

Eddie, The 25 Year Reunion

Milana's Story (A Story Within a Story)

Copyright © 2022 by Dr. Robert E. Zee

Author's Note: This story is extracted from *Eddie, The 25 Year Reunion*. Slight modifications have been made from the original text to better introduce the characters for those who have not read the entire series. Also, some of the text below does not appear in *Eddie, The 25 Year Reunion*.

Quitting the Band

On the last day of classes before Christmas break, Eddie and Kathy's daughter, Milana, comes home, surprisingly announcing to her parents, "please don't get mad at me, but I quit the band. Next semester, I'm taking home economics, with everyone else who quit the band." Kathy asks, "really? What happened?" Milana explains, "Mr. Sharpe, the band director, kept telling me all semester that I'm doing everything wrong. So, I quit." Kathy replies, "good for you." Quite relieved, Milana is silent for a moment, then asks, "so, you're not mad at me?" Kathy replies, "of course I'm not. It's their loss."

Milana asks her parents, "do you want to hear what happened?" Eddie replies, "sure. What was his problem this time?" Milana energetically explains, "I was practicing my Bach piece, *Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue in C Major*, before class, on the keyboard. But, I set the keyboard to be a harpsichord, because I wanted to hear what it sounded like. And, so Mr. Sharpe told me that my expression was all wrong. So, then I asked him, 'what's

wrong with it?’ And, he told me a bunch of mumbo jumbo yakety yak bullshit. Then, I told him, ‘I’m playing this piece on an organ during Christmas service. Organ keyboards don’t have any expression, the organist does. Organ keys are on off switches. I just wanted to hear what it sounded like on a harpsichord.’ So, he got mad at me, and told me, ‘the way you played that, you were hurting my ears,’ and that I was giving him a headache. So, then I told him, ‘fine, then. I quit. Find someone else to play the keyboard for the band.’ Then, he got all bent out of shape and pretended to apologize.” Talking in what sounds like one big run-on sentence, Milana sounds a bit like Kathy when she was her age.

Eddie asks, “do they have someone else who can play the keyboard?” Milana replies, “yeah. They have David Alexander, but he can’t even get through *Chopsticks* or *Here Comes the Bride* without making a mistake. And, he can’t play in some keys because too many sharps and flats confuses him. And, there’s Laurie Wolff. She’s okay, but she’s always an eighth step behind because she can’t read music very well. She’s always looking back and forth from the music to the keyboard, so she gets left in the dust.” Eddie comically points out, “well, maybe everyone else can play an eighth step behind her. Then, she’ll be in sync with everyone else.” Milana replies, “dad! It doesn’t work that way!” Eddie answers her, “I know. I was just messing with you.”

Introducing another complaint, Milana asks her parents, “and, do you want to hear something else?” Knowing that Milana is on a roll, Kathy replies, “sure. What’s up?” Milana replies, “and, the drummer, Donny White, can’t read music either. So, he takes the drum music, and rewrites it into something that says, ‘chick chick boom snap snap’ so he can understand it.” Kathy laughs, asking, “what does all that supposed to mean?” Milana explains, “a ‘chick’ is hitting the high hat, a ‘snap’ is the snare drum, and a ‘boom’ is the bass drum. Oh! And, for an open high hat, he writes the letter ‘S’ five or six times for that. And, he has a bunch of other words he made up for the other drums.” Eddie asks, “can he keep a

beat?" Milana replies, "as long as he wasn't smoking pot the day before." Kathy sarcastically asks, "and, what was Mr. Sharpe's complaint about you again?" Sounding a bit like her parents, Milana replies, "yeah. Exactly."

Eddie asks, "is there anyone good in the band?" Milana replies, "yeah. Svetlana is great on the guitar, but she's not in the band anymore. And, Vance is great on the saxophone. Let me think who else." As Milana pauses, Eddie contemplates that a middle school band is much like a middle school track team, where some members are highly skilled, and others are best utilized by sending them home permanently, such as Jimmy O'Brien. Milana continues, recalling, "oh yeah. And, Yasmine can play the bass way better than anyone else there, but Mr. Sharpe wouldn't let her play in the Fall Concert because she's a girl. So, she's quitting band next semester too."

Kathy interrupts, asking, "what? What's up with that?" Milana explains, "for the same reason he won't let Svetlana play lead guitar. He always wants the guys up front." Eddie suggests, "maybe you, Svetlana, and Yasmine can form your own band." Milana thinks for a half second, and replies, "yeah. But, we'd need a good drummer." Kathy suggests, "maybe Darryl would know of a good drummer your age." Milana energetically screams out, "wait a second! There's Roberta! She quit the band in the beginning of the year! But, she's really good and she still plays!" Kathy tells Milana, "well, there you go. The Northside Middle School girls' band." Milana exclaims, "awesome! We're gonna do this! We're going to get together and, in the Spring talent contest, we're gonna kick ass!" Eddie comments to Kathy, "she's sounding just like Braden." Kathy laughs, and tells Milana, "now, all you need is a name for your band."

Kathy curiously asks, "why did Roberta quit the band?" Milana explains, "because Mr. Sharpe put her on the Timpani, the tambourine, the bells, the cajon, that stupid triangle thing, and a whole bunch of other percussion junk that she doesn't want to play." Eddie comments, "I

totally get that. It's kind of like telling Bobby B. that he's going to run the mile in a track meet rather than throwing the shot-put." Glad that her father understands, Milana replies, "yeah. Exactly." Kathy and Eddie both realize that what goes on in the band room is not unlike any other facet of life.

Giving fair warning, Milana reveals, "oh. And, the school is going to be calling you guys." Kathy asks, "oh, really? What's on their agenda?" Milana explains, "when I went to my guidance counselor to change to home economics next semester, he asked me why I wanted to change. So, I told him. And, then he said he will have to discuss this with my parents." Kathy asks, "do you really want to take home economics?" Milana replies, "I don't care. I just don't want to listen to Mr. Sharpe telling me that I'm doing everything wrong all the time." Reassuring Milana, Eddie informs her, "we'll tell the guidance counselor that we're behind any decision you make." Kathy mentions, "you could always join the band next year, when you're in high school." Milana replies, "yeah. I know. I probably will."

Milana then mentions, "oh, and I invited Mr. Sharpe to Christmas service. And, I told him to feel free to give me feedback on my performance." Kathy laughs, and tells Milana, "if Dr. Erlanger thinks you're doing great, I'm sure there's not a whole lot that Mr. Sharpe can say." Milana replies, "I know. I just want him to know that I'm good at something."

While Milana is putting her books away, Eddie whispers to Kathy, "it sounds like Lana kicked Sharpe's ass." Kathy agrees, stating, "you could have seen that coming a mile away. Geesh. She's only thirteen years old, and she's playing Bach flawlessly. I don't know where they got this new guy from, but he's no Mr. Spaulding." Mr. Spaulding, who taught music at the middle school when Eddie and Kathy attended there, was a top-notch instructor. Unfortunately, for Milana, Mr. Spaulding retired at the end of the last academic year.

Christmas Service

It's been twenty-one years since Mark, his father, and Eddie's father completed the construction of Dr. Akinmola's church building. Still in perfect condition, the cathedral-like structure has been the home to weekly services, weddings, and various special events.

Christmas Eve brings the entire tribe and their extended families together once again. Eddie and Kathy drive into the church parking lot driving their Volkswagen Bus, parking next to Mark and Paula, who have already arrived. Arriving with Eddie and Kathy today is their son, Eddie, Jr., and their daughter, Milana.

On the way in, Kathy asks Milana, "are you all prepared?" With a display of great confidence, Milana replies, "of course, mom. I got this." Kathy replies, "good. I was just checking." Milana is just as confident at the organ console as Eddie and Kathy are on the track.

Walking through the door into the narthex, Eddie, Kathy, and their son and daughter are greeted by Adekunle Akinmola, who tells Eddie, "merry Christmas, my friends! I am so glad to see you on this beautiful day!" Eddie and Kathy both reply, "merry Christmas!" Akinmola tells Eddie, "I am very happy to see you guys today." Eddie asks, "are you doing the service today?" Akinmola replies, "I am leading the first service. My father will be leading the second service."

Kathy's father and mother walk up, wishing Eddie and Kathy a merry Christmas. Akinmola wishes Kathy's parents a merry Christmas. Eddie, Jr. caught up with Hunter Braden, and are having their own conversation off to the side, most likely about Hunter's Porsche 914 electric conversion that Eddie, Jr. has been working on. Kathy's mother, Chloë, asks Eddie, "are your mom and dad coming to this service?" Eddie replies, "they're probably coming to both services." Eddie comments, "and, here they come." Eddie's parents walk up, joining in with the Christmas greetings.

Just then, the organist can be heard playing the prelude to the service, *Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue in C Major*, composed by J.S. Bach. Chloë asks Kathy, “is that Milana playing the organ?” Kathy replies, “yeah. She’s been up here practicing all week.” Chloë tells those around her, “excuse me, but, I’m going inside to listen.” Chloë walks into the sanctuary, with the rest of the group joining her, taking a seat where they can see Milana play.

The Flentrop pipe organ, installed when the church was built, has a very distinct and beautiful tonal quality to it. Within fifteen minutes before the service begins, the whole tribe is together, all seated in the same area, along with many of their parents. Needless to say, everyone is impressed with Milana’s musical talent.

After the service, those present from the track team wish each other a merry Christmas. As they are getting ready for the next service, Kathy’s and Eddie’s parents are talking with Milana, congratulating her on an awesome performance. Kathy’s and Eddie’s parents again wish Eddie and Kathy a merry Christmas. And, Eddie, Jr. is nowhere to be found, likely hanging out with his friends in the parking lot at the moment.

Between services, Milana finds her organ instructor, Dr. Elianna Erlanger, and energetically asks, “how did I do?” Giving Milana a hug, Dr. Erlanger exclaims, “that was really awesome, girl! You rock!” Milana asks, “did I mess anything up?” Dr. Erlanger replies, “not that I heard. But, I must admit, I thought there was something wrong with the organ when you first started playing. With all the people in the sanctuary, there wasn’t much reverb at all.” Milana comments, “yeah. I guess when I get my lessons, there’s no one there but us.” Today, at the first service, there was standing room only.

Walking up, and interrupting Milana and Dr. Erlanger’s conversation, Mr. Sharpe, the middle school music teacher, boastfully tells Milana, “that was much better than I expected!” Before Milana could answer, Dr. Erlanger comes to her rescue, and asks Mr. Sharpe, “oh

really, sir? What exactly were you expecting?” Realizing he was being a bit rude, Mr. Sharpe tells Dr. Erlanger, “I’m sorry. Let me introduce myself. I’m Steven Sharpe, Milana’s music teacher.” Already understanding the disposition of Mr. Sharpe from her past discussions with Milana, Dr. Erlanger pleasantly replies, “I’ve heard a lot about you. It’s nice to finally meet you.” Allowing the adults to have their conversation, Milana listens carefully to hear what is said about her, as most thirteen year olds would do.

Mr. Sharpe asks Dr. Erlanger, “are you Milana’s mom?” Dr. Erlanger replies, “no. I’m Dr. Elianna Erlanger. I’m Lana’s organ instructor. And, yes. Lana’s performance this morning was flawless, even if I do say so myself.”

Not wanting to be too outclassed, asking a question that was already partially addressed, Mr. Sharpe asks Dr. Erlanger, “so, you’re Milana’s organ instructor? Where did you study, Dr. Erlanger?” Dr. Erlanger replies, “I got my doctorate in Music Theory and Analysis at The Juilliard School, and I now teach at the State University. My undergraduate work was done at Hunter College. And, for a few select gifted individuals, I give private lessons.” Mr. Sharpe quickly realizes he is considerably outranked, something Milana knew since the beginning of this school year.

Wanting to gain some sympathy, Mr. Sharpe informs Dr. Erlanger, “Milana has unfortunately decided to not continue her music career next semester. She will definitely be missed by both me and the band.” Dr. Erlanger replies, “actually, Lana will be continuing her music career. It is my understanding that she just won’t be continuing music at the public school level.”

Dr. Erlanger could ask Mr. Sharpe where he studied, but she has heard enough from Milana to not even care. On many occasions, Dr. Erlanger has had to undo or unteach some of the less than skillful techniques taught to Milana by Mr. Sharpe. Not naive regarding psychological warfare tactics as she learned from her

parents, Milana listens carefully as she hears a tactical war brewing between the two adults.

Expressing a strong opinion clearly intended to be overheard by Milana, Mr. Sharpe tells Dr. Erlanger, “it would be really nice to have Milana back for next semester. I strongly believe it would be beneficial for her to play with kids of her same age. Perhaps you can convince her.” Dr. Erlanger boldly replies, “to ‘play with kids of her same age’, as you put it, Mr. Sharpe, will only hold Lana back. At this point, her decision to cease playing with the middle school band is probably the best decision for her future.” Digging himself into a hole, Mr. Sharpe now wishes he never brought the subject up.

Not letting Mr. Sharpe escape that easily, Dr. Erlanger assumes an offensive position, asking, “do you realize, sir, the unique and technically demanding characteristics of the organ Lana played this morning?” Mr. Sharpe does not immediately answer, a dead giveaway that he is clueless. Answering her own question, since the answer is far above Mr. Sharpe’s pay grade, Dr. Erlanger explains, “the organ Lana was playing this morning is a Flentrop tracker organ. An organ utilizing tracker action requires far more skill and is not quite as easily played or forgiving as, say, a modern-day electronic keyboard. Depending on which stops¹ are selected, there can be an inherent delay from the time the key is pressed until the pipe expresses its voice. On the Flentrop, this is not too much of a problem with most of the stops associated with the manuals². This characteristic is, however, a problem with the eight-foot and sixteen-foot stops associated with the pedal section. Lana must be very careful, when playing

¹ Organ Stop: The rod of the mechanism that brings an organ stop or rank into action.

² Manual: Proper term for the organ keyboards.

these ranks³, to be approximately one-sixteenth to one-eighth step ahead of the manuals. That, sir, is a skill characteristic to only very elite musicians.”

Regarding the quiriness of the pedal section and, more importantly, wanting to save face, Mr. Sharpe asks Dr. Erlanger, “I’m now curious. Why is that?” In place of Dr. Erlanger answering, Milana jumps in and explains, “it’s because the mechanics of a tracker organ are located behind the keyboards. When the key is pressed, a chamber is pressurized, and whatever stops are pulled in determines what pipes play. The chamber is a whole lot bigger for the pipes going to the eight and sixteen-foot ranks, so it takes a little more time to come up to pressure. So, there’s a really small time delay. But, in a modern-day electro gizmo pipe organ, like the one I play at the University, all the valves are electronically controlled. They’re all located at the base of the pipe, where there’s a constant pressurized air supply. So, it ain’t got that problem.” Shocked at Milana’s response, Mr. Sharpe asks Milana, “how did you learn that?” Milana takes a deep breath, sighs, and replies, “my dad taught me. He’s an auto mechanic.”

Mr. Sharpe laughs, albeit very quietly, sarcastically asking Milana, “so, your father is an auto mechanic? What does he know about pipe organs?” Milana replies, “more than you do. He bought this organ for the church. My dad and Mark keep it running just fine.” Mr. Sharpe comments, “really? Pipe organs must be very complicated.” Milana replies, “not to someone who knows what they’re doing.”

Further digging a hole for himself while trying to sound intelligent, Mr. Sharpe comments, “well, some of those pipes had a very shaky tremolo sound to it. Maybe your father can look into fixing that.” Knowing exactly to

³ Organ Rank: A set of pipes producing the same timbre for each note. “Rank” is somewhat interchangeable with the term “stop”.

what Mr. Sharpe is referring, Milana replies, "if you're talking about the Kromhoorn stop, well, it's kind of supposed to sound that way. Everybody knows that." Now getting a little ticked off, Mr. Sharpe digs deep into his music education, and suggests, "oh. I see. So, you used the tremulant stop on the organ?" Milana laughs, and replies, "no. There is no tremulant stop on this organ! Look at the console! Do you see a tremulant stop? I don't. What's the matter with you?"

Trying to defuse the heated situation brewing between Milana and Mr. Sharpe, Dr. Erlanger mentions, "Lana is fully correct, sir. What Milana referred to earlier regarding the mechanical action of the organ is why the organ's console is located very close to the organ itself, and why the ranks are tightly packed. If you take notice, the eight-foot and sixteen-foot ranks are located very close to the console, and the four-foot, and smaller ranks are farthest from the console. And, it's not likely you'll find a tremulant stop on a tracker organ such as this one. The tremulant sound to which you were referring, Mr. Sharpe, is created by the relationship between the resonator and the boot of the Kromhoorn pipes. A reed stop in which the resonator is much smaller in diameter than the boot favors some back pressure into the boot, creating a secondary resonance within the system, resulting in a tremulant effect. The Kromhoorn rank was designed to sound as it does. Lana is very familiar with the instrument she plays. And, as Lana mentioned, her lessons are not only conducted at this church on the Flentrop, but also at the pipe organ at the State University, which is a modern-day electronically controlled instrument. She is quite skilled at playing either."

Jumping at the chance to further bury her less than skilled music teacher, Milana mentions, "and, another thing about the eight and sixteen foot ranks. Anyone can tell that, if you listen to classical organ music, there's always a slight delay when the big daddies are played. You know, kind of like when Laurie Wolff plays the keyboard." Expecting to get some sympathy from Milana, Mr. Sharpe replies, "now, now. You have to remember,

Laurie is in the seventh grade.” Sounding exactly like her father, Eddie, when he spoke of Todd McCutchen, Milana replies, “I played better than Laurie when I was in first grade.”

Coming to the defense of Laurie Wolff and slyly admonishing Milana, Mr. Sharpe tells Milana, “for being in the seventh grade, Laurie has one of the best soprano voices I’ve ever heard.” Countering the attack, Milana responds, “yeah. If being a Tierce⁴ soprano is good, I totally agree with you.” Trying not to laugh, Dr. Erlanger grins, fully understanding that Milana just told Mr. Sharpe that Laurie Wolff sings way off key. Milana’s comment, however, flew ten-thousand feet over Mr. Sharpe’s head.

Leaving the argument with his former student behind, and attempting to sound intelligent, Mr. Sharpe abruptly changes the subject and ignorantly comments, “I wonder why they can’t just put the mechanical valve at the base of the pipe, like in the newer organs.” Quickly jumping in with the answer, Milana explains, “then, at the keyboard, you’d have a super gigantic mess of spaghetti linkages moving a gazillion valves sixty feet away. Good luck with that.” Milana would again be correct, for a plethora of sixty-foot linkages requiring sophisticated counterbalance mechanisms to keep the keyboard force low would take up far more space than is practical. An organ designed in such a way would also be a maintenance nightmare.

Not wanting to continue the battle, Mr. Sharpe announces, “well, this was very enlightening. And, congratulations, again, Milana, on a fine performance.” Milana replies, “thank you.” Wanting to get rid of Mr. Sharpe, Dr. Erlanger tells the less than skilled middle school music teacher, “you have a wonderful day, sir.”

⁴ Tierce: A mutant organ stop where the note voiced is intentionally a major third away from the note played, eg., play a C and get an E.

Once Mr. Sharpe is far enough away, Milana tells Dr. Erlanger, "I don't like him." Dr. Erlanger informs Milana, "that's okay. You don't have to. And, for the record, neither do I." Milana then prepares for the second service as Dr. Erlanger heads home for the evening. And, it's no secret that Milana will inform her parents that Dr. Erlanger kicked Mr. Sharpe's ass today.

Twenty minutes later, Milana is again heard playing the prelude to the service, Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C Major. Eddie heads into the sanctuary again with Kathy, who both, with their parents, stay for the second service.

The Talent Contest

On a Friday evening, Kathy and Eddie arrive at the middle school along with the whole tribe to hear Milana and her band perform at the middle school talent contest. Joining the tribe for this event is Darryl Stone, a well sought after concert drummer, and his wife, Angela Meadows, who is now a famous sportscaster. Also on the guest list tonight are Darryl's parents, Athena Leighton and Mike Stone, Milana's organ teacher, Dr. Elianna Erlanger, Mr. Frazier and his wife, Dawn, Dr. Zunde, Mr. Chubin, and a few others from Northside High School and the University. It would appear that Milana's band has their own groupies, but in an age reversal sense.

The evening begins with the middle school principal, Mr. Anderson, addressing the attendees. Listening as Mr. Anderson speaks to the audience, one could come to the conclusion that the middle school is the greatest school in the world. But, a few towns over, another middle school principal is touting the same nonsense, claiming that her school is the best and most talented in the nation.

In the audience tonight, not paying one bit of attention to what Mr. Anderson is saying, is Mr. Steven Sharpe, the middle school band director and music teacher. Mr. Sharpe is not present by choice, for it is generally accepted protocol that the faculty attends such

events, especially since his jazz band will be performing tonight. And, being the school's music teacher, Mr. Sharpe was assigned the duty of being one of the judges.

While Mr. Anderson brags about the upcoming talent show, word gets around the auditorium that Angela Meadows is present at the event. Within no time, far more attention is focused on Angela than Mr. Anderson. A few of the parents recognize Darryl as the long-haired hippie drummer who won a gold medal in the Olympics a while ago, and wonder why he is present tonight. A few of the athletic-type students recognize Eric Johnson, the high school track coach and physical education instructor, whom they have heard a lot about. Many of them will have the awesome pleasure of doing push-ups and sit-ups in front of Johnson sometime in the near future. And Eddie, the best mechanic in town who was once the fastest man in the world, goes relatively unnoticed.

First up in the talent contest is a student performing *Doesn't Really Matter* to a taped accompaniment, originally released by Janet Jackson two years prior. During the performance, Eddie whispers to Kathy, "she's pretty good." Kathy quietly replies, "I know. She's going somewhere." Of course, anyone following this act will have a tough time of it. Everyone in the audience knows this is a class-one act for a middle school girl.

For the second performance, the stage is empty as music is heard through the sound system. Suddenly emerging from stage right is a dancer, whose entrance suggests that she has been taking dance lessons for several years. Paula whispers to Kathy, "wow! Did anyone dance like that when we were in middle school?" Kathy whispers back, "if they did, I never knew. I never went to any of these things when I was in middle school." Paula whispers to Kathy, "you could have gotten out your hoops and hooped, girl. And, you would have won." Kathy whispers back, "dang. Yeah. I could have. Way too late now."

As the show moves on, Mark comments, “here it comes, the proverbial puppet show. Wake me up when it’s over.” Paula replies, “me too.” As in any middle school, there are those acts which will prove as an embarrassment to the student. Puppet shows are usually at the top of the list. This one is no exception. But, the audience is tolerant, knowing that these are middle school kids, and they are doing their best.

During another act, Eddie whispers to Kathy, asking, “when is Milana up?” Kathy replies, “they’re up last, since they have a lot of equipment to move onto the stage. Someone is going to talk for a few minutes while they set up, and then introduce the band.” Eddie asks, “who is going to introduce them?” Kathy replies, “shh. Let’s just watch.” Eddie whispers, “what are you up to, Katarina Karakova?” Kathy replies, “what makes you think I’m up to something? And, by the way, it’s Katarina Bogenskaya.” Eddie now knows Kathy has something interesting planned. But, he will have to wait to find out. Eddie knows he will not get an answer out of Kathy.

Backstage, during the show, in the stage left wing, Roberta is carefully positioning her Gretsch drum kit on a carpet that will be dragged out onto the stage carrying her drums with it in just a while. On the carpet are markings, which facilitate aligning Roberta’s drums and cymbal stands exactly as she likes. Svetlana gets her Gretsch guitar hooked up to her amp, testing it very quietly to ensure there are no problems. Once that is done, Svetlana installs a new 9-volt battery in her wireless microphone and adjusts a few settings on her mixer. Yasmine, likewise, ensures there will be no problems with her Gretsch bass guitar once she is on stage. For some reason, Gretsch instruments seem to be preferred among the band. Milana, the lone band member without a Gretsch instrument, makes sure her Yamaha keyboard is ready to be carried on stage, which is a far cry above the quality of the middle school’s outdated equipment. And, to top it off, Milana will also be integrating her Moog synthesizer into the performance tonight.

As a fellow student is on stage reading poetry, Yasmine, seeing another band getting ready, whispers to her group, “there’s our competition, getting ready across stage.” Taking a look, Svetlana giggles, replying, “that’s no competition. Those guys like totally suck, well, except for Peter.” Milana comments, “Peter would be better off playing alone.” Yasmine laughs, replying, “you got that right, girl.” Roberta comments, “it’s just too bad they don’t have a drummer.” Yasmine replies, “yeah, they do. They have Donny.” Roberta replies, “as I said, it’s too bad they don’t have a drummer.” Catching on, Yasmine embarrassingly admits, “got it. Silly me.” Listening to the four girls discuss their competition, they sound a bit like Eddie and his track buddies when they were in middle school. Some things never change.

Introducing the next act, Mr. Anderson proudly announces, “for our next performance, please welcome our school’s very own dance band.” Reading from a card, Mr. Anderson announces, “on drums, we have Donny White. Playing the keyboard is Laurie Wolff. Playing bass is Julius Nash. And, on lead guitar is Peter Matondo.” One would surmise that, if there is only one guitar player, that person would logically be the lead guitar. But, Mr. Anderson is a paper pusher, not a musician.

Milana and her group watch and listen, as the school’s dance band, a subset of the main band, begins to perform *Thank You*, a song originally hitting the charts by Dido. Yasmine whispers to her group, “no! Tell me they’re not!” Milana replies, “yup. They are. They must have overheard us talking about doing that song.” Roberta adds, “poor Dido. They’re gonna trash her work.” Roberta comments, “there ain’t no way they’re playing any trip hop⁵ and getting away with it.” Yasmine replies, “you got that right.”

⁵ Trip Hop: A music genre based on a slow hip hop beat, with frequent drum breaks, incorporating a repetitively hypnotic melody usually played in a minor key. More appropriate for a mezzo-soprano voice.

Milana looks over at the dance band, wondering who is going to sing. Following the intro, Milana hears Laurie belting out the words, *I didn't hear you leave*, slightly flat from the key they are playing in. Roberta comments, "well, that's not exactly going too well. A woodpecker has better timing than Donny." Milana laughs, and replies, "yeah. Seriously." Not wanting to be distracted, Svetlana suggests, "let's get ready. We're up next."

Taking their mind off the current performance, walking up to Milana and her group, the guest speaker who will introduce the band inquires of each member exactly how to pronounce their name. After all, no one wants their name pronounced incorrectly, especially in the presence of a few hundred people.

Knowing that Milana's group is up next, sneaking backstage is Darryl Stone, who wanted to get a first class seat to Milana and her band's performance tonight. Darryl, in particular, wants to see Roberta, the drummer, play not just hear her. And, since this is a middle school, it was a cakewalk for Darryl to make his way backstage. Security is virtually non-existent.

The school's dance band finishes their number, and receives a good amount of applause. As they leave the stage with their instruments, the guest speaker who will announce the final act walks on stage. The auditorium goes quiet, so that all that can be heard is the sound of a few instruments being brought on stage.

The guest speaker announces, "good evening. Thank you all for coming out this evening to hear these very talented students perform tonight. It certainly takes a lot of courage for them to get up on stage and perform in front of you. And, every one of them has done an awesome job tonight. Please give all of them another round of applause." The audience gives the student participants a standing ovation, as Roberta comments to the group, "all that applause is for us." Yasmine replies, "yeah. I know. Right?" It would seem the newly-formed band has quite a high confidence level.

The guest speaker continues, announcing, “this has been a wonderful evening for me, and hopefully for you, too. For those of you who don’t know me, I am Angela Meadows. I was given the privilege of announcing tonight’s final act.” Hearing the announcement, Milana and her group quickly get into position to wave to the audience once their name is announced.

Angela announces, “please welcome, on the keyboard, Milana Bogenskaya.” Milana waves to the audience, receiving applause, much of which comes from the area where the tribe is seated. Angela continues, “on guitar, Svetlana Pushkin,” who is the granddaughter of Viktor Pushkin, the track coach of a university in the area. Mr. Pushkin, seated with Mr. Frazier tonight, tells Mr. Frazier, “I hear Svetlana has been practicing for three months with her group. I think this will go very well.” Waving her arm toward the group, Angela announces, “on bass, Yasmine Gretzky.” Yasmine, one of the most popular girls in the school, receives abundant cheers, especially from the guys in her class. Angela announces, “and, on drums, Roberta Osborne.” Roberta waves to the audience, also receiving a warm welcome.

Waving her hand toward the group, Angela then announces, “please give a warm welcome to Milana and the G-Strings!” The group receives applause, cheers, and whistling from the audience, with many parents surprised at the name the group chose for themselves. In the audience, Athena asks Kathy, “how in the world did they ever come up with the name ‘Milana and the G-Strings?’” Kathy explains, “everyone except Lana plays Gretsch instruments. The G stands for Gretsch. So, it’s Milana and the Gretsch musicians.” And, backstage, taking a close note of the drums, Darryl notices that Roberta has a top of the line Gretsch USA Custom drum kit, usually only owned by professional musicians.

Immediately silencing the audience, the group begins to play *The Power of Love*, a top hit recently popularized by Céline Dion and originally done by Jennifer Rush. Walking around stage with her guitar, belting out the

words with confidence, it is clear that Svetlana has performed in front of an audience many times before. Working her Yamaha keyboard and Moog simultaneously, Milana gives a performance that Mr. Sharpe will never forget. Yasmine, on the bass, decides to stand, also moving about on the stage. And, Roberta, on the drums, impresses Darryl, the professional musician, for *The Power of Love* is not exactly the easiest song to play on the drums. Darryl, however, notices that Roberta's drums are not exactly in tune. But, only an expert would notice that.

Hearing Milana's group play *The Power of Love*, Kathy tries hard not to show her tears of happiness. Eddie puts her arm around Kathy, who whispers to Eddie, "that is so nice of Lana. She knows how much I love this song." Milana has heard *The Power of Love* many times, and knows that it is, by far, her mother's favorite song.

In the audience, students get out of their seats, and start slow dancing in the aisles. This, of course, irritates the administrators, who expect everyone to remain quietly seated during the performance. But, there is not much that Mr. Anderson and his administrative henchmen can do. To rain on the parade would be social suicide.

At the end of their performance, the group waves to the audience, receiving a remarkable standing ovation. The audience starts screaming, "encore! Encore!" But, only one number was permitted to be played by any musical group tonight. As Mr. Anderson walks up on stage to address the audience, as planned, the group starts playing the number-one hit, *Breathe*, by Faith Hill. With the audience going wild, there's not much that Mr. Anderson can do, other than ride with the tide and go with the flow. If Mr. Crum were the principal, it's a sure bet that Milana and the G-Strings would be called into his office Monday morning for violating some unwritten rule.

At the end of the number, the group receives another standing ovation. Walking back on stage, Angela Meadows claps along with the audience, leading to even

more applause. Several minutes later, as the applause subsides, Angela walks off stage with the group. Backstage, giving each band member a hug, Angela tells them, “you guys were so awesome! Congratulations!” The girls are ecstatic, not only because of their great performance, but because Svetlana, Roberta, and Yasmine got to meet Angela Meadows in person. Milana, of course, has met Angela, a friend of Eddie and Kathy’s, many times in the past.

During the discussion among the judges, Mr. Anderson addresses the audience, making a few unnecessary announcements. But, something has to be done to fill the time while the judges do their work. It is clear to the audience that Milana and the G-Strings won the competition by a huge margin, but the judges base their scores on criteria other than popularity.

Once the judges have made their decision, the sealed envelope containing the results is handed to Mr. Anderson. While it is totally unnecessary to seal the envelope, it gives the audience the impression that the votes have not been tampered with during the 50-foot trek from the committee chair to the principal.

Without further ado, Mr. Anderson announces, “in third place, performing a dance for us tonight, is Dakota Miller.” Dakota walks on stage, proudly receiving her award. During the applause, taking her place to the left of the podium, Dakota is just as interested to see who won as is the rest of the crowd.

Mr. Anderson proudly announces, “second place goes to our very own dance band, who played *Thank You* tonight. Receiving second place, I’m sure they’re all very thankful. Come on up, Donald White, Laurie Wolff, Julius Nash, and Peter Matondo.” As they walk up on stage, Donny stumbles a bit, having a bit too much alcohol before tonight’s performance. The jazz band receives a round of applause, surprising quite a few students that they actually won something.

With the audience on the edge of their seat, Mr. Anderson announces, “and, in first place, winning the competition tonight, is Audrey Collier, who eloquently read a poetry selection to us tonight. I’m sure we were all deeply touched by her reading.” A meager level of applause breaks out, quickly overshadowed by a few students yelling out, “G-Strings! G-Strings! G-Strings!” As the chanting catches on, Kathy reminisces of her track days, when the Amazon chants broke out during the high school meets. The tribe joins in with the chant, which shows no signs of subsiding.

Backstage, Svetlana announces, “we won. I don’t care what the judges think. We won!” Yasmine agrees, confidently stating, “you got that right, girl!” While the girls are disappointed, they realize that they are number one with the fans. Angela, knowing the girls are disappointed, brings the group together, having a private discussion with them while Mr. Anderson tries to calm the audience.

Angela realizes that the principal, Mr. Anderson, embarrassingly has lost all control of the event. Coming to his rescue, walking on stage, Angela motions to the audience to calm down, something at which Mr. Anderson failed miserably. As the audience calms down, commandeering the microphone, Angela announces, “in a moment I will have a really big surprise for you. But, before I make that announcement, please give a hearty round of applause to our winner tonight, Audrey Collier.” The audience gives Audrey her well-deserved recognition, as Audrey wipes the tears from her eyes. Angela walks over to Audrey, giving her a heartfelt hug, a moment that will overshadow any disappointment she felt earlier. And, Mr. Anderson fully allows Angela to maintain control, for he knows that, should he get behind the microphone again, it will likely spell disaster.

Angela then announces to the audience, “as you head out tonight, Milana and the G-Strings will play another number for you. The group will also be giving you a free concert tomorrow at noon at Eddie’s Service Station,

located over on Union Avenue. Since you all live around here, you probably know exactly where it is. And, there will be free pizza and drinks for everyone. I, myself, am certainly not going to miss this event. Please feel free to stop by. But, please bring your own seating.” Angela steps offstage, as Milana and her group perform the song *Thank You*, by Dido, the way it should be performed as opposed to the dance band’s rendition.

Nearly everyone in attendance stays around for the grand finale. During the number, Eddie tells Kathy, “well, I guess I’m not working tomorrow.” Kathy replies, “sure you are. From what I just heard, you’re ordering pizza and drinks for everyone.” Eddie asks, “how do you know that you’re not the one ordering the pizza and drinks?” Kathy replies, “hmm. Maybe we can get Eddie, Junior to do it.” Eddie replies, “forget it. I’ll get the pizza.” While Eddie, Jr. is fast on the track, he is relatively slow accomplishing anything else.

Svetlana’s, Roberta’s, and Yasmine’s parents join Eddie and Kathy’s conversation. Referring to tomorrow’s concert, Svetlana’s grandfather, Mr. Pushkin asks Eddie, “did you know this concert was going to happen?” Eddie replies, “no. It’s a surprise to me, too. But, they’ll have fun.” Mr. Pushkin smiles, and tells Eddie, “they only live once. This is going to be a big event for them. I’m certainly going to be there for it.” So will Roberta’s and Yasmine’s parents, who are fully onboard with the plans. That is good news, for Roberta and Yasmine have not yet told their parents about tomorrow’s concert, for the group only decided to do the concert a few minutes ago themselves.

Once the event winds down, Eddie suggests to Svetlana’s, Roberta’s, and Yasmine’s parents that the instruments be dropped off at the service station, which will undoubtedly save a lot of time tomorrow morning. Roberta’s mother asks, “where are they going to play? On the parking lot?” Eddie replies, “no. There’s a pretty big lawn behind the service station. We’ll need the front area for parking and, since Lynn and Penny don’t do studio

work on the weekends, we can use their lot for any overflow.” Breathing a sigh of relief, Roberta’s mother tells Eddie, “it sounds like you have this under control.” Kathy reassures Roberta’s mother, telling her, “nothing will go wrong. This will work out.” Everyone then loads up their kid’s equipment, and heads out for the evening.

The Concert

Saturday morning, Eddie, Kathy, and Milana drive into Eddie’s Service Station, getting an early start setting up for today’s concert. Already in the service station back yard, Mark and Bobby B. are just finishing up setting up a stage they built made with materials from Eddie’s and Mark’s storage yard. With quite a short notice, Mark and his former construction assistant got the project knocked out in no time.

By 10:30 a.m., the entire band has arrived, and is setting up their equipment. Impressed by the stage provided for them, the girl’s energy level rises, knowing that today will be one of the high points of their year.

Wanting to hear Milana and the G-Strings perform in an informal setting, Darryl Stone, along with his wife, Angela Meadows arrive early. While the band is setting up, Darryl walks over and mentions to Roberta, “congratulations! That was a really awesome performance yesterday.” Not knowing who she is talking to, Roberta replies, “thank you. We practiced a whole lot, and really tried hard to win.”

Seeing that Roberta has a lot of work to do, Darryl asks, “do you need any help setting up?” Feeling that she is under time pressure as she is attaching the pedal to her bass drum, Roberta replies, “sure, if you’d like. You can go inside, and get my cymbals. They’re in a round black cymbal case.” Darryl replies, “you got it,” and heads inside.

Returning with the cymbal case, as Roberta is setting up, Darryl sets up Roberta's cymbals. Seeing that Darryl actually knows which cymbal goes where, Roberta asks, "do you play?" Darryl replies, "yeah. I do mostly studio work these days, but I've gone out on tour with a few bands," which is the understatement of the day. Turning around as she is speaking with Milana, Angela tells Roberta, "he's being modest," and proceeds to tell Roberta all the groups Darryl has played with. Needless to say, Roberta is immediately impressed. Roberta and Darryl talk shop as the band sets up for today's performance.

Darryl casually offers to Roberta, "by the way, your drum set is a little out of tune. Do you mind if I tune it?" Roberta replies, "Mr. Sharpe, the music teacher at school, tuned it once. But, my floor tom doesn't sound too good. It has way too much ring and sustain. And, there's like no punch to it anymore." Darryl confidently replies, "no problem. We can fix that if you want." With nothing to lose, Roberta tells Darryl, "sure. If you can fix it, that would make me really, really happy."

Taking the drum key, Darryl proceeds to remove the batter heads⁶ from all three toms. Across stage, with a worried look, Yasmine whispers to Milana, "that guy is taking Roberta's drum set all apart." Knowing Darryl for years, Milana replies, "that's okay. He knows what he's doing." Yasmine, now seeing Roberta's drum set in pieces, still has her doubts.

With the batter heads removed, Darryl adjusts the resonant heads⁷, telling Roberta, "the first thing we want

⁶ Batter Head: The side of the drum that is struck.

⁷ Resonant Head: The bottom head of the drum, which is not struck.

to do is set the tension rods⁸ for the resonant heads. The resonant head primarily determines the tone and the timbre of the drum. I'm going to adjust the resonant heads to the natural resonance of each drum, then work from there. Once we find the natural resonance, we can increase the tension, if need be, to get a higher pitch." Roberta asks, "can you decrease the tension on the head below the natural resonance?" Darryl replies, "not really. The drum will end up sounding kind of dead. If you want a deeper tone, you can get the heavier, two-ply batter heads, or buy a larger drum."

Once he completes the procedure on the floor tom, as he is working, Darryl tells Roberta, "it's really important to get the tension of each tension rod equal. That will get rid of any undesirable overtones." Darryl then lightly taps the resonant head near each tension rod, showing Roberta how to make the required adjustments. Realizing Darryl knows what he is doing, Roberta tells him, "wow! I can definitely hear the difference near each tension rod." Darryl replies, "our goal is to get the drum head sounding the same at all five tension rods."

Moving on, Darryl reinstalls the batter heads, roughly setting the tension of each tension rod. While he is working, Darryl informs Roberta, "the batter head primarily determines the attack and decay characteristics of the drum. That was half the problem with your floor tom. You can also modify the attack and decay with studio rings, or, with the built-in head dampener that your kit has." Roberta replies, "I have studio rings at home. Otherwise, it gets kind of loud." Darryl replies, "good. The really nice thing about the studio rings is they quicken the decay, but don't appreciably change the tone of the drum."

Once all three batter heads are reinstalled, Darryl mentions to Roberta, "since you have twelve-inch,

⁸ Tension Rod: Screws holding the hoop against the drum shell, creating tension on the drum head.

fourteen-inch, and sixteen inch toms, we're going to tune your set to perfect fourths, and see how that sounds. We'll start with your problem child, the floor tom." Giving the clear impression that he knows Milana, Darryl yells out, "hey! Keyboard girl! Give me a C2!" Milana obliges, smiling as Yasmine still looks extremely worried that Roberta's drum set was in pieces right before their concert. Darryl quickly gets the job done, moving on to the other two toms, tuning them to F2 and A2. Darryl then tunes the snare and bass drum, which is a relatively easy task compared with tuning the toms.

During the tuning session, Roberta asks Darryl, "is the right hand and right foot primary for timing, or is it the left?" Darryl explains, "definitely your right. The right hand and right foot are controlled by the left side of your brain, which is your analytical side. Your left brain is your clock. That leaves your right brain to give a more artistic impression to your work." Roberta informs Darryl, "Mr. Sharpe says that, since I'm left handed, I should have my drum set up in a mirror image, like with my snare drum and my high hat on the right side instead of the left." Darryl bluntly replies, "that's nonsense. Don't listen to him. Whether you're left handed or right handed, the right hand and foot are your primary timing."

Looking up as he is tuning the bass drum, Darryl asks Roberta, "what other kind of nonsense do they teach you over at that school?" Roberta thinks for a moment, and explains, "well, I'm not really sure. I quit the band at the beginning of the Fall semester. But, one thing Mr. Sharpe kept telling me is that I need to follow the music closer." Darryl replies, "that's good in the classroom, but remember this. When it comes to music, an A in the classroom is an F on the stage." Roberta thinks for a moment, and replies, "yeah. Got it."

Darryl takes a seat on the drum throne and, giving Roberta some good advice that she will not hear in a classroom, explains, "there's only five skills a drummer really needs to be an awesome drummer; timing, rhythm, expression, depth, and clarity. Timing and rhythm are

your left brain. Expression, depth, and clarity are your right brain.” Roberta repeats, “timing, rhythm, expression, depth, and clarity. Got it.”

As he is tuning Roberta’s snare drum, Darryl then lets Roberta in on a secret, telling her, “you know, when I was in college, I had my own band. For my music classes, I was primarily enrolled in what they call ‘self study classes’, where I was graded on my public performances rather than all that nonsense that goes on in the classroom. My band played at graduation, faculty Christmas parties, frat parties, and other events. Did they ever get the school’s band to work those gigs? No. Not when I was there. The only thing the school’s band was good for is playing all that mechanical stuff out on the football field at halftime. What they played is not artistic at all. A marching band sounds so mechanical that it can be replaced with a machine and no one listening would know the difference.” Fully comprehending Darryl’s point, Roberta replies, “yeah. Marching bands. There’s not much you can do with 2/2 timing. Got it.”

Thinking back to the prior school year, Roberta explains, “last year, when Mr. Spaulding was the band director, we had one song that was 9/8 timing. But, there was no drum score to it, so I had to come up with something myself. So, I played 9/8 with my right side, and alternated between 4/4 and 5/4 with my left side.” Wanting Darryl’s expert advice, Roberta then asks, “is there a better way to do that? Or, was I totally wrong?” Quite impressed, Darryl looks up, and replies, “there’s not a whole lot of drummers out there who can do that. That’s pretty impressive. You did right.”

Roberta asks Darryl, “what’s the hardest thing you ever played on the drums?” Darryl thinks for a moment, and explains, “I once worked a piece with 4/4 timing and 6/8 timing simultaneously.” Roberta comments, “wow! That must have been hard. When was that?” Darryl tells Roberta, “a few years ago. I was doing some studio work. The piece called for 6/8 timing. But, the band manager wanted a slower tempo. So, I played a slower tempo.”

Then, the band manager told me the tempo was too slow. After a few iterations of his nonsense, I wanted to hand him the drum sticks and show me exactly what he wants. But, on the next take, I played 4/4 and 6/8 simultaneously. After the number, he yelled out, 'that's it!' I should have charged him extra for that. But, I'm sure that, to this day, anyone playing that piece on the drums can't figure out the timing."

Darryl stands, and announces, "well, it's all tuned up." Now that the job is completed, Darryl could take a seat on the drum throne, and play a quick energetic solo. Instead, he tells Roberta, "go ahead, and see how that sounds." Roberta takes a seat, cranking out the beat to a song running through her head that no one around her knows but her. A few measures into the song, Roberta abruptly stops, announcing, "okay. Is this really my drum set?" Darryl asks, "does it sound okay?" Nearly in tears, Roberta quietly cries out, "this is what I always wanted it to sound like. It like sounds so great!"

Now having her drums sounding the way she always wanted, Roberta takes a short break to compose herself. Darryl takes a seat on the throne, cranking out a beat that catches the attention of everyone around. Anyone in the area immediately stops what they're doing, watching as Darryl gives Roberta's newly-tuned drum set a test drive.

On the other side of the stage, Yasmine whispers to Milana, "that really does sound a lot better." Milana replies, "yeah. It sounds a whole lot better now to me, too." Svetlana agrees, stating, "yeah, really. That guy really knows what he is doing." Milana replies, "yeah. Unlike Mr. Sharpe." With a quick comeback, Svetlana blurts out, "you mean Mr. Dull." Yasmine replies, "I don't know. Maybe it's Mr. Flat." Milana, the mechanic's daughter who has also seen a bit of construction in her life, chimes in again, stating, "maybe that wrecking ball, Mr. Sharpe, poked a hole in the tire, and now he's Mr. Flat." The girls have a good laugh, relieving a bit of performance anxiety that may be brewing.

Behind the girls, a voice is heard announcing in a dry tone, “good morning, ladies.” Milana turns around, sarcastically asking, “what are you doing here?” Mr. Sharpe replies, “I thought I’d come out to hear you guys play this morning.” Yasmine informs Mr. Sharpe, “in case you haven’t noticed, we’re girls, not guys.” Playing the bass line from *The Joker*, a song by the Steve Miller Band, Yasmine sends a message that flies clear over the head of Mr. Sharpe. Wanting to get rid of the unwanted guest quickly, Milana tells Mr. Sharpe, “well, I hope you enjoy the show.” Milana, Yasmine, and Svetlana get back to their own conversation, fully convinced that Mr. Sharpe heard them butchering his name a moment earlier. But, they do not care in the least, for they all have left the middle school band.

In a desperate attempt to gain the attention he thinks he deserves, Mr. Sharpe walks over to the drums, where Roberta is again seated at the throne. Mr. Sharpe tells Roberta, “that sounded really good.” Roberta replies, “I know! Thank you. The drums sound a whole lot better now that they’re in tune.” Darryl interjects, telling Roberta, “whoever tuned your kit before had no idea what they were doing.” Darryl, however, does not know that Mr. Sharpe, standing right next to him, is the one who last tuned Roberta’s drums.

Trying to discover why the long-haired hippie thinks Roberta’s drums were tuned incorrectly, Mr. Sharpe asks, “what’s wrong with the way it was tuned?” Darryl bluntly replies, “the resonant heads on all three toms were tuned to the same note. You just can’t do that. The batter heads were so out of tune with each other that it sounded like drums from three different drum kits. And, none of the tension rods were set correctly, so there were horrible overtones.” Darryl could go on, but he made his point. And, Darryl’s point went straight through to Mr. Sharpe’s heart, who thinks he tuned Roberta’s drum set just fine at the beginning of the school year.

Somewhat ignoring Mr. Sharpe, wanting to give Roberta some encouragement, Darryl tells her, “you know,

there are people out there who read music, press keys or valves on their instrument in the order they see on the page, and out comes a melody. The same is true for the drums, or any instrument for that matter. They like to call themselves musicians. But, honestly, they're not. The true musicians are like you guys, who can instinctively play an instrument with minimal instruction. If last night was any indication, you guys are going to have a great show today." Looking out at the lawn, Roberta replies, "I really hope we do. There are a lot of people here. I really don't want to disappoint them." Darryl replies, "you won't. You're what, thirteen or fourteen?" Roberta replies, "fourteen." Darryl informs Roberta, "trust me. You're the best fourteen-year-old drummer I've ever heard. You're far better than you think you are." Gaining some confidence, Roberta smiles, and replies, "thank you so much."

Giving Roberta more encouragement and confidence, Darryl tells her, "think about this. You guys are up here performing. They're out there watching. That should tell you a lot." Roberta smiles, replying with a long, drawn out, "yeah! Got it!" Darryl then steps away, knowing that the concert will start in a few minutes and Roberta needs to get ready.

Mr. Sharpe, however, does not step away, but rather asks Roberta, "who was that guy?" Roberta replies, "Darryl Stone." Not liking that Darryl criticized his drum tuning abilities, Mr. Sharpe answers, "what? Is he supposed to be some hot shot drummer or something?" Roberta, now knowing who Darryl Stone is, replies, "he sounded really great to me, don't you think?" Mr. Sharpe coldly comments, "well, it's all a matter of perception." Ignoring the middle school band instructor who ran off the better members of the band, Roberta cranks out an energetic drum beat, hitting the crash cymbal quite hard a few times, fully intending to run off Mr. Sharpe. Not wanting to have a conversation with a 120-decibel crash cymbal sounding in his ears, Mr. Sharpe walks away.

A few minutes later, Angela Meadows stands on stage, announcing, “thank you all for coming out this morning. Milana and the G-Strings have a really great show planned for you today. And, there’s pizza and drinks in the office for those of you who haven’t had lunch yet. So, without further ado, let me introduce the band. On the keyboard, please welcome Milana Bogenskaya.” Cheers and clapping are heard, as Milana waves to the audience. Angela continues, “on guitar, Svetlana Pushkin, who I also hear is a great track and field athlete.” The crowd again cheers, as Svetlana waves to the crowd. Angela announces, “on bass, Yasmine Gretzky.” Yasmine’s newly found fan club, a bunch of guys from her class, can be heard cheering quite loudly. Angela then announces, “and, on drums, Roberta Osborne.” Roberta waves to the audience, receiving a warm welcome. Seeing the band ready to play, Angela then announces, “ladies, and gentlemen, please welcome Milana and the G-Strings!” The crowd cheers as Angela walks offstage, and the group begins their first number, *Kiss Me*, originally done by the group Sixpence None the Richer.

Angela takes a seat next to Darryl, who managed to get a seat up front since they arrived early. Truth is, Darryl wanted to hear the drummer, Roberta, up close. So do Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, who are also seated up front. And, the middle school band director, Mr. Sharpe, who forgot to bring his own seating, is standing in the back, commiserating with himself about how he lost so much talent in the band this year.

Inside, Kathy and Paula, hearing the music begin, grab another slice of pizza and head outside. Paula mentions to Kathy, “check it out, girl! This place is packed!” Trying to eat and talk at the same time, Kathy replies, “good. They should have won last night. This turnout beats first place in a stupid talent contest any day.” Kathy and Paula take a seat in their chairs, strategically placed on the marble portal just outside the rear door to the service station office.

During the second number, *Breathe Again*, originally done by Toni Braxton, Braden, wearing his police uniform today, walks up to Eddie, mentioning, “there’s a whole lot of people here. I wasn’t expecting this many.” Eddie replies, “me either, bro. But, I’m happy for Lana. She’s as good behind that keyboard as we were on the track.” Braden whispers to Eddie, “from what I’m hearing right now, those girls are better than the band over at the University.” Eddie informs Braden, “they were originally going to practice one or two numbers for the talent contest yesterday. Then, they found out that they work really well together. So, they met three or four times a week and jammed. And, the good news is they’ll all be together for four years in high school.”

An hour into the show, Svetlana announces, “I hope everyone enjoyed those sets. We are going to take a quick break, and get a slice of pizza. We’ll be back on in ten or fifteen minutes and play a few more songs for you.” As the girls walk off stage, the crowd cheers, also taking a break to stretch or walk around.

On her way into the service station where the pizza is, Milana asks her mother, “is there any pizza left without plumbing washers on it?” Kathy replies, “there is. And, there’s a whole pizza left with fungus on it.” Walking through the door, Yasmine bluntly asks Milana, “what in the world were you talking about back there, girl? Plumbing washers and fungus?” Milana replies, “oh, that. Sliced black olives are plumbing washers, and mushrooms are fungus.” Yasmine recalls, “yeah. That’s right. Mushrooms are fungus. I remember that from science class now.” Roberta comments, “that makes a lot of sense. It just sounds so weird.” Milana then informs her group, “nothing around my house is normal.”

Over pizza, Milana tells her group, “when I was a kid, I asked my mom, ‘what are we having for dinner?’ And, so she said, ‘plants and animals.’ And I told her, ‘mom! I am not eating plants and animals for dinner! No way!’ So, she told me, ‘okay. How does chicken and broccoli sound?’ And, so I told her, ‘a whole lot better.’ I thought

she went off the deep end or something, wanting to feed me plants and animals for dinner.” Yasmine informs Milana, “duh! A chicken is an animal and broccoli is a plant.” Milana replies, “I know that. But, when you’re four years old, eating plants and animals just sounds like yuk.”

Back outside, as the band is taking a break, walking over to Darryl, Mrs. Osborne, who saw him working on Roberta’s drums earlier, tells him, “thank you for whatever you did to Roberta’s drum set. It certainly sounds a lot better now. Even I can hear the difference.” Darryl replies, “it was a bit out of tune. So, I tuned it up.”

After formal introductions, Darryl tells Mrs. Osborne, “you know, your daughter is far better on the drums than anyone thinks she is.” Mrs. Osborne informs Darryl, “we’ve been trying to find someone to give her formal lessons, but the instructors all want to take her back a few steps and start again with the basics. They all say she developed a lot of bad habits, and she needs to break them.” Darryl replies, “that’s nonsense. Roberta is a natural-born drummer. Her timing is perfect. She’s got the rudiments down. The two solos she had this morning were awesome. And, her speed is great. She should be teaching them.” With a sigh of relief, Mrs. Osborne confides, “that makes me feel a whole lot better.”

Darryl then offers, “if you want, I can give Roberta a few lessons, and help her get to the next level. She obviously learns very quickly. No one taught her to play that way. She learned it by herself.” Learning that Darryl is a world-class drummer, Mrs. Osborne replies, “if you could do that, I would really, really appreciate that. I’m sure Roberta really would too.” Darryl replies, “no problem. I’d be glad to help her out.” Mrs. Osborne then asks the inevitable, “I hate to ask, but how much do you charge for lessons?” Darryl explains, “for someone like Roberta, I wouldn’t charge anything. It would be my pleasure. I see it more as helping out a fellow musician.”

Rudely interrupting and ineptly joining the conversation that he was eavesdropping on, Mr. Sharpe

interjects, informing Mrs. Osborne, “if Roberta would come back to the school band, we can give her drum lessons.” Recognizing Mr. Sharpe from an encounter earlier today, Darryl asks, “and, who are you?” Mr. Sharpe proudly announces, “I’m Steve Sharpe. I’m the music teacher over at the middle school.” Getting the 411 from Roberta earlier regarding the middle school music teacher, Darryl instructs Mr. Sharpe, “why don’t you go back to your middle school, stand in front of your classroom, and count to four. When you’re done, count to four again. And, wave your hands in the air while you’re at it. If you haven’t noticed, Roberta’s skill level is far beyond anything you can teach her. So is the rest of this band.” Mrs. Osborne, who knows that Mr. Sharpe is the only reason that Roberta quit the school band, is secretly happy that Darryl put him in his place.

But, Mr. Sharpe doesn’t like the place Darryl put him in. Now hot under the collar, grabbing Darryl by the shirt, Mr. Sharpe yells out, “I have half a mind to break your neck!” Reaching for Darryl’s neck, Mr. Sharpe fully intends to make good on his threat. But Darryl, in far better physical shape than Mr. Sharpe ever expected, hurls Mr. Sharpe straight into the brick wall. Landing on the ground, Mr. Sharpe slowly stands up, fully intending to finish Darryl off.

Interrupting Mr. Sharpe’s plans, approaching from behind, Bobby B. grabs Darryl’s assailant, throwing him over his shoulders, telling Braden, “it looks like it’s time for us to take out the trash.” Braden tells Bobby B., “I agree. Follow me.” Catching onto the situation, Erika, also in uniform today, rushes over to join Bobby B. and Braden. Braden, and the rest of the crew, walks through the rear door of the service station, through the office, and to the front of the building.

Sitting close to the action is Mr. George Frazier, seated with his wife, Dawn, and Athena and her husband, Mike. Hardly recognized by the audience today, Mr. Frazier has been observing the audience, noting that not much has

changed since his days of working in the public school system.

Seeing a small tear fall from Mr. Frazier's eye, Athena asks, "are you okay, George?" Having a flashback, the emotional Mr. Frazier replies, "I'm fine. What you're watching right now is exactly what went on when I coached track at Northside High School. A fight breaks out. Braden, Bobby B., or one of the guys step in, break it up, and restore order. Some things never change." Dawn adds, "I remember George telling me about those stories." Showing more emotion, Mr. Frazier reveals, "what I'll never understand is how this group of men and women have stuck together so tightly over the years. It's just amazing. And, they're, by far, the best group of athletes I've ever coached." Coaching alongside Mr. Frazier for over two decades, Athena replies, "I can't say I disagree with you, George."

Inside, Milana, Svetlana, Roberta, and Yasmine, enjoying a slice of pizza, walk to the front window, wondering what's up with the music teacher they dislike so much. Milana tells her band members, "that big guy is Bobby B. He's our bouncer. Officer Braden and Officer Bradshaw are our security team." Yasmine replies, "and, they're all doing a great job of taking care of that pint-sized twirp!" Roberta observes, mentioning, "wow! Our own security team. We've hit the big time!" Knowing Bobby B. well, Milana announces, "here it comes! Watch this. Bobby B. is going to slam him to the ground." The band watches closely as Bobby B. prepares to forcefully dispose of the unwanted middle school music teacher.

Out front, Bobby B. slams Mr. Sharpe onto the ground, as Braden asks, "what was all that shit back there?" Mr. Sharpe exclaims, "I'm going to have someone arrested!" Braden firmly replies, "the only one around here that I see who's gonna get their ass arrested is your flimsy ass. Now, I'm gonna ask you one more time. What was all that shit back there?" Straightening his clothing as he stands up, stating his case, Mr. Sharpe yells out, "that guy back there insulted me!" Braden bluntly replies, "so what.

There ain't no law against that. You got ugly shoes, junior. There. Go ahead and have me arrested." Strengthening his case, Mr. Sharpe yells out, "and, then he threw me against the wall!" Erika replies, "yeah. I saw that. He threw you against the wall after you grabbed his shirt and started to choke him. The last time I checked, that's called assault followed by justifiable self defense."

Erika informs Mr. Sharpe, "I suggest, sir, that you get in your car and go home. If I see you around here again, I'll personally arrest you, and put you in jail." Braden adds, "and, today's Saturday. Your flimsy ass is gonna be sitting in that jail cell until Monday, 'cause there ain't no judge that's gonna come in on the weekend and set your bail." Realizing he is in a no-win situation, Mr. Sharpe relents, stating, "okay. Okay. I'm out of here." Braden replies, "good. At least your ass has got some sense." Bobby B. tells Braden, "you're right, bro. His ass is where all his sense is. There certainly ain't any sense in his head." Seeing the sheer size of Bobby B., Mr. Sharpe decides another confrontation is simply not worth it. He would lose anyway.

Back on stage after the brief intermission, Svetlana announces, "if anyone missed what happened a few minutes ago, the guy who was carried out of here was Mr. Sharpe, our former music teacher at the middle school. So, we've decided to dedicate our next number to Mr. Sharpe." Walking up to the microphone, adding her two cents, Roberta explains, "what you're about to hear is how they teach us to play music in band class at the middle school. Please feel free to laugh as much as you want."

The band begins to play the popular middle school band piece, *Seventy Six Trombones*, intentionally slightly out of rhythm, and with a few deliberate wrong notes thrown in here and there. Replacing the classical lyrics with those made up by Eddie when he was in high school, Svetlana belts out the words,

Seventy six trombones sold for scrap metal,
A hundred and ten clarinets for firewood,
A truck load of tubas make the plumbing for my
house,
And a trumpet, an air horn for my car.

Adding their own butchered lyrics to those composed by Eddie many years ago, the band's performance becomes an instant hit with the fans, sans one. Hanging out in the parking lot, Mr. Sharpe, who clearly heard the announcement and is now hearing the composition, is now more ticked off than ever.

Sitting with Paula, Kathy whispers to her, "I can't believe they're actually doing this!" Paula reminds Kathy, "they're not doing anything different than we did when we were their age, girl." Kathy asks, "what are you talking about?" Paula reminds Kathy, "I distinctly remember a certain person sitting in Mr. Crum's office, giving him a lecture on the proper use of English. And, let's see. What else? Who was that who told Mr. Crum that they were going to have their father shove barbed wire up his constipated ass? And, I distinctly remember a few fragile and delicate flowers wedging a certain high school principal's VW Beetle between two trees. And, let's see. What group of four girls carried Mr. Crum out of the arena that day?" Kathy laughs, and abruptly interrupts, telling Paula, "okay! Got it! I guess the apple didn't fall far from the tree." Paula informs Kathy, "you ain't seen nothing yet, girl. Just wait until your wild child is in high school." Kathy is silenced, knowing that Paula is spot on.

Not liking in the least that his skill as a music teacher is being insulted by four teenagers, Mr. Sharpe rushes back into the venue, headed straight toward the stage. Quickly intercepted by Braden as he gets one foot on the stage, Mr. Sharpe is quickly put into an arm lock, screaming, "let me go! You're hurting me!" Braden replies, "shut your ass up. I ain't begun to hurt your fat ass yet." Catching the attention of all around, Mr. Sharpe yells and screams as Braden drags him toward the service station rear entrance.

Just finishing their rendition of *Seventy Six Trombones*, Milana, wanting to give Mr. Sharpe a farewell he'll always remember, whispers to each band member, "that goodbye song." Giving her the thumbs up, each band member gives the go ahead that they can play that song. Milana announces, "from the chorus," prompting the band to start the chorus of *Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye*, a song by the group Steam that is often performed by the winning high school or collegiate sports team's band as the losers depart. The whole band joins in singing, quickly accompanied by many of the middle school kids attending today's concert.

In the office, Braden is joined by Erika, who saw Mr. Sharpe's temper tantrum. Erika asks Braden, "now what do we got?" Braden replies, "it looks like to me that this guy was gonna walk up onto that stage, and do something." Erika tells Mr. Sharpe, "I'm going to tell him to release you. Then, I am going to ask you a few questions. Am I understood?" Mr. Sharpe yells out, "those kids out there insulted me!" Braden tells Mr. Sharpe, "you'd better shut up or I'm gonna put your scrawny ass in handcuffs." Mr. Sharpe quiets down, deciding for the moment to be a more reasonable person.

Erika instructs Braden, "okay. Release him." Braden releases Mr. Sharpe, who suddenly turns around and punches Braden in the mid section. Erika quickly grabs Mr. Sharpe, cuffs him, and announces, "Steven Sharpe, you are under arrest for assaulting an officer of the law." Erika and Braden escort Mr. Sharpe outside, where Erika radios for the uniform officers to come and take him away. As they await the uniform officer's arrival, Erika reads Mr. Sharpe his rights. Unfortunately, for Mr. Sharpe, the charges of assaulting an officer are far more serious than the charges of disorderly conduct, which he might have gotten out of, if he had not struck Braden.

The uniform officer arrives, already informed of the situation by the dispatcher. Officer Kenneth Wilson walks up, asking Erika, "what do we got here?" Trying another angle, Mr. Sharpe exclaims, "I demand to be let go! These

pretend officers put me in handcuffs!" As Erika steps aside informing Officer Wilson of the situation, Braden tells Mr. Sharpe, exclaiming, "what are you talking about, junior? Officer Erika Bradshaw arrested your ass at the corner of Assault and Battery. And, now your ass is gonna be spending the night downtown at the corner of Jail and Bird." Mr. Sharpe utters a bunch of nonsense, none of which is understandable by any of the officers. Ignoring Mr. Sharpe's nonsensical babbling, Officer Wilson takes custody of Mr. Sharpe, placing him in the cage of his patrol car.

A little further into the afternoon, Kathy asks Braden, "hey. Can you still sing *Jungle Boogie*?" Braden confidently replies, "yeah! Get down with the boogie! I still got the dance steps down, too!" Kathy explains, "the girls can play *Jungle Boogie*, but they just can't sing it." Kathy then asks, "do you want to get on stage and sing it?" Braden energetically replies, "yeah! I'll do that if they want me to!" Kathy replies, "awesome! Go inside and practice your dance steps, and I'll pass Lana a note." Braden heads inside, as Kathy writes a note that she'll pass on to Milana between sets.

Two sets later, nearing the end of the show, Milana announces, "our next song is from the 1970s. It's called *Jungle Boogie*, by the group Kool and the Gang. Some of you may remember it. We will be playing the music. Singing *Jungle Boogie* for us will be Mr. Axel Braden, who is one of the police officers who were nice enough to get rid of Mr. Sharpe for us." During a mixture of the crowd cheering in anticipation of the song and laughing at Milana's treatment of Mr. Sharpe, Braden walks up to the stage, and is fitted with a wireless microphone by Svetlana.

The band begins to play and, without missing a beat, Braden begins, singing, "Get down, get down. Get down, get down." With not enough space on stage, Braden realizes he can move about, and moves off stage onto the grass, dancing as he sings.

Many of the adults, who remember the song when they were in high school, stand and dance to the beat. The teenagers are surprised to see their parents dance, proving that, perhaps, their parents were not born yesterday. The tribe joins in, remembering the dance steps to Jungle Boogie quite well.

As the afternoon comes to a close, Kathy whispers to Eddie, "Lana's going to sleep for twelve hours tonight. Look at her. She's all wiped out." Eddie whispers back, "they all look wiped out. This is the first time they've done this together." Kathy whispers, "somehow, I don't think it's the last." Eddie asks, "Lana's not playing the organ tomorrow in church, is she?" Kathy replies, "no. Dr. Erlanger is." Eddie replies, "good. We'll let Lana sleep in if she wants." Kathy confidently informs Eddie, "oh, she'll sleep in. She'll wake up at noon, looking for left over pizza." Eddie replies, "that sounds exactly like someone else I know." Kathy smiles, catching Eddie's drift.

Finishing their last number, Milana and the G-Strings receive a standing ovation from their audience. The girls take a bow, grateful that their show went really well. While everyone comes up to meet the band, Kathy sits back, realizing that Milana is on the stage what she and Eddie once were on the track.