

*Song for Chance*

A novel by John Van Kirk  
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John Van Kirk

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# *Song for Chance*

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Struck by a devastating personal loss, aging rock legend Jack Voss must take an unflinching look at his past to understand why his world has come undone.

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Keyboard man Jack Voss spends his evenings in the relative sanctuary of the clubs, playing jazz standards on the piano and occasionally singing some of the songs that made him famous. His 1974 rock opera, *The Enchanted Pond*, catapulted his band, Vossimilitude, into the stratosphere of rock superstardom. Later, solo albums earned him a reputation as a musician's musician. Reverence for his genius led his shortcomings—as a husband, father, and friend—to be forgiven, or at least overlooked.

But when his life of comparative comfort and solitude is rocked by a devastating personal loss, Voss is led back to *The Enchanted Pond*. The story of an ill-fated love triangle based on the tense relations between Voss, his childhood girlfriend Avery, and Vossimilitude's dangerous and charismatic bassist, Hal Proteus, Voss's masterpiece set him on a path to this day of reckoning. To endure, he must confront the tragic consequences of his self-absorption on the only firm ground left him: the piano.

With the sure, unsentimental narrative command of writers like Richard Russo and Jonathan Franzen, John Van Kirk has brought to life in *Song for Chance* not just a fallen rock god, but—with the help of liner notes, bonus tracks, and the complete Voss discography—the whole sex, drugs, and rock and roll era with an immediacy so recognizable that it feels like yesterday.

## **Praise for *Song for Chance***

“A passionate, elegiac tale about the excesses of sex, drugs, and rock and roll over a tortured musician's lifetime. . . . An invented discography, excerpts of lyrics, and cameos by real-life figures like Nick Cave give a feeling of authenticity to Van Kirk's fictional rock star.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Debut novelist Van Kirk delivers the highly authentic story of melancholy, aging keyboardist Jack Voss. . . . Reminiscent of Robert Stone's works (e.g. *Outerbridge Reach* etc), Van Kirk's is a reflective story of how manly 'maturity' happens.”

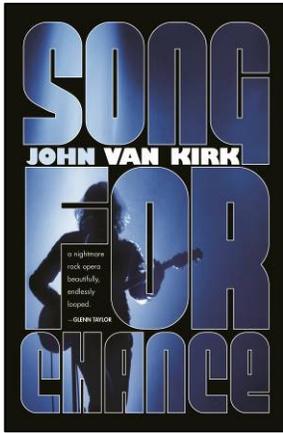
—*Library Journal*

“In these pages, lost landscapes emerge and out-of-print records spin again. Memories haunt forever, cutting through years of smoke and haze and vertigo, until the past becomes the present. A nightmare rock opera, beautifully, endlessly looped.”

—Glenn Taylor, author of *The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart* and *The Marrowbone Marble Company*

## **Biographical Note**

John Van Kirk's stories have earned him the O. Henry Award and The *Iowa Review* Fiction Prize. He lives in West Virginia. *Song for Chance* is his first novel.



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**More Praise for *Song for Chance***

“With the cool complexity of a jazz fugue, *Song for Chance* plays out beautifully. Smart, gripping, and atmospheric, this journey of music and redemption and love will leave you yearning for an encore.”

—Zoë Ferraris, bestselling author of *Finding Nouf* and *City of Veils*

“On its surface, John Van Kirk’s *Song for Chance* is a tale of 1970s sex, drugs, and rock and roll, seen through the eyes of a musician who, along with his band, goes for the big crazy ride of rock star success and endures a volatile mix of unanticipated (and often dire) consequences. Van Kirk’s knowledge and love of popular music shines through and richly informs his story, but it’s the deeper aspects of *Song for Chance* that make the novel truly memorable—a generously rendered account of a soul’s journey through an unexpected life. Van Kirk’s story is expansive, eloquently tracing the often strange alchemy in the great sea-changes of living, loving, and dying. The cadenced rhythms of *Song For Chance* will stay with you long after you’ve finished the book.”

—Richard Currey, author of *Fatal Light* and *Lost Highway*

“John Van Kirk’s *Song for Chance* masterfully captures the essence of the 1970s rock culture by chronicling the meteoric rise and fall of fictional rock legend Jack Voss, a keyboardist whose life is as improvised as his playing. Van Kirk creates a remarkably vivid cast who could snort lines with the likes of Steven Tyler and Keith Richards. Not only is the hedonistic sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll lifestyle unflinchingly exposed, but Van Kirk reveals the evolution of Voss as a musician and as a man through the songs that he writes. In a brilliant move, those telling song titles and lyrics are included, along with liner notes, a discography, and bonus tracks, which add kick-ass authenticity. Amidst all the rock-god mayhem, however, is Voss’s meditative Zen quest—all while at the piano, the only language he really knows how to speak—where he realizes the tragic consequences of his self-absorption and fame for the people he loves the most. *Song for Chance* is a beautifully orchestrated debut composed with the artistry of a fine piece of music.”

—Marie Manilla, author of *Still Life with Plums*

**From *Song for Chance***

**July**

He rounded a bend and saw a golden picture window with gauze curtains go dark as he approached; then another window in the same house lit up as he drove past. People were going to bed, turning out the lights as they left day rooms for night rooms. He was nearly alone on the road, his rental car ticking along dependably. He’d turned the radio off about half an hour before after searching in vain for something listenable, but only now did he notice the quiet of the evening. Up ahead, a thin, yellow sliver of moon climbed slowly through the tree limbs. The Earth was rolling along through space, and he was riding the roll, moving eastward on the eastward turning blue-green planet, tiny under the star-strewn heavens. As long as humans had stood up on their hind legs, they had gazed up at this same sky looking for answers. And only the delusional found them.