

Cutting heads

Tuck was troubled by this thought: The Devil doesn't visit us all. And the next: What if I don't recognize him when he does? But he would. He knew it. There was a real shifty looking dude at Aces Down last week. Haunted the table by the bar all night long, but come set break --- poof, gone, nothing. Tuck beat his foot onstage, playing a blues for missed connections --- blew out the door at 4 a.m. and saw Shifty face down by a broken pay phone in the side parking lot, rolled for his wallet and rings. A blues for missed connections. Tuck wasn't a young man anymore. No 20-year-old with potatoes in his ears, thumbing rides from dive to dive. Those days were gone, and Tuck's blues had never been sweeter, more low-down, meaner. It was all in there: the miles, stages, 63 years of good times and rotten. He'd played it out, seen it all, but this one last thing: to call down the Devil himself with a bent string, dusty moan, the low ache of love gone south. And Tuck had it in him. Sure as sun follows moon, he had it in him. He pulled out his guitar at night, tucked it beneath his bed at dawn, got down on his knees, and said a little prayer each day that he'd get his chance to cut the Devil himself. Cut heads and get out clean. Take back the souls of all the bluesmen who went before him: from Beale Street to the Delta juke to Chicago, Detroit, and all around the world. Take them all back to their Maker where they belong. The Devil may not visit us all, thought Tuck, but soon enough he'll come for me. And when he does, I'll be playing the blues.

