

Episode 7

Dear Young Rocker,

Welcome to junior year of highschool. For some people this is when they hit their stride, find out where they fit in and start feeling confident at school. Those people are different than you. Maybe socially things are getting even more complex and hard but musically you are doing pretty great. You are going to make more mistakes but you are also going to make some choices that are good for you, even though they are going to be very difficult. A lot of the time changing your course for the better and breaking ties with negative situations creates big waves and to you that might seem like you're still screwing it all up and back down because of the recourse – but I promise as scary as it all is you are on the right path. I wish I could hold your hand but you are meant to walk it alone. Like really alone. And that's OK. Hey as I write this it's a Friday and I know I'm hanging alone tonight, maybe even tomorrow night too. To you this might sound like a reason to say mean things about yourself but to me it says freedom. I'm gonna dye my hair pink and watch embarrassing TV shows and maybe even write a song for the first time in a while. Being alone isn't bad at all my friend. Ok tell us what's up.

Theme Music

I walk into the big room (carpet sound) and sit in a plastic chair in front of the timpani and xylophones. The tall kid with curly blonde hair and sideburns is already sitting in there but no one else. He's got headphones on. I can't hear what he's listening to. He gives me a sort of nod with a shy side eye. He starts banging on the music stand in front of him with two pencils. I put my own headphones on. I like the days that I have music theory first period. I can go into the super quiet classroom that's set off from the rest of the school and sit there before the bell rings instead of having to be in the busy hallways trying to not get freaked out and overwhelmed by all the people talking.

I can tell this guy is on the same page. We haven't talked yet even though we've been the only two in the room a few times now. I look at him drumming and have an idea.

I wave at him to take off his headphones.

“Uh, hey do you play, like, real drums?”

“Yeah. Um. Sort of. Sure”

“Um....do you want to be in a band?”

“Oh wow uh gee uh ok...?”

He starts blushing.

It's kind of cute.

So - when summer started Ricky and I didn't talk to Nick. We played some shows with this freshman kid named Bobby. He was pretty OK at drums and he was always really happy to practice and play gigs unlike grumpy Nick. Ricky had to show him how to play in three for part of one of our really long songs but other than that he did good. He really liked the Killers and my Chemical Romance and wanted to wear eyeliner like them and all the other bands now that are really into that look, I think it's dumb, but his mom wouldn't let him. She didn't seem to really like him to be in a band at all actually. But I brought my makeup and drew it on him before the shows we played. We did a pretty funny goth photo shoot once with all three of us wearing a ton of black eyeliner and we wrapped curly guitar cables around our necks and pretended to look dead cause that's in for some reason.

Once school started up again though, we gradually sort of stopped hearing from Bobby. We'd ask him to practice and he wouldn't show up or call us about it. He said his mom didn't like him being in a band and wanted him to focus more on his homework. We thought that was a pretty lame excuse but whatever.

Then I met the guy in my music theory class, Dan. It turned out he was like, very good at drums annnd had a practice space in his basement.

After we stopped playing with Nick we had to change our name again, naturally. Ricky and me decided on "the Psykicks" spelled p-s-y-k-i-c-k-s because we had the same thoughts all the time and decided we were psychic with each other.

I started writing some songs, well at least parts of them, and then Ricky would put them together. I wrote one about the first seat cellist in our orchestra. She was younger than me so I really should be the first seat due to seniority. After all last year that jock dude Jim got first seat only because he was older than me, the orchestra director even told me that after we had done a cello battle. But *Emily* has a fancy cello teacher and a super expensive cello and can play super high notes. But I play way more in-tempo and have better rhythm -- I'm a bass player in a band after all, and the first seat is supposed to lead the section. I'm always trying to slow her down but she just races ahead of the tempo. It's totally obvious how happy she is to be seen as better than the rest of us. So anyway I wrote ...

Em-emily Em-emily I hate your face... Em-emily I wanna spray your eyes with mace, when I see you walking down the hall, I'm always hoping that you'll fall-alll-allll.

I wrote another song about how I always feel like I totally suck at singing. It starts with that ska bass line I wrote. I can't sing and keep up with playing that part at the same time so Ricky sings the verses -- he's kind of representing the voice in my head "You know that you can't do it, you can't sing this song listen to that awful voice now, you know you're gonna do it wrong..." Then in the chorus I answer, "Get out my wayyy I wrote this song... get out of my way and don't sing along!" It feels good to yell at the dumb thoughts in my head. I'm still not sure I totally agree with the confident part but at least I can pretend to while I'm singing that part.

The band started sounding really good after we practiced with Dan for a while. He can actually play guitar and bass too so he knows how to make the songs really work and helps figure out parts when we write new stuff. It's a big improvement from Nick.

In the romance department though... things are still... weird.

I started feeling all these um urges... since like 9th grade. They've gotten progressively worse. And I know Ricky deals with it too. Sometimes when we make out he gets really into it and ends up like... getting a wet spot in his pants, whatever you wanna call that. But it's not fair like he is clearly all done, he even giggles, but I just feel achey and lightheaded and grumpy and don't know what to do about it. I kind of feel like I am going to explode all the time and have no idea how to deal. I think that maybe I'm gonna have to like you know *go all the way* – like actually *do it* for real to feel better. That's at least what my body and brain keep trying to tell me. Sometimes I imagine how much of a relief it would be. But, per my mom and Ricky's dad we aren't allowed to be alone together. We tried to find spots to pull over my mom's car in the woods but when we found the most remote spot a huge truck with spot lights on it drove slowly past us and then I saw the no trespassing signs on the side of the road. One time we found a good spot but he couldn't... uh... get the thing on the whole way, it like only went up half way for some reason and so we were worried it wouldn't work. Like what if the stuff came out? Honestly, I think we were both kinda relieved when we decided to drive away. I was feeling really shaky.

When I imagined doing it though, it definitely wasn't with Ricky, it was with Chris. I know there's supposedly things you can do to yourself, but I really don't want to reach up in there or whatever you have to do, that freaks me out. I don't even like using tampons for that reason, so I think I maybe I need a um object – that I also don't want to say the name of – to do that -- and there's no way I could ever get one. Plus, what if my mom found it she's always looking around my room. Sometimes when I'm super pent up I even have dreams where I'm running around my house desperately looking for something of the right shape and size to make the feeling go away. I talked about it with Chris on AIM since he's older and not a virgin, and even though I am intimidated to talk to him in person I can say Anything on AIM. He told me to rub some part of myself but I didn't really know what he was talking about. They didn't explain any of this to us in health class. Like I know what boys do because it's pretty obvious. But I don't know what I can do. I just said to Chris "I don't think I have that part or maybe it's broken." So I just stay awake all night sweating and aching.

One time, I was walking home and there were two dorky boys ahead of me. I had been feeling that achy annoying feeling in my guts for like five days in a row cause my period was coming. In my head I was yelling out at them, "Hey that's my house right there and no one's home, which one of you wants to do it with me?" It *almost* actually came out of my mouth.

I still just want to be with Chris though.

We played a pretty good show at Ricky's family's church in Worcester. A lot of kids came out to it. As a stunt at the end of our last song me and Dan both pulled out a pair of scissors and cut all of Ricky's long hair off. It was pretty cool and I thought he suddenly looked cuter, or at least different.

At one point after we played I was walking around the room and I turned around and noticed Chris way over on the other side. I had felt him looking at me. He was just staring. I liked it. That night in my diary I wrote a poem:

“You looked at me/ It was sexual/ it was animal/ it was everything I’ve ever wanted.”

As a band we decided we needed to get new recordings since we still only had the not so great ones from John. Chris said he could do it for us.

We did most of the tracking in Ricky’s basement where we usually practiced. Dan suggested we add lots of extra tracks of clapping and percussion to make it sound fuller, we even used a slinky on one. It seemed like this EP would come out way better than our last one. At one point we took a break and Ricky and Dan went upstairs. I was still downstairs with Chris. He laid down on the carpet on his back with his eyes closed and stretched his arms over his head. His hoodie popped up and I could see a few inches of his furry stomach. I had the strongest, strangest urge to get down next to him and put my face on it. I didn’t say a word.

A week later me and Ricky went to Chris’s house to do some final guitar and bass re-dubs. I had messed some stuff up and Ricky wanted to re-do some solos and add more guitar tracks. After he was done, the last thing left to do was a bass part, so Ricky went home.

I was *finally* alone with Chris, sitting on the edge of his bed. I wanted to impress him. I wanted to say whatever I could to be with him. After I was done recording, I started talking to him about Ricky. I said how annoying it was that he wanted to be with me every minute of the day. Chris said, “that’s normal he’s your boyfriend.” He didn’t get it, Ricky was clingy. He was driving me nuts lately. I mean he was literally clingy, like physically, he would wrap himself around me like a weird spider monkey or jump on my back cause he weighs like way less than I do probably like 95 lbs or something. It was like a little brother or a pet, like kind of as a friend goofing around once in a while but not exactly attractive when it happens constantly. Chris still didn’t get it. “Ricky’s cool,” he said. I knew I should put my money where my mouth is dump him but I just couldn’t the band was doing well – and I thought about how he threatened me before we even started going out to sop talking to me and break up the band - this record needed to come out I couldn’t ruin it all right now. And I couldn’t tell Chris all that.

I looked into his eyes. Every time I made eye contact with him I still felt butterflies. What I really wanted to say was, “I am completely in love with you but am terrified to say it, and can’t bring myself to dump Ricky even though I am not feeling it at all anymore: But I didn’t.

“Hey Chris - Mom’s making her famous pizza does Chelsea want to stay?”

I didn’t know if my mom had dinner plans for us. I said, “no thanks.” When I went downstairs with my bass his dad asked again,

“are you sure?”

“Yeah...” I wasn’t sure. I just knew my mom said she’d pick me up at 7 and I tried to call her cellphone and she hadn’t picked up. I was also *really* shy and nervous around people’s parents. Having dinner with my biggest crush in the world and his parents sounded scary. I probably wouldn’t be able to breathe never mind eat pizza.

Eventually my mom showed up. I got in the car. I told my her they asked me to stay for pizza and she said, “why didn’t you stay? You can go back if you want. I’ll get you later.” No I said. I felt like it would look stupid if I went back in.

That night in my bed I put my head under my pillow and screamed into my mattress as loud as I could over and over again until I was so out of oxygen, I felt my face burning and then kicked my legs under the covers until I almost passed out. "Why didn't you stay you idiot? Idiot. Idiot. Idiot. Idiot." I told myself. I slapped my head and cried. I couldn't sleep. I knew I'd never ever be able to tell someone I liked them. I'd never be able to get what I actually wanted because I would always let people take advantage of me. I'd only ever date people I don't even really find attractive in any way at all and never make any cool friends because I'm a stupid idiot who can't talk to anyone she thinks is remotely cool. Why can I only talk to people I think are dorkier than me? I might as well die, I thought.

AD BREAK 20:34

School has still sucked since screwing over Nick. I see him around and feel terrible. I just don't feel like I have a real group anymore and I've never felt like an official part of Ricky's friends even though that's kind of my only choice of who to hang out with. They're all in AP classes together and a bunch of them have wealthy parents. One girl has like a mini movie theater in her house. They seem to think they're better than everyone or at least never feel self-conscious ever, never seem to worry they're cool enough to talk to anyone else, how nice would that friggin be huh? It pisses me off as much as it intimidates me. Being an asshole is their way of interacting. One time one of these boys was walking toward me in the hall. When he passed me he said "Hey it's Chelsea Ursin what's wrong with your face? Why's it so ugly?" Maybe he was right, maybe that's why I don't have any friends besides my band. I didn't know what to do. I thought HE was the ugly one. I imagined punching out his giant teeth.

I went into the lunchroom one time to find a seat and that mean kid and Ricky's other friends were mostly taking up an 8-person table. There were two seats left but they both had bird poop all over them because there were a lot of birds living in the ceiling due to the construction going on all over the school. Our cafeteria is what used to be the gym. I just kind of hovered and looked at the seats for a while. Ricky wasn't there yet. No one said "Hi" to me or told me to sit down. I started feeling like maybe I was unwelcome and walked over to the empty table next to theirs. I knew they probably thought I was weird.

Screw those preppy dicks.

Sometimes Ricky's best friend Drew hangs around when we practice. He can be kind of annoying and says dumb stuff or flails around when we play to get attention. Sometimes he can be funny but he still strikes me as kind of a prick. His humor is kind of like Zach Galifinakis – absurd and obnoxious. It's a lot funnier when it's on TV rather than in your face. At one practice I was talking about something and Ricky said "That's why you have no friends" and Drew laughed at it and it seemed like he was agreeing.

Nothing anyone's ever said to me in my entire life has ever made me so mad. They had hit my most painful insecurity. I've always struggled with friends but -- I thought -- they were some of my only ones. Maybe he's right I thought for a second I mean if I can't seem to be in a group of friends not even my boyfriend's best friends, well then maybe I am just completely socially incompetent. The hurt was so deep it turned into instant blind out of control anger. I've never yelled at anyone in my life but I started right then. I felt like my body was just doing the yelling while I fell backwards into a blackhole. My vision turned off, everything was black and all I could sense was this heat getting hotter and hotter. I don't even know what I said. When I came back to I saw their faces give me the you're being a crazy stupid girl look which made me even angrier.

I usually waited at Ricky's and had my mom pick me up but since Dan had his mom's car I asked him to drive me home right then. He had seen the whole thing and agreed that I needed to go. On the ride, I told him how I thought Ricky and Drew were dickwads. Dan said he really didn't understand how I was dating Ricky because I was a nice person. I suddenly didn't get it myself.

I really wish I could never have to see Ricky's dumb friends or go to that stupid school ever again.

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Dear Young Rocker,

Oh boy. That was completely unfair of them. I'm glad you spoke your mind – whatever it was you said – instead of just running home crying like a younger you probably would have done. You can't let bullies get away with crap like that no matter how crazy they think you are when you defend yourself. But now I have to break some hard truth to you. It IS technically your fault that you are not in a group as in stuff you have done is why you're not. Before you get mad at me - I don't mean that in a bad way. I just mean you haven't actively done the things you need to do to get yourself a big group of friends but like so what who cares? You don't like big groups of people it's fine. It's like totally and completely ok to not be in a clique no matter what movies and TV and the jerks at school say. Let me explain some:

Don't take this the wrong way but you were ostracizing *yourself* by not sitting at Ricky's friend's table. I know it always feels like what is going on around you is making you uneasy but because of your anxiety it is actually the opposite. First your brain makes you feel uneasy which makes you have bad thoughts about yourself, like I don't belong with anyone, and then you manifest those thoughts in reality. So technically it's your brain's fault, so I'm not trying to make you feel guilty here but sadly your brain and you are one being. I wish I could tell you how to make those thoughts stop forever but here I am at 31 and I haven't figured that one out yet. What you will eventually learn to do instead is when those thoughts come up you learn not to trust them. Look, for example, here's how we could rewrite that lunch table scene: you walk over and see one seat left, it has bird poop on it, instead of looking down and sort of looking around anxiously hoping someone will notice you and then walking away when they don't, you loudly say, "Ew what's wrong with this school? I am gonna' sit there but I have to get that nasty crap off, save my seat while I go get some paper towels!" That's it. It is you taking control instead of letting the dumb kids and your negative thoughts take over. Your brain wasn't in a place to do that so it's fine, again I'm not mad at you just letting you know how it could have gone. And when that one kid came up to you and said you were ugly your self-conscious brain believed it, a stronger you would realize that is total crap and said back to him something like "takes one to know one buddy." It's hard. It takes years to learn how to not believe your thoughts and you will have days especially the few days before your period every month, where you won't have the mental strength to put those thoughts down. I'm sorry no one's taught you this yet. Your mom saying to you that you need to grow a backbone like her is entirely unhelpful and just makes you feel worse about it. You have a backbone, you are incredibly strong for surviving highschool as someone with terrible social anxiety, you just need to learn the tricks of how to get around it.

Again, it is PERFECTLY OK to not be part of a group. It's ok to just not be a group person. Some of us do well in groups and some of us do not. For many years you are going to just keep saying to yourself that you haven't found the right group – you'll keep thinking that in each group you encounter the people aren't cool enough, interested enough in the things you are, funny enough, whatever it is that makes you feel like you don't have a connection to them. Eventually you'll realize maybe it's not the group –

maybe it's you. And that's totally OK. Media tells us we have to be in a group to be happy, especially as young people and super especially in highschool – basically every sitcom or teen movie is about being in a group. The people who choose to hang out by themselves are portrayed as disturbed, demented or incredibly depressed – the angry goth with scars on her wrists. They make it seem like only people who have something horribly wrong with them are alone. The only other option is to be someone who longs to be in a group but is ostracized – a kid with a physical disability who needs to use a cane or a wheelchair for instance and gets made fun of. Those are the only two options we see in media. Well adjusted, normal, able-bodied people are SUPPOSED to be in a group even if they are nerdy or weird those people are just in the nerdy weird group right? No way. Groups just aren't that great for some people. For so many years I've told myself this story about how I must be defective because I never made many friends in highschool. I mean even up until I first started writing this podcast I still sort of believed it. I'm totally over beating myself up now though. I was just different. So are a lot of people. And that's chill. If we had met each other back then we could have had our own totally weird group that doesn't really hang out together.

And here's another thought. For you, the constant flux of under the surface tensions and relations between different group members just overloads your social capacity and your senses. It's kind of an ADHD thing but we'll get to that in a later episode. But for now realize that you only find a deep connection with one of those people usually, and that's what you want in a friend, you don't want dumb surface level conversation, so what's the point of the group? To succeed in group situations, you have to constantly say sort of boring small talk stuff that pleases everyone, you can't really have deep talks without someone disagreeing or not getting your point, and you can't sit in silence like you can with a close friend. Also, every group talks behind each other's backs. It's almost required that when you are alone with one or two other group members you critique the missing one in order to feel closer to the people you are with, and then visa versa when *they* aren't present. That feels dishonest and yucky to you, because it is. You hate drama and people talking about each other. So you opt out of it. It's fine. Screw groups. TV and movies don't show it but lone wolves can be totally happy, as long as they don't fall for the "I'm alone so there must be something wrong with me" message coming from the outside. Be yourself. Hang with a friend once in a while and have a real connection. There's nothing wrong with that.

Now as for the physical stuff going on. Man, I am sorry. The sexual education in this country really fails especially for girls and pretty much anyone that's not a cis boy. You live in a time before Google too and your only experience with sex stuff on the internet is porn which you are not at all interested in and wouldn't exactly give you a realistic depiction of how you could uh help yourself out anyway. All I can say is I'm just happy you aren't doing anything unsafe and you have plenty more years to safely and happily enjoy all of that stuff and no you definitely DO NOT have to 'go all the way' with someone to get the relief you're looking for. All you need is yourself my friend, but this is not the place to explain that in more detail.

I know it doesn't feel like it but I promise, you will end up okay. Just about 5 bajillion more mistakes til you get there.

Next Time on Dear Young Rocker

Chelsea says a painful goodbye to a big part of her life and considers dun dun dun College.