

RIP, B.B.

by Mike Mariano
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(A kitchen. The signs of a struggle. An overturned chair lies next to the table. A phone cord trails to the floor, its body still on a nearby end table and the receiver dangling, marked with bloody fingerprints. A wad of crimsoned paper towels lies in the middle of the floor. At rise, a POLICE OFFICER walks the stage, taking in the carnage. The OFFICER sighs and puts on some plastic gloves. ANOTHER OFFICER enters.)

SECOND OFFICER:

I've got the tape.

FIRST OFFICER:

Oh, Christ.... What's on it?

SECOND OFFICER:

I haven't played it. We'll be the first. But from this room we know it won't be pretty.

FIRST OFFICER:

Are you sure this is something for us, and not for the guys in the lab?

SECOND OFFICER:

No, this is for us. If anything can explain what happened here, it'll be this.

(The OFFICERS look at each other. The FIRST OFFICER nods.)

FIRST OFFICER:

Go ahead.

(The SECOND OFFICER starts the tape. Silence. Then a man creaks in his chair and clears his throat. He speaks: it is the loud, jovial voice of bluesman B.B. KING. The OFFICERS remain steely-jawed.)

KING:

Alright...here we go! The next song on the new B.B. King album!

(An electric blues guitar begins to wail, and B.B. goes into his routine. But, just a few moments into the song, he stops.)

What's the matter, Lucille? We didn't quite pick up that opening, did we? It's all right. We can try it again; why don't we try that again?

(B.B. clears his throat and begins the song once more. He doesn't get much further than before though. He strums Lucille idly for a bit, trying to determine the problem.)

Now Lucille, I don't know if it's you or me, but something's not right here. That's unusual. You and I have been doing this for years now, and it's never been like this. We know how to play together. But I'm not hearing my notes, Lucille. I'm playing them, but I'm not hearing you sing them. And I know it's not because you can't sing them; I know you can. Now, can it be that you just won't sing them?

(A pause.)

Lucille, I want an answer. It's OK; you can tell me. It's this magazine, isn't it?

(The FIRST OFFICER looks on and under the table for a magazine, but finds nothing. The OFFICERS exchange glances. B.B. chuckles and flips the pages.)

That's right, that's right: *Guitar World*. I was looking at some of the new models. Some of them are fine guitars. But you're a fine guitar, Lucille; there's no sense in getting jealous. You understand? I know you do. Now, why don't we get back to work? We start with one, two—

(Only a half-beat of music, then a frustrated chord, and—)

Lucille, I can't tolerate this. This jealousy. It's going to drive us in two! And that can't happen. The blues without a guitar is like... Well, it's not good! And you, Miss Lucille, are my guitar, and you know I can't think otherwise.

(Beat.)

I'll tell you what, Lucille. I don't need the magazine. I don't need to know what Joe Satriani thinks about twelve-strings. If I can stop a black guitar from turning green with envy, I'll do it.

(The sound of B.B. getting up and throwing out the magazine. The SECOND OFFICER looks in the trash and picks it up. B.B. sits.)

You know I can't go onstage with a guitar I can't call Lucille. You know this. But just for peace of mind, reassurance. That's what I want for you. Let's play.

(No music this time. Silence.)

Lucille?

(Beat.)

Luuciille...?

(B.B. sighs, upset.)

This is something. This is absolutely something. You are the most high-minded musical instrument in the world, I'll tell you. One jealous moment out of all the time we've spent together? It's more than a bit ridiculous. You sit there, so proud with yourself. But I know you. That's right, Lucille. I know you aren't Miss Perfect. You can act like it, and I let you act like it. But there have been times before when I've bit my tongue. Just held my breath and watch you make a fool of yourself. You think I haven't been jealous? What about that time Eric Clapton was over? You remember that? He had his hands all over you. I saw that. But I didn't say anything. I didn't think I had to. Because you're mine, Lucille, and nothing's going to bring us apart.

(A beat.)

Do you get it now? You understand how it is, Lucille?
Then can we play?

(B.B. waits for a response, then sighs.)

I can't say why a man and a guitar should come together if there's no music between them. Oh, but excuse me, Lucille. I forgot you don't like to picture me with guitars, and if we're not playing together I guess that includes you, too. Well, Lucille, maybe you're right. Maybe it's time I gave up on guitars. I don't need the magazine, and I'm sure Eric can give you a good home. Just run off with your guitar god. And don't you worry about old B.B. I'll do just fine; maybe get myself a new trade. I'll learn to work the saxophone, and I'll play just what I feel! That's what I'll do!

(B.B. laughs.)

I'll...oh boy.... Baby, maybe it's time I broke the news. You are not the first. Not by a long shot. There have been other Lucilles in the past.

(B.B. lets this sink in.)

Oh...Oh, this is a surprise? You're a flawless new guitar. I'm a man looking at 80 from all the wrong directions. You do the math. And I've been well stocked. I've had a different Lucille for each Republican presidency, and that goes twice for Reagan! Think about it, Lucille, think about it. It doesn't mean you aren't special, but you've got to think about it. You're still one in a million, but you're also one of dozens. You're a special guitar and you've got a reputation to live up to. Now I know you can do it, but I want to hear you say it. I want to hear you play.

(Beat.)

I'm not going to get a note out of you, am I? Well, fair enough. You just sit here.

(B.B. is heard putting Lucille on the chair. He goes over to the phone and begins to dial. The OFFICERS watch.)

Hello, Victor? Hi there; this is B.B. King. Now, listen Victor, I know it's late. I know, but this is important. I'm going to need a new Lucille. You heard me, Victor; a

new Lucille. Yeah, this one is acting up. Repairs? Now I don't know.... I'm thinking this Lucille has worn out its welcome. Do you think I could get one by Thursday? I'll be at the- AAHH!

(The sound of Lucille falling and a string popping. The OFFICERS jump as they hear the phone bungee to the ground. B.B. drops as well.)

Ah! Oh, Lucille.... Lucille, you cut me! My wrist, it's.... Lucille, Jesus! The bleeding, I'm.... Oh Jesus; I need to stop the bleeding....

(B.B. is heard pulling a roll of paper towels from the table. The FIRST OFFICER picks up the bloodied paper towel roll. The previously observed wad is now shown to be still attached to the roll. B.B. is getting light-headed.)

Lucille, Lucille, you need to get back on the chair. You'll be ruined getting all this.... And I need to call an ambulance. I need a...I need a doctor. I need to dial....

(B.B. grabs the phone and Lucille strikes again, falling on top of the man. B.B. screams in pain.)

Oh, Lucille! Oh, my head.... Ohhh!

(More violent noises come from the tape. Presumably this is the chair, garbage can, etc, falling onto B.B. as he struggles. But underneath it all, there are the atonal sounds of a guitar body and strings, as if it's Lucille herself beating and lacerating B.B. to death. These sounds and B.B.'s screams go on for a few moments, until the SECOND OFFICER switches off the tape. The FIRST OFFICER stares.)

FIRST OFFICER:

Why'd you stop?

SECOND OFFICER:

Why'd I stop; are you kidding? I didn't expect this. I can't-

FIRST OFFICER:

We have to.

(The SECOND OFFICER takes a deep breath and restarts the tape. The violence resumes.)

KING:

Ohhh! Oh, Lucille, get off me! Oh, why'd you have to do this?! Ohhh....

(A long beat. Finally B.B. speaks, faint.)

Lucille, I didn't think it was that bad. I thought we'd have a few more years left together. We'd play, just like we have, just like we were going to do tonight... And when it got old, I'd find you a good home. In a nice display case at the Hard Rock Café. That nice one in Annapolis.... Why didn't it work, Lucille. Why are we both on the floor, covered in blood? Why didn't we just play? Why?

(Whispered:)

Why?

(And the rest is silence. The SECOND OFFICER stops the tape. Both are at a loss for words.)

SECOND OFFICER:

You know, my aunt's name was Lucille. She was killed with a B.B. gun.

(Looks up:)

When we first got the call, I thought maybe it was fate. Maybe in some semantic way it was a cosmic balancing. But then I get here and see the room. And I hear this....

(Sighs:)

There's no balancing. There's no sense in this at all.

FIRST OFFICER:

The thrill is gone. And so is B.B....

(The SECOND OFFICER places the recorder in a plastic baggie and seals it. The OFFICERS exit and the lights fade.)

THE END