

‘This baby can really rock out! Mind if I jam with you guys?’



A Different Beat

Sometimes you have to keep fighting for what you love.

Characters

Narrators 1 and 2: people who tell the story

Jack Sweeney: a 17-year-old boy

Jenna
Nick
Willie } garage band members

Ian Sweeney: Jack’s 15-year-old brother

Veronica: Jack and Ian’s 14-year-old sister

Yori: a girl in Veronica’s class

Mr. Reed: school band director

Mrs. Sweeney

Scene 1

Narrator 1: In a peaceful neighborhood, the Sweeney house stands silent. Suddenly an ear-piercing guitar chord screams from the garage.

Jack Sweeney: One, two ... one, two, three, four!

Narrator 2: The air fills with the sound of a rock band. Jack, the drummer, is the leader of the Grock Rocks. Willie plays guitar. Nick plays bass. Jenna is the singer.

Jenna: (singing) Youuuuu don’t like me ... and I—yi-yi-yi—don’t like youuuuu!

Narrator 1: Jack’s younger sister, Veronica, sits on her father’s workbench. She is watching Jack play the drums.

Jenna: (still singing) But something about you,

baby, makes me want to get up, get up, get up, and get youuuuu!

Narrator 2: During a killer guitar solo, the band members hear a strange sound. The sound gets louder and stranger.

Narrator 1: Jack’s brother, Ian, enters the garage. The band members stop playing. Their eyes widen. Ian is holding the funkier instrument anyone has ever seen.

Narrator 2: Ian’s instrument hangs on the front of his body from two shoulder straps. It looks like a big box with a keyboard on one side. It has a panel of buttons on the other side. The middle has a pleated section that expands and contracts.

Nick: What the heck is that thing?

Narrator 1: Jack and Veronica look at each other. They hang their heads in shame.

Willie: Dude, you play the accordion? Weak!

Nick: A-cord-ee-what?

Ian Sweeney: It’s an accordion. This baby can really rock out! Mind if I jam with you guys?

Jenna: You must be kidding!

Willie: Wait! Ian, how does an accordion player end up with a million dollars?

Ian: Umm, I don’t know. How?

Willie: He starts with 2 million dollars! Get it?

Narrator 2: Jack does a rim shot on the snare drum and cymbals. Nick and Jenna burst out laughing. Ian squeezes his instrument shut.

It gives out a soft sound like a sigh. Ian sighs as well. Then he leaves the garage quietly.

Scene 2

Narrator 1: At school the next day, Veronica's ninth-grade class files into the band room. The students are learning to play instruments. Veronica heads straight for the drums. Yori, a girl from her class, follows her.

Veronica: (to Yori) My brother plays the drums. He's the best.

Yori: Really? I thought your brother played the accordion.

Veronica: Oh, you're thinking of Ian. My other brother Jack is cool! He plays the drums.

Yori: Ian sounds like a freak! I mean, why would anyone want to play the accordion?

Veronica: Exactly. That's why I'm going to play the drums, like Jack. Just listen.

Narrator 2: Veronica sits on the drum stool. She picks up a pair of drumsticks. Then she starts to bang away as loudly as she can. Yori covers her ears.

Narrator 1: Mr. Reed, the band director, hurries toward the girls. He tugs the drumsticks from Veronica's hands.

Mr. Reed: OK, Veronica. Let's set you up with something else. How about the saxophone?

Veronica: No, Mr. Reed. You don't understand. I play the drums. It's the coolest instrument there is!

Mr. Reed: Maybe so, Veronica. But I'd like you to consider a different instrument. The band already has too many drummers. I'm sorry.

Veronica: No, please! I really love the drums.

Mr. Reed: You have a lot of spunk, Veronica. That's just the kind of thing I like to see ... in a tuba player.

Veronica: Tuba? You're joking, right? That thing is three times bigger than I am.

Mr. Reed: Well, you are small, but I like your energy. Playing tuba takes a lot of energy. And besides, we need a tuba player.

Narrator 2: Just then, Ian bursts into the room. He is carrying his accordion. He starts to play the instrument. The class comes to a halt.

Ian: I am a captain without a ship! I am a king

without a country! I am a musician without a band!

Mr. Reed: Oh, no, not again, Ian! Haven't we already discussed this?

Ian: Yes, but I am the mighty accordionist! Hear my lonely song!

Mr. Reed: Ian, please! I've told you before—there is no place for an accordion in our band. Maybe you could learn to play the tuba?

Narrator 1: Ian plays a sad chord on the accordion. He stops when he sees Veronica.

Veronica: Ian, why are you doing this to me?

Ian: I'm bringing my sad story to the people. Musicians of America, lend me your ears!

Mr. Reed: Ian, accordions are for playing polkas. They're not meant for other kinds of music.

Narrator 2: To prove Mr. Reed wrong, Ian starts to play "Hey Ya!" by OutKast.

Narrator 1: Veronica covers her ears. She is upset.

Veronica: (to Ian) You're insane!

Narrator 2: Veronica storms out of the room.

Scene 3

Narrator 1: That night, Veronica is working on homework at the kitchen table. Her mother walks in.

Mrs. Sweeney: Hello, sweetie. How are things?

Veronica: Just fine, Mom. Everything is just peachy keen.

Mrs. Sweeney: Oh, good. I'm glad to hear it.

Narrator 2: The sound of Ian's accordion drifts into the kitchen.

Veronica: Why does Ian have to practice that thing all the time?

Mrs. Sweeney: I think it's because he is trying to get better, honey.

Veronica: Well, Jack doesn't practice that much, and he is still the world's best drummer.

Narrator 1: Her mother doesn't answer.

Veronica: You know, Ian pulled another stunt at school today.

Mrs. Sweeney: What do you mean, dear?

Veronica: My class was trying out instruments in the band room. He had the nerve to come in

and play that thing. It made me so angry.

Mrs. Sweeney: That sounds like our Ian. Anyway, did you find an instrument that you like?

Veronica: Yeah. The drums, of course. But Mr. Reed says he has enough drummers. He said that maybe I should try the saxophone or (gagging) the tuba! Can you believe that?

Mrs. Sweeney: How about the piano, sweetie?

Veronica: Look, I just want to play the drums, like Jack does. I've been banging on his drums for years when he's not around. I think I could be really good. I love the drums.

Narrator 2: Jack enters the kitchen.

Jack: What's up, everyone?

Narrator 1: Veronica gathers up her homework. Then she hurries to her room.

Jack: What's *her* problem?

Scene 4

Narrator 2: Ian finishes practicing. As he walks past Veronica's room, he hears her sobbing.

Narrator 1: He taps lightly on her door.

Veronica: (muffled) Leave me alone!

Ian: (entering her room) What's wrong, Ronnie? Did something happen at school?

Veronica: You wouldn't understand. Nobody understands. And don't call me Ronnie! I'm not a kid anymore!

Ian: Sorry, Veronica.

Narrator 2: Ian sits next to his sister.

Veronica: Why do you have to be different? Everyone at school laughs at you and your stupid accordion.

Ian: I don't worry about what other people think. I am who I am. I love my accordion.

Veronica: You do?

Ian: Sure. There is something about the sound the accordion makes. It's so rich and full.

Veronica: I never thought about it that way.

Ian: When I play, my arms and fingers are in control of a universe of sound. That's why I keep fighting for the school band—no, for the world—to accept me.

? Just want to play the drums, like Jack does. I've been banging on his drums for years.?

Veronica: I love the drums, but I can't play them.

Ian: Says who? If you love them, then you should fight for what you want. Like me!

Veronica: Mr. Reed says he doesn't need any more drummers in the band.

Ian: Then you'll just have to work hard to be the best drummer he ever heard. Take it from me: You have to fight for the instrument you love.

Narrator 1: Veronica looks at her smiling brother.

Veronica: (laughing) You are such a dork!

Ian: Yeah. Too bad for you we're related.

Narrator 2: Jack pokes his head into the room.

Veronica: Hey, Jack, why don't you let Ian jam with you sometime?

Jack: You're joking, right? The Grock Rocks would lose their edge.

Veronica: What edge? You sound just like every other band on the radio. Give him a shot. An accordion might actually *give* you an edge.

Jack: Fine. Come down to the garage. We'll see what happens.

Ian: OK, but after we jam, you have to show Veronica how to lay down a funky beat.

Narrator 1: Jack shrugs his shoulders.

Jack: You're in the hands of the master now. Come, little ones. Let's rock! 1

—Bryon Cahill

