

"[My kids] just really want me to just be Mom and be normal," Madonna (in May 2015) told *The Advocate* in 2012.

MADONNA vs GUY

**The** *Night*

"Guy likes to think of himself as firm but fair," says a source close to Ritchie (with Rocco Aug. 14).



Battling for her boy:  
**Madonna** sues  
ex-husband **Ritchie** to  
send their 15-year-old  
son, Rocco, back home

BY SARAH GROSSBART

**M**adonna wanted to take a Christmas holiday. And it had to be flawless. Before she was to arrive at her \$20 million rental home at Park City, Utah's Deer Valley Resort, the self-described perfectionist pored over every detail with her realtor. She requested that a monitor in the house be linked to the security camera at the top of the mountain so her kids, Lourdes, 19, Rocco, 15, David, 10, and Mercy, 10, could track conditions on the resort's 101 slopes. The spread would also need to be stocked with snowboards, of course. And an instructor was required to be on call 24/7 during the family's stay "in case the kids wanted to be taught tricks," says a source. "She said, 'I need it all to be perfect for them.'"

But perfection wasn't sufficient for her rebellious son Rocco. Bunking with dad Guy Ritchie since early December, he refused to leave London — even ignoring a December 23 order from a Manhattan Civil Supreme Court

# for **Rocco**

ON THE COVER: ANTHONY BEHAR/SIPA PRESS. INSETS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JASON LAVERIS/FILMMAGIC; FAYE SADOU/UPA/RETNA LTD.; GIRLIE/FAMEFLYNET PICTURES; SPLASH NEWS; NEWS PICTURES/PHOTO. FROM LEFT: TAYLOR HILL/FILMMAGIC; DAVE ALLOCCA/STARTRAKSPHOTO.COM

judge to return to New York. (A source says Madonna bailed on the ski trip.) Six weeks later, says a source, he spurned his mom again, only seeing her once when she flew to London January 28 for a three-day stay. And at press-time, he was planning to join his dad at a February 3 custody hearing in New York to explain why he wanted to live long-term in London. "It's really horrible," says a Madonna source. "She feels incredibly hurt." Yet she also understands why life with Dad is more appealing. While Madonna, 57, transformed from a wild child in cone-shaped bras to a self-described "disciplinarian" after having kids, Ritchie, 47, shuns rules and structure. Says a Madonna insider of Rocco, "You can't blame him for wanting to live with someone who will let him run wild."

### WAR OF THE RULES

Rocco's U.K. stay was supposed to last only a few days, at most. For three months he, David and Mercy had followed the seven-time Grammy winner on her 82-date *Rebel Heart* tour. "They travel everywhere with me," Madonna has explained of the trio. (Her oldest daughter, Lourdes, is a sophomore at the University of Michigan.) When the tour arrived in London December 1, Rocco asked to spend a few nights with his dad, his stepmom (model Jacqui Ainsley, 34) and his three half siblings. But he decided to stay put when the tour rolled on to Amsterdam. Says a Madonna source, "She was hurt Rocco didn't want to leave with her, but never thought he'd stay longer than a few weeks."

Rocco quickly adapted to life *chez* Ritchie, where study time is replaced by playtime. With Madonna, "he had private tutors and lessons," says the source. "Education is the biggest priority for Madonna." But Ritchie, who dropped out at 15, has said he's



"The happiest moment of my life was when my children were born," Madonna (with Ritchie, Rocco and Lourdes) tells *Us*.



# Madge, the Mom

The Queen of Pop is devoted to her little subjects



She says David picked their Ralph Lauren tuxes for that year's Grammys.



"Blonde Ambition!" Madonna captions this September snap of a pigtailed Rocco.

against school. "Everyone told me that to be good at school was important, but for me it wasn't," the *Man From U.N.C.L.E.* director told *Details* in 2011. "So I am anti-school. And I'm anti people putting so much pressure on kids and robbing their childhood by giving them so much homework. I think if kids want to arse around, then they should." To that end, says another Madonna source, while Ritchie is homeschooling Rocco, he isn't forcing



2007

A year after Madonna adopted 1-year-old David, they visit an orphanage in his native Malawi with Lourdes.



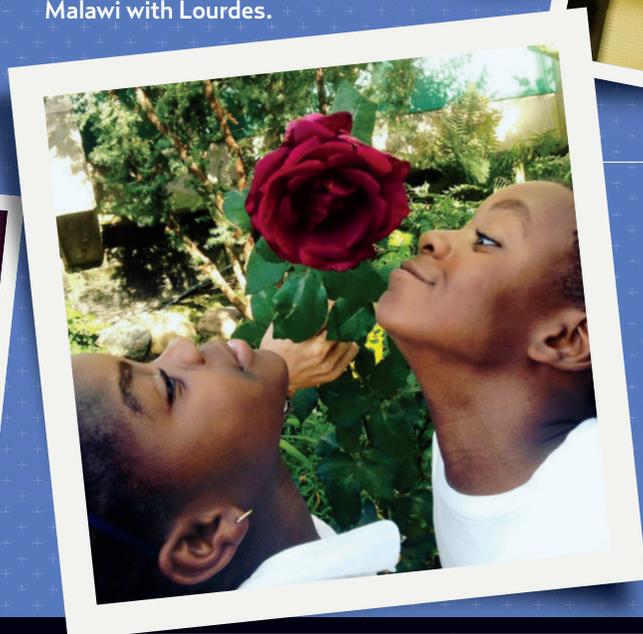
2010

Malawi-born Mercy visits the country with Mom. Says a source, "Madonna wants her kids to be cultured."



2012

"He loved touring," a source says of Rocco, on stage during Madonna's MDNA tour.



2015

"3 flowers in the Garden!" she captions this October Instagram of Mercy and David.



2015

Madonna posts this shot of Lourdes on her phone on Christmas in New York.

him to study for his May high school qualification exams. "Madonna wants him to do those exams," says the source. "Guy has pretty much told Rocco that if he wants out of education, he can quit now."

Ritchie's entire parenting philosophy is lax, adds a friend. "He thinks children should be given enough room to learn their own lessons," says the pal. "He doesn't like the idea of strict parenting." Rocco, a film and photography buff, now spends his days riding bikes with Ritchie or skeet-shooting at his country estate in Wiltshire, England. "It's

something he and Guy have always enjoyed," says the pal, noting it's not a Madonna-approved activity: "She doesn't like her son handling guns."

She isn't wild about the lack of structure, either. "The kids are on a strict schedule," says the Madonna source. "It's like being in a military academy." And she doles out demerits. In a 2005 *Newsweek* interview, she detailed what happened if Lourdes left dirty laundry on the floor: "We take all of her clothes and put them in a bag, and she has to earn all of her clothes back by being tidy. She wears the

same outfit every day to school until she learns her lesson."

The singer also has a trick for keeping her teens off their cell-phones. "I can't stand when I'm talking to someone and they're just texting," she told *Us* last March. "My kids do it and it drives me up the wall. I always put my hand on their phone, and whatever they are doing, I just ruin it!" That's not to say Madonna doesn't like having a little fun of her own. During her tour, she posted a photo of a sullen-looking Rocco dolled up in pigtails. And in an even more

my-mom-is-*sooo*-embarrassing move, she posted a video of him doing a backflip in orange boxer briefs. The caption: “#nosausage.” Still, the source says Rocco “always seemed totally happy with his mom. He has the freedom to skateboard and have friends over.” (The Madonna source nixes rumors the kids are on a macrobiotic diet, but another source says their sugar intake was limited: “Whereas most moms make exceptions for things like birthday cake, she doesn’t.”) The Madonna source admits the singer “has rules, but it’s not crazy. She’s strict, but not overly strict.”

### ► PAPA, DON'T PREACH

To Madonna, the problem lies with Ritchie — not her rules. The pair’s strained marriage — sources say they fought over everything from their sex life to Madonna’s decision to adopt David in 2006 — turned into an acrimonious uncoupling in late 2008. As they battled over their divorce settlement (without a prenup, Madonna was forced to hand over \$75 million of her fortune) and how to raise their two sons (Lourdes’ dad is trainer Carlos Leon; Madonna adopted Mercy postsplit), Madonna flaunted her romance with the New York Yankees’ Alex Rodriguez. Nearly a decade later, says the Madonna insider, Ritchie’s contempt for her is still raw. “Madonna feels he’s always been competitive with her,” explains the insider, “and now she thinks he’s turning their son against her.”

By defying their custody arrangement (Madonna has primary custody of Rocco and David; Ritchie has visitation rights), “Madonna thinks Guy is trying to get at her however he can,” says the Madonna insider. “She feels Guy is using Rocco as a pawn,



“She’s been extremely emotional but soldiering on,” says a source close to Madonna (Jan. 23).

“SHE’S A GOOD MOTHER. YES. THAT’S ALL I HAVE TO SAY. SHE’S VERY STRICT, BUT IN A GOOD WAY.”

ROCCO, WITH HIS MOM, ON THE ELLEN DEGENERES SHOW IN 2012

telling him he can do whatever he wants.” Not to mention saying whatever he wants. The insider claims Ritchie often disses the singer in front of Rocco. “He’s telling Rocco he should stay with him,” says the insider. “It seems like he’s trying to brainwash the kid.” Adds another source, “He sometimes talks s--t about Madonna. He puts it in Rocco’s head that she’s the villain. This entire thing is 40 percent Rocco wanting to do what he wants and 60 percent Guy being an a--hole.”

### ► HOW SHE’S COPING

The situation has left Madonna 100 percent gutted. The woman

who has called herself “the biggest unapologetic bitch” has been prone to bouts of crying, says the pal. The February 3 hearing could lead to more tears. New York-based family-law attorney Valerie Tocci says it offers Rocco the chance to share his wishes “so the judge can decide if they need a full custody hearing.” Either way, the shows must go on for the “Bitch I’m Madonna” singer. As she preps for the Asian and Australian legs of her tour, “she’s focusing on work, David, Mercy and Lola,” says the source. “She will always be there for Rocco, but he’s a teenage boy rebelling with a father who wants to hurt her.” **US**