

# THE RIGHT WAY TO ROCK



NAT AMOORE

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*For JC. You rock!*

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# ACT ONE

## Scene One

### **Mac Cooper's Bedroom**

The sounds of Watterson create a rhythm. The honk of a car horn, the ding of a bicycle bell, the thud of roadworks. The beat builds up, providing a soundtrack to MAC COOPER's awakening. He leaps out of bed, throwing the curtains wide open as sunlight streams onto his face like a spotlight and a bluebird lands on the windowsill. Mac sings to the street . . .

### **'Good Morning Watterson'**

(to the tune of 'Good Morning Baltimore'  
from *Hairspray*)

Good morning Watterson!  
Every day promises more fun  
Every night is a wistful dream  
Every kid has a brilliant scheme.

Good morning Watterson!  
And some day when all's said and done  
No matter how far I might roam  
Watterson is home.



‘Mac Fleetwood Cooper! You’d better be in the shower already!’

I press stop on Mum’s old iPhone, cutting off my musical alarm and abruptly ending my show-stopping performance. Mum bursts through my bedroom door, but she’s definitely not here to give me a standing ovation.

‘Shower. Now!’ she yells as she fights with the inside-out t-shirt in her grip.

‘Muuuum!’ I yell. ‘What happened to knocking?’

She mumbles at me through the fabric as she yanks the tee down over her messy hair. ‘I’ll start knocking when you start being able to get yourself into the shower before every other kid is already in first class.’

She tugs on the bottom of her faded Fleetwood Mac t-shirt and tries to pat down her hair. A hairbrush might have more effect, but she's got that 'don't push me' look in her eye so I don't suggest it.

'Well?' she says, glaring at me like one wrong move will have me babysitting Stevie for eternity. I look over what I call her 'uniform'. Mum's wardrobe looks like Bart Simpson's, but instead of a whole heap of blue shorts and red shirts, it's faded rock-band tees and ripped jeans (which she actually paid for – the rips, I mean).

Mum grabs hold of the sides of her hair. 'I swear to Gwen Stefani, if you are not in the shower by the count of three, Mac, I'll . . .'

I don't wait to hear the end of it. I duck past her and bolt for the bathroom, moulting clothes onto the floor as I go. Stevie's sitting in the middle of the hall playing Lego in his undies. I hurdle him, yelling, 'Stevie, DUCK!'

'Duck, duck, goose!' he sings, not ducking even the slightest bit, but I clear his head with ease.

Within 45 seconds, I'm in the shower and have avoided the wrath of Morning Mum.

Morning Mum is not my real mum. She's some kind of monster that comes from finishing work at 2 am and having to get two boys ready and out the door before 8:30 am. My real mum's pretty cool and chill, and even a bit patient. Morning Mum is *none* of those things. You don't mess with Morning Mum.

I tilt my head back and the warm water drums out a beat on my forehead. I can't stay in here for too long, but if I skip washing my hair, I'll have time for one song. I grab Mum's back scrubber and flip through the songbook in my head. I land on 'Consider Yourself' from *Oliver!* and flick on my imaginary top hat. I raise the scrubbing brush to my lips and belt out the words in my best cockney accent, my singing muffled by the bathroom fan and the pelting water.

I barely get to the first chorus before Morning Mum is screeching at me again, so I put away my microphone-brush and finish actually washing myself.

‘I shouldn’t have to be on your back in the mornings anymore, Mac,’ Mum says as I make my way into the kitchen. ‘You’re going to be in high school next year. High school! The least you can do is get yourself ready on time.’

‘Time, Mr Wolf. What’s the time?’ Stevie yells out. Mum dumps a bowl of soggy cornflakes in front of him.

I fill my own bowl and Mum rages a breakfast war with Stevie, who is totally capable of feeding himself but totally bored by it at the same time. High school next year. A feeling of dread creeps over me. I want to think it’s going to be just like *High School Musical*. All of us dressed in crisp red and white uniforms, singing about how ‘We’re All In This Together’, but my guess is that the reality is far less boppy. The local high school colours are brown and yellow too, which is just gross.

‘Have you got band practice today?’ Mum asks. She watches Stevie through narrowed eyes as he attempts to get the cornflake-filled spoon into his mouth using his left hand. Stevie is right-handed, but he likes a challenge.

He fails miserably, sending soggy flakes splattering over Mum's face. 'Stevie Nick Cooper!' she yells. Mum loves using our full names when we're in trouble. I was named after the band Fleetwood Mac and Stevie was named after their lead singer, Stevie Nicks. She thinks that's pretty clever. I just find it kind of embarrassing. And a bit sad that we didn't even get our own names – we're just borrowing someone else's. If you haven't guessed by the t-shirts and our names, Mum is a big fan of rock bands. Like a BIG fan. With Fleetwood Mac being the number one supreme rock band of all time – Mum's words, not mine.

'Yeah, I've got practice after school.' I pour milk on my cereal and wait for it to go soggy.

'School bell. Ring ring!' shouts Stevie, dropping another left-handed spoonful of flakes and milk. Half of it splashes up into Mum's hair and the other half drips onto his bare legs. I notice Mum isn't giving *him* a 'you're going to be in primary school next year, the least you can do is wear pants' lecture.



Mum throws a cloth at Stevie. ‘I give up!’ she says, picking soggy flakes out of her hair. She points at me, a little bit of cornflake mush hanging from the end of her finger. ‘Tell your brother to eat like a normal kid.’

‘Here,’ I say, moving to sit next to Stevie. ‘Let’s try with our right hand BUT we have to eat one spoon every count of eight.’ I take my phone out of my pocket and find Stevie’s playlist. Tones and I bops through the speaker.

“Dance Monkey!” Stevie coos.

‘That’s right,’ I say. ‘But only if you eat your breakfast. With your *right* hand!’

Stevie slides back in his chair, picks up his spoon and eats in unison with me. One spoonful on every count of eight as Tones asks us to dance for her.

‘I don’t know why he likes this song so much,’ says Mum as she throws together our lunches. ‘I’ve tried all the *really* good bands, but they just don’t have the same effect.’

Stevie’s already halfway through his cereal as he bops away and chews in time to the beat. I point that out to Mum. ‘I don’t know why you fight it.

If he likes it, and it makes him stop throwing food at you, then why not let him listen?’

She shrugs. ‘I know, but I just want him to appreciate REAL music.’

Mum has a very narrow view of ‘real’ music. It’s like a pyramid of rock. Fleetwood Mac are perched right at the top, untouched by any other band in the history of music, and then all her 90s favourites sit just below – No Doubt, Alanis Morissette, The Cranberries. Then everything that isn’t rock is unacceptable. So, if she doesn’t approve of Stevie’s love of indie pop, it should be easy to see why I keep my Broadway performances strictly for the shower.

‘He’s five, Mum! Last week his favourite song was Baby Shark. I wouldn’t be too worried about his musical appreciation just yet.’ I go back to stabbing at my cereal.

Bread slips across the kitchen bench as Mum slaps on way too much peanut butter. ‘It’s never too early to make sure he’s on the right path. He’s got great rhythm, you know? I think he’s gonna be a drummer. I’ve already asked about lessons.’

This doesn't surprise me at all. She had me in guitar lessons at four, so she probably considers Stevie a slow starter.

Mum whacks the bread together and wraps the pretty rough-looking sandwiches in cling wrap. 'I start at five tonight, so Mrs Moshie will be here from four.' She throws the mangled sandwiches in our lunch boxes, topping the whole thing off with a piece of fruit, and slides them to the end of the counter. 'Do you want me to drop Stevie off or can you take him?'

'I'll take him.' I clear Stevie's empty bowl as he slips down off his chair. I stop him before he skips away. '*If* you can be ready before the end of the next song.'

'What is it?' Stevie says, holding his breath and waiting.

The next track on his playlist starts – 'The Kids Are Coming' by Tones and I.

I grin at him. 'Your favourite!'

Stevie puts his hands on my cheeks and squishes my face together. 'Your favourite brother is me!' he yells, and bolts into his bedroom to get dressed.

Lately he's got this habit of taking the last word you say and turning it into another sentence. It's really annoying and ridiculously cute. But that sums Stevie up perfectly.

'I'll take that as a yes,' I shout after him.

I finish packing my school bag before Stevie comes back, then take his hand. Mum covers both our faces in kisses and herds us out towards the door. 'Make sure you're straight home after practice, Mac. I'll pick Stevie up.'

I pause in the hall. 'Actually, Mum, I'm supposed to make this solar system thing for school and I haven't even started. Maybe I could ask Ms Fox if it's okay to skip band practice and get it done?'

Mum looks at me like I just asked if I could sell Stevie to the second-hand store. 'Miss band practice?' She pulls Stevie's bag up on his shoulders. 'No way. Don't worry, I'll sort the solar system thing for you.'

'Mum! It's MY homework. You can't do it for me.'

She rolls her eyes. 'Band practice will do more for your rock career than painting a few styrofoam balls ever will.'

‘Mum!’

‘Okay, fine. Go to practice and then I’ll *help* you with the project. If we don’t get it done on time, I’ll talk to Mr Deery. He’ll understand that you can’t let Ms Fox or the rest of the band down. You have commitments.’

I throw my own bag over my shoulder. ‘I think Mr D probably considers schoolwork a commitment too, Mum.’

‘Ha ha,’ Mum says sarcastically as she pushes us out the door. ‘Put it this way: do you want to be an astronaut?’

‘No.’

‘Exactly! You want to be a rock star and rock stars have to prioritise their music. Now get to school and be good.’

‘Good luck with that!’ Stevie yells as he waves goodbye.

Mum shuts the door behind us.

I close my eyes for a second and practise the words in my head for the gazillionth time. *I don’t want to be a rock star either, Mum.* I wonder what that would sound like out loud.

‘C’mon on,’ Stevie says, yanking on my hand.  
‘I wanna get to school.’

‘Said no kid ever,’ I mumble under my breath,  
and let myself be dragged off down our street.

‘You want to go by Howard Street or through  
Brennan Park?’ I ask.

‘Park the car. Brennan Park.’

‘Brennan Park it is.’

‘Is Wizz Fizz.’ He grins at me as we cross the  
road and walk onto the grass.

Stevie’s little legs work double-time to keep  
up with me as we rush past the Lego house and  
towards Town Hall. I peek through one of the  
Lego windows, but can’t see any sign of Kathy or  
her pet ferret, Mr Piddles. They must have had an  
early start today.

Stevie tugs on my hand. ‘Can you do the tango,  
Mac?’

‘Again?’

‘Pleeeeeeeeeease cheese!’ Stevie begs.

What he wants is the song ‘Cell Block Tango’  
from the musical *Chicago*. I do my own version  
with any words or sounds that Stevie picks.

‘All right, so what do you want?’

He looks around and points at some dog poo on the ground. ‘Poop!’

Gotta laugh at that. ‘Okay. And?’

He spots the ducks at the nearby pond. ‘Quack! And fish.’

‘Good choices. Now we need a two-beat word and some longer ones.’

‘Bon bon. Macaroni. And . . .’

A woman rushes by us, putting on lipstick while looking in the camera of her mobile phone. ‘Lipstick!’ sings Stevie.

I laugh. ‘Those words work perfectly, Stevie. You’re getting good at this. I’ll start, then you join in and help me, all right?’

‘All right, all left.’

I tap my hand against my leg to give us a beat.

Poop. Quack. Fish. Bon bon. Macaroni.  
Lipstick.

Stevie joins in.

Poop. Quack. Fish. Bon bon. Macaroni.  
Lipstick.

Stevie continues as I make up the verse.

They should be runnin'  
They should be runnin'  
They really should pick up the pace.  
But they are walkin'  
And they are talkin'  
I bet I'll beat you in a race!

I let go of Stevie's hand and run across the park. 'No fair. Head start!' he screams, running after me. He's right. It's not fair. But it's the **ONLY** way I'm going to get to school on time and I really don't need to be late again.

'Faster!' I yell over my shoulder. 'Last one there gives Mrs Moshie a foot massage.'

It's cruel, I know, but sometimes a big brother's gotta do what a big brother's gotta do. And *this* big brother's gotta be on time for school.