

I nodded. “Yep. A band. Me and Greg. We both play the guitar. Well, I’m on rhythm guitar.”

Uncle Dex looked even more serious. And he started nodding. “So you probably need a keyboard player,” he said. “Like me.”

I didn’t know what to say. He’d caught me off guard. Was he seriously asking if he could be in the band? A grown-up?

“You know I used to play, right?” he said. “When I was in high school. We had a band, too. Plus, in college I was in a ukulele ensemble.”

“I’m not in high school yet,” I said, as if that was the real issue here. “I’m just in sixth grade. And anyway, we kind of already have a keyboard player.” That was a lie, but I had to say something.

“Oh yeah?” he said, as if he didn’t quite believe me.

“Yeah,” I said. “A girl, actually.” I blurted that out without thinking about it, although a girl had, in fact, asked me and Greg if she could be in the band. Her name was Julie Kobayashi and we hadn’t ever talked to her much, even though she’d been around since elementary school. She’d overheard us talking about our plans to write some songs and perform them at one of the All-Ages Open Mic Nights they had at this big warehouse downtown.

Of course, we'd told Julie Kobayashi no. We didn't want a girl in the band, and especially a girl like Julie, who was probably even more invisible than me and Greg. With that much invisibility onstage, it would be as if we weren't even there.

Not that Uncle Dex had to know any of that.

"Well, okay then," he said. "But, hey, if you need a uku-lele, I'm your guy."

"Definitely," I said, meaning "definitely not."

Uncle Dex led me down to the basement, then through a confusing series of hallways until he suddenly stopped. "In here," he said, tapping on a green door. "There's just some of Pop Pop's old stuff he bought at yard sales in this one. Clear it out and the space is yours." He winked at me, which is a thing only grown-ups ever do.

We both had to pull hard to get the door open. It made one of those haunted mansion sounds that sends chills up your spine. Then we had to wade through a bunch of cobwebs to get inside, though we couldn't go very far. A mountain of stuff was piled up everywhere.

Uncle Dex patted me on the back — another thing only grown-ups ever do — and then headed back upstairs to see if any actual human customers had wandered into the store.

I just stood there, frozen, overwhelmed by the amount of work it was going to take to even make a pig path through all that junk. I was also totally creeped out. I definitely had the feeling that I wasn't alone.

I pulled out my cell phone so I could text Greg. We'd ridden our bikes downtown, but he was off wandering around somewhere while I talked to Uncle Dex. I couldn't get a signal, though. Sometimes that happens. But sometimes if I lift the phone up over my head, I'll get lucky.

So that's what I was doing, waving my cell phone around, when a cold hand clamped down on my shoulder.

I screamed, and then dove forward to get away from whatever it was, crashing into an enormous pile of boxes that came tumbling down on top of me.

"Help!" I yelled — because of the hand and because now I was totally buried.

Somebody started pulling boxes off me — but I had a panicky feeling that it wasn't Uncle Dex.

"Did you wet your pants, Anderson?" a familiar voice asked, and then burst out laughing, or rather, snorting.

It wasn't Uncle Dex, as it turned out, and it wasn't a ghost, either.

It was my moron best friend.