, and we talked about our majors and how cool science is and if college is worth it and after a while, finally, we talked about the people we were dating. I was still with Dan, technically, but I hadn't felt the need to mention it until Matt told me he had a girlfriend back home who was younger and still in highschool. That made it seem OK to spend all this time together and now I definitely didn't have to think about whether I was in love with him since I just legally couldn't be.

I keep walking and I see some pine trees and think about Dan. We used to hike together sometimes. I should really be thinking about Dan more than I do. It's too easy to forget about him being an hour away from me. I need to definitively decide if I love him anymore. I must not love him though because if I did I wouldn't have done this, right? When he came to visit me I was embarrassed at how he had his Nintendo DS in its case clipped to his belt loop with a beaner like a middle schooler and his t-shirt tucked into his shorts with a belt. Only huge nerds tuck in their shirts. It's like really 90's looking. Well, I think love might be fake anyway. Or i've just stopped feeling it already at nineteen - I'm over it. Love seemed really important in high school and so like black and white. I had tried to make myself love Ricky and Nick when I dated them and I thought I really loved Dan but now i'm starting to think it's all bullshit and who you're dating and hooking up with doesn't have anything to do with love. I don't know.

So one night I found myself sitting on a log by the dirty Merrimack river with Matt, and after inching towards each other for like three hours while I was shivering and had to pee really bad we looked at each other a while, and finally kissed. Somehow having to pee made it feel more intense. It also made me feel happy. He looked happy too but then he started tearing up because he was thinking about his girlfriend. And I pretended to feel really guilty. But I didn't feel guilty ... I felt a charge of energy running through me. I hadn't felt that since the last time I had played a show and had people clapping and headbanging, whatever that feeling was. Maybe this is ridiculous to say but it's the kind of feeling that makes being alive worth it. The rest of the story is too sad to mention. Basically his adorable wonderful girlfriend came to visit, she suspected what was up, we stopped hanging out, I dumped Dan after first lying about Matt and

then a few weeks later finally admitting i'd kissed someone else. Dan said I was a bad person. I guess I am. The end.

Walking feels good. It feels better than sitting still especially when my mind is just going and going like this. I look over the railing down at the river. It kind of smells like a trash can and there's a plastic bag stuck in the sticks poking out of the water and a poor little duck is trying to eat it. I want to stop thinking about dumb boys and just experience what's around me right now but my brain won't let me for more than a couple seconds. It's all so confusing. I get so caught up in the feeling of someone wanting or worrying that they don't that sometimes I don't even know if I like them or not. It's weird. Like sometimes I definitely do although it takes me a while to figure it out like kinda until it's too late - like Matt - and sometimes I definitely don't. Like this creepy guy who was in my freshman orientation group this summer who kept sitting behind me and giving me massages when we were sitting at different talks. His hands smelled like he didn't wash them after he went to bathroom. It was really uncomfortable having people see it happening but I didn't want to look like a crazy girl and make a scene. I just wanted to be invisible so I didn't even talk to anyone else in our group in hopes no one would notice me and this guy hanging all over me. At one point we were touring the dorms, we were looking around in an empty room, and suddenly this guy closed the door and locked it. He pushed me against the windows and said something about how friends can hookup sometimes or something and started making out with me and I just really didn't know what to do. I knew he had a girlfriend. He just mentioned her. I just tried not to seem scared and like kinda went with it as gross as it was because I had no idea how crazy he was, who knows what someone so unpredictable would do if I told him off. It almost felt like I had somehow caused it to happen by letting him give me all those massages. But I never said I liked it I never asked for it I just felt too weird to tell him not to. After a few minutes he let me get away. I gave him a weird fake smile and left. I can't believe I smiled at him. I could have stopped it obviously but I didn't. Maybe I am really a bad person.

I've gone over and over it in my mind and don't really even understand how it happened. That's one more reason I pretty much never leave my room or hang out with anyone. What if he finds me again and tries to go even further next time. Ugh.

Well I mean really I want to be wanted but by someone who I admire and think is cool and smart and thinks i'm cool and smart back. (scoring) I want someone to be as fascinated by life and the universe as I am and to think my take on stuff is really original and that my jokes are funny and that i'm smart. I want to be wanted as like a soul or something not just a body. I want to be known the way I was in a band - as a creative spirit. I need that connection again. That feeling of being both way more than just a body and somehow also more at home in my body that playing music gave me... How do normal people get that? How do I be normal?

My head is swirling and I feel like it's inevitably time to go back to my room, so I stop staring at the duck and walk away. As I'm approaching the front door of my dorm building, I see another

guy I'm not sure I want to see. He has super long curly hair. I actually sort of know him from high school because our bands played together at one of the Sterling Battle of the Bands. Even though I've wanted a music friend and I thought it was cool when he came into my room the other day and played my bass I feel weird around him. I can tell he's working up the courage to ask me out and that makes me want to throw up - not cause he's terrible or anything, he's nice it's just because it's, I dunno it's a weird feeling, I don't know how to talk to people, and his hair is kind of a turn off to me. Plus he's always smoking on our stoop and I hate the smell of cigarette breath because it reminds me of the smell of my mom trying to kiss me. I walk up to him since I can't just run by, "Hey Chelsea."

"Hey Nick."

"So what you got going on this weekend?"

I tell him I might drive home but I might try to stay here for once. He says if I stay we should go out and get dinner together. I feel myself turning red. "Yeah um maybe yeah ok see you later." And I go into my dorm. *Crap*. I've had enough social interaction today I hope my roommate isn't in, but I hear the Chris Brown playing before I open the door. She's looking in the mirror and brushing her hair. She says I should come out with her to the frats tonight there's a party in a basement she knows about. These "frats" by the way are not even actual frats. They're just a row of dumpy houses full of dudes that drink too much on a sketchy looking street. Maybe I'm being a baby or too under the influence of my parents but it doesn't seem safe to hang out in a random basement full of drunk older guys who are total strangers. There are way more guys than girls at this school so we'd be... looked at more than I like. It would probably be all other people like her who can't do their own homework and just talk about dumb stuff and I'm horrible at making conversations with more than one person at a time, even dumb people. Am I just sabotaging myself from making friends or does everyone here just suck? I tell her to go ahead without me and I say I have to study. Which is kind of true.

It's a relief when she leaves. This year I've pretty much only listened to music to try and help me get through my math and science homework. I put on my long playlist of every Daft Punk album in a row and crack open my stupid Chemistry textbook. I know all the songs by heart on this playlist at this point. The beats make me feel like I could keep going forever even if my brain can't concentrate for two seconds and some parts of the songs are actually pretty emotional for dance music. After five minutes of highlighting nearly every word I realize I am just thinking about bands and boys and whatever while the words on the page have passed before my eyes. I try to read them again and they seem unfamiliar but then I'm back in my head after ten seconds. Sometimes I wonder if I like science enough or even if I'm just not smart enough to be a scientist. I give up and open my laptop to go on this website where you click a button and it pops up with some random stuff you might be interested in. *Five minutes* I tell myself. After 30, I look at my water bottle collection. I have one of every size of Poland Springs water bottles from the little tiny ones right up to the gallon jug. I put my chembook up on the top shelf and pull out a roll of packing tape and I use my desk to start making this Frankenstein pan pipe type instrument with all the bottles. I start playing it along to Daft Punk. Then I open Photobooth and do a modeling session with it and put one of the pictures on Facebook to show my accomplishment.

In Photobooth I can see my roommates *stupid* Chris Brown poster staring at the back of my head. When she put it up she'd said "I think he's fiiiine, don't you?" I did not agree. To me his goofy smile makes him look too stupid to say anything interesting. Everytime I look at it I want to draw a unibrow on him, but I guess most people don't find unintelligence to be as much of a turn off as I do.

Dear Young Rocker,

I know you're confused and lost and lonely again even though you thought college would be different. I'm sorry.

You're seeking to fill the hole music left in you. You want the feeling you had when you were on stage performing for a room full of people with your bandmates sharing something and feeling proud to be yourself. It's a feeling so good you feel like you'll never have to eat again or kiss anyone because you were totally fulfilled by it. Look, don't completely berate yourself for your transgressions or for wanting to feel appreciated and wanted, that's super normal and it makes sense that you've found another way to get some connection but it's too bad most of it's been with people who don't really respect you whatsoever and who you're not sure you even really like yourself. It feels confusing right now but I promise it's pretty easy to figure out if you don't like someone. You're just ignoring your instincts and paying too much attention to physical stuff. You have a young hormonal body that will still respond to a potential romantic partner even if they aren't your cup of tea or even completely bad news - your hunch was right -- making out has nothing to do with love - you can makeout with people you barely even like and it can still feel good. That's what the age you're at is for in some regards, figuring this all out. And no matter how much you love the person you're dating, you can still be physically attracted to other people too. That whole Disney Princess I'm saving myself for the Prince's one true kiss bullshit - that ain't real.

However -- that one stinky guy from orientation - that was more than him not respecting you, that was straight-up completely non-consensual contact. He never asked if you wanted any of those massages he just did it which immediately made it *your* burden to stop it in public in front of a bunch of people who you wanted to not make a weird first impression on. So as a shy person this made you feel kinda trapped. Unfortunately our culture won't really acknowledge how bad that all is until a good ten years from where you are in 2007. For you it feels like your fault because you've never had consent explained to you. It's a big topic to unpack but i'll try to sum it up like this - if someone tries to makeout with you without asking if they can kiss you first

or you using very clear body language to show you want to kiss them or actually telling them that you want to - well then they are in the wrong. You didn't do anything wrong. You shouldn't feel stupid and like you can't tell anyone about it. You were understandably shy and scared. And he took advantage of that shyness. Rest assured though, he eventually will get kicked out of school for doing the same kinda stuff to someone else who luckily is able to speak up about it. That's all the time I have to talk about that thing for now but it's important. And it's all part of you feeling lost and alone before college even officially starts. Bad people are good at finding people like you who are having trouble making connections and taking advantage of them. So dear young rocker please keep that in mind. Although there's nothing wrong with being a loner if that's how you want to be, know that the lions always have their eyes on the gazelles who wander away from the group.

As for school stuff: you do have a passion for learning about science, but I agree you probably aren't a scientist. However, you are perfectly *smart enough* to be one if you should choose. You aren't stupid, you just have difficulty with attention, which is not your fault. Sorry to let you down again, but you probably have ADHD. It sucks to learn something's wrong with you, but at least you can stop beating yourself up. You didn't have enough information about ADHD to know that it's at the root of a lot of the things you've found impossible your whole life such as participating in a group conversation or paying attention to a teacher or a friend if any other noise is going on. You aren't *just naturally bad* at being social or doing homework or cleaning your room. Your brain just handles it all differently than other people. I wish I could help you stop beating yourself up for being messy and over-sensitive and scattered. I still lose my glasses, keys and phone every single damn day and forget where i'm going when i'm driving or in the middle of a sentence and forget to introduce people to each other and to say the normal things you're supposed to say. But this curse is also a blessing because we wouldn't be so creative without it.

The other thing that I want you to know about you is that you're... how do I say this without pissing you off ... well I'll use the term given to you by a guy you encounter later in college - as he says you're a *fox*. That is not an understatement. Not that your physical appearance is all that matters or that it's what you want to be recognized or cared about for - I know it's the opposite. I'm not saying that. I am just saying it's helpful to know how you impact other people. You don't need to lose any weight even though that's all you think about. If how you look renders other people unable to speak, well even if it feels narcissistic to admit that, that info can help you. It's a power issue. Just like in high school, you currently feel powerless and alone. These guys that show interest in you - you don't need to let them touch you if you don't want to. If you would just step back and take the uncomfortable step of admitting you're attractive, you could recognize that you actually have a good deal of power over these dumb boys because of it and use it to just feel good about yourself rather than flipping back and forth between hiding from and or using their desire for you as validation that you are a wantable person. You are very wantable. You don't need anyone else to prove that. Let them all go on their way and be yourself or you'll end up being a selfish narcissist and hurting others because of it and you're starting to track that way - yes hating yourself is actually a form of narcissism. Any time you're just thinking about yourself all the time - whether good or bad - that's a narcissist. For instance

thinking “am I better than everyone else or worse than everyone else” is totally narcissistic because the answer is you’re just as kinda good and kinda bad as anybody else, but you’re 19 so being super self-centered is a normal thing you’re going through and you’ll work through it eventually. Just know real self-esteem will never come from someone else’s attention. And how unfair this all is to Dan. Oh my god. There’s a lot you need to work on. I know it’s sad thinking about this whole freshmen year being somewhat wasted but it will be a relief to learn why you’ve done certain things you’ve done and to appreciate the incredible amount of creativity this supposed disorder actually provides you with. You’ll forgive yourself for a lot.

I know you’re craving connection and that’s another part of it. It feels impossible to make friends of any gender, especially girls, but just like in highschool you are blaming that on having the wrong type of people around you - you write them off as too nerdy or too preppy, partiers or into the wrong type of music and assume from the sample size of the 5 people you’ve talked to that there’s no one to be friends with here. Well that certainly would make you a bad scientist. First of all there are definitely people in Lowell who you can connect with and strangely enough you will meet a ton of them many years after you graduate when you finally figure out how to talk to other humans, but also there’s the bigger issue of just giving people a chance and not giving up so quickly. Believe it or not you can have friends and even date people with different interests if you value the same things. Or you can start by being friendly with people you aren’t a 100% match for and through them meet other people who are more up your alley you don’t need every person you meet to be the perfect friend you’ll have for life.

But you don’t really know what you value yet, you’re still trying to detangle your parents influence on your worldview and create your own like most people your age. Learning about yourself and how you work is a process that really never ends no matter how old you get. Well, see you next time kid.