

Eddie, The 25 Year Reunion

Chapter Six Springtime

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On a Friday evening, Kathy and Eddie arrive at the middle school along with the whole tribe to hear Milana and her band perform at the middle school talent contest. Joining the tribe for this event is Darryl Stone, a well sought after concert drummer, and his wife, Angela Meadows, who is now a famous sportscaster. Also on the guest list tonight are Darryl's parents, Athena Leighton and Mike Stone, Milana's organ teacher, Dr. Elianna Erlanger, Mr. Frazier and his wife, Dawn, Dr. Zunde, Mr. Chubin, and a few others from Northside High School and the University. It would appear that Milana's band has their own groupies, but in an age reversal sense.

The evening begins with the middle school principal, Mr. Anderson, addressing the attendees. Listening as Mr. Anderson speaks to the audience, one could come to the conclusion that the middle school is the greatest school in the world. But, a few towns over, another middle school principal is touting the same nonsense, claiming that her school is the best and most talented in the nation.

In the audience tonight, not paying one bit of attention to what Mr. Anderson is saying, is Mr. Steven Sharpe, the middle school band director and music teacher. Mr. Sharpe is not present by choice, for it is generally accepted protocol that the faculty attends such events, especially since his jazz band will be performing tonight. And, being the school's music teacher, Mr. Sharpe was assigned the duty of being one of the judges.

While Mr. Anderson brags about the upcoming talent show, word gets around the auditorium that Angela Meadows is present at the event. Within no time, far more attention is focused on Angela than Mr. Anderson. A few of the parents recognize Darryl as the long-haired hippie drummer who won a gold medal in the Olympics a while ago, and

wonder why he is present tonight. A few of the athletic-type students recognize Eric Johnson, the high school track coach and physical education instructor, whom they have heard a lot about. Many of them will have the awesome pleasure of doing push-ups and sit-ups in front of Johnson sometime in the near future. And Eddie, the best mechanic in town who was once the fastest man in the world, goes relatively unnoticed.

First up in the talent contest is a student performing *Doesn't Really Matter* to a taped accompaniment, originally released by Janet Jackson two years prior. During the performance, Eddie whispers to Kathy, "she's pretty good." Kathy quietly replies, "I know. She's going somewhere." Of course, anyone following this act will have a tough time of it. Everyone in the audience knows this is a class-one act for a middle school girl.

For the second performance, the stage is empty as music is heard through the sound system. Suddenly emerging from stage right is a dancer, whose entrance suggests that she has been taking dance lessons for several years. Paula whispers to Kathy, "wow! Did anyone dance like that when we were in middle school?" Kathy whispers back, "if they did, I never knew. I never went to any of these things when I was in middle school." Paula whispers to Kathy, "you could have gotten out your hoops and hooped, girl. And, you would have won." Kathy whispers back, "dang. Yeah. I could have. Way too late now."

As the show moves on, Mark comments, "here it comes, the proverbial puppet show. Wake me up when it's over." Paula replies, "me too." As in any middle school, there are those acts which will prove as an embarrassment to the student. Puppet shows are usually at the top of the list. This one is no exception. But, the audience is tolerant, knowing that these are middle school kids, and they are doing their best.

During another act, Eddie whispers to Kathy, asking, "when is Milana up?" Kathy replies, "they're up last, since they have a lot of equipment to move onto the stage. Someone is going to talk for a few minutes while they set up, and then introduce the band." Eddie asks, "who is going to introduce them?" Kathy replies, "shh. Let's just watch." Eddie whispers, "what are you up to, Katarina Karakova?" Kathy replies, "what makes you think I'm up to something? And, by the way, it's Katarina Bogenskaya." Eddie now knows Kathy has something interesting planned. But, he will have to wait to find out. Eddie knows he will not get an answer out of Kathy.

Backstage, during the show, in the stage left wing, Roberta is carefully positioning her Gretsch drum kit on a carpet that will be dragged out onto the stage carrying her drums with it in just a while. On the carpet are markings, which facilitate aligning Roberta's drums and cymbal stands exactly as she likes. Svetlana gets her Gretsch guitar hooked up to her amp, testing it very quietly to ensure there are no problems. Once that is done, Svetlana installs a new 9-volt battery in her wireless microphone and adjusts a few settings on her mixer. Yasmine, likewise, ensures there will be no problems with her Gretsch bass guitar once she is on stage. For some reason, Gretsch instruments seem to be preferred among the band. Milana, the lone band member without a Gretsch instrument, makes sure her Yamaha keyboard is ready to be carried on stage, which is a far cry above the quality of the middle school's outdated equipment. And, to top it off, Milana will also be integrating her Moog synthesizer into the performance tonight.

As a fellow student is on stage reading poetry, Yasmine, seeing another band getting ready, whispers to her group, "there's our competition, getting ready across stage." Taking a look, Svetlana giggles, replying, "that's no competition. Those guys like totally suck, well, except for Peter." Milana comments, "Peter would be better off playing alone." Yasmine laughs, replying, "you got that right, girl." Roberta comments, "it's just too bad they don't have a drummer." Yasmine replies, "yeah, they do. They have Donny." Roberta replies, "as I said, it's too bad they don't have a drummer." Catching on, Yasmine embarrassingly admits, "got it. Silly me." Listening to the four girls discuss their competition, they sound a bit like Eddie and his track buddies when they were in middle school. Some things never change.

Introducing the next act, Mr. Anderson proudly announces, "for our next performance, please welcome our school's very own dance band." Reading from a card, Mr. Anderson announces, "on drums, we have Donny White. Playing the keyboard is Laurie Wolff. Playing bass is Julius Nash. And, on lead guitar is Peter Matondo." One would surmise that, if there is only one guitar player, that person would logically be the lead guitar. But, Mr. Anderson is a paper pusher, not a musician.

Milana and her group watch and listen, as the school's dance band, a subset of the main band, begins to perform *Thank You*, a song originally hitting the charts by Dido. Yasmine whispers to her group, "no! Tell me they're not!" Milana replies, "yup. They are. They must have overheard us talking about doing that song." Roberta adds, "poor Dido. They're gonna trash her work." Roberta comments, "there ain't no way they're

playing any trip hop¹ and getting away with it.” Yasmine replies, “you got that right.”

Milana looks over at the dance band, wondering who is going to sing. Following the intro, Milana hears Laurie belting out the words, *I didn't hear you leave*, slightly flat from the key they are playing in. Roberta comments, “well, that’s not exactly going too well. A woodpecker has better timing than Donny.” Milana laughs, and replies, “yeah. Seriously.” Not wanting to be distracted, Svetlana suggests, “let’s get ready. We’re up next.”

Taking their mind off the current performance, walking up to Milana and her group, the guest speaker who will introduce the band inquires of each member exactly how to pronounce their name. After all, no one wants their name pronounced incorrectly, especially in the presence of a few hundred people.

Knowing that Milana’s group is up next, sneaking backstage is Darryl Stone, who wanted to get a first class seat to Milana and her band’s performance tonight. Darryl, in particular, wants to see Roberta, the drummer, play not just hear her. And, since this is a middle school, it was a cakewalk for Darryl to make his way backstage. Security is virtually non-existent.

The school’s dance band finishes their number, and receives a good amount of applause. As they leave the stage with their instruments, the guest speaker who will announce the final act walks on stage. The auditorium goes quiet, so that all that can be heard is the sound of a few instruments being brought on stage.

The guest speaker announces, “good evening. Thank you all for coming out this evening to hear these very talented students perform tonight. It certainly takes a lot of courage for them to get up on stage and perform in front of you. And, every one of them has done an awesome job tonight. Please give all of them another round of applause.” The audience gives the student participants a standing ovation, as Roberta comments to the group, “all that applause is for us.” Yasmine replies, “yeah. I know. Right?” It would seem the newly-formed band has quite a high confidence level.

¹ Trip Hop: A music genre based on a slow hip hop beat, with frequent drum breaks, incorporating a repetitively hypnotic melody usually played in a minor key. More appropriate for a mezzo-soprano voice.

The guest speaker continues, announcing, “this has been a wonderful evening for me, and hopefully for you, too. For those of you who don’t know me, I am Angela Meadows. I was given the privilege of announcing tonight’s final act.” Hearing the announcement, Milana and her group quickly get into position to wave to the audience once their name is announced.

Angela announces, “please welcome, on the keyboard, Milana Bogenskaya.” Milana waves to the audience, receiving applause, much of which comes from the area where the tribe is seated. Angela continues, “on guitar, Svetlana Pushkin,” who is the granddaughter of Viktor Pushkin, the track coach of a university in the area. Mr. Pushkin, seated with Mr. Frazier tonight, tells Mr. Frazier, “I hear Svetlana has been practicing for three months with her group. I think this will go very well.” Waving her arm toward the group, Angela announces, “on bass, Yasmine Gretzky.” Yasmine, one of the most popular girls in the school, receives abundant cheers, especially from the guys in her class. Angela announces, “and, on drums, Roberta Osborne.” Roberta waves to the audience, also receiving a warm welcome.

Waving her hand toward the group, Angela then announces, “please give a warm welcome to Milana and the G-Strings!” The group receives applause, cheers, and whistling from the audience, with many parents surprised at the name the group chose for themselves. In the audience, Athena asks Kathy, “how in the world did they ever come up with the name ‘Milana and the G-Strings?’” Kathy explains, “everyone except Lana plays Gretsch instruments. The G stands for Gretsch. So, it’s Milana and the Gretsch musicians.” And, backstage, taking a close note of the drums, Darryl notices that Roberta has a top of the line Gretsch USA Custom drum kit, usually only owned by professional musicians.

Immediately silencing the audience, the group begins to play *The Power of Love*, a top hit recently popularized by Céline Dion and originally done by Jennifer Rush. Walking around stage with her guitar, belting out the words with confidence, it is clear that Svetlana has performed in front of an audience many times before. Working her Yamaha keyboard and Moog simultaneously, Milana gives a performance that Mr. Sharpe will never forget. Yasmine, on the bass, decides to stand, also moving about on the stage. And, Roberta, on the drums, impresses Darryl, the professional musician, for *The Power of Love* is not exactly the easiest song to play on the drums. Darryl, however, notices that Roberta’s drums are not exactly in tune. But, only an expert would notice that.

Hearing Milana’s group play *The Power of Love*, Kathy tries hard not to show her tears of happiness. Eddie puts her arm around Kathy, who

whispers to Eddie, “that is so nice of Lana. She knows how much I love this song.” Milana has heard *The Power of Love* many times, and knows that it is, by far, her mother’s favorite song.

In the audience, students get out of their seats, and start slow dancing in the aisles. This, of course, irritates the administrators, who expect everyone to remain quietly seated during the performance. But, there is not much that Mr. Anderson and his administrative henchmen can do. To rain on the parade would be social suicide.

At the end of their performance, the group waves to the audience, receiving a remarkable standing ovation. The audience starts screaming, “encore! Encore!” But, only one number was permitted to be played by any musical group tonight. As Mr. Anderson walks up on stage to address the audience, as planned, the group starts playing the number-one hit, *Breathe*, by Faith Hill. With the audience going wild, there’s not much that Mr. Anderson can do, other than ride with the tide and go with the flow. If Mr. Crum were the principal, it’s a sure bet that Milana and the G-Strings would be called into his office Monday morning for violating some unwritten rule.

At the end of the number, the group receives another standing ovation. Walking back on stage, Angela Meadows claps along with the audience, leading to even more applause. Several minutes later, as the applause subsides, Angela walks off stage with the group. Backstage, giving each band member a hug, Angela tells them, “you guys were so awesome! Congratulations!” The girls are ecstatic, not only because of their great performance, but because Svetlana, Roberta, and Yasmine got to meet Angela Meadows in person. Milana, of course, has met Angela, a friend of Eddie and Kathy’s, many times in the past.

During the discussion among the judges, Mr. Anderson addresses the audience, making a few unnecessary announcements. But, something has to be done to fill the time while the judges do their work. It is clear to the audience that Milana and the G-Strings won the competition by a huge margin, but the judges base their scores on criteria other than popularity.

Once the judges have made their decision, the sealed envelope containing the results is handed to Mr. Anderson. While it is totally unnecessary to seal the envelope, it gives the audience the impression that the votes have not been tampered with during the 50-foot trek from the committee chair to the principal.

Without further ado, Mr. Anderson announces, “in third place, performing a dance for us tonight, is Dakota Miller.” Dakota walks on

stage, proudly receiving her award. During the applause, taking her place to the left of the podium, Dakota is just as interested to see who won as is the rest of the crowd.

Mr. Anderson proudly announces, “second place goes to our very own dance band, who played *Thank You* tonight. Receiving second place, I’m sure they’re all very thankful. Come on up, Donald White, Laurie Wolff, Julius Nash, and Peter Matondo.” As they walk up on stage, Donny stumbles a bit, having a bit too much alcohol before tonight’s performance. The jazz band receives a round of applause, surprising quite a few students that they actually won something.

With the audience on the edge of their seat, Mr. Anderson announces, “and, in first place, winning the competition tonight, is Audrey Collier, who eloquently read a poetry selection to us tonight. I’m sure we were all deeply touched by her reading.” A meager level of applause breaks out, quickly overshadowed by a few students yelling out, “G-Strings! G-Strings! G-Strings!” As the chanting catches on, Kathy reminisces of her track days, when the Amazon chants broke out during the high school meets. The tribe joins in with the chant, which shows no signs of subsiding.

Backstage, Svetlana announces, “we won. I don’t care what the judges think. We won!” Yasmine agrees, confidently stating, “you got that right, girl!” While the girls are disappointed, they realize that they are number one with the fans. Angela, knowing the girls are disappointed, brings the group together, having a private discussion with them while Mr. Anderson tries to calm the audience.

Angela realizes that the principal, Mr. Anderson, embarrassingly has lost all control of the event. Coming to his rescue, walking on stage, Angela motions to the audience to calm down, something at which Mr. Anderson failed miserably. As the audience calms down, commandeering the microphone, Angela announces, “in a moment I will have a really big surprise for you. But, before I make that announcement, please give a hearty round of applause to our winner tonight, Audrey Collier.” The audience gives Audrey her well-deserved recognition, as Audrey wipes the tears from her eyes. Angela walks over to Audrey, giving her a heartfelt hug, a moment that will overshadow any disappointment she felt earlier. And, Mr. Anderson fully allows Angela to maintain control, for he knows that, should he get behind the microphone again, it will likely spell disaster.

Angela then announces to the audience, “as you head out tonight, Milana and the G-Strings will play another number for you. The group will also be giving you a free concert tomorrow at noon at Eddie’s

Service Station, located over on Union Avenue. Since you all live around here, you probably know exactly where it is. And, there will be free pizza and drinks for everyone. I, myself, am certainly not going to miss this event. Please feel free to stop by. But, please bring your own seating.” Angela steps offstage, as Milana and her group perform the song *Thank You*, by Dido, the way it should be performed as opposed to the dance band’s rendition.

Nearly everyone in attendance stays around for the grand finale. During the number, Eddie tells Kathy, “well, I guess I’m not working tomorrow.” Kathy replies, “sure you are. From what I just heard, you’re ordering pizza and drinks for everyone.” Eddie asks, “how do you know that you’re not the one ordering the pizza and drinks?” Kathy replies, “hmm. Maybe we can get Eddie, Junior to do it.” Eddie replies, “forget it. I’ll get the pizza.” While Eddie, Jr. is fast on the track, he is relatively slow accomplishing anything else.

Svetlana’s, Roberta’s, and Yasmine’s parents join Eddie and Kathy’s conversation. Referring to tomorrow’s concert, Svetlana’s grandfather, Mr. Pushkin asks Eddie, “did you know this concert was going to happen?” Eddie replies, “no. It’s a surprise to me, too. But, they’ll have fun.” Mr. Pushkin smiles, and tells Eddie, “they only live once. This is going to be a big event for them. I’m certainly going to be there for it.” So will Roberta’s and Yasmine’s parents, who are fully onboard with the plans. That is good news, for Roberta and Yasmine have not yet told their parents about tomorrow’s concert, for the group only decided to do the concert a few minutes ago themselves.

Once the event winds down, Eddie suggests to Svetlana’s, Roberta’s, and Yasmine’s parents that the instruments be dropped off at the service station, which will undoubtedly save a lot of time tomorrow morning. Roberta’s mother asks, “where are they going to play? On the parking lot?” Eddie replies, “no. There’s a pretty big lawn behind the service station. We’ll need the front area for parking and, since Lynn and Penny don’t do studio work on the weekends, we can use their lot for any overflow.” Breathing a sigh of relief, Roberta’s mother tells Eddie, “it sounds like you have this under control.” Kathy reassures Roberta’s mother, telling her, “nothing will go wrong. This will work out.” Everyone then loads up their kid’s equipment, and heads out for the evening.