

David

It was early afternoon when David opened his eyes. A flowing light-show moved across the bed as the sun glared through the blinds that danced above the whistling air conditioner. David opened the window, looked at the beach below him and smiled at the rolling ocean. He walked to the counter, opened his laptop and clicked a link his sister sent him.

“A local musician has been getting a lot of attention for his Youtube videos that boast views in the tens of millions. Bo Addison from right here in Cleveland has been selling out shows throughout California and doing so in a remarkable fashion.”

“That’s right Dianne. Bo, who goes by the stage name David, uses only a guitar and his controversial lyrics to attract a crowd. He says that he would never charge more than fifteen dollars for a ticket and that what matters to him is getting his message out.

“Very exciting. All the best to David who starts his nationwide tour next month and will be playing a hometown show August 17th.”

David took a coconut water from the fridge and sprawled onto the couch with his guitar. He closed his eyes, gently strummed some chords and thought about Emily. He saw her the first time in an oceanside bar serving drinks to the retired, leathery men of Solana Beach: the town where she grew up and went to community college. Her beauty and small frame inspired his desires and her dirty blonde hair fit beneath his chin when she would hide in his arms.

His daydream cut short when Mack paraded through the door that connected their rooms. David and Mack met at the San Diego School of Music. Mack studied audio and music

production and David found his excuse to go to California. The two began to play shows on campus and were soon traveling to Los Angeles to play bars and small venues.

“What are you doing in here, having a moment?”

“Something like that,” David said.

“And where did Leila sleep last night?”

“In her room.”

“Sure she did,” Mack smiled.

The two met Leila in LA where they saw her singing at a bar. David, wanting to improve their show, recruited her as a background singer and she got them even more attention.

“Well get your ass up homie, we gotta get to the venue and set up.”

Every seat in the beachside Santa Monica amphitheater was full by sunset. The warm night was cooled by a breeze that made the men in the audience cross their arms and the half-dressed women shake off occasional chills. The lights shone from the stage and David looked to see the illuminated faces of the generation that had come to hear him.

The lights went out and the crowd cheered. Behind his DJ table, Mack played bass that shook the arena. A single white light shone and revealed David, kneeling in the center of the stage. A deep, thunderous voice came from the loud speakers.

“I have found David, a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfill all my will.”

The stage lit up and David played the bass line to the first song. The notes were recorded into Mack’s computer and he played them back through the speakers. David thumped the body of the guitar twice and raked his hand across the strings to create the sound of a kick drum and a

snare and Mack played it back over the bass line. David then played an intricate riff that Mack looped on top of the beat.

David grabbed the microphone and ran around the stage, rapping an electrifying song that energized the entire arena. The song finished and Leila walked onto the stage to more cheers. David picked a slow bass line, followed by a gentle melody and watched as Leila closed her eyes and sang a chorus. She wore a blue, skin tight dress and no shoes and had a feminine energy that balanced the stage.

David's hair had become messy and matted into light brown, skinny dread locks that reached his shoulders. His long white tank top hung over his skinny jeans and showed his tan skin and narrow body. His guitar was held together by duct tape and he rapped about everything from war, propaganda, and governments secrets to hidden knowledge and the occult. He rapped about life: love, freedom, struggle, and hope. The show came to a close and the three bowed to the audience that, applauding and cheering, had come to their feet.

After a talk with some fans, David went back to the hotel room. He texted Emily but got nothing back. He sat down with his guitar and notebook and worked. Two hours passed and his eyes had become heavy and streaked with red. David walked to the side of the bed, opened the nightstand drawer and looked inside: The Holy Bible. As he reached for it he heard a knock on the door. He opened it and saw Leila. Her tan legs were uncovered by a white shirt that hung to her upper thighs.

“God.” David said.

“What?” She asked.

David smiled, rolled his eyes and closed the door behind her.

“You did really great tonight.” Leila said.

“Thanks, so did you.”

“Have you been writing?”

“Yeah.”

She picked up his notebook and laid on the bed with her hand under her chin.

“These are amazing David. I don't think I will ever understand how your mind works.”

She looked at his bloodshot eyes. “Why don't you ever come get a drink with us?”

“I don't drink anymore,” he said, dimming the light and lying next to her.

“Yeah, Mack told me you had some struggles in Ohio.”

“Yeah.”

Leila touched his arm. “What do these mean?”

David had two tattoos: one on each forearm. On the left was a pyramid and on the right an inverted pyramid.

“They’re just a publicity stunt. Just like you and just like the duct tape on that guitar.”

Leila thought for a moment. “I saw a video that said you sold your soul to the Illuminati and they made you get those. Is that why you're so sad all the time?”

“I never sold out.” David looked at the simple black triangles on his arms. “These represent the right and left brain: the feminine and masculine - imagination and intellect. Destiny is on the right, and free will on the left.”

“So that’s why you’re sad.” Leila said. “You’re not balanced. You spend all your time working and never relax.”

“Yes. After high school I broke and started doing psychedelics, trying to find an answer. I woke up a year and a half later, had forgotten to eat half the time and didn't even recognize myself when I looked in the mirror. If I stop working, I feel meaningless. I feel like I will miss my opportunity. How can I relax in a world where every one of our actions has a consequence? If I relax today, I miss out tomorrow. These tattoos were supposed to help me remember that true intelligence is born when we balance work and play, but I can't find peace.”

“Well maybe I can help you with that,” Leila smiled. She got up, turned off the light, and fell into bed with him.

David woke, walked to the counter and looked at his phone. 11:57. No messages. He walked into Mack's room and saw him on his laptop, nodding to a beat.

“Morning superstar,” Mack grinned.

“What's up man. You making some new shit?”

“Yes sir. The real question is, are you ready for tonight?”

June 17, 2023. The date had been on their minds for months. The Sky Room in Long Beach, a music hall with a capacity of 9,000 and a retractable roof, was twice the size of any venue they had played.

“I'm ready,” David said.

The sky became dark as the three waited backstage. Leila was finishing her makeup, Mack was talking with the light engineer, and David was pacing and warming up his vocals when he noticed something on his dressing room counter.

For David.

He peeled the note off the coconut water, took three long drinks and heard a roar from the audience. He looked in the mirror, took a deep breath and walked behind the stage. He hugged Leila and shook hands with Mack as the stage lights went dark. Mack shook the stage, the white line shone, and the mighty voice spoke.

“For I acknowledge my transgressions: my sin is ever before me. Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. Hide thy face from my sins, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

David jumped up, played the first song, and had the audience singing and dancing. After the second song of Leila’s alluring voice and David’s powerful poetry, his stomach became unsettled. He played the parts for a soft song: one he had written for Emily two years ago. Mack put together the instrumental and Leila sang the chorus. As he began his verse, shooting pains beneath his ribs made his breathing shallow and weakened his voice. Leila started again and David looked to the crowd. The bodies in the pit were a turbulent ocean: morphing and swaying. David’s heart moved erratically and sweat stung his eyes. He began the next verse and his voice could no longer be heard over the music. He moved forward, wavering from side to side, barely keeping himself standing. Leila ran off the stage to find help and Mack cut the music. Then, David saw her. Emily was in the first row and tears were streaming down her face. David collapsed to his knees. Security held her back as he reached and fell to the cement between the stage and the steel barricades. His guitar flattened beneath him and blood began to drop from his temple.

Leila sat by the bed and softly massaged David's hand as Mack paced the room.

"Fucking poison man. What the fuck," Mack said, citing the doctor's diagnosis. "We're gonna have to go back to making club bangers if you're gonna be taking nose dives off the stage."

"It was just a publicity stunt," David said quietly.

"Ya right. I told you this would happen after you wrote that song about curing cancer," Mack smiled.

Emily appeared in the doorway and Mack and Leila stood up. Leila hugged her and Mack shared a supportive look. They left the room and Emily walked to the bed. The tears she had fought came again as she looked at David's faded skin and purple lips. She laced her fingers in his and examined the stitching above his brow.

"I miss you Bo," she said. David opened his dark eyes and looked into hers.

"Before any of this, you were the only thing that gave my life meaning," he told her.

"I'm sorry I've been ignoring you. I felt like you didn't need me anymore and you were just going to forget me and find another girl..."

David thought about the nights he spent writing songs with Leila.

"I picked her to sing because there is something I have to do. I was put here to deliver a message. I only want to be with you Emily."

David made a video on his Instagram about how he would come back and play the show for free and it was viewed four million times as news of the incident spread. Two weeks later, he returned to Long Beach and was backstage again as the sun went down and the arena filled. The

stage lights went out and the bass shook. The booming voice spoke again as David kneeled in the light.

“The Lord is my light; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies and I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.”

The stage lit up, and David played.

