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Faun Among Maidens

By James Barr

The ancient question — what should she wear tonight? Willie studied her face that had suddenly sprouted a fine sweep and fall of eyelash to the left. The new silver lace, or the old white gown that some of Eddie's guests might have seen. Perhaps she should be conservative since the party was only for some hick novelist whose first book was currently being devoured by the gaiety. Not a very good book either, even if it was based on the rise of that new movie actor who had been such a hit in that picture about a racehorse — or something. No point in dazzling the poor fool; it would be the old white gown tonight. But with her new mink — —.

The front door clicked and Charles called, «Hello. Home?»

Willie picked up the rouge brush, stretched her lower lip and pretended to paint it. From the corner of her eye she saw his reflection enter their bedroom. With his Homburg and brief case he looked more like a young broker than a mere medical student she thought half resentfully, but with a certain pride for it was her money that had accomplished the transformation. Willie loved beauty, but some of it was hardly worth the bother. Charles, for instance.

«Oh», Charles grinned, «you're here. Why no answer?»

He *was* a god when he smiled. Nothing in Italy could touch him, really, and she'd been half mad that whole six weeks. That gorgeous piece of energized statuary that had driven her into the Florentine hills — and then the way the miserable wretch had held out his hand and smiled. «A thousand lire, please!»

It had just ruined her entire stay. Such stupid commercialism!

«I asked you why you didn't answer my hello.»

Willie tossed the brush back among the color and crystal. «Can't you see, dahling? I'm doing my mouth.» She looked up, smiled and held out her hands, half way.

Charles dropped his hat and brief on the chaise, took her hands and kissed the eyebrow she presented him. «Sweet,» he whispered and pulled her shoulder against his coat.

«Oh, don't!» she cried. «You're wet!» She tissueed her outraged flesh and repowdered it. He stripped his coat and sat down beside her on the bench. He really was god-like at this range.

«Ummm, you smell like heaven,» he said, closing his eyes.

«Like it? New. Called *Ephebe's Embrace*.» He tried to kiss her. «Oh, dahling, don't. I'm not dressed yet.»

«All the better,» he whispered. The oversexed fool.

«But you have to shower,» Willie pouted for him prettily. «Did you remember to pick up the things I asked you to?»

«I did,» Charles snapped. He was exasperated again.

«Want me to make you a cocktail before we go, sweet?»

Charles brightened considerably. «Would you?»

«Of course, dahling.» The next half hour now had a purpose, to find

excuses to delay mixing him the promised libation. «But you know it will have to come off the evening's total, no matter what Eddie urges you to drink. I *won't* drive you home another time. I'll take a taxi and leave you to Poor Ravenous Eddie!»

«I'll behave.» He put his thick brown arms around her, flexed his muscles for her while she shivered for him. He turned her brutally and started to smear her lipstick. It would take five minutes to reapply, five minutes from the total of thirty before they left the house. At the first opportunity she seized a dab of cleansing cream and spread it about her lips. He sagged like a sodden towel. «I thought you wanted to — —».

«Oh, lambkin,» Willie massaged her mouth in brisk little circles. «You know how Poor Eddie suffers when we're late. And she's quite as anxious to show us off as she is her new novelist.»

«Well, if you — —».

«Shower, dahling, and I'll have your cocktail ready.»

With a quick kiss on her bleached curls he trotted off to the bathroom. Willie removed the film of grease. «A doctor,» she muttered. «When he gets a M. D., I'll replace the Statue of Liberty for a short vacation!» Ten minutes later, when he stepped out of the bath, she was just finishing her makeup. He looked at his bureau expectantly. «Dahling,» Willie anticipated him, «you didn't tell me what you wanted so I finished here. Which will it be? Manhattan or a Martini?»

«Manhattan,» Charles said shortly. His frown was his worst point. It *quite* shattered his whole face. It really did.

«Dry, dear?» Willie asked, putting down her perfumed cigarette.

«Of course, dry, dear!»

Willie adjusted the realistic breasts inside her brassiere. She put her head critically to one side, prinked one. «Well, dahling,» she said calmly, «if that's the way you feel, fix it yourself!» She hooked her stockings and walked across the room, superb on rhinestone heels. At the closet she lifted out a heavy satin gown and let it writhe down over her shoulders. To her annoyance, Charles stalked past her to the bar. He'd been promised a drink and, by damn, he was going to have it if he caused a separation. She knew her Charles. She went to the door.

«Come and zip me up.» He stared at her sullenly, decanter in his hands. «Please,» she said. «Make me feel domestic.»

He set the decanter down, wrenched up the zipper with five times the necessary energy and started to leave as she turned.

«I'm hateful, dahling,» she put her arms around him, «and disgusting and horrible, but I love you, Chahles.» She dropped her lashes for just the right number of seconds and then lifted them to reveal eyes radiant with great love. «Now you run along and dress and I'll make your cocktail as I promised.»

He hugged her like a bear and trotted back to the bedroom. She poured the wine and whiskey into a tall piece of Swedish glass and added bitters. No lemon; it would mess her fingers.

She carried it to him, martyrlike, and set it on his bureau. Then, to prolong his torture, she seized his tie while he suffered before the slowly beading glass not quite within arm's reach. She made four mistakes, but

stood aside at last while he seized the drink with a hand that, in a few more years, would surely shake in the act, and sipped with relief. «Marvelous!» —

«Better than usual, dahling?»

«Much better!»

«Oh? Let me sip.» He looked apprehensive, then frightened as she sipped daintily and looked up. «My! It *is* good, isn't it?» As he reached for it, she drank it down.

«Charles, we really *must* hurry now. Poor Eddie will be forlorn. Your coat, dahling.» She fastened her diamond bracelets about either wrist, got out the new mink stole and handed it to Charles, who dropped it ungraciously about her shoulders. She settled the cool lining against her skin, tossed one of the long glowing panels over her shoulder and told him brightly, «Ready!»

The car eased away from the curb and pointed in the general direction of the Village. Eddie lived in an utterly impossible section — all those unwashed immigrants she was always inviting up for dinner. Horrible. Imagine coming home to find the garlicy creatures waiting on your doorstep five deep. And Eddie thought it a *compliment!* No wonder she was getting fat! So *many* dinners!

And speaking of fat, Willie remembered her hips. A bit of rolling every morning, starting next week. But Eddie had done marvels with that apartment. Old gold and cypress. *Too* Californian, really, but decorating *was* her line. Must comment on the new drapes. She glanced at Charles' profile, a profile, which once seen on a giant curved screen, would launch a million outstretched autograph books. Willie sighed.

«I'm *not* looking forward to this evening,» she said wearily.

Charles did not take his eyes from the street. He was terrified of having an accident with her in women's clothes. He had nothing to lose. His family were *bean* pickers in Jersey!

«Just fashion's slave,» he commented acidly. «Poor butterfly!»

«Chahles!» She saw his jaw harden.

The car moved past Union Square and idly, Willie wondered what a communist would be like. She'd heard some were simply notorious. Didn't their party always call them homosexual when it kicked them out? Might be rather sweet, she decided, if he played the violin, or crooned those haunting Russian lullabies. Go over big at parties. Better if he crooned since they *couldn't* turn up at the door with a fiddle!

And he'd have to be big to have the proper effect. After all, he was supposed to be a menace. One of those underfed, weasel faced ones would just be ridiculous. Yes, very big with simply Herculean thighs and biceps. And wrapped in some disgusting *rag* of a jacket, Willie's mind enlarged, with black hair bejewelled with rain in the dirty lamplight. Quite *Dorian Gray!* Bless dear old Oscar.

And *ugly!* She decided on this revolutionary touch with a surprised pride of herself. He *must* be ugly — but in that brutish way of Gabin's. Gabin a brunette? No, she couldn't quite see it somehow. So much of him would be lost, really. But he could be ugly in some other way. Of

course, he had to have good teeth! Otherwise, even with nature's own chlorophyl, their breaths *always* stunk!

Of course, it might be dangerous to have one around the house, but he *could* live somewhere else, and that mightn't be so expensive since they were forbidden by their fuhrer, or whatever they called him, to love luxury, like Catholics and their sin.

Still, there was lots of good left in Charles, and she'd have to finish the season with him if he was to be remembered at all. She'd bought him twelve hundred dollars worth of clothes already, half a month's allowance! And his semester fees! She turned and gave Charles a dazzling smile. They were almost to Eddie's.

«Sweet, I'm sorry about the cocktail.» She saw the sullen lines evacuate his face. «You're such a god, until you're drunk!»

«Who's the piece de resistance tonight?» he asked.

Willie winced. Could his French be worse than this flat Americanization? «Some novelist from Oregon or Idaho. First novel, so he'll be hideously full of himself, poor thing.»

«What'll I say if he asks me how I liked his book?»

«A good question, dahling, for he will. They're *so* uncouth. Just say you didn't quite understand the significance of the symbolism in the opening chapters. That'll keep him talking until you learn what his inane scribbling is about.»

Charles took his nearest hand from the wheel long enough to squeeze her knee and smile hungrily in her direction. Willie kept from looking pained and smoothed her gloves.

She walked through the door, made sure Charles was behind her and paused, Tallulahesque, on the first step above the room below for her arrival to be noticed. There were half a dozen people around the piano where someone sang richly, *Adieu, Mon Coeur*. A couple danced and twenty or thirty milled and chattered. The publisher was certainly paying for this one.

«Dahleeng!» Eddie screamed at the sight of Willie and tore through the ragged fabric of her guests toward them. If only she remembered to stand to the side when she announced them, Willie thought nervously. Silly to be nervous, but *what* — *what* if someone laughed! She smiled, keeping her teeth together as she had practiced. «Eddie! Dahling!» Eddie was *positively* dowdy. Who on earth had put her into *brown* satin? Like the last chapter of *Back Street* she looked. As Eddie seized her hand, Willie exerted all the strength of her arm and veered her to the side. The fool! She'd forgotten about blocking the view again!

«Gorgeous!» Eddie paled with envy. «*Mink!* Dahling, *mink!*»

Oh Lord, she was overdoing it. After all, it *wasn't* sable!

«And your drapes!» Willie speared the falling crescendo on exactly the right note to preserve only the correct amount of enthusiasm. «Dahling, they do remind me of a daisy chain!» She turned superb full-face to bewitching profile for the attentive throng.

«But, dahling, they *are* a daisy chain! Didn't I tell you!»

Willie allowed her furs to enchant the audience a moment longer and just as Eddie finished her, «Everyone, oh everyone, I want you to meet

our fabulous Miss Willie, and *her* Mr. Charles,» Willie gracefully allowed Charles to remove the furs, revealing her incomparable shoulders. Eddie seized her hand and led them directly to her newest novelist standing in a large group with an air of condescending superiority.

«I just can't *wait* for you two to meet,» Eddie whimpered with excitement. «I just *know* our Miss Willie will be in your next book!»

Poor Eddie *was* a clever hostess — at times.

Willie looked at the new celebrity with interest. Not *too* bad, she decided, and he was kissing her hand! A trifle *rechercher* these days, but it would be all over town tomorrow, maybe Winchell would print it, and Charles had a glass in his big, fat paw already. Thank one of those hungry eyed cats for that. The spite one had to endure these days to set paces!

«My dear,» the novelist had a surprisingly good baritone, «have you ever been to the West Coast?»

«No.» Willie closed her eyes for brief emphasis, «I haven't.»

«Then come,» the novelist begged softly, «and deprive us no longer of your famous beauty!»

Was he laughing at her? His face was humble, and the eyes *were* rather starry. Imagine! And from Idaho too! Willie wondered if he knew any timberjacks, or whatever they called those brutes with green plaid shirts and bulging thighs and biceps.

«How charming,» she murmured. That was the note. Regina receiving homage. «Charles and I have so enjoyed your book.» Eddie was dancing with impatience at her elbow. «Please save me some time to talk with you later on?» The novelist bowed, slowly, solemnly, reverently. Even if it was an act, it was a good one. If he ever became famous she might take him somewhere. Cuba. or Rio if he did very well. «I'm coming, Eddie, I'm coming!»

She moved from group to group, blossoming before the bright intensity of envy, contempt and hatred. Poor Eddie hadn't done too badly with her crowd; almost everyone was handsome, clever or a name, though of course, no one rivalled Miss Willie. If Eddie could manage to find enough novelists, and their publishers, to keep this same tone for six months, she'd be close to being established as something or other. But Poor Eddie. There just couldn't be that many arty fruits — even in New York. Willie listened with a polite show of indifference to the wash of conversation that crept forward, swirled and retreated about her.

« — — we were in the Chez Fees, down on the docks.» Sharp little teeth chewed a bright lip with nervous delight. «*Well*, he leaned over and closed his eyes. *Well*, naturally, I — —»

« — — perfectly *slimy* reviews,» said a statuesque brunette, «and after *all* of them John went to bed with. But then it's *just* as he says, a critic's a maggot until he gives you a good review, *then* he's a poor relation, but — —»

« — — when she came to, he was standing there with ice *cubes*, the round ones with holes in the center, so she divorced him!»

« — — she just took that plane route *all* the way around South America, and had a *bull* fighter for a whole week in Lima until her money ran out. And the pictures, in color, she got!»

« — — living in Hollywood the rest of her life, but then she always was a trifle *bizarre*, being one of the *great* homosexual beauties of her day. You've heard how she got her last husband? No? *Dahling*, fantastic! He was a burglar and one night he broke into her bedroom and she got the drop on him. She always sleeps with a Beretta, or whatever they call those little guns, under her pillow, just in case she needs it. So she tied him up and — —»

« — — like James Barr. He has a new book out, you know. *Gad*. I don't know what he called it this time! One of those *arty*, pseudo-abstract things he seems to prefer, I suppose. But, psychiatrically speaking, he *should* have called it *Little Stories for Growing Homosexuals*. He's elemental, *dahling*, positively elemental!»

— — doll-doll, *dahling*, arling, dolling, darleeng do, why *dahlin'* don't, poor *dahling*, sweet *dahling*, my frustrated *dahling* — — all the *dahlings* of the world met, pecked, nibbled, mouthed, stunk right up to high heaven and fell apart on a sea of gin cocktails.

Willie was growing tired. Didn't it *ever* change? In a few more minutes it would be a strain to keep smiling and she couldn't afford to strain, not with thirty now of the past. She looked about for Charles.

But what was that? Charles and that odious little novelist behind the piano? And those simpering Oregon wrists flying every which way? Willie moved forward with a wildcat's speed. «Deprive us no longer of your famous beauty, my moneymaking — —»

Willie's bee-line was interrupted by a group of three, who, she knew instinctively, had guessed her protective intentions. Two of them leaped before her and started gushing madly, while the third nelled off to warn Charles. By the time Willie could reach him, he was standing quite alone and that cowardly little novelist was nowhere to be seen.

«We're going home.» Willie announced with hard eyed grimness.

«So soon?» Charles' eyes were sparkling. The wretch!

«Come!» She led the way.

Poor Eddie flew up to them in a lather of fright. «*Dahleeng*, what — —»

«Oh *Dahling*, just another unexpected attack of sinus. Really my fault. Should have stayed in on such a wet night.» She nestled into her wrap that Charles held solicitously for her, giving him her most enchanting glance over her shoulder. «*Do* make apologies, Eddie, such a delightful party.»

«Oh, dear, I do hope your — ah — sinus improves very very soon,» Eddie stammered with real concern. He'd better.

«It will, *dahling*, after a good night's. *Bon soir*, now.»

Eddie saw them into the elevator. As it descended, Willie put her arms around her errant man.

«Sweet,» she purred, «I'm so proud of you. You really did resist temptation.» The face above hers remained guileless, a good sign. «I saw that nasty little slob corner you behind the piano and the by-play of those three harpies that got you apart. But I trusted you completely. What *is* love without trust?» Willie felt the big body relax slightly within her arms. «*Dahling*, I do want a cigarette, please.»

«Right here in my pocket,» he started to free himself.

«Never mind, sweet, I'll find them.»

Quickly she went through his pockets. No note, no slip of paper with a pencilled address. Willie felt much better. Charles was too gullible really. She gave him a swift kiss on the chin, «Dahling,» and turned to step out into the lobby.

«Two-oh-one, East Fifty Seventh Street, Suite 24-A, two o'clock tomorrow afternoon,» Charles repeated silently for the dozenth time. Yes, he had it for sure, he thought happily, taking Willie's arm. In the meantime, there should be at least another thousand or so in this present bag before he decided to get himself a new one.

Book-Review

Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition

By Derrick Sherwin Bailey.

Longmans, 15s.

Should the law concerning homosexual acts be changed? This question has recently been raised and it will undoubtedly give rise to a great deal of discussion in the near future. It will be approached from many different points of view. There are those, no doubt, who feel that the attitude of the Jews as presented in the Old Testament and the views current in medieval Europe are irrelevant to the modern issue. On the other hand there are certainly those who feel that the «Western Christian Tradition» cannot be lightly put aside.

It is to these that Dr. Bailey addresses his arguments. He has made a careful investigation of the Hebrew evidence, the laws of the Christian Emperors, the opinions of the leaders of the Church in the Middle Ages and the medieval and modern legislation of this country. He shows that the common imputation of homosexual practices as characterising the Cities of the Plain is a later accretion, and that the view that their destruction was due to that particular form of activity is unfounded. He also shows that though the Church has always regarded homosexual acts as sinful, they have not carried out the violent campaigns against them of which they are accused. In Dr. Bailey's view the disapproval of homosexual relations between males is compounded of three trends: a high regard for masculinity, which made it appear that homosexual activities were degrading and 'womanish', while no regard was paid to lesbianism which only concerned the less worthy sex; a desire to protect minors from assault; and a complete ignorance of the existence of the 'true invert'.

A more balanced evaluation of the sexes, and our greater psychological knowledge should make us think again. *While minors should be protected, as in heterosexual intercourse, consenting adults, it may be suggested, should be left to the dictates of their own consciences.* Dr. Bailey is the Central Lecturer of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council. His book is learned and at the same time eminently readable. He has made an outstanding contribution to this controversial subject.

From «The Listener», London, May 1955.