



**First Look Access**

(Episode 11: Leslie Hauser)

## **Chasing Eveline**

### **Chapter One**

They say music is the key to the soul. Or maybe it's the heart. I can't remember exactly what my mom said that day she danced into my room with a new record for me to hear. I was only in the fourth grade, but I became a believer. I remember so vividly how the drums rattled deep within my chest and the lyrics I didn't even understand seemed to whisper secrets meant only for me. The song lingered inside me for days. My mom swooned and told me that's why music must be shared.

So when I saw the desperate school blog post calling for a volunteer DJ at tonight's Back to School Dance, I jumped at the chance. The music my friend Matt and I plan to throw into the mix is a giant master key. I just hope it will open the teenage hearts in this musty gym and linger inside them long after the last balloon deflates. This music is important to me.

I nudge Matt, whose face is glued to the computer screen at our DJ table. A vibrating speaker to our left thumps out music, so I yell into his ear, "Is the set list ready?"

He tilts his head toward me. "Geez, Ivy. I just plugged in the flash drive."

"Okay, sorry." I step away. He sweeps his blond hair out of his eyes and returns his focus to the computer.

I pace behind him, a nervous left followed by an excited right and back again. The musical brilliance of the greatest guitarist of all time will soon weave through these bodies and drift into every ear. My heart floats up with the blue and yellow balloons hovering like a latex fog.

Near the gym entrance, Principal Henry stands with Narc 1 and Narc 2, and a wave of yawns travels across them. The newbie freshmen line the walls and cluster in groups. The scene resembles a casting call for an acne medication ad.

The dull atmosphere isn't helped by the annoyingly synthetic pop noise blasting through the speakers. After I offered our free DJ services to Karen, the Dance Committee Chairperson, she gave us a mix of music tracks to play. She was grateful to have saved some precious dollars for this year's prom, but I'm not sure she trusted two no-name juniors to get the job done.

However, after listening to thirty minutes of her set list, I'm seriously questioning the cool factor of the popular crowd. Karen's mix features some of the worst radio music of all time. Every song is a mere echo of the previous one—peppy beats and vacuous lyrics about hook-ups and partying. I can't even tell if the voices belong to boys, girls, or machines.

I tap Matt's shoulder. "Are you almost finished?" I nearly have to scream.

"Yeah. I'm just making sure we have the songs in the right order." He turns around and leans toward me. "Ivy, you really want to do this?"

I smile at him and hope he doesn't see all the tiny cracks waiting to splinter. "We're just sharing some great music. It'll be fine."

"I get it about good music. Really, I do. But you understand you don't *have* to do this, right?" His eyebrows raise, and my gaze immediately shifts to the scuffed-up gym floor. I know where he's going with this. "It's okay if you and I are the only ones who listen. Making everyone like her favorite band isn't going to—the music isn't going to bring her back." The last words tiptoe out of his mouth.

I realize the resurgence of some broken-up '80s band won't bring my mom back. Two years ago, she left my dad and me, and I'm pretty sure she's never coming back. I still can't decide if I hate her or miss her, but the blurring of tiny details in my memories lately definitely freaks me out. And then there are all the questions still colliding like bumper cars in my brain.

I'm not ready to let go, and this music is all I have left of her. It can't fade into obscurity.

"Tonight isn't even about her," I lie, brushing off the awkward mention of my mother. "I'm stoked on this music. That's all. You know how you discover great music then want to share it with the world? Let's see what happens." I wave him back toward the computer. "It's not as if anyone is dancing out there anyway." I point toward the static bodies huddled on the dance floor.

"Okay." He clicks the mouse a few more times, looks over at me, and smiles. "Thirty seconds to lift-off."

Just thirty seconds until I introduce the students of Carmel Heights High School to Chasing Eveline, dubbed by *Rolling Stone* as the most influential rock band of all time. Despite the tiny part of me that shares Matt's skepticism, goose bumps of anticipation still bubble all over my arms.

As the music of the peppy pop song fades, I step back from the DJ table. When Matt's finger makes a final click of the mouse, I close my eyes. *Three, two, one...*

My hand strikes an imaginary drum right on cue as drummer Andy O'Connor hits that first beat. A few more, then Ethan Cassidy's melodic guitar joins in with Michael Murphy's bass. The music carries me out of this stuffy gym and drops me onto a darkened Dublin street. Colin Delaney's melancholic voice starts up. He begs to be taken out into the bright lights of the city. I plead along with him—we don't care where we are going, we simply want to be outside and alive. Under a glittering marquee, he wonders when it will finally be his turn, and I ache with his fear and yearn for his hope. He longs to feel the thumping of late-night music in his heart, but I'm already there. My heart, my body, the music—we're all in rhythm. My fingers strum an imaginary guitar, and Colin's voice takes me farther and farther away. I feel—

*Smack.*

I'm back in the school gym. My eyes fly open, and a pizza crust rests on my plaid canvas sneaker. *A pizza crust?* My head rises in time to see a silver aluminum can zooming toward me. I duck as it whizzes by my ear.

"Matt?" I call out and dodge a series of rainbow-colored M&Ms aimed at my chest and arms. When the firing stalls for a moment, I try again. "Matt?" *Oh, there he is.* He's underneath the DJ table, a boy-box of short, skinny legs folded neatly into his chest with two fleece sweatshirt arms wrapped around like ribbon. A chorus of boos, moans, and insults drowns out the start of the second song in our playlist.

I crouch next to Matt, who's wiping pizza sauce off his gray Notre Dame sweatshirt. "Are you okay?" A Diet Coke can crashes on the floor between us.

"They really hate the music," he says, his eyes fixed on the stain.

"Are we sure it's not something else?" My brain understands that Matt's right, but my heart wants to search for another explanation.

It would be typical of a few immature freshman boys to start a food fight, and we could have simply gotten caught in the crossfire. I stand and search for warring factions, but I find only angry eyes and clenched fists aimed at our table.

"This music sucks!" shouts one voice, and another one soon follows, "This dance sucks!" A third adds, "You suck, loser!" which could possibly be aimed at us or at the kid to our right who has enough wire in

his mouth to run a toy train. Another pizza crust misses my head by inches. *Geez. The music isn't that bad.*

My heart sinks. How can anyone not like Chasing Eveline? Colin Delaney has been called “a lyrical genius” and Ethan Cassidy “a master of astonishing tone and riffs.”

Maybe I could try one more thing.

I hold up a hand. “Okay, okay. Wait!” I shout over their yelling. I speed-read our playlist. An empty Coke can hits my arm. “Hold on! Give me a minute!” I implore as I finally spot “I Can't Help the Way I Feel.” Ethan's guitar riffs are much stronger on this song, and the beat is a little catchier.

I stop the song that's playing, and some of the bellowing fades.

“I think this'll be better,” I yell out as my finger double-clicks on the track. My brain laughs at my heart and its love affair with second chances.

I freeze in front of the computer—barely breathing—and wait for their reaction. A couple of kids turn around and join the food fight that has continued to our right, then more start walking away, back toward the center of the gym. Some murmur to each other.

I exhale cautiously. “Maybe we just played the wrong song.” I turn wishful eyes down at Matt who's still obsessing over the pizza stain on his sweatshirt.

*Thwomp.*

The hard edge of a pizza crust nails me on the upper back. A couple of jocks-in-training advance on our table. I was wrong. They'd just turned around to reload. An entire slice of greasy pepperoni pizza slaps me on the arm. A handful of Skittles pelts me on the chest, and a water bottle—full of water—beans me from the left. The cackles and yelps of other kids tell me the chaos has nothing to do with the music anymore.

I drop to the floor—all those elementary school disaster drills finally paying off—and cram myself under the table alongside Matt.

Amidst all the boos and insults bombarding our table, Matt turns to me and says, “I knew they might not like the songs, but I never saw this coming.”

Before I can reply, Principal Henry's shiny black loafers park themselves in front of us. His voice booms in our direction. “What in the world happened here?”

I scoot forward a few inches and lean my head out from under the table. Principal Henry's cherry-red face stares down at the computer,

and he pounds on the keyboard. “How do I turn this stuff off?” When a Red Vines box narrowly misses his head, he screams at Narc 1 to get things under control.

He must have finally found the pause button because Colin Delaney’s beautiful voice stops in mid-sentence. The principal steps back and glares down at us. “Get up here now and fix this music situation. There’s a dance going on, and I need music that won’t cause a riot.”

I can’t move. Although I honestly knew my plan was a long shot, the defeat is still an arrow to the chest. I don’t understand how people can prefer cookie-cutter, synthesized pop songs to the greatness of Chasing Eveline. “They didn’t even give it a chance.” I say the last part aloud to Matt and to the world in general.

“NOW!” Principal Henry barks.

Matt scampers to his feet, shielding his head from any stray shots that might still be fired. I remain motionless, Colin’s pleas to be out under the lights still echoing in my ears.

While Matt works on the computer, Principal Henry’s hands rest on his hips, and he shakes his head slowly. “I step out for five minutes and all hell breaks loose in here,” he complains into the space around us. Moments later, a high-pitched, ambiguous voice travels out of the speakers. The students erupt in cheers.

Matt gives the all-clear to stand, but I remain on the floor.

“So, are we good?” Principal Henry asks.

“Yes sir. We got it,” Matt assures him.

“Okay.” A long sigh escapes from the principal. “Thanks to this, I now have some parents to call and students to suspend, so please keep it under control. Just play the music that will keep them dancing, understand?” Matt nods, and Principal Henry walks away, shouting something over the walkie-talkie at Narc 1 and Narc 2.

I roll my eyes at the glee produced by this empty pop nonsense and slide over to the wall. I lean against it and pick off a pepperoni that’s stuck to the sleeve of my black T-shirt.

Matt drops down and sits next to me. He starts fussing over the pizza stain again.

“The stain will come out. Don’t worry.” I kick the pepperoni away.

“I hope. This is my favorite sweatshirt, and I can’t afford another one. I wanted to wear it at the prospective student weekend next month.”

I kick at the pepperoni once more. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault,” he mutters.

“Sort of, it is.” Everything sucks. A brown-haired girl crashes into our DJ table. She giggles then trails after a swoony boy. Hopeful recognition flashes in Matt’s eyes, but it’s gone in an instant. I know he’s thinking of her. “I thought Notre Dame was your thing with Charlotte. You’re still applying, even though you guys are...?”

“Yeah. Even though we broke up, I can still go there,” he snaps then scoots over a few inches and folds his arms. I shouldn’t have brought up Charlotte. The night of bad decisions. We stare at the ground as squeals of delight and electronic vocals alternately bounce off the walls all around us.

Eventually the robot voice stops yapping about Guccis and hoochies. In the split second of silence between songs, I nudge Matt with my elbow. “I’m sorry about bringing up Charlotte and about your sweatshirt. I’ll help you get the stain out when this is over.”

“Thanks,” he mumbles.

The next bubblegum pop song starts, and he leans over. “I’m sorry it didn’t work out like we wanted. I know you really wanted them to love the band.”

“Sometimes I feel like I just don’t belong,” I say. I’m not even thinking about my mom right now. It’s about the music. “I mean, Colin’s voice and the guitar, they’re so much better than this...” I wave my hand up into the space above us.

Right on cue, the machine-like voice screeches something unintelligible, and Matt laughs. “Yeah. This stuff is bad.” He gets up to check the music set. We still have thirty painful minutes of this dance to endure.

My mind wanders to the days my mom and I spent entire afternoons listening to her music collection. A sea of records surrounded us, and my mom jumped up and down to change songs every few minutes. I’d rate each one she played, resulting in either a gleeful approval dance or a muffled sigh of dismay. But even when I didn’t particularly care for a band at first, I always gave the songs another shot. Mom would break out the concert footage, and when I watched her float away to some darkened arena, I couldn’t help but fall in love, too.

“Wouldn’t it be awesome if we could see them in concert?” I say to Matt who’s dropped back into hiding with me.

“Who?”

“Chasing Eveline.”

“Yeah, that would be cool, but I don’t think they have any interest in getting back together. I’m not sure if any of them are even playing anymore.”

“That’s not true.” I hold up my finger. “A year ago, Ethan was interviewed in *Rock* magazine and said he’d be open to reuniting if the rest of the guys were. Plus, bands get back together all the time. Blue Sky, The James Dixon Band, Max Wattage...they all reunited.”

“Max Wattage?” Matt raises his eyebrows at me. “You’re using a one-hit wonder whose song was titled ‘Wired to Love’ as an example? You’re probably the only person on Earth who even knows they reunited.” He smiles and starts singing, “Wa-wa-wa-wired to loooooove. Ain’t no electrocutin’ me, baby.”

I playfully shove him. “I’m just trying to prove a point. But seriously, it could happen...” My voice trails off, and pictures of the band on a dimly lit stage consume me. A series of single spotlights shines on each member, and the crowd cheers as Ethan hits that first guitar note. *The crowd cheers.* That’s it.

I turn my whole body toward Matt. “Hey, maybe we should try to get them to play a reunion gig.”

Matt snorts out a laugh. “Yeah, sure. I’ll send Colin a text.”

“No, I’m serious. If people could see them live, I bet they’d see what we do. Wouldn’t it be cool if they reunited?”

“Of course. It’d be awesome. But seriously, Ivy, that’s impossible.” Matt’s not much of a dreamer.

“I wouldn’t say *impossible*. I mean, somehow people brought back that cancelled TV show you love so much, so there has to be some way to make it happen.”

“Yeah, you have to get thousands of people to show support. We couldn’t even get *one* tonight.” Matt shakes his head and returns to picking at his sweatshirt. He’s got a point. But it can’t be impossible. There has to be some way to reunite Chasing Eveline. That, for sure, would be more powerful than some song mix at a Back to School Dance. And maybe...maybe a reunion could help me find my mom.



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