



**Lzzy Hale, "Is Steven here?"
Steven, "AnnCha, whatcha been doing?"**

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Lzzy Hale stood in the dimly lit hallway of the old rehearsal space, the scent of stale coffee and ozone from blown amplifiers hanging in the air. Her leather jacket was slung over one arm, and a faint sheen of sweat still glistened on her temples from her own session. The thunder of her band's last chord still echoed in her bones, but a different, quieter urgency pulled her down the corridor.

She stopped outside a familiar, scarred door, from behind which only silence seeped. No chugging guitar, no steady thump of a bass line, no metronomic click of drumsticks on a practice pad. Just the distant, muffled thrum of another band down the hall.

She raised a fist, knuckles poised against the chipped paint, but hesitated. Instead, she called out, her voice softer than the rock goddess roar she was known for, tinged with a concern that felt out of place in these concrete walls.

“Is Steven here?”

The question wasn't just a query. It was a search party for a missing frequency. Steven, their rhythm guitarist, was the anchor, the human metronome with a smile that could disarm any tension. He was never late. His silence was a wrong note in their otherwise harmonious chaos.

From the room adjacent, the drummer, Mike, poked his head out, his face uncharacteristically grim. “Haven’t seen him, Lz. He was supposed to be here an hour ago. Didn’t answer his phone.”

Lzzy’s brow furrowed. She pushed the door open. The room was a tomb of gear. Steven’s guitar case stood open and empty by his amp. A sheet of tablature for their new song, *Echoes in the Static*, was neatly placed on a stand, the complex chords he’d been struggling to master circled in red. A half-full bottle of water sat beside it, condensation still fresh.

“He was here,” she murmured, her fingers brushing the paper. The Steven she knew would never leave his prized guitar uncased. A cold trickle of unease, sharper than pre-show nerves, traced her spine.

Her phone buzzed in her back pocket. A text from an unknown number. Her heart hammered against her ribs as she opened it.

It was a photo. A blurry, dark image of Steven’s distinctive guitar pick—the one with the galaxy print she’d given him for his birthday—resting on a damp, wooden surface. A pier. The old industrial pier down by the river, a place they sometimes went to write, to escape the boxy rooms.

Beneath the photo, a message: **“He heard a different melody. Come find the harmony. Alone.”**

The professional in her screamed to call the police, to rally the band. But the message was a hook, a riff meant for her ear only. This wasn’t a random act. This was about the music. Their music. Steven had stumbled into a verse of a song they hadn’t written, and the composer was waiting.

Lzzy Hale looked from the empty room to the text, the quiet “Is Steven here?” now morphing into a deafening, silent scream. She grabbed her jacket, her own guitar pick digging into her palm. The search had a location. The stage was set, not for applause, but for a rescue. She had to go tune into whatever dangerous frequency had taken her anchor and bring him back to the band.

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