

Revenge of a Band Geek Gone Bad

By Naomi Rabinowitz



Naomi Rabinowitz has always loved being creative. Raised in Nesconset, NY -- a suburb on Long Island -- she was introduced to the arts at an early age. Her mother, Joyce, is a pianist; her father, Melvin, plays piano and guitar; her grandmother, Esther, was a talented knitter; her late grandfather, Morris, was a violinist; her late great uncle, Sid Robin, was a well-known jazz musician, who penned the lyrics to the popular big band hit, "Undecided."

Naomi's parents, who were both teachers, frequently took her to museums and concerts. During their summers off, her family traveled. By the time she was 15, Naomi had been to several European countries, as well as China, Japan, Israel, Egypt, Russia and Mexico.

Naomi's love for writing emerged when she was in the second grade and her poem, "The Four Seasons," won first prize in a local literary competition. She became interested in journalism in junior high when her English class was selected to write for Newsday's "Kidsday" column.

She had as much passion for music. Though she began playing piano when she was three, she switched to her "true" instrument, the flute, when she was nine and eventually added tenor sax and clarinet to her list so that she could play in jazz band. She performed in almost every musical group from wind ensemble to orchestra (but never marching band!). In 2008, she released her jazz album FLUTE PATH.

Naomi received a B.A. in English from Binghamton University and an M.A. in magazine journalism from Syracuse University. From 1998-2012, she worked as a reporter/editor for national TV magazine Soap Opera Digest.

These days, Naomi writes, plays jazz flute and designs jewelry for her businesses Naomi's Designs and MayaGirl Creations. She lives in Queens, NY with her husband, Jonathan, and their cat, Maya.

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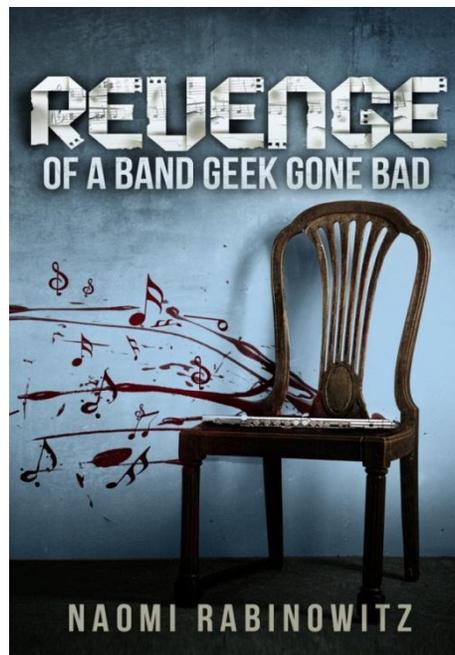


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Shy, overweight sophomore Melinda Rhodes thinks that her world is falling apart when she loses first chair flute in band to her nemesis -- the beautiful and popular, but nasty Kathy Meadows. Now doomed to sit second chair, Mel is ready to accept the fact that some people just aren't meant to shine.

Her luck changes when she catches the eye of Josh Kowalski, the rebellious trumpet prodigy and class clown. Josh has also been hurt by Kathy and persuades Melinda to team up with him so they can take Kathy down.

At first, the pair's pranks are harmless, and as they work together, Mel comes out of her shell. Even better, she finds herself falling for Josh and it appears as if he might feel the same way about her.

However, their schemes become more and more dangerous and Mel is surprised to discover her dark side. Just how far will she go to get what she wants -- and is Josh really worth the risk?

Excerpts:

1. (300-500 words):

Josh followed me into the hallway and fell into step beside me. "How'd you like to get your seat back?" he asked. Only he said it really quickly so it sounded more like "Howdylikegetaseatack?"

"Huh?"

"How'd you like to get your seat back?" he said more slowly. "How'd you like to knock Kathy back down to second chair -- or even lower than that?"

I sighed and kept walking. "I'm not really sure I'm the person you want."

"The Hindemith Sonata," he blurted, snapping his fingers. "That's what you played last year at the band recital. It was very good."

I stopped walking, surprised by the compliment. "Thanks."

"Kathy played a Mozart piece and wasn't nearly as good as you," he went on. "I remember that, too. That's how I know she shouldn't have beaten you today."

I was beginning to understand why Josh was so popular; he had this way of making you feel at ease and like everything you say is important. My initial nervousness at being around him washed away. Yet I wasn't entirely convinced that this guy was on my side. How could I trust someone who tormented Mr. Francis on almost a daily basis?

He bit his lip and was quiet for a moment. "Look, I have some issues with Kathy, too," he admitted. "I asked her out this summer at a party we were both at. And you know what she did? She didn't just say no. She spilled a large Coke on my head in front of everyone and then posted photos of me online. Can you believe that?"

I'd missed seeing these photos, but couldn't help laughing at the thought of him dripping with Coke, his ego shattered. I covered my mouth so he couldn't see me, but he did. "Yeah, yeah, it was hilarious," he said, rolling his eyes. "She apparently had some boyfriend there with her who I didn't know about so she was mad at me for daring to approach her. But she didn't have to be such a beyotch." He shook his head, obviously still pained by the memory. "My point is, she messed with me and now she messed with you. If we don't stop her, she'll do it to someone else."

"I guess. But to be fair, Kathy didn't really do anything today," I said. "It was Mr. Francis who flipped out and I should probably be thankful that he didn't make me last chair."

Josh's blue eyes narrowed. "So you think Kathy's innocent in this? Oh, please. Who do you think snapped your spring out of place?"

"What?" This hadn't even crossed my mind. Could Kathy have done that to me? No, there was no way. The spring was really small and she would've had to have gotten really close to my instrument in order to do that. "She didn't," I said. "If she did, I would've felt it."

Josh held up the wallet which I kept in my purse. "You didn't feel me taking this."

I angrily snatched it out of his hand and stuffed it back into my bag. I then realized I'd been so busy listening to Josh that I'd missed my bus. "Damn it!" I muttered.

"What?" He held up his hands. "I swear, I didn't take anything from your wallet!"

"No, it's not that," I explained. "I missed my bus."

Josh smiled. "Hey, no problem. I can give you a ride."

"Really? It's no big deal. I can just walk..."

"Well, I don't think you can really walk in those jeans."

He was right. I didn't need everyone else to see my granny panties and I could be doing worse things than riding home with a hot guy. "Okay, thanks."

"But there's just one condition," he said, as we made our way to the parking lot. "In exchange for this ride, you give me just one chance to help you get your seat back. If it doesn't work or you don't like what I'm doing, I'll leave you alone."

"I don't know..."

"Oh, come on. I gave you my jacket. I'm giving you a ride home... it's the least you can do. Do it for the guy who got a bucket of soda dumped over him?"

I laughed despite myself. "Okay, one chance."

"Oh, good!" he said, clapping his hands. "Let's get ready to bring Kathy down."

Excerpt 2: (1000 words):

I waited for a while, sipping a Diet Coke as I sat. Now that it was getting later, the bar was quickly filling up with people, most of them in groups. I felt pretty self-conscious since I was obviously underage and well, don't really look like someone who'd frequent a bar. But no one seemed to care. A couple of ladies with bleached-blond hair sat down next to me and ordered up a round of beers. They didn't even seem to notice that I was at the table with them.

A few minutes later, Chuck walked to the front of the small stage. He fumbled at the mic and it made a loud squealing sound. One of the women at my table put her hands to her ears.

"Uh, sorry 'bout that," called Chuck as he adjusted the microphone. He spoke into it again. "Um, testing ... testing, 1 ...2 ..3." His buddies rolled their eyes. "Okay, it seems to be working," he called. He then cleared his throat and tried again. "Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, spreading his arms wide. "Thank you so much for coming out here tonight. We hope you eat good, drink good ... and tip great." The crowd laughed. "And now it's time for Chuck Davis and the B-Sharps ... and back by popular demand is Mr. Josh Kowalski!"

Everyone cheered as my jaw hit the ground. I figured we'd be seeing some kind of musical act, but I had no idea that Josh would be the main attraction.

The already dim lights lowered to almost total darkness; a few seconds later, the stage lights came on, bathing the entire room in soft blues and reds. Suddenly the Dew Drop Inn changed form and I could no longer see the decay in the ceilings and walls or the mis-matched nature of the chairs and tables. Instead the place glowed with a warmth I hadn't appreciated before. I took a more careful look around, this time taking in the rows of old photographs and art-deco jukebox. The bar wasn't merely old; it was

full of history, full of people's stories. No wonder Josh loved it. He knew it was a "classic."

And then the B-Sharps began their set. I soon understood why Chuck and Marty had laughed when I'd asked them about their musical careers. Chuck was a master pianist, gliding over the keys as if they were made of water. His hands moved so quickly from one position to the next that I briefly wondered if he had more than one pair. Marty, meanwhile, treated his saxophone as if it were physically attached to him. Whenever he played a long note, he'd lean way back, pulling the instrument with him; when he zoomed through the fast passages, his whole body swayed as if he were dancing. From time to time, he'd also change to flute or clarinet, making the transitions so seamlessly that he appeared to be performing magic.

Doug, on the other hand, alerted us to his every move, banging and pounding the drums as if he were conjuring up a thunderstorm. I now understood why he was so quiet. He didn't need to speak since he was so loud on stage.

But it was Josh who got most of my attention. In his day-to-day life, he was almost always in motion — snapping his fingers, drumming lightly against his steering wheel -- but all of his quirks came together when he played. He held his trumpet high above his head, the red and blue lights dancing off its bell. And when he blew through it, the warm tones enveloped me like a protective blanket. Throughout the entire set, he tapped his feet and bobbed his head in time to the music, though the sounds the escaped from his instrument weren't bound to any particular meter or scale. His improvised melodies spun the notes out into space in a way that defied their form and function, but at the same time his melodies made me feel a sense of nostalgia for something I couldn't quite place.

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The quartet played for about 45 minutes, and I found myself enjoying each number more than the last. I was jolted out of what had felt like a daydream when they suddenly stopped for a break. As the audience burst into applause, Josh came to the edge of the stage and motioned for everyone to quiet down. I wondered what was going on.

"You guys are a great crowd tonight!" he announced. Everyone cheered. "It feels so great to be back after all these weeks. And to make up for the lost time, I've got a special treat for you. The sweet sounds of flutist Melinda Rhodes!"

Wait a second, did he just call me? Surely it had to be someone else with my name. But when I looked around, no one else budged. Josh peered into the audience, searching.

"Mel?" he called into the microphone. "You out there?"

Somehow I managed to make my legs stand up, but I still didn't move. Josh locked eyes with me and broke into a grin. "Come up here, Melinda," he said. "Don't be afraid."

"Yeah, go up there, Melinda," one of the blondes at my table repeated loudly. "Go see what the cutie wants."

I thought I was about to faint, but I made my way to the stage. Josh crouched down, ready to greet me.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"It'll be okay," he insisted. He motioned to the rest of the band. "Let's go, they're waiting."

My mouth fell open. "What..?" I realized what he was getting at. "Oh, no," I told him. "I don't play jazz! If I go up there, I'll make a complete fool of myself."

"No you won't," he insisted. "It's easy. I'll show you."

"But ... I don't even have my flute!"

He shrugged. "You can use Marty's."

"But ... but... but," I sputtered like a broken-down car.

"Come on, Melinda," the blonde called out again. I turned around and glared at her, but she was unfazed — or really drunk. "Go on, honey," she slurred. "I know you can do it."

"Yeah, come on, Mel," Josh said, chuckling. He grabbed the mic. "Everyone, let's help my friend out here."

"Mel, Mel, Mel, Mel," a low chant began.

"Mel, Mel, Mel!" Josh chimed in. He signaled to the crowd, encouraging everyone to join in.

"MEL, MEL, MEL, MEL!" everyone yelled. I sighed and climbed up onto the stage, figuring that since I was already thoroughly humiliated, nothing could be worse. The bar erupted into hoots and hollers.

"Yeah, Mel!" a guy in the back cried. "Woooooo!"

As I looked out into the crowd, which now seemed to be made up of about a million people, I wondered if this was really a dream, you know, like the kind where you show up to school naked and then find out that you have to give a report.

But this was no dream. Dreams don't smell like rancid beer.