



Song for Chance

John Van Kirk

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Skilled writer Van Kirk depicts the world of an aging rock star by alternating between soft reminiscence and gritty action.

In *Song for Chance*, John Van Kirk has combined external vibrancy with thought-provoking introspection, juxtaposing understated drama with inner sadness.

An aging legend cannot escape the nightmare of a composition that catapulted him to fame in this realistic yet lyrical look at the drug-fueled music industry of the 1970s. Steeped in the culture of a time gone by, Jack Voss faces a suicidal hell that strikes close to his soul and exposes the inadequacies of his successful youth.

The Enchanted Pond, a 1974 rock opera inspired by his precarious relationship with girlfriend, Avery, and bassist, Hal, in a doomed love-triangle, had faded from a volatile decade into the annals of history. Living a quiet existence, playing the clubs, and savoring a life of mature renown, Voss is not prepared for the irreversible personal tragedy that disrupts his peaceful existence. Forced to confront his inner demons and relive his shattering losses, he turns to his piano, his only comfort. John Van Kirk's story replays the events that lead to the final act, and this time, the end is real.

This skilled writer has combined external vibrancy with thought-provoking introspection, juxtaposing understated drama with inner sadness: "Voss headed out of the cemetery, trying to remember the route. If the paparazzi really did follow him, he wasn't aware of it. Within minutes he was passing into the long enclosure of the Holland Tunnel, the grimy, tiled passageway—so dark by day and so bright by night—that led under the river into the city."

Subdued by the passage of time, this once flourishing musician can no longer rely on sheer momentum to keep living. Instead, he faces the far-reaching extent of his own influence and learns to deal with the consequences of irrevocable decisions, especially the choices of those close to him. Alternating between soft reminiscing and gritty action, the narrative is an outstanding depiction of real life.

Though filled with the expected altercations, overdoses, and rehabilitation, the book transcends the typical, exposing the reader to a vivid picture of creative production versus creative stagnation: "Voss thought again about composing new songs, about not composing new songs. The music stand on his piano was covered with sketches of tunes, but he hadn't been able to come up with a new lyric in years."

John Van Kirk has received the O. Henry Award and *The Iowa Review* Fiction Prize for his short stories, which have appeared in magazines, journals, and anthologies. He teaches writing and literature at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. *Song for Chance* is his debut novel.

This tragedy confronts the difficulty of moving on, even thriving, after experiencing devastating, mind-altering events. Kirk does not gloss over the painful details, for it is the process of grieving that may be at the heart of recovery.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (Fall 2013)

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