

The guitarist beamed like a child as he took the stage, his tattoo spanning the width of his torso with its golden braided shapes spiraling like dragons across his shoulders and down his arms. He'd dreamt of this moment when he would finally make it, perhaps even change the face of contemporary music. Holding his arms spread-eagle, he turned around for the throng of thousands of spirited fans calling out his name. The Coachella festival was one of the most coveted gigs in the country, and he was still a little flummoxed by his presence here, considering his band, Skinny Jeans, had only one album and had never played in a venue bigger than that Texas livestock and rodeo show. But that didn't matter, he was here now, even if he knew that the music was secondary to his audience's curiosity at his tattoo.

The man who bore the tattoo was, by all accounts, not a spectacular man. In fact, his newfound notoriety had nothing to do with his tight-fitting clothes, his sub-standard mastery of the guitar, or his emo rockstar hair-do resembling wet seaweed stuck to his face. Skinny Jeans had become an overnight success not for reasons of the musician's talent or artistry, but because the tattoo adorning Jack's body had become something of a sensation due to his manager's public insistence that it was the most expensive, and compelling, tattoo ever cut into human flesh.

And it was true. The tattoo depicted an intricate series of abstract shapes that suggested human body parts, or winding vines, or perhaps a topographical map. It was done exclusively in ink infused with microscopic flakes of gold and the result was a shimmering, almost three dimensional, abstract work of art that made even the most intricate Salvador Dali painting look like a children's coloring book. The tattoo had taken over a year to carve into Jack. It was crowded with dazzling images so complex and textured, that no two people, examining the same patch of skin, had ever been able to agree on what was being represented. Even more incredibly, of those who were fortunate enough to view the tattoo multiple times, not one ever saw the same image twice—not even Jack. The first time he gazed upon the golden masterpiece adorning his torso, he saw in the intricate patterning a dragonfly overlapping a human hand; but the next time, in the same place on his body, he saw a human sitting in the lotus position, bulbs of energy emanating from his head. News shows followed Jack for a while and he felt a little bit like a side-show. But his manager told him it was the best thing for his music career so he endured the attention and paraded his bare chest for anyone who would bother to look.

"Hello Coachella!" shouted Jack into the mic, "Are you ready to rock?"

The din of the audience had fallen silent and nobody responded. This couldn't be good, he thought. The jumbo-tron, Jack noticed, was displaying a close-up shot of his tattoo. He heard a woman in the front row call out, "It's a jellyfish wrapped around a teddy bear."

"Thank you. We are Skinny Jeans," said Jack. He always said *we* even though the band was a solo act.

Another woman cried out, "I see it! It's a pair of hands shaking each other!"

"This first song is off our album," said Jack, "It's called *Screw Wranglers.*"

Before Jack could strum, a man said, "No, that's the face of my dead wife."

And a young girl said, "I think it's a jellyfish hugging a teddy bear!"

Jack played the song. When he finished nobody clapped, they were still calling out the things they saw in his tattoo. He was crushed.

"Let's keep this about the music," he said softly into the mic, his voice trembling.

A man's theatrical, booming voice cried out, "It's like the face of God!"

And a woman in the front row reached out and touched Jack's red Converse sneaker. "I want to see my dead brother one more time. Can you help me?"

Jack realized now that this wasn't a typical festival crowd, it was an outpouring of people who might have fared well in cults. His music held no power over these people. They hadn't come to hear his songs, they had come because they had problems, and for some reason they believed that his tattoo might be the answer.

He strummed lightly on his guitar, but one string was out of tune and the chord fell flat. The jumbo-tron showed him on the stage from a bird's eye view, a lonely speck on an empty stage. After reluctantly returning the guitar to the case, Jack turned to the microphone.

"Zoom in closer, please." The jumbo-tron zoomed until the screen was again filled with his brilliant tattoo, casting light in all directions.

Jack announced, "We'll go one by one. Tell me what you see."

