Battle of the Bands

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The smell in the garage is lousy. No matter how much incense Cia burns to cover it up, the aroma of mold and car exhaust lingers. Old bulbs coated with years of dust and cobwebs don’t cast the best light either. But when I pick up my guitar and my fingers find the strings and that first riff comes screaming out of the amp, the only thing that matters is sound.

Kel joins in on bass and then Cia gets going, pounding out the beat, making
snarly faces because she thinks drums ought to lead off. The girl does set down a solid rhythm, but I keep telling her, original doesn’t follow any rules. Kel and I grin at her and she scowls. Then she smiles too and we get in sync, start gelling.

Sometimes that whole rush of being perfect lasts for all of two minutes and then one of us messes up and it’s over. I say, *Man*, and Kel says, *Crap*, and Cia says nothing, just rolls her eyes. Then we go again. We keep going because, someday, everyone’s going to listen to The Lunar Ticks.

That’s us, our band. Kelvin is on bass guitar. He is over six feet tall, and on a lucky day, after pizza, he might weigh 130 pounds. His hair is long and thin too, and his feet! Let’s just say his parents have his shoes special ordered. They look like modified skis. The only wide thing on Kel is his mouth, and maybe that’s what attracted his girlfriend, Amy.

Almost everything on Amy is wide. Her bottom end has a hard time staying
inside the confines of her jeans—it’s like she’s oozing out everywhere. Her chest is mega, and then there’s her mouth. It’s not just the actual size, it’s what she does with it. Her mouth is one of the band’s main problems. She talks way too much, and every time we finish a song she has to plaster her lips to Kel’s. Our practice time is seriously shortened by all the breaks for mouth to mouth. It’s like some sort of lifesaving routine, and it’s not pretty. I try not to watch, but sometimes I still catch a glimpse and it’s scary. Scary because Amy’s eyes are usually wide open and glaring at Cia.

Cia never watches the face-sucking act. She either keeps her sticks tapping or she lights up a cigarette and stares at the smoke drifting into the rafters. This leads to more delays. There’s scenario A, in which we have to wait for Cia to finish her smoke, or scenario B, in which Cia’s mom smells the smoke and starts yelling. I hate scenario B. It goes like this:
“Alicia Stanton, what is that revolting stink? I’m going to count to ten and then I’m coming into that garage and all of your guests had better be gone because you are in trouble, young lady! Do you hear me? You are in deep trouble.”

So then Mrs. Stanton starts counting, and Kel and Amy and I have to grab our stuff and make a run for it because if we don’t make it out in time, we’re in for a long lecture. We have to hear about how we ought to thank our lucky stars that she lets us kids use her garage for practice. We ought to be more considerate. Don’t we know how bad smoking is for our health?

Cia never says a word. She just keeps staring at the rafters as her mom rages on. The funny thing is that Mrs. Stanton never blames Cia directly. Don’t ask me why. It’s not like Cia is the picture of sweet innocence. She has shorter hair than Kel or me, a spiky mix of purple, green and black. She has too many piercings to count.
There’s hardware in her nose, her lips, her eyebrows, her ears and who knows where else. I figure Mrs. Stanton knows it’s Cia who smokes, but she pretends it’s us so she can get her message across. Something twisted like that.

And then there’s me, Jay. I’m not exactly perfect either, but I’m the leader of The Lunar Ticks. I’m the guy who got us together. We’re a dedicated band. We have to be, because now is the time if we’re ever going to be big. One day soon we’re going to win a major battle, like the one coming up in June. It’s just a couple of weeks away, and we need that win. The prize is an entire day in a professional recording studio. We’re going to send out copies of our shiny CD, and all the DJs are going to play it and everyone’s going to love it. We’ve got it all planned.