



Lost in showbiz

How to make friends and influenza people

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Macca wows Wisconsin - without even leaving London

As the Booker prize result demonstrated so clearly, what the nation's taste-makers want these days is grim, dispiriting narratives, suffused with a sense of the ultimate meaninglessness of existence. So perhaps that's what explains the ongoing fascination of literally some people with the meandering divorce proceedings of Sir Paul McCartney and Heather Mills, currently grinding towards a multi-million-pound stalemate at the high court in London. The former Beatle - and it's many years since fans of McCartney's career-defining 1980s collaborations with Rupert Bear resigned themselves to the fact that he will always be known as "the former Beatle" - is expected to part with £25m of his £725m fortune. The offer has been put on the table, says a source, and "all he has to do is sit and wait".

Which made matters all the stranger this week when McCartney was spotted in the town of Wausau, Wisconsin, causing statewide media chaos and the storming by excited fans of an upmarket Wausau restaurant. As will become evident, we use the term "spotted" in a loose sense. This is to be contrasted with the strict sense of the word, as in the sentence "Lib Dem leadership frontrunner Nick Clegg was given community service in Germany after being spotted setting fire to a cactus," a fact that remains the copper-bottomed truth, and just as unremittingly fantastic a month after we first learned of it.

Anyway, the McCartney tip-off reached the Wausau Daily Herald from Tate Baumer, owner of the Baumer Limousine Service, who first heard the rumour from a friend. "I called the restaurant and asked if anything weird was going on, and they said Paul was eating dinner, so I went," he said. The back terrace room, he reported, was shut off for McCartney's party. "I didn't get a good look at him," said one diner, Chuck Ghidorzi, "but everything going on around him indicated it was him." Excited onlookers were "pounding on the doors" and chasing McCartney's entourage. "Rock Legend Sighted In City," read the headline, followed by speculation that the 102nd richest individual in Britain might be in town "doing a commercial with Wausau Insurance".

You can almost see why they believed it - notwithstanding the daily news reports from the UK detailing McCartney's appearances outside court. What better hideaway for a pop icon in desperate need of some peace than a town that nobody back home could even find on a map? A town, no less, whose name comes from a native American word meaning "faraway place"? (Which is, when you think about it, an odd name to give to a place when you're actually there, but never mind about that for now.) The appeal is obvious, really.

But of course it wasn't the former Beatle - it was Mike Oltersdorf, a 57-year-old professional Macca lookalike from Illinois, hired by Delco Estate Planning Services to perform at the company's annual appreciation dinner for its senior clients. He had done his job too well - particularly impressive given that the photograph accompanying the Wausau Herald's sheepish follow-up suggests that he only somewhat resembles Sir Paul.

Still, call us sentimentalists, but we can't help being moved by this tale. In a world that can sometimes seem oppressively dominated by the triple spectres of global warming, armed conflict and Martin Amis's spectacularly ill-justified sense of self-importance, there's something touching about the way the residents of Wausau, for a few enchanted days, brought a little bit of magic into their lives through the sheer power of belief. Because if you only believe hard enough ... anything is possible.

One could draw an alternative moral from this story, which is that there's at least one extremely stupid person born every minute. But that would be mean-spirited and depressing, and thus wholly inappropriate in the context of the dignified story of how a former Beatle and his former wife amicably decided to go their separate ways, leaving everyone involved, and everyone looking on, feeling somehow uplifted, and a just a little happier to be alive.

Reese rules herself out as US president

Should the Liberal Democrats decide they need to enhance the glamour quotient of a leadership race otherwise dominated by Chris Huhne and notorious cactus-arsonist Nick Clegg, they may now consider themselves free to call upon the services of Reese Witherspoon, who in an interview with *Us Weekly* has (finally!) ruled out being otherwise occupied with a run for the US presidency. "I can't imagine being responsible for national security or global security," she tells the magazine, in an earnest response to an apparently completely earnest question about a White House bid. "I can't imagine having to be in that position and make those decisions. That's why I'm not. That's why I'm an actor."

Such striking good sense is a rare commodity in Hollywood: elsewhere in the same issue, Britney Spears is overheard in a Beverly Hills department store demanding to have her dog couriered from Malibu. Film stars, Ms Witherspoon clearly comprehends, are temperamental, prone to egomania, and likely to lack the subtle understanding of world affairs required in anyone who might ever get their hands on the nuclear football.

That kind of high-level decision-making is a job best left to the likes of George Bush and Republican frontrunner Rudy Giuliani, and *Lost in Showbiz* trusts that other brain-dead Hollywood figures, notably Harvard graduate and cognitive neuroscientist Natalie Portman, will swiftly follow suit in ruling themselves out of contention, leaving the important work of geopolitics to people who really know what they're doing.

Jennifer lands a leading role to be sneezed at

It's that time of year - cold, dark, germ-ridden - when it's only natural to ask the question: who is the new "Face of Influenza"? Now the answer can be revealed. Why, it's Jennifer Garner, appointed by the American Lung Association in a bid to persuade more people to get flu shots. "Women play an important role in a family. It's our job to take care of those we love - that's why I make sure my family is protected against influenza," explains the former star of *Dude, Where's My Car?* and *Mr Magoo*. "Look around, and you'll see someone in your life who should receive an influenza vaccination."

One assumes there is not much competition to be the Face of Influenza. More, perhaps, than for the Face of Necrotising Fasciitis, or the Face of Pete Doherty, which is in any case taken. But still, it's an unenviable job, and so - tempting as it is to suggest that the fear of public embarrassment stops being an issue for a person around the time they marry Ben Affleck - a certain amount of respect is due, and is hereby given.

• Marina Hyde is away.

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