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Opening extract from

Rebecca Rocks

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Anna Carey

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MONDAY 

I'm not meant to be writing this.

I'm meant to be studying, because our summer tests are in just three weeks, and my mother has locked me in my room and forced me to do maths and geography for an hour. Well, okay, she hasn't literally locked me in my room. But this is probably only because my room doesn't actually have a lock. I wish it did, though, then I could lock her out. She keeps peering in and making sure I'm studying. And she says reading non-school books doesn't count, even though I tried to tell her that all reading is the study of literature and that I was learning about LIFE and art, but she didn't care. She knows there's no chance I could be on the Internet or the phone because I don't have a computer of my own and she has taken my phone away and locked it in her study! Not that it would be much use, I have no credit on it anyway.

But still, Cass or Alice might ring me. Although they probably won't; their parents have got all strict about studying and homework too, so I bet they're locked (not literally) in their rooms as well. Recently all our parents have started saying annoying things like: 'You've got up to an awful lot over this

school year, but school still has to come first!' Cass's mum even started hinting that if she doesn't do well in the summer tests, she might have to go to a special summer school where she would have non-stop maths grinds. This is a terrible prospect for poor old Cass and, on a selfish note, would totally spoil all our big summer plans.

Our parents are right about some things, though. Not about possibly forcing Cass to go to summer maths classes, of course, but it's true, a lot did happen this year. Nothing really happened at all when we were in First Year, apart from the time Ellie fell into the lake on the school tour to Glendalough, of course, but our second year at St Dominic's has been surprisingly dramatic. I mean, first my mum wrote that terrible book and everyone thought it was about me, and then I met Paperboy, the nicest boy in the world, and then me and Cass and Alice started our band, and then Paperboy moved to Canada and I was a miserable hollow shell of a girl for months and months.

All that on its own would have been eventful enough – much more eventful than all of First Year – but then we had to go to crazy Vanessa's giant birthday party and Alice had her accident so the band had to go on hiatus. And THEN we were

in the school musical and I met John Kowalski and went temporarily insane for a few weeks (it is the only explanation for the fact that I thought he was a decent human being). And then we did the musical. And since then we have been doing band practices and planning for the greatest musical summer ever.

I have to admit that from the outside it might look as if we have not had much time for studying and all that. But that would be very unfair. My parents have clearly forgotten that when I was rehearsing for the greatest school production of *Mary Poppins* ever, they were obsessed with my homework and kept forcing me to stay at home and study practically every non-rehearsal night and at the weekends too. And when I was all miserable about Paperboy going to Canada, I sometimes ended up just doing my homework by accident because after a while anything was better than staring out the window for hours wondering why he hadn't mailed me in ten days. So, actually, all our extra-curricular activities haven't made any difference to my school work at all.

Of course, there's no point in telling my parents any of this because they never listen to me. This is because they're totally obsessed with their latest plan to humiliate me in front of the

world. But I can't bear to write about that now, it's too terrible.

Oh no, I can hear Mum coming up the stairs to check on me AGAIN. Better go.

TUESDAY

I can't wait for these stupid summer tests to be over. I keep dreaming of being able to just lie around and read and not have to think about maths or Irish. I actually can't remember what it was like not having to study all the time. It's like having school twenty-four hours a day. Speaking of which, actual school is even worse than ever, because all our teachers are acting like we're doing our Leaving Cert rather than our second-year summer exams, which, let's face it, are not going to make any difference to our lives whatsoever. I think some of them are still annoyed with us musical people for spending so much time on *Mary Poppins*. Miss Kelly can't stop going on about it in geography class (when she's not telling us about environmental disasters, her favourite subject).

'Now, some of you may have been too busy singing and dancing to notice,' she said this afternoon after going on

about climate-related crop failure for what seemed like about ten years, 'but we did actually cover this subject a few months ago.'

Even Mrs Harrington has started to have little digs at us in English class, and she was quite enthusiastic about the whole musical thing when we were doing it.

'I know some of you have had lots of fun and games this year,' she said, 'but we need to get down to work now and make up for all that lost time!'

I don't know what they're talking about – it's not like we got out of lessons when we were doing the musical. Apart from the day of the actual show, but even that was just for a few hours.

'I think doing the musical should count as an exam,' said Cass when we were walking home. 'Or even two exams. I mean, we worked really hard on something and it turned out brilliantly. And we learned loads. Like, I learned how to make sets, and you learned lots of songs and how to perform them, and we all learned how to put on a big show. I think we should get off at least one exam for having done all that.'

I think she is right. But unfortunately neither our school nor our parents agree on the importance of all our hard

work. Which is pretty hypocritical of my parents, because now they're off doing a musical of their own, and they make such a fuss about it you'd think they were taking part in a big Broadway spectacular rather than something that's going to be put on in a school hall down the road. Yes, my own musical adventures reminded them of the time they took part in some crazy college production of *The Pirates of Penzance,* and they went off and found a local musical society to join. So now they are both going to star in a production of *Oliver!*, which I hope I can get out of going to see because the last thing I need, after the year I've had, is being forced to watch my parents dressed in Victorian outfits singing about food glorious food. But I bet I'll end up going whether I like it or not, and, knowing my luck, someone from my class like Karen Rodgers will be there too, and I'll never hear the end of it. This may seem unlikely, but after all the embarrassing things my parents have got up to this year, it wouldn't surprise me if half my class just happened to go and see them parading about on stage in top hats. It's like they spend their entire lives working out new ways to be embarrassing.

The only good thing about this musical business is that in a few minutes they will both be leaving the house to go to a

rehearsal, so I am going to take a break from my labours and go and watch telly until they come back singing about picking a pocket or two or some such nonsense.

LATER

I was settled in front of the telly when Rachel came in and said, 'Aren't you meant to be studying?' in her most irritating big sister voice.

'Aren't you?' I said.

She glared at me. 'Mum and Dad told me to keep an eye on you, so that's what I'm doing.'

'Well, now you've seen me,' I said. 'Oh, come on, Rachel, I'm allowed to take breaks.'

Rachel sighed and stopped looking so grown up.

'I suppose so,' she said. 'Shove over.'

And then she slumped down next to me on the couch, and we spent a very relaxing hour watching *Laurel Canyon* until we heard the car in the drive.

'Quick, turn it off!' said Rachel, and we both sprang off the couch and ran into the kitchen where Rachel quickly put the kettle on.

'Hello, girls,' said Mum when she came in. 'What are you up to? Haven't you been studying?'

Honestly! She doesn't trust us at all.

'We're not up to anything,' said Rachel. 'I'm just making me and Bex some nice herbal tea to soothe our nerves after all our hard work.'

'Really,' said Mum. She didn't sound very convinced.

'How was the rehearsal?' I said. Which, if I say so myself, was a brilliant thing to say, because of course they immediately forgot about our studies and started going on about how well everything is going in their ridiculous production, despite the fact that they are not the stars of the show. Even though it's twenty-five years since they were last in a musical and they are the newest members of the musical society, I think they are both secretly disappointed they didn't get huge parts. They're just in the chorus, though Dad is also understudying the Beadle, the man who runs the workhouse where poor little Oliver lives. Mum isn't even understudying anyone, but, as I pointed out to her, there aren't really very many parts in *Oliver!* for older ladies. She didn't seem very comforted by this, though.

Anyway, they blathered about the musical for a while and

got so enthusiastic that they forgot to lecture me and Rachel about studying. They even let us watch some telly, as though we were just normal girls and not studying slaves. So actually it was quite a nice evening in the end.

WEDNESDAY

Oh dear. I had forgotten that in a moment of what I can only describe as insanity I told Mrs Harrington that my mum was going to name a character in her next book after her. I just did it out of guilt because Mrs Harrington had really wanted to meet Mum, and I'd managed to arrange it so their paths didn't cross, so I told Mrs Harrington a total lie to cheer her up. I know it was stupid but it somehow seemed like a good idea at the time. Like I said, it was a moment of insanity.

Anyway, I hoped she'd forgotten about it because she hasn't mentioned it in weeks, but of course she hasn't, as she proved when she pounced on me today. Luckily she waited until our English class was over and we were all going off to lunch so none of my classmates witnessed it all.

'Now, Rebecca,' she said. 'I know it's a bit cheeky, but I was

wondering if you know what sort of character your mammy has named after me in her new book? Gerard and I are so excited. He thinks it'll probably be a teacher, like me, but I have a feeling it's going to be a nurse. Or the heroine's mother.'

Good lord. She has been thinking about this far too much. As has Gerard, apparently. Gerard is her husband who is just as much of a crazed fan of my mother as his wife. Although in fairness you'd never guess if you met him, he seems quite normal.

I managed to get out of it by saying, 'Oh, Mum never tells us details about her books until they're finished,' which was another total lie. But I know I'm only putting off the terrible day when she eventually picks up my mum's new book and realises there's no Mrs Harrington in it. Or whatever her first name is. She did tell me at one stage, 'so you can tell your mammy', but I've forgotten. Was it Eileen? I have a feeling it was Eileen.

Anyway, I told Cass and Alice at lunch, but they weren't as sympathetic as I'd hoped.

'Why on earth did you say it in the first place?' said Cass. 'It's not as if she even suggested your mum put her in a book! It was all your idea!'

'I don't know why!' I said miserably. 'I just felt guilty because she was so disappointed when my mum didn't turn up that night. Although I don't know why I felt bad for her, considering how much she's tormented me all year going on about how she loves my "mammy's lovely books".' (I did what I think was quite a good impression of Mrs Harrington for that last bit.)

'Maybe you could persuade your mum to actually put Mrs Harrington into the book?' suggested Alice.

'But then I'd have to tell Mum that I lied to Mrs Harrington,' I said. 'She won't be very happy if she thinks I've been going around telling people they can be in the next Rosie Carberry book.'

'Don't worry, you'll figure something out,' said Cass cheerfully, which was a bit callous, I thought. She could have shown a bit more concern for my plight. 'Now, let's talk about a bigger issue – the future of Hey Dollface. We need to sort out our summer plans. Like regular practices.'

'I wish we could have regular practices,' said Alice sadly. 'If only I lived nearer town.'

We practise out in Alice's place, because there are all these barns and old stables and things next to the house. The thing

is, the only reason they have all that space is because they live in the middle of the countryside near Kinsealy, and it's hard for me and Cass to get out there. There's a bus that comes about once every two weeks (well, that's what it feels like if you miss it), and even if you get it, the bus stop is about twenty minutes' walk from Alice's house. So basically we have to rely on getting lifts, which doesn't suit any of our parents, and will suit them even less once the holidays start and we want to go out there during the week when they're all at work.

Of course, my mum works at home, so technically she could easily take a break and give me and Cass a lift, but she gets very annoyed if you suggest that working from home is in any way different from working in an office. Over the Easter holidays I tried to get her to take us out to Kinsealy, and she acted like I'd interrupted her while she was in the middle of doing some brain surgery.

'I'm at work, Rebecca!' she said when I knocked on the door of her study. 'Would you go in to your dad if he was at work giving a lecture and ask him for a lift?'

I was just about to say, 'Well, Dad wouldn't be wearing pyjama bottoms at work and you are.' But I didn't because I knew it would increase her wrath.

Anyway, we are trying to think of ways to get around the lift/bus issue but it's not looking good.

'Maybe we could get a rehearsal space somewhere in town?' said Cass. 'Liz says that her big sister's band rent a place on Parnell Square. It's a bit ramshackle, and the loo doesn't work very well, but it's okay.' Liz is in a band called Bad Monkey who we met at the Battle of the Bands, and she and Cass have become good friends.

'But that costs money,' I said. 'And isn't Liz's sister in college? I mean, I don't think our parents would give us the cash to just go to some manky old studio somewhere.'

'You're probably right,' admitted Cass. 'Oh well. We'll just have to get really good at timing the buses.'

She's right, we can manage it. It's not the end of the world if we have to keep on practising at Alice's place. It's just that it would be good to be able to practise more often. Imagine if we could practise every day! We'd be, like, professional quality musicians by the end of the summer.