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A
FABLE FOR
ADULTS

ANGELA'S SATYR

By BRIAN CLEEVE

The music was like a bird singing, so gentle and so natural that she never noticed it. As light as a dandelion clock floating on the summer air, she stepped down the grassy slope and dipped one bare, golden foot in the stream. The stream gave a little skip and ripple of pleasure and washed her toes with silver.

"Ah," the girl whispered, and pulling her simple peasant's dress over her golden head, she stepped into the water. It came to her knees like a kitten purring. Throwing the red cotton dress onto the grass, she crouched down and began to wash herself. The music that had been impersonally beautiful took a sudden, passionate and distinctly masculine tone.

"Ooh!" screamed the girl and covered herself with water to protect her modesty. For there on the bank, half hidden among the bushes and the long grass, was a man. Or perhaps a boy. She raised herself a little, for after all she might need to run, and it was

best to be prepared. Distinctly a boy and, so far as she could see, as naked as she was. A dark-bronze chest, a neck of honey gold like a Greek column and a head so handsome that it made her heart swim. Dark curling hair with subtle flames of red gold buried in its darkness. Eyes green gold and slanting like a cat's. A curved nose with flaring nostrils and the most delicious hint of masculine brutality; and teeth as white as the bite of an apple, glistening with pleased ferocity, or so it seemed to the girl.

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't really —" the girl said in a small, weak feminine voice. The boy tilted his head and raised an eyebrow.

"Wouldn't what?" He had a most curious accent, as if he weren't used to speaking dialect, and she wondered if he was a gentleman's son from the city. She stood up the tiniest bit further and spread out a very small hand to cover as much of her beauty as it could, which wasn't much.

"Who are you?" she whispered, for really in all her eighteen years she had never seen anyone half so handsome and her

ILLUSTRATED BY MAI GERHARD

ANGELA'S SATYR

particular valley in Sicily is a valley of handsome men.

The boy put his homemade pipes to his mouth and blew a nightingale's trill of notes. "My name is Dionisio," he said, "and I am a satyr." And with that he stood up and stepped delicately down the bank toward the water, while the girl, with a little scream of fright, fainted dead away. Because from the hips down Dionisio was covered with shaggy fur, and instead of human feet he had the daintiest pointed silvery hoofs, like a goat.

Squatting down by the water's edge, without wetting more than his fingertips—for satyrs have a constitutional aversion to water—Dionisio caught the girl by her floating hair and drew her gently out of the river.

"How very beautiful," he said. "My mother must have been quite mad."
"Why?" said the girl, who had recovered with really astonishing quickness.

"What is your name?" said Dionisio, stroking back the wet gold hair from her temples and gazing into the dark-violet depths of her eyes.

"Angela," whispered the girl. "Dionisio." Her eyelashes fluttered, and the sunlight laid leaf shadows on her slender neck. "But why do you say your mother was mad?"

"Because she told me to beware of humans, and above all of girl humans. She told me they were unbelievably wicked, depraved and untrustworthy."

"Some of them are," whispered Angela. Her lips parted, her eyelids closed. "You wouldn't—take advantage of me, would you?"

"How?" said Dionisio.

"You wouldn't kiss me?"

"How do you kiss someone?" asked Dionisio, whose mother had been most frightfully strict.

"Like this," said Angela, sliding a golden arm round his bronze shoulders, and planting the softest, warmest, most intoxicating of kisses on his astonished lips.

Dionisio's whole body trembled and tears came to his eyes. "Oh," he cried out when he could make any kind of sound at all, "is that kissing? Is that what I mustn't do?"

"Yes," said Angela.

"I'd better try it, just to make sure I don't do it by mistake," said Dionisio and, pursing up his lips with care, as if to blow the sweetest music into his pipes, he kissed Angela rather lopsidely on the corner of her adorable mouth.

"You haven't got it right at all," said Angela. "I'd better show you again." And she did.

It shows how slow some learners are that it took her the whole afternoon and a lot of the evening to teach him exactly what it was he mustn't do, and before they were both satisfied that he had it right it was dark. They lay side by side in the warm grass under the huntress moon, whispering occasional things and holding hands.

"So this is love," whispered Dionisio, enchanted. "It is fun."

Angela said nothing, but only ran her warm hand through the thickness of his curls. And found just above his forehead two small, blunt horns. Which brought her up with something of a start, for it reminded her that Dionisio was not ev-

erything that a lover ought to be. The priest, for example, might look askance at them if they tried to get married. She sat up, stabbed by a further thought.

"You're not married already?" she cried.

"What is married?" asked Dionisio and this of course required a further lengthy explanation. So lengthy, in fact, that they fell asleep at the end of it and slept till dawn. When the first rays of sunlight touched them, Angela woke with the most delicious feeling, stretched her darling self and stepped into the stream as if it were a waiting bath.

"Dionisio!" she called. "Don't wake up, you mustn't look," and to her grave vexation he didn't wake and therefore didn't look. She appeared at her best in the river, and she knew it. Even three years ago, when she was still a child, an artist had surprised her washing her hair in the river and had been so thunder-struck that all the time he was trying to sketch her he kept dropping his pencils and charcoals in the water. Afterward her mother had whipped her soundly for not charging the painter a thousand lire for allowing him to paint her, so she remembered the occasion vividly.

She finished washing herself and came and knelt on the bank, gazing down at the sleeping satyr. Something would have to be done about him, but what? To continue meeting him in secret might have a certain charm, and without doubt there remained many other prohibitions to teach him—dear heaven, the boy knew absolutely nothing, it was terrible—but she could see any number of difficulties that might arise. Yet how to bring him into human society? She touched his silvery hoof, and he twitched in his sleep and flung one arm across his face, shielding his eyes from the growing sunlight. Special shoes? Baggy trousers? A hat to cover his horns? And then she thought of Mamma Zofia, the witch.

"Wake up!" she cried and tugged his hoof with an impatient hand. "I'm going to get you turned into a human boy. Quick, before there are any people about."

So, holding his hand, she running and he skipping, she led him through dark woods to the desolate valley where Mamma Zofia had her dilapidated hovel.

The witch was having her breakfast of stewed mice and herbs, and was less than pleased at being disturbed. But when she saw Dionisio, she sucked her gums in astonishment. "A satyr!" she croaked. "I haven't seen one of them for high on seventy years. I thought they all died off of thirst in the time of the phylloxera blight. Well, well, well, what brings you two to Mamma Zofia?" She leered at Angela in the most disgusting way.

Her hut was so dark that it was difficult to see anything except the yellow round eyes of her tame owl, and the glow of a little red brazier at the back of the hut, like a tiny doorway to hell. Angela tried to make out Mamma Zofia's wrinkled, walnut features.

"We want to turn Dionisio into a human boy," she said timidly.

"Why?" said Mamma Zofia. "Isn't he all right as he is?" And she cackled in the most shameless way, which spoke very badly for any dealings that she might have had with satyrs seventy years before.

"We want to get married," Angela said with a rush, twisting her little hands together. "And you see, the priest—"

"Ha," said Mamma Zofia, "horns before marriage, eh?" And she cackled again. "It'll be very expensive."

"How much?" said Angela, her voice suddenly quite sharp and, to anyone who knew both of them, surprisingly like her mother's.

"Three drops of blood from your third finger," said Mamma Zofia, trying to seize Angela's left hand. "Three locks of hair from the left side of your head. And three gold coins from your dowry."

"Mamma mia," said Angela. A coal hissed and flared in the brazier, the hut filled for a fleeting moment with soft red light, and Angela saw it reflected on

Dionisio's gleaming shoulder. "All right," she whispered. "But cash on delivery. Turn him first."

The light died in the hut, the owl closed his eyes, and Mamma Zolfa huddled down on the pile of rags that served her for bed and chair, table and wardrobe.

"It may take a bit of time," she said. "I haven't done this for years. And never with a satyr. People into goats. Even goats into people. But a satyr —" She sucked her gums, remembering ancient spells.

The air in the hut grew close as a blanket, black as a cave. The owl flew out with a screech of fear, and mice and rats scuttled in their willow cages.

"*Anima perduto* —" the old crone began, and the words lost themselves in a tumbling jumble of toothless sounds. She felt on the ground for herbs and dropped a handful of them on the brazier, filling the thick darkness with stinking smoke and a green flame that seemed to give no light. "*Cambia risma satiro!*" she screamed suddenly, and Dionisio gave a great cry of pain. The hut was shaken with the sound of the stamping of his hoofs and with wild frightened bleating. Something butted against Angela's thigh. She screamed in terror and tore her way outside the hut, followed by a very large and very handsome goat.

"Dionisio!" shrieked Angela. "Mehhhhhh," bleated the goat and tried pathetically to stand on its hind legs. Mamma Zolfa tottered out into the sunlight.

"Where is Dionisio?" Angela shouted at her. "What have you done with him?" She ran past the old woman, wrenched aside the curtain of rags that sheltered the hut's doorway, filling the filthy hovel

with sunlight. But there was no one there. Both women, crone and girl, turned to look at the goat.

"Dionisio!" whispered the girl. "I must have got the spell wrong," said Mamma Zolfa. "Dear oh dear, my memory's failing me terribly these days. I really ought to retire." And she shook a regretful head.

"You silly old witch!" shrieked Angela. "What are we going to do?"

"There's nothing we can do," said Mamma Zolfa, resignedly. "When it goes wrong like that it's irreversible. Except —"

"Except!" breathed Angela.

"It's ridiculous, really," said Mamma Zolfa, "quite impossible. He has to be kissed on the nose by a real princess, and she has to tell him with complete sincerity that he is the most beautiful goat in the world."

"Oh my heavens!" cried Angela. "Do you know any princesses?"

"No," said Mamma Zolfa, "there seem to be far fewer of them about these days. It's the taxation that kills them." And at that moment, with a terrible cry of anger, anguish, anxiety and antipathy, Angela's mother descended like a fat fury on the scene. In one hand she brandished a switch, in the other a length of rope.

"Strumpet!" she screeched. "Shameless baggage, hussy, harlot! Where were you all night? Where is the villain?" For as softly and secretly as Angela had led Dionisio to Mamma Zolfa's hut, an early laborer had seen her golden head stealing through the woods, and not alone, and having followed the pair at a distance too great to see what Dionisio really was, he had run to tell Angela's mother the distressful news. Hence her furious arrival now. "Where is he?" she roared and, throwing down the rope, she caught her daughter by the hair and began to make the switch dance a tattoo on her back.

Filled with protective rage, Dionisio charged the mother and received a blow with the switch across the skull that nearly blinded him.

"Control your goat, you filthy old wretch," shrieked Angela's mother and gave Dionisio such a kick that he lost all interest in Angela or her mother and lay on his back imagining that he was dead. Angela, twisting out of her mother's grip, fled weeping down the valley. Her mother pursued her, showing a remarkable turn of speed and a deadly accuracy with the switch.

"Meh, meh," croaked Dionisio, coming slightly to his senses.

"Waste not, want not," said Mamma Zolfa, slipping the fallen rope round Dionisio's neck. It was a pity that it was a billy goat; if she could beg the loan of a nanny goat from somewhere, there was no telling what might happen. "All's well that ends well," she said, tying the other end of the rope to a nearby tree. Giving Dionisio another hearty kick to introduce him to the new regime, she went inside the hut to finish her breakfast.

ANGELA'S SATYR

Meanwhile the most extraordinary things had been happening in the nearby city.

The artist who had long ago painted a ravishing picture of Angela bathing in the river had died in an appalling state of insolvency. Whereupon his long-suffering landlady, who was owed at least three

weeks' rent, seized his goods and arranged for them to be auctioned.

There were four kettles with holes burned in the bottom, two broken chairs, a bed, a piece of carpet, an enormous number of half-empty tubes of paint, forty-seven camel-hair brushes with most of the bristles missing, thirty-seven paintings of no earthly interest to anyone, and the portrait of Angela. And who should happen to see and buy this totally delightful picture but a television producer! A thin, anxious man who wore

dark glasses in bed and lived on pills, he gave one tiny but heartfelt cry of delight when he saw the painting and said, "For me, for me!"

There followed a month of detective work to discover who the model might have been, and on exactly the morning that Angela and her mother arrived in a dead heat at their humble cottage in the Sicilian valley of Zeppo di Fiori, there arrived at their door the most enormous motor car, apparently ninety-four feet long and requiring two chauffeurs, while

far in the luxurious scarlet-leather depths of the stern, surrounded by swansdown cushions and crystal cocktail shakers, sat the television producer. He took one look at Angela and, uttering another tiny but heartfelt cry of joy, he said again, "For me! For me!"

Only this time, having Angela's mother to deal with, it cost him a great deal more money than the picture had. It also cost Angela's mother some fatiguing exertions with the switch to persuade Angela that this was in the best interests of all concerned.

"He will feed you like a Christmas pig," coaxed Mamma Angela.

"Dionisio!" Angela wept.

"He will dress you in silks and satins, and you'll have clean underclothes every Sunday!" shouted Mamma Angela.

"I only want my Dionisio!" wailed her daughter.

"You'll have a real bathroom to bathe in and hot water out of a tap and a mirror to see yourself in," screamed Mamma Angela in a paroxysm of impatience, and gave her daughter the switch across a tender place so vigorously that it clinched the argument then and there. So, weeping for Dionisio and sitting gingerly on two swansdown cushions, the golden, gorgeous simplicity of Angela was carried off to the city.

Swallowing four tranquilizing pills at a gulp from a little silver box, the television producer guided Angela into his eighteenth-floor apartment. Angela stood stunned in the hallway until called to herself by the arrival of a maid in a starched white apron. She dropped a profound curtsy. "My goodness, miss," said the maid, "you mustn't do that. You're to be the mistress here. At least, I expect so." And leading her off to the marble bathroom, she introduced her to the delights of hot water and scented soap, talcum powder and enormous, soft, cuddlesome towels. But even while she lay in the steaming water fragrant with essence of jasmine, Angela sighed, "Dionisio," and wondered what horrible things might be happening to her beloved. For the things that can happen to a goat in a place like Sicily are truly horrendous.

She sighed "Dionisio" while she was being wrapped in a heavy mandarin dressing gown of raw yellow silk; while her toenails were being pedicured and her fingernails manicured; while her tawny golden hair was being waved and sleeked under the skillful fingers of Madame Hortense and her breathless assistants.

She sighed, "Dionisio" while her elocution teacher strove to remove the rough edges of dialect from her linnets' voice; while her dancing teacher taught her to float like a swan; while a retired duchess taught her to eat as if she had never been hungry in her life and to behave at parties with the degree of insolence and boredom proper to her beauty. "You'll be the success of the season!" wheezed the duchess. "I can't wait to see you!" And poor Angela let the weight of her golden head bend her lily neck and sighed, "Dionisio."

Whenever she saw the twittering arrival of the television producer at one of her lessons, her mind's eye saw behind him the living statue of her satyr, the sunlight filtering through forest leaves to fall in light and shadow on his burnished shoulders, his arching chest, his green and slanting eyes. When at her music lessons her teacher guided her fingers on the piano keys, she heard not "Do re mi fa" but the woodland notes

of Dionisio's pipes. And when at night she lay on swansdown and drew the blue satin sheets up to her delicately molded chin, the last word she invariably uttered was "Dionisio." Nevertheless, being a human girl, she found some consolations in her situation.

Which could not be said for Dionisio. Alas! Mamma Zolfa had borrowed a nanny goat from a near neighbor who owed her something for a little matter of a love potion. It was not a very pretty nanny goat nor a young one. But it was certainly a great one for the billies, as its owner proudly said. Cackling ferociously, Mamma Zolfa led the abandoned creature back to her hut, and unfettered Dionisio's rope from the tree, fastening the end round the neck of the nanny, tying the two creatures together with three yards of rope between them and the light of love already burning in the nanny's eyes.

"Unholy matrimony!" cackled Mamma Zolfa and went into her hut to cook some rats for supper.

"Stay away from me!" said Dionisio. "I'm not what you think!"

"Dream goat!" whispered the nanny and made a rush. Dionisio jumped three yards back and the nanny followed him like a ball on a string.

"Help!" bleated Dionisio. "Mamma!"

And so, leap and counterleap, the two creatures—the one driven by terror and the other by unmentionable ambitions—tore up the mountainside, and but for the happy accident by which a sharp edge of rock sliced the rope binding them together, I would never have had the heart to go on telling you this story.

"Free!" shrieked Dionisio.

"Love, come back!" pleaded the nanny. But she hadn't the speed and, after half an hour of fruitless chase, she gave up and wandered disconsolately home. The wretched Dionisio, so ashamed of his appearance that when he drank from a pool he closed his eyes against his reflection, wandered far and wide, avoiding the haunts of men and beasts and stopping only for necessary snacks of grass. Now and then he would raise his poor bearded goat-face to the indifferent sky and sigh, "Angela! Oh, Angela!" Until one day a laborer, seeing a fine fat goat wandering masterless across the mountainside, captured Dionisio and sold him to a butcher.

Meanwhile the exquisite Angela, stopping all breaths with her beauty, had reached the destiny for which the television producer had spent so much money and time and anxious twittering. She was about to go on his program as question mistress in a panel game. Need I describe the ravishment of the studio audience, the spellbound delight of the panel members, the delirium of the viewers, the superlatives of the critics? Angela caused a furor.

"Television has found its soul!" cried the *Gazzetta*. "Angela for President!" pleaded the *Giornale*.

In the largest of his palaces the elderly and lecherous Prince Massimo Grasso wheezed, "Angela for me!" as he gazed oyster-eyed into the thirty-six-inch television screen mounted at the foot of his six-poster bed. "See that it is arranged," he said to a henchman. "If necessary, employ the Mafia. Buy the television studios. Do anything. Just so long as she is here by tonight, I shall even marry her."

And so it was that weeping tears like pearls and looking ethereal in a wedding gown of seventy yards of Bruges lace, poor Angela was led slowly up the aisle by the television producer, while the monstrous prince waited for her at the altar steps, breathing heavily. Reporters from ninety-five countries crammed the cathedral, television cameramen hung like bats from the columns and the organ loft, seven bishops served as acolytes, and an eighth bishop, the prince's first cousin, conducted the ceremony. The local schoolchildren were given a day's holiday, and the prince ordered a truly enormous barbecue party to take place on the palace lawns, to be attended by all his retainers, tenants, serfs, peasants, debtors, creditors and poor relations. So enormous did the party promise to be that the butchers' shops of the city were emptied of every lamb, goat and calf that they contained, and live animals were obtained from country butchers for miles around as a reserve supply, to be led bleating and lowing into the orchard gardens of the palace. And among these unfortunate beasts was poor Dionisio. Imagine his feelings as he waited, tethered to an apple tree, while the scent of barbecued goat drifted toward him.

"Oh, Angela!" he sighed. "If only I knew that you at least were happy, I could die consoled."

When what should he hear, high-pitched and unmistakable, but his beloved Angela's scream of fear? For I must tell you that while the barbecue party was going on, the prince found himself impatient to relieve delights that he ought to have put sternly behind him many years before.

"My little jubbe," he crooned in Angela's ear. "Come upstairs and we'll look at the pretty fireworks from my bedroom window."

Yet when they got upstairs, to Angela's surprise she found that the bedroom windows didn't overlook the front lawns, but the orchard.

"Where are the fireworks?" cried Angela. "I can't see any at all."

"I've brought my own!" cackled the prince, and with that he began chasing poor Angela up and down the enormous bedroom.

"Help!" screamed Angela in a paroxysm of terror. "Help!" And this was the cry that Dionisio heard. Bounding against his rope with desperate force, he broke free.

"Angela!" he bleated and, leaping through an open window, he galloped through the palace searching for his beloved. Up marble staircases, along shining corridors beneath ancestral portraits and suits of armor, Dionisio charged to the rescue.

While running as fleet and light as a deer, Angela broke from her pursuer and raced into the corridor, the puffing prince behind her. And there, at the head of the stairs, Dionisio caught up with them.

"Charge!" bleated Dionisio. And down went his head, up went his tail, thud went his hooves, and his curved and powerful horns caught the prince precisely in the rump, lifting him a yard into the air. Dionisio skidded back onto his haunches as if he had hit a railway buffer, and the prince fell, hit the middle step of the staircase, bounced, and crashed to the marble floor twelve feet below, stone dead.

"Oh, my savior!" cried Angela and, not thinking of Dionisio or of anything else but the frightful fate from which she had just been saved, she threw her arms around the goat's neck, kissed him warmly on his moist nose and said with heartfelt sincerity, "You are the most beautiful goat in the world!"

Whereupon the most astonishing changes began to take place in Dionisio; for, of course, Angela since eleven o'clock that morning had been a real princess and quite by accident had done and said the only things which could rescue Dionisio from his horrid shape. Within moments, before her astonished and delighted eyes, there stood her satyr, her beloved Dionisio, bronzed, beautiful, and with green, slanting eyes filled with love and gratitude and wonder.

What more is there to tell? The prince was buried in a black marble sarcophagus in the cathedral, with an inscription relating how he had been killed tragically on his romantic wedding night by a maddened goat escaped from the barbecue wedding feast. The princess, not noticeably overcome by grief, retired to a large country estate, where soon she married a country fellow unknown to aristocratic society. The two are rarely seen and, when they are, the husband is invariably wearing unfashionably baggy trousers and a high-crowned hat. But they seem very happy.

THE END