

The
Queen's
Head
#3



Apologies and corrections

The cover of Issue 2 falsely advertised a feature concerning flying squid. Those with a keen eye will have noticed zero mentions of squid in Sean McCormack's piece, which concerned the humble and mysterious octopus. As it happens, since then scientists have confirmed the Japanese flying squid can achieve a rudimentary type of flight via jet propulsion, achieving up to 30m at speeds of 10.31m per second. This will no doubt be of much comfort to Sean.

*

Issue two also incorrectly credited Robin Davis as Robin Davis. He prefers R. A. Davis. Sorry, Robin, it won't happen again.

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Connoisseurs of 90s sitcoms will have spied an unforgivable typo on page 4 of Issue 2. Senfield is of course more commonly known as Sienfield.

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→ The original submissions deadline for this issue was the last day of December 2012, and came with the stipulation that no submissions were to even think of mentioning Christmas or New Year, as nothing gets in the way of a good miscellany quite like a symbolically rich public holiday. We needn't have worried – everyone ignored the ridiculous deadline and rightly so, as nothing gets in the way of a good pagan midwinter festival of feasting and light quite like work.

So now, on the cusp of spring, it's perhaps even more in the spirit of the miscellaneous to mention Christmas, which Anna Fisk does right at the beginning of her retrospective on the year just past, on family and nostalgia, and the cultural explosion of craft. Touching and critical in equal measures, it's well worth breaking a resolution to feature it in this issue.

Making a further mockery of intentional disorder, our other three submissions tap into varying degrees of nostalgia, each with one eye on the past and the other focused elsewhere, be it San Francisco, Mississippi, or Crete. That's a lot of crazy eyes. You won't know where to look.

Also of note: another huge thank you again goes out to Bryan, Kris, Laura and Bill at the Print Box, which now not only prints but also sponsors The Queen's Head, which is ridiculously kind.

Anna Fisk

PATCH WORK

*On perseverance, the
aesthetics of nostalgia,
and reckless knitting.*

*All made easier by
living in the west
of Scotland rather
than south east
England, where
my family are.*

→ *Part One: Keep Calm and Carry On*

Christmas 2012 was momentous for my family, in that it was the first ever Christmas in which there were no loud arguments, nor were there shed any tears of recriminatory hurt and rage. However, one person did cry a little bit, and that was me, during – much to my embarrassment – the Queen’s Christmas address.

At this point it bears stating I am a shrill socialist and feminist, and have no affection for, nor interest in, the Royal Family. I ignored the wedding two years ago, the jubilee last year, and plan to ignore this year’s birth. Nevertheless, this year, much to my mortified astonishment, I found tears were pootling down my cheeks whilst I listened to the Queen’s understated comment on Britain’s 2012, the national achievement of the London Olympics and Paralympics, and her introduction of the military wives choir – a reminder that the Union Jack is draped on coffins as well as the shoulders of gold-medal-winning athletes.

However much I recognise the nasty imperialism and jingoism inherent in any celebration of national success as ‘British’, I am very susceptible to waves of communal sentiment, and have a deep, albeit misguided, affection

for nostalgic stereotypes – the Women’s Institute, tea out of cups and saucers, village cricket, and so on, as well as Guardian-readerly British values such as ethnic and social diversity, the NHS, and Radio Four.

But my tears were less for Paralympic and Olympic success, and certainly not for idealisation of military sacrifice (on New Year’s Eve I went eggless rather than buy a box of Eggs for Soldiers, the only free range ones left on the shelves), and more for a generation that is passing, whose spirit of stoicism and understatement – stiff upper lip in the face of adversity – is encapsulated by the Queen. I realise this is all a myth, that the ‘Blitz spirit’ was born of a combination of horrible necessity and government propaganda. I know its reinvention in the commercial imagery, pop culture and political rhetoric of the last six or seven years is at best a form of escapism, at worst a distraction from reality manipulated by government agenda. Nevertheless, I think it is better to accept my own mawkishness and occasionally allow it to roam free for brief periods before it has time to do any harm, than to joylessly police the sentimentality of

myself and others.

That was the abstract political version of why the Queen’s Christmas address made me cry. The other not entirely separate version is more personal. We only watch the Queen’s speech every year because my grandmother (‘Nanny’) wants to, and mostly what made me cry, thinking about 2012, is the sight of my 85-year old Nanny watching the television.

My Nan has long had an affinity with the Queen; just as →



the Queen is ER, Elizabeth Regina, my Nanny is also ER, Ethel Regina. When giving her that middle name upon her birth in Stratford in East London, what would be the site of London 2012, my great-grandmother perhaps had ideas above her station for her firstborn daughter. Ethel Regina is a year younger than Elizabeth Regina, and the defining event of both their lives – my Nanny’s marriage and the Queen’s coronation – was in the same year, 1952. So 2012 was a momentous year for both of them: the Queen’s jubilee, and Nanny’s diamond wedding anniversary.

But dates seem to mean less and less to my Nanny, and increasingly she forgets them. The summer of 2012 is perhaps less significant for Nanny as heralding her 85 years of life and 60 years of being married, than as when the changes that have for the last decade been coming gradually were suddenly made concrete. The day after my PhD graduation ceremony, Nanny was seriously ill and taken into hospital. Although she has since recovered fully, her illness in the summer solidified the total change of roles of her and my grandfather. For the past few years, she has been doing less and less of the domestic tasks she once took full responsibility for; now my grandfather brings every meal to her chair.

The involvement of the health and social services has also led to the confirmation of what

everyone except Nanny has known for a long time – the gradual onset of Alzheimer’s. This year its effects have been more and more pronounced, and at Christmas it occurred to me that every time I visit home and see Nanny, there is less and less of her: her memories, her personality. She is developing another personality, one that is cheeky, outspoken and charmingly childlike, but rather different from who she was. So as I watch the Queen and end up weeping, I grieve for the slow passing of my Nanny, as well as the slow passing of the generation represented by the Queen and my grandmother, the generation against which mine continues to define itself.

According to what seems to be the accepted national (media) narrative of the previous twelve months, 2012 was the year in which double-dip recession Britain pulled its socks up/self together/self up by the bootstraps, celebrated the Jubilee in the pouring rain, and put on the

massively successful Olympic and Paralympic Games. It was also a year in which the word used to describe the amount of parodies of the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster shifted from 'multitude' to 'innumerable'. The propaganda poster prepared in 1939 to be put up in the wake of air raids was never used; the bombings didn't come till later. This seems to confirm the ultimate unreality of the present-day embracing of this slogan as representing the national character: resolute, reserved, gently-self-mocking.

And keeping calm and carrying on has become popular at a particular point in time, in the wake of the credit crunch and stringent government cuts in spending. These are justified in the language of 'austerity' – the word used of the post-war economy – and the rhetoric of 'we're all in this together,' a piece of propaganda not nearly as successful as 'keep calm and carry on,' but of the same oeuvre

and reflective of the coalition government's attempts to manipulate the national mood to one of acquiescence rather than protest.*

Critique of wartime retro kitsch and its popularity amidst the early 21st century crisis of capitalism extends beyond propaganda slogans to the general aesthetic that has become ubiquitous over the past few years: cupcakes, Cath Kidston, tea-dances, jiving, the Great British Bake-Off. All this, tied in with the Olympics and the Jubilee, distracts our attention from the present-day reality, the result of coalition policies, in which people are forced to rely on food banks to feed their children.**

I know this. But as I said before, this particular aesthetic of nostalgia appeals to me, up to a point. In 1995, when I was about 11, it was the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII, and bunting and propaganda posters were everywhere then, too. It fascinated me – I used to pore over Robert Opie's Wartime Scrapbook, loving the design and the clothes and the hair. And yes, at that age, there was something really appealing about looking back to a time I had never known, when there were landgirls and black-market silk stockings and GIs and everyone was working together, with a common cause that was meaningful.

Distracted by the aesthetic of ration books and posters



*See Jeremy Gilbert, 'Sharing the Pain: The Emotional Politics of Austerity'

**See Dan Hancox, 'Let Them Eat Cupcakes' (opendemocracy.net)

My nan's phrase about life during the Blitz: "When you went to bed at night you didn't know if you would be alive to get out of bed in the morning."

about the Blitz, I never really absorbed the truth that the 'home front' was about surviving the horrendous food shortages and the threat of death hanging over you and your loved ones. That's not something I could fathom as a child who had grown up in safety. I know that now, and regret not asking Nanny more about it when her memory was better, but I can't help but continue to love Vera Lynn songs, utility chic, the lindyhop.

Whilst my generation has fetishised an image of wartime life, we'll never really know what it was that enabled them to survive it, and to continue life afterwards relatively unscathed, twenty years later laughing at Dad's Army on the telly. They kept calm and carried on. And I cry at the Queen's Speech because Nanny is fading away, and soon the Queen will die, and it won't be long before the whole WWII generation will be gone, and we'll be left with shelves and shelves of plastic tat emblazoned with variations on the slogan 'keep calm and carry on.'

Part Two: Make Do and Mend

Another phrase popularised by the current wave of retro chic, one that actually was extensively used in wartime propaganda, is 'make do and mend.' My feelings towards this one are even more

complex than they are towards general WWII nostalgia. As a principle, 'make do and mend' is something we need to adopt in the face of environmental crisis; it's also an antidote to the throwaway consumer culture that has contributed to the current economic climate.

Yet not only has the slogan 'make do and mend' been appropriated by the business of selling vacuous trinkets (for example, the Ministry for Information's 1940 booklet with that exact title has been reproduced and marketed on Amazon as "a nostalgic showcase of 1940s style, which makes it the perfect gift"), the very practice of making and mending is increasingly commodified. The contemporary craft revival, sprung largely from the DIY zine aesthetic and from feminist rhetoric, is now appropriated by Kirstie Allsopp and her commercial tie-ins.

Here there are further ambivalences for me, yet again connected to my grandmother. 'Make Do and Mend' pamphlets represent government advice to women on how to make, cook and clean for their husbands and children – part of an oppressive mode of existence a good feminist such as myself terms 'patriarchy.' For many of the feminist thinkers and activists of the 60s and 70s, making and mending was something women did to please other people and distracted them from more important things.

But in the 21st century, many young feminists have reclaimed crafts such as knitting and embroidery as personally and politically empowering. As well as being a locus of community and a form of self-expression, crafting is also regarded as a way of reconnecting with women's heritage, with something one's mother and grandmother did, and perhaps also taught you to do. But this reconnection isn't simple – it's complicated by the lure of nostalgia, as well as the need to recognise that whilst the 'women's work' of the past was valuable and skilful and meaningful, it was also part of the restriction of women's choices.

My Nanny, in many ways the archetypal grandmother, her life defined by her domestic skills and her care for her family, taught me to knit when I was a child. I took it up again as an eighteen-year-old, and she showed me how to purl and how to crochet (both processes involved my extreme frustration, culminating in rage). Over ten years of constant knitting later, I myself regularly teach people how to knit.

I am not much like my Nanny, who always used to be easy-going and resilient, readily contented, not someone to overthink things. Even our approach to craft has been very different – hers precise and obedient to the pattern, mine haphazard and experimental. (Although When I recently cleared out her long-untouched

cardmaking supplies, I could see evidence of 'make do and mend' and my own disinclination to ever throw away anything that might come in useful later, as she'd clearly kept every last scrap of ribbon or paper). But recently we seem to be becoming more similar. One manifestation of her dementia could be characterised as the onset of feminist consciousness; when I suggest she could make her own lunch, rather than telling my grandfather to bring it to her, she responds "He should wait on me – I waited on him for all those years."

To keep Nanny's mind and hands as active and occupied as possible, my mum suggested we start her crocheting a blanket, like the 'granny square' types she used to make. She was unable to remember the pattern or follow the written instructions, and I had to show her what to do. I managed not to cry when she said, "Goodness, I taught you how to do this, now you're having to show me," but she gets the hang of it, and ends up obsessively crocheting, making tens of blankets for family and friends. Once she ran out of people to make blankets for, we decided to try to get her knitting again and, following some charmingly 'folk art' looking toys, I set her to work on a blanket I had started for myself, made of the leftovers from my own knitting projects. The blanket consists of patches shaped like apple cores that tessellate →

together. Sewing it together would be too difficult for Nanny, but we felt it would do her good to follow the pattern in knitting the individual patches.

When I teach people how to knit, I often start by asking if they've ever knit before. "Not since I was seven years old," the women usually answer. When I show them how to do it, and they take to it quickly, I say, "Ah see, your fingers haven't forgotten how to do it, even if your mind had." Nanny's fingers haven't forgotten how to knit, or crochet. What her mind has forgotten is the internal quality control that was once so rigorous: she doesn't notice (or care about) the mismatched seams, joining a new end with a knot, errors dealt with by fudging and carrying on, when her work used to be flawlessly neat, following the prescribed pattern and techniques to the letter. Now Nanny just does it; she's in the zone, absorbed by what she's making, but not judging it. She will try things out as they occur to her.

For the apple-core blanket, I carefully paired colours that may be used together on the same patch; these strict instructions she ignored, and made colour choices I would never have dared pair, but work surprisingly well together. She also disobeyed my instructions to combine colours using stripes, and created shapes and motifs using colourwork techniques that came out of

her head rather than a book. Nanny knits how I did when I first learnt - enthusiastically, incessantly, creatively, without worrying about neatness or good taste. Proficiency has made me cautious, and much as I value the craft skills it has taken years to develop, I miss those early days of unthinking experimentation, when knitting was still the one part of my life I didn't appraise with a critical eye. I am glad Nanny is there now, that for the first time in her life she is making and mending not for someone else, but for herself.

The blanket is finished. Sewing it up was particularly hard work due to Nanny's somewhat misshapen apple-cores, but I got there in the end, and it's beautiful as well as being made from leftovers. Still practical to a fault, Nanny says, "It'll keep you nice and warm up in Glasgow."

It does.



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apologies, apogees, well-timed apostrophes;
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R. A. Davis

St. Andrew's Day

Find a hipster reading Edwin Morgan
in San Francisco. Tell them how you cried,
laughed, and felt something like national pride
swelling when the choir sang A Man's a Man;
pride in amazing, but only human,
grace, as he called it. Everyone inside
your church, your university. Outwith
yourself. Was it the choir or the organ
that played out Strawberry Fields at the end?
It echoes in Bute Hall when you return,
(late November, a year on) like the friend
at your feast teaching manners you should learn
(In San Francisco I can recommend
a diner in Berkeley they call Saturn.)

Advent

That morning you marvelled at how she would sleep
her quiet way each time, into the bed's
exact middle. Look how she always spreads
one arm to where you are not, so to keep
her co-sleeper arrested in a leap
over her side. The cold castaway treads
mattress with the wild strokes of quadrupeds
or babies, warm covers kicked in a heap.
You held on in the dark for those green eyes
to open in their own time, first windows
of Advent. The shedding of the disguise
that suited you last night. Somehow she knows
better than you, the very shape and size
of the woman who sleeps, and where she goes.

Ryan Vance

ASTERION

→ *Prologue a*

These days children run towards the Minotaur.

He has a white uniform and a tidy hat like a sailboat and a chariot that plays a doubletime version of The Entertainer. It also plays Pop Goes the Weasel but ever since Googling the lyrics the song makes the Minotaur feel ill. The most lucrative spot during summer is just inside the park entrance. He serves swirls with flakes, he serves fruit slushies and screwballs, he serves long fizzy drinks to sip in the grass. He wears an electronic ankle bracelet chained to a registry downtown because he's still not sure if the sound of children screaming makes him feel hungry or angry. Sometimes when it's quiet he'll smoke with the skaters behind the van, and he's convinced there's a secret wager over who'll be first to touch his horns. There are a few who, were they older, or he much younger, would only need to ask and he'd hunker down for them.

Today it's so hot even the self-conscious boys have thrown their baggy

tees under trees, while the self-conscious girls keep to the shade and worry about sweat patches. Parents order lollies for their children, and sometimes their children cry, and the parents tell them to stop or the bad man will get them. The Minotaur is almost always the bad man in question. He looks the part; by mid-afternoon he smells the part, too. Filling the toppings dispenser, the Minotaur pauses to flick a summer bluebottle from his snout with his tongue.

“Two ice creams, please,” says the next guy in line and The Minotaur, on autopilot, expertly pumps out two Mr Softees. The customer pays but doesn’t go anywhere. He waits until the Minotaur actually looks at him. Olive skinned, sculpted curls, nice smile. He hands one cone back with a wink. “This one’s for you.”

He’s not one of the self-conscious boys.

*

Prologue β

Pets are forbidden, but there’s musk all through the close. Not poodle nor little terrier nor any city breed; more of a hound-smell, a hunt-smell. Lucille scrunches her nose as she climbs the stairs, although it’s not altogether an unenjoyable aroma. A loyal stink, it pads alongside as she opens her front door. When she sits down, she can feel the weight of its head in her lap.

Some time later the doorbell rings. She turns on some lights and the television before answering. It’s the owner of the smell and her new upstairs neighbour, the Minotaur, bringing ingratiating gifts of boxed sea salt and deli

olives.

A damaged part of her has lately been falling in love with the most hopeless of men, the passive drunks stuffed into the dark corners of bars, the loners spending hours on the same park bench. She usually shrugs it off and goes home alone, well aware she’s projecting onto them a romantic desperation which they’ve left behind long ago.

But there’s no fighting it this time. Check out his eyes! So big and sad, all those years, all those centuries, with nobody alike in the entire world. He must be so lonely. Oh sure, he’s got a history, but so does everyone. What sentimental fate that two people so sad should find each other!

Lucille invites him in, smitten.

*

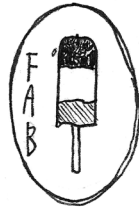
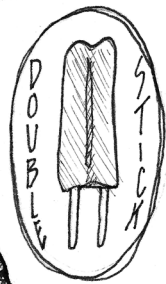
Boustrophedon

Dusty pictures blanket the Minotaur’s bed, unearthed by a fit of spring cleaning. So many are portraits of himself, you’d think he was a narcissist. Framed digital prints, loose disposables from the 90s, daguerreotypes, scratchy cubist things, a few charcoal rubbings of crumbling old walls. The most recent is a Polaroid of Damon posing in Speedos on Pefkos beach, and digging it out of the pile has guilted the Minotaur into finally calling after a week of laying low, even if he doesn’t quite know what to say. Not even a hello – he just leaves Damon hanging on the other end.

“Min, are you there?” Damon asks, even though he knows the Minotaur must be. Tiny mobiles and phones in general don’t agree with the shape of the Minotaur’s head, so instead he has this →



HAVE AN ICE DAY



big bakelite thing at home that doesn't go anywhere ever and is always on speaker.

"Look, I've been wanting to talk about how things ended. I mean ended last time we, you know, I don't mean the first time. Um. Anyway. I don't think we understood each other too well. So I'm glad you're calling. A bit weirded out you're not talking though."

He should be relieved Damon's even alive, but something's wrong – why isn't he angry? Why did he even pick up the call? The Minotaur plays with his nose ring, a nervous tic

"Are you doing anything later? It's a nice day. We could grab a coffee. Let me know, either way. It would be nice to see you. Okay, well, speak to you later, I hope."

Damon grins up at the Minotaur from the Polaroid, and he can almost feel the hot sand underfoot, the salt crusting on his hairy back. His horns were sharper, then.

All morning Lucille's been watching her bedroom's bare lightbulb dance to the beat of the Minotaur's footsteps. Partly by osmosis, partly through obsession, she has figured out most of his routines, and will sometimes move with him from one room to another to prove to herself how well she knows him. This week has been difficult. He's been pacing, stamping, sometimes just standing at his front door without leaving. Something's up.

Now, however, he's going through to the bathroom, and running a tap while he brushes his teeth, and then to the kitchen where he gets a glass of water, and then once more back to the bathroom to noisily urinate. This is his leaving-the-house routine. She listens to him lock the

door and a few minutes later hears him drive off in his musical van.

It took some active snooping to decipher his occasional half-step in the close on returning: a jump to reach the ledge where he hides his spare key. The Minotaur locks himself out more often than most. It's psychological. She likes to read about psychotherapy and while she couldn't quite understand Freud's Medusa obsession she liked the bit about how forgetting is only your subconscious giving you a reason to return. She has a bunch of theories about why the Minotaur so often locks himself out. Well, she calls them theories, but theoretical purists would probably say they're more like fantasies.

Almost as often as he locks himself out, Lucille lets herself in.

The café rumbles golden with spring sun through the skylight. The Minotaur sits with his back to the door. The tables are small and round, set with blue tulips in tall milk jugs and thin china plates twice as wide as the food. They had their first date over by the window, where the Minotaur made Damon laugh by being clumsy. The Minotaur suspects he's to provide similar comic relief today but, still very much on the defensive, he concentrates on moving delicately.

"I'm surprised you brought the van," says Damon. The skin around his left eye still bears discolouration, a bruised eclipse. "You don't have to work, do you?"

Of course he doesn't, it's February, but the more they make a sport of looking away from each other the more he fancies a quick, melodic getaway.

The waitress brings Damon's



pomegranate salad and the Minotaur's bowl of tofu; one good thing about this place is it caters well to speciality diets. The Minotaur eats as quietly as his bovine head will allow.

"So... about last week."

Lucille inhales deeply from the Minotaur's size thirty-sixes.

The Minotaur has no tees or jumpers for obvious reasons. His taste in cardigans and shirts tends towards the neutrals, the sandstones and greys of his childhood home. Jeans are tailored for his rather big thighs; Lucille likes to lie down with them on the bed, her head resting near the crotch, imagining the smell of his flesh through the denim.

But not today. His bed is occupied by memories that go beyond her. Dust settles on the photos. For the first time since the first time she feels like an intruder, and snidely asks herself why she expected otherwise.

"Because he's a fucking minotaur. Aren't they lusty? Hungry? Lonely?"

She says it out loud, as if it might scare away the idea that he may be all of the above only never for her, as if the man in the beach photo might overhear and bury himself in the sand, as if there were ever other minotaur, and multiple choice studies charting their loneliness on a five-point-scale between 'not at all' and 'most definitely.'

On the edge of an epiphany as to what the Minotaur's singular nature portends concerning his one-to-ten lusts, the pills grab the collar of her coat before she can flutter off the edge.

Last week was the first time they'd met since the break-up a year previous. Filling

each other in on life events, an evening walk through the park had strayed into the cruising area, the river path dotted with men anticipating dusk. The Minotaur had tried cruising, once – it's a wink in the roses, a long hard stare across shrubs – but without the blessing of anonymity it all seemed a bit futile. Damon took this admission as a challenge and, ever the willing champion, grabbed the Minotaur's wrist and threaded him through the trees. All too late, he understood where he was being led. The hedge maze.

Damon had meant the best. To lead him there was to say all open secrets yet unspoken could be left to the side to have sediment of days heaped upon them until they turned to myth. The Minotaur understood this. But the man's fear had filled his wet nose. Memories sprang from the bushes, sharp like holly in a glory hole. A black sail wrapped around the rising moon.

"You seriously don't remember any of this?" Damon's picking at his pomegranate salad, appetite waning. "The park? The fight?"

The Minotaur recalls the blackout coming on and nothing more, although he

suspects it went further than violence – Damon has kinks, obviously, to be fooling around with him, but he’s no masochist.

The only thing keeping the Minotaur from outright assuming they had sex that night is the fact he hasn’t remembered having any in, oh, a few thousand years or so.

Is drag an option?

Lucille goes to the Minotaur’s bathroom, (which is a horror show, so much hair in the plugholes, toothpaste crusting on a hairbrush) and scrutinises her face in the mirror. It’s soft. It looks like it should be malleable, like she should be able to press it like clay until cheekbones broke through. How much hair would she be upset losing? A pencilled beard would be unconvincing, but a jar of Vaseline and a split teabag could pass for stubble. She could dress like him and be her own wooden cow; shoulders set far back, Lucille tries to look hard and hollow and ready to fuck.

The man in the photos didn’t look hard, though. Somewhat gallant, maybe thoughtful, like he’d suit both youth and old age, but not do so great between the

two. Perhaps the Minotaur likes them lost, she thinks.

“Can I change the tune?” Damon asks as they pull into a garage. The Minotaur shrugs and, once parked, digs out the van’s manual from the glove compartment. It lands in Damon’s lap with a puff of stale paper air, and he flips through it while the Minotaur fills the tank. The chimes pages are a mess of scores, most of the animal-themed ones scratched with such a heavy hand the page is slightly torn. Only a dozen or so of the others remain legible. The Entertainer is honoured with an asterix next to it, as is Girls and Boys (Come Out To Play). A simple choice, then.

“Is this one as creepy as it sounds?” Damon calls, and gets another shrug, delivered via wing mirror. He sighs and shuffles over to the driver’s window to get a good look at the Minotaur.

“If you don’t want to do this...”

The Minotaur slaps the cap shut and hooks the pump noisily.

“Fine, I’ll stop asking, but you’re being really childish about it.”

Nobody can glare quite like an angry bull with two millennia of practice.

“No. I don’t care how long you’ve been kicking about, you are being childish. You know, I’m trying to help you in spite of everything, so hear me out. What happened in the maze, it’s not as simple as forgiving and forgetting, and anyway that’s impossible, you can’t do both. Forgetting’s instant, it’s gone. Forgiving takes constant work, you have to remember something before you can forgive it, and you have to remember you forgave it, and why, and then you’ve to remember to forgive it again. It’s



continual. And I think you've been around so long, you've got lazy and taken the easy way out."

The Minotaur would disagree, each blackout a dead end, but it's been a long time since anyone's cared enough to follow him into the dark.

Classically conditioned, Lucille's unwittingly trained herself to leave the Minotaur's flat when she hears The Entertainer blaring its way back towards their block. They live in a quiet area of town and she'll only realise she's been paying attention to the song halfway through putting his things back where she found them. By the time the Minotaur's parking the van she's usually already half-jumping to put his key back on the ledge in the close.

But this only works with The Entertainer. The nursery chant of Girls and Boys doesn't even register, so she's still trying to decide which of his shirts make her look more masculine when she hears his keys in the lock of the front door.

Should she hide? He's brought somebody home, and Lucille feels more

horrified at the thought of being caught snooping by a stranger than by the Minotaur himself. The bathroom is out of the question as she'd have to pass them in the hallway. She's not jumping out a third floor window, as there's no romance in such an embarrassing death. Under the bed? No, just... no. She doesn't remember ever being this panicked in her fantasies. Oh, he's hungry, lonely, lusty, yes, all of these, but angry, sharp and territorial too. And real. Most monstrous of all, he's real.

Lucille, draped in borrowed threads, climbs into the Minotaur's wardrobe.

Cattle can detect odours up to five miles away. Lucille's been leaving her scent on everything for months now. A wardrobe is child's play

Damon sits on the Minotaur's bed and sifts through the Pefkos beach polaroids, then the charcoals, then the blocky etchings. He recognises them, then starts to laugh, and says, "I really shouldn't be surprised. Of course this was you. Made you look good, too. Very manly."

The Minotaur wonders if Damon's thinking of all the other, bigger, more famous Picassos where he's straddling naked women; there are some with men, too, but never exclusively so. There is one with a child. Recalling it makes the brace on his ankle feel heavy. He's tried to avoid the art scene since then; it is too permissive for him and, at any rate, he no longer requires their skills to keep track of how the world sees him. Amateurs can prop their camera on a rock, set a timer, pose with him on the sand, and it is no less representative.

The idea of a self-portrait worries him.

He packs the pictures back into their boxes with a closer eye to organisation

than usual. Damon watches with patience and a smirk. With his back to the bed, The Minotaur opens the wardrobe door halfway and, crouching to eye level with Lucille, places the pictures at her feet. The Picasso sits atop the pile. He nudges it towards her and she takes it, wild-eyed.

“Quit stalling,” says Damon, ever the romantic.

The Minotaur shuts her in.

Through a gap between the doors, Lucille watches as Damon rises to meet the Minotaur. Held at the waist, he rests his head against the Minotaur’s thick neck; with delicate movements he nudges deep into the Minotaur’s mane, where Lucille hears him inhale soft and slow.

“If you feel yourself drifting,” he says, “let me know. We’ll stop, and we’ll pick up again when you come back.”

The Minotaur nods and walks him back towards the bed. Damon sits down and holds the backs of the Minotaur’s knees, presses his face against the Minotaur’s belly. The Minotaur starts to undo his belt, but Damon lifts the big hands away and holds them out to the side.

“Nuh-uh. Take your time.”

Damon shuffles backwards and the Minotaur kneels up on the bed. When the Minotaur bends down to kiss, his tongue is rough and grey in Damon’s mouth. Damon hooks one hand in the Minotaur’s jeans, rubs behind one goofy oval ear with the other. It looks, to Lucille, as if the Minotaur likes it, but he shakes his head free and snorts. The labyrinth is creeping up on him.

“Eyes open, Min.”

Damon holds the Minotaur’s gaze until the man half returns. Gripping the horns Damon draws the heavy body

down to lying prone. Lucille can see only his legs and chin and lips sticking out from under the Minotaur, but after a bit an arm wriggles free and reaches south; the Minotaur lows. It sets Lucille’s teeth on edge. They hold still like this for quite some time, until Damon complains of a lack of circulation in his feet. More untangling, and the shirt, the shoes, the jeans come off. The ankle tag stays on. The Minotaur’s back and belly are hairier than Lucille expects, his build fatter, more bullish. It’s a bulk made for bursts of brutal force, but Damon’s constant whisperings keep it calm and slow.

Where is the monster she expected? He’s letting her watch, but what is she meant to see?

In the shadows of the wardrobe she can just about discern the details of the Picasso etching. He’s singular, yes; alone, perhaps; but the charcoals, the oil paintings, the chips of marble in a box, they’re all part of one infatuation as long as history itself. Like a lance to the head, it strikes Lucille that the Minotaur has never been lonely. How could he ever be lonely? There’ll always be someone to wipe their own blood off his snout and →

fingerpaint his children all over the walls.

Leaning triumphantly over Damon, the Minotaur whips off his underwear and she sees his ass crowned by the scarred nub of a clumsily docked tail.

Like a curse lifted, she doesn't find him, him the beast, him the total sum of man and bull, in any way attractive. He's still functional, perhaps, and such a terrible function at that – she would like to be his red rag, his ankle tag, his gored toreador – but despite daily practise, she cannot imagine herself in that bed nor recognise this gentle version of the Minotaur, even as she watches it be tamed.

Drained of expectations, she's tired and can feel her calves cramping. She waits for a particularly noisy moo to cover her manoeuvre into a more comfortable position, and beds down among the Minotaur's clothes.

Waiting on the darkness of sleep, she makes a promise to herself: no more ritual visits.

*

Epilogue

Summer is on its way again, and the Minotaur is back at his spot, slinging raspberry swirls. He's considering quitting the trade – it's obvious now that children really do just make him angry, and the mere thought of the little brats fills him with wanderlust. Today, though, it's quiet, and he's leaning against the back of the van smoking. There's something hypnotic about the constant movement of the skate park, the back and forth. Used to be a time, long ago, when he would have charged the lot of them, head down, but not today.

He's been watching this one girl, a regular, sail round the concrete for the last two hours or so. She wears a long denim shirt like a dress, and a small backpack which pulls the shirt tight across her chest. Every so often a guy will keep pace with her and try to flirt and sometimes she'll flirt back. If she really likes him she'll unzip the backpack and show off the sprycans inside.

This one guy, after he's seen the cans, not-so-surreptitiously points towards the Minotaur, and he knows he's again been made the subject of a dare. She circles the park a few times before summoning the courage to talk to him.

"Hey, um," she says. "Can I bum a smoke?"

The Minotaur obliges, even though he knows she doesn't smoke. She tucks the cigarette in her back pocket and squints up at him.

"So, like, don't look, but my friend over there in the cap, he thinks I won't... god, this is so embarrassing. But if it's really personal never mind but I really want to impress him and... yeah. And... um, could I, like, do a picture of you on the park? You're here, like, all the time, but some of the guys have been saying you're thinking of leaving, and that makes me sorta sad, so I want to, you know, commemorate or something. Just a picture, of you, if you don't mind much."

The Minotaur doesn't mind at all. ★



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Paul Smith

THE ~~FREEBIRD~~ RULE

*Or: the best pro
wrestling blues tag
teams that never were*

→ Let's talk about wrestling.
I didn't have cable TV growing up so I had people tape the shows for me. I had a full sized Duane "The Rock" Johnson poster on my wall. There are videos of me and my friends wrestling in my backyard. My friend and I had planned to create a wrestling team called the Studley Boys. My name was to be Studmuffin, a grade school nickname. It wasn't a nice one. I told my mother that I wanted to be a wrestler, and she told me she would visit me in the spinal injury hospital.

Let's talk about the blues.
About age 22 I learned the blues harp, a style of harmonica playing. I played on the couch and in the shower and whilst doing the dishes - I had a wire rack for that. It annoyed many people. After I heard this blues moan called *Going Down South* by R.L. Burnside I decided to learn blues guitar. I'd started playing the guitar when I was 13, focusing

first on pop punk, then hardcore, so my blues guitar was based mostly on how fast I could palm mute. This approach has definitely shaped my appreciation of the genre. I am not interested in piano in the blues. I love hypnotic slide guitar riffs and am interested in songs that have no chord changes but manage not to feel monotonous. My vision of the blues is one man playing in a room by himself.

Let's talk about wrestling and the blues.

The Didacticism of wrestling in the eighties and Nineties reflected a world that my nine-year-old self could embrace. This was an age before the Anti-Hero. When Hulk Hogan body-slammed the Iron Sheik, it was the forces of good defeating the forces of evil and no one could say any different. The blues embraces a much more murky definition of hero. Past crimes and indiscretions are worn like a badge of honour. For example Leadbelly, already a one-time prison escapee when incarcerated for murder, was granted early release partly on the strength of recordings collected by John and Alan Lomax.

In the spirit of The Freebird Rule, which allowed any two of the three Fabulous Freebirds to defend the NWA tag team title on any given night, the pairings which follow suggest personality matches between the wrestlers I grew up with, and the blues men I have grown to love.



Furry Lewis and Dynamite Kid

Furry Lewis is good at the guitar whilst at the same time being terrible. He understands the guitar and is able to put together a good song but, if you watch him, it looks a little bit like someone playing wearing mittens. I have always been fascinated with musicians and songwriters who embrace their shortcomings; it's about at some point saying stop, and some people have a different point at where the stopping happens.

Kid Dynamite is a Brit. He is best known as one half of the tag team The British Bulldogs. He has wrestled overseas both in the WWF and in Japan. His matches are widely respected and considered among the best in the business. He used to do a top rope diving headbutt. He now cannot walk.

Song Suggestion: *Everybody's Down On Me*

Match Suggestion: *Dynamite Kid Vs. Tiger Mask (4-21-83)*



Mississippi Fred McDowell and Bruiser Brody

Fred isn't from Mississippi. He is from Tennessee. They call him that mostly for marketing reasons. He is one of the few bluesmen whose I electric slide blues I still enjoy, although it is mostly unaccompanied. A true troubadour, he tells stories and weaves them into his songs.

Bruiser Brody is not a particularly well known wrestler by today's standards. He wrestled throughout the 70s and 80s and never made it big in the WWF or WCW. In those days wrestling was a lot slower and deliberate. He was known for being hard to work with. He would get mad and 'no sell' – meaning he would get hit but not act like it hurt. This is an act of disrespect in wrestling. He was stabbed to death before a match in 1988.

Song Suggestion: *Judge Harsh Blues*

Match Suggestion: *Bruiser Brody vs. Mighty Igor (09-20-86)*



Son House and Terry Funk

Son House, a former preacher, is a consummate blues man, from his National resonator to his string tie. To use one word to describe his music: ramshackle. He, similar to Furry Lewis, is able to dance on the line where a song is powerful on sheer wilfulness rather than any technical or lyrical ability. Everyone should own what they do, and Son House does exactly that.

Terry Funk is old. Terry Funk is broken. Rapidly closing in on 70 years old, Terry Funk no longer has any business wrestling, but still, have you ever seen a man in his sixties do a backflip onto someone? His career has spanned 5 decades. My father once told me his philosophy on life. He thinks that the world is divided into Workhorses and Showponies. He said that a workhorse can try something their whole life, they can get good at something and even great at something, but there will always be a showpony who can do it faster and more effortlessly. He said, "You and I are workhorses. We aren't ballerinas. We are always going to be bottom of the top or top of the bottom." Terry Funk is a workhorse.

Song Suggestion: *Downhearted Blues*

Match Suggestion: *Atsushi Onita vs Terry Funk (5-5-93)* ★



