

The Fat City Review

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Babeland

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Babeland — Laura Mays Hoopes

Dylan Faston? Nobody really understands him. Not that I have any special insights, I don't know him well but I heard things, ever since he moved up here from Tupelo three years ago. You know he built that big house, it's really a mansion, with huge landscaped grounds and who knows how many bedrooms, maybe 20 or even more, and bathrooms for most of them, right in one of the best neighborhoods, and he brought his whole family up here from the delta with him, right? He must be doing pretty well.

I don't like to gossip, but he was overwhelmed with willing women when he first got here. That slick hair, those eyes that sneaked a look at a babe out of the corners. They really got to people. Women followed him in the streets, he had to call the cops to just go for a walk.

Did you hear that Glenda Spence threw a party for him at Chicasaw Country Club of all places? And he never was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, you can count on

that. Just look at his show some time. But for some people, money is all the introduction they need. And the club didn't mind, not when Glenda Spence wanted to do it. It's all profit for them when she rents the whole shebang for an evening, even pays all the employees time and a half to stay late, park the cars, and so forth.

No, Glenda isn't low class, that's not what I'm saying at all. She took him up, but she's from old money. Plantation down Vicksburg way, I think it was called Foxfire or something like that. Her mother was a famous society beauty back in the day. I guess she likes to keep up with what's new, just like a lot of people. Especially if he's sexy too, you know what I mean?

No, she didn't meet him by going on a tour at Babeland. I've heard he comes out to see the tours when he's at home, and he does chat people up when they come on the tour. The high school girls, they go nuts over him. Some of those little chickies come back time after time on those tours, say they are "friends" with Dylan. But I've also heard he doesn't ever follow up on women who do that, even if they give him their numbers and plenty of encouragement, or invite him over, ask him to meet them, all that stuff.

That Glenda, how she met him, she crashed one of those after-parties at the end of his night club show, where he invites his friends and plays a lot of pick up songs. Glenda had the sense not to ask him to sing any of his competitors'

songs like “Rock Around the Clock” or “Unchained Melody.” You know she plays the electric bass a little so she played along with the group, said how much she loves “Heartbreak City,” and “Don’t Be Mean” and they got to talking at the break and one thing led to another, you know how it is.

Glenda didn’t last long, with those chicken-skin hands of hers, never mind the plastic-wrap she calls facial skin. She loved to come to his shows and act possessive, but at first he didn’t seem to mind. She wore a ton of jewels, and I’ve heard he likes that, women with a diamond choker and long dangly earrings, and maybe a ring or two. Those dinner rings, so-called, with the ten carat jewels in them. Especially sapphires, he has a thing for those. A nice big sapphire flanked with two big diamonds, what could be better? But later on, she walked around in her low-cut golden Turkish bath robe laying down the law, just couldn’t resist telling him how he should perform and, well Dylan is pretty easy going but he wouldn’t have that. “You should just sing a nice Cole Porter song once in a while?” No way. More tea? I think I will just have one more Madeleine, thank you.

Then it was Carolyn Chase. Lots of people think she looks just like Elizabeth Taylor when she was younger, you know, when she played Cleopatra. Dylan went out with her for almost two months. He liked to play with her hair, and once he even asked if he could put eye makeup on her. She was proud as a peacock about their relationship too,

boasting at the Charity Prayer Breakfast about how soft his skin is. While they were going out, she decided she wanted to be an interior decorator, and he let her practice on some of his bedrooms, I hear. Kate Compton said they were embarrassingly lavish, but probably the tourists liked them.

Maybe her talking about his skin at the Prayer Breakfast got back to him, I don't know. Or what I really think it was, although they had an affair, she was a prude underneath. So, maybe it was just that she kept telling him he didn't really need to let his hip swinging get so dramatic, he could never get on Ed Sullivan that way. One thing he just won't put up with is being told what to do in his act. And you know what? Ed Sullivan did put him on, hip swinging and all, he just had the cameras focus elsewhere when things got hot. Of course I mean when he shook it all, haven't you seen his act? He is shameless about it. That's what gets all the women so hot and crazy for him.

Then, after her, he went on to Leticia Swopes. She plays basketball, you know? Some of the women who had been drooling over him stopped when he was with her. Sweaty, aggressive, maybe even a touch of the tar brush? I really don't know why. Anyway, supposedly she threw him over for Rick Wolf and he was back looking for a new babe.

No way, I'm not prejudiced, I don't know what you're talking about. We're all cosmopolitan in Memphis these days, right? Look at the Negro models in Vogue, they couldn't be more beautiful. And think about how we're all

laid out on towels trying to get tan, when they're naturally the color we want to be. It's almost funny. Where was I?

About then, he started making these lists, old babes and young babes.

Old Babes

Young Babes

Glenda Spence

Carolyn Chase

Susan Clarke

Leticia Swopes

Cheryl Britten

Rosie Davis

Libby Conners

Dabney Raines

Of course, these lists of babes were all women he had tried out and found wanting. Yes, I thought it was pretty disgusting, sort of like a coup stick or a record of kills. But then, primitive men can be very attractive to some women, so I've heard. You should hear the way the women suck in their breath at his concerts when he takes off his shirt. Pheromones unleashed. And that crying tenor voice, you just can't help being swept away. Where was I?

Time went by and the brains of our fellow women didn't get any sharper about the dangers of Dylan, so his lists got longer.

His line between old and young babes was at 30. I think that's about how old he is himself. Yes, Cheryl is over 30, I happen to know. Yes, I knew her at Miss Climptons' high school. Well, why she looks so good is no mystery. That Ellington Shumway, the plastic surgeon, really cleaned up with her as a customer. But he did a good job, don't you think? And some liposuction, that's what I heard, not just face and neck surgery. You could make an extra person out of the parts some of these women had taken out.

Really, you're right, not all men are willing to go with women as old as they are, but you can see that he didn't even stop there. A rich cougar could have as good a shot at him as a young cutie.

With Cheryl, she really hung on about a month with him. She was determined to beat the record, which was two months, but they went out to a Pancake House after one of his late night gigs and she started picking at him. He was just using a nice triangle of pancake to mop up the cane syrup on the side of his plate, when she started up with, "Maybe your hair needs just a little trim at the back of the neck." I guess she didn't notice that smoky expression in the back of his eyes, so then she went on to tell him that he had a spot on his shirt. He smiled a lazy half-smile at her and kept on working on pieces of his pancake, sipping his orange juice, and thinking they could leave pretty soon and she'd sleep off her crossness.

But she wasn't going to lay off. She began to say that she

wanted him to sing “Unchained Melody” in his next act. Ronnie Millsaps’ song, not anything he’d be caught dead singing. He was pretty polite about it for some time, he can be mellow in the middle of the night when the act is over and he’s just unwinding, but then he thought about the whole wide world of babes out there. That was her last night.

He had been in town not quite a year when he met the woman he might have settled down with, a mystery woman who left town after six weeks. Maybe he regretted the loss of the incredibly light and tasty Western omelettes she whipped up for breakfast or the fresh-squeezed orange juice she always made first thing in the morning. He might have stayed intrigued with the Sheherazade-like stories she told him in bed, or the way she pulled on his earlobes when she was about to come or the secret nickname she gave a certain part of his body, but all that was swept away. Mystery woman was gone and she went on the Old Babes list with the rest.

I’m not saying Dylan got desperate at that point, but you know how men sometimes go out with a lot of women at once? He started doing that so his list looked like this:

Old Babes

Young Babes

Serena Grainger

Lucy Cathlamet

Debby Lanham

Katie Merriweather

Mystery Woman

Miggy Lloyd-French

Charlie Grave

Twink DeRisi

Karen Everest-Craig

Serena, her real name is Bertha Moore, so I heard. When she took up with the literary types down at Memphis State, she decided to “update her name,” that’s what she said. And she wrote a novel that she self-published with BookLocker and Serena wanted to sell it at the Chicasaw Country Club, you know set up a table at the monthly dinners for members and like that. Mr. Armstrong sent her to the right about over that, and threatened to suspend her privileges. Lucky for him, he found something in their membership contract about selling things on the premises, so she had to lay off on her demands.

Then she started in with the poetry, love poems. Nothing more embarrassing, if you ask me, than an old lady going on out loud about love and sex. Not that there is anything wrong with sex at any age, that’s not what I’m saying at all. But there’s no need to tell the world. It’s just not *comme il faut*, if you know what I mean.

Serena, she started writing poetry to Dylan. He seemed to enjoy it, took up with her. She would stand up at the after parties and declaim on and on about his left eyebrow, or about, well, parts of him that it would be better not to mention in public. She told him she wanted to give him

gifts, but like the Little Drummer Boy, all she had to give was her art: poems. He seemed to be lapping it up, although some people said he was laughing at her secretly and just seeing if the others hanging around him would catch on to the joke.

It's not like he needed her to give him money or anything, you can just see how his career has taken off, so many golden albums and TV shows, and all that. Maybe Serena was only a novelty to him. But it might have occurred to him that talking poor-mouth like she always did wasn't so consistent with belonging to that Chicasaw Country Club, and driving a jaguar.

Anyway, her days were numbered once she suggested that she could give a few poems during his shows, not just at the after parties. At first it was just a suggestion, but she got more and more insistent until that's almost all she talked about. Every time she read him a new poem, she wanted him to put it into the show. So then, she was gone.

You know these are all just things I heard, I don't know, so just keep an open mind. I don't want to mislead you. I can't really say, but this is what I put together from different people at the time, since you're interested in Dylan. I know, it's hard to figure out where he gets all this S. A. Ever been to Tupelo where he started out? You wouldn't drive through the town and think there was a dime's worth of pheromone in the whole place.

Dylan started to get mixed up about his dates and a couple of these dames, I think it was Katie and Miggie, shrugged him off as a flake after he kept on calling them each others' names and such. He didn't seem to care, just replaced them on the list.

Old Babes

Young Babes

Claudia Esterhazy-Blake

Susie McRae

Linda Smythe-Jones

Claudia was an interesting one, do you know her? She's related to the Debhams, some kind of cousin, says her family goes back to Hungarian royalty. Her husband Jack made a bundle in cotton in the Delta, went on to speculate big time in soybeans, made a second killing, and moved the two of them up here to Memphis. Then she divorced hubby and while she was living high on the hog, using all that alimony, she took up with Dylan.

I don't think Dylan was really such a social climber as people like Lydia Davis said, but he seemed to get a kick out of Claudia's claim to royalty, made her spell out Esterhazy for him, and so forth. Maybe he looked it up. He has plenty of books in that mansion, although I've never seen him actually open one of them and sit down to read it. But he has dictionaries and a couple of encyclopedias, all that. He probably bought it all by the yard from his interior decorator. Not Carolyn, the real one he got when he bought

the place, you know. A lot of them do sell books by the yard, I have no idea where they get them. Daedalus maybe? Or publishers fire sales?

Anyway, he took Claudia on a trip to Atlanta when he performed over there, a couple of sold out shows I heard. They stayed in the Hyatt I heard, I think it was the Hyatt. She insisted on the best, knowing her. She turned kind of wild after she left Jack, and she would go skinny dipping in those hotel pools late at night with whoever was still up, including Dylan of course. I heard she had a fetish for whipped cream and bananas too, lay down on a dining table in the nude and had the hotel dining staff frosting parts of her body with whipped cream and sliced bananas in their suite.

Of course it's disgusting, but Dylan was supposedly fascinated with her. I suppose whipped cream is part of every red-blooded American boy's fantasy sex scene, don't you think? And that French maid's outfit with the minimal boob cover, the nurse with the low-cut uniform with a micro mini skirt and no underwear, that sort of thing. Maybe it's *Playboy* that makes them all hanker after those fantasies, I wouldn't know.

Claudia supposedly took off the top of her two-piece gown dancing with Dylan at the Peabody Hotel. No, I wasn't there, it was a private party, I think a fund-raiser for retired race horses. Yes, I know some of these charities are unbelievable. But there has to be some excuse for parties,

don't you think? And Claudia, well I suspect she had to have some silicon in there or she never would have dared, she is getting up there. Yes, maybe even forty-five.

He seemed to enjoy it, that's what I heard. But then, they went to an after party at the NightOwl Jazz Bowl, and he sang there for free the way he sometimes does, just having fun with his friends. And she wanted him to sit down and talk to her instead of singing.

Then she started to sing along, demanded a microphone. I don't know if you've ever heard her voice, just like a crow. Really not good quality singing at all. No one wanted to hear her sing, they all just wanted Dylan, but she couldn't get it through her head. Kept on at him about it, till he finally up and left her, the place, and the whole relationship. Not easy to push him around, I'll tell you that.

More tea, Susan? Yes, I think I will have another cup now that Ricky has brought us a fresh pot. I love a good hot cup of tea.

Here you go, Patsy. Oops, I spilled a little. But I guess Ricky will take care of it. Would you like another madeleine? Well, I sure would like to know who he is going out with now. He's a good-looking man, there's no denying that. That hair is really sexy. I heard that he was with the country singer, Maisie Kuhl.

No, Susan, I'm sure he isn't with her. She's so low-class,

and from everything I've seen, he likes to be with rich society babes, not people who came out of the delta with nothing in their pockets like he did. He's seen enough of those people before he left Tupelo. No, it's Madame Alexander dolls, no Raggedy Anns for him.

Look, Patsy, I don't know about that, he went with that basketball star, and she started out in Baton Rouge, so I guess he doesn't insist his women be born rich, at least that's the way it seems to me. Did he talk much to you about backgrounds of women?

I keep telling you, Susan, I never had a relationship with Dylan Faston. That's all completely gossip, not a word of truth in it.

But Lizzy Prince told me she saw you going to the after parties with him after a lot of his shows in clubs around Memphis.

Not at all. Why would he give little night club shows here? He gets millions for a show now, insists on stadium seating and all that. No need for Dylan to do all that work for a pittance.

Lizzy said he mentioned you in his act, right before he sang, "Love me true," one night when she was there. Susan folded her napkin and raised her eyebrows at Patsy.

That was just a joke. Nothing between us at all. I keep

telling you, we did not have any kind of relationship. Patsy pushed back her chair. A little frown appeared on her forehead, but not enough to intensify the crows feet beside her eyes.

Patsy, I heard you tried to put meat tenderizer on you-know-what once when he wanted to keep on and you were tired. And you two jumped rope double dutch in his garden in the nude and the neighbors next door called the cops on you for indecent exposure, not to mention singing at the top of your lungs and disturbing the peace. It's hard to cover up something that so many people saw. The gossip mills are full of it.

Patsy threw down a Madeleine she had only taken one bite of. Her voice got loud. I'm disgusted! That's just gross, Susan. People will say anything at all to make a woman look bad. I can't believe the rumors are getting so awful. I guarantee you nothing like that ever happened. That Lizzy should have her mouth washed out with soap. Or with Lye!

Now, now, calm down. Patsy. Don't get all sniffy about Lizzy. They all said it happened when you and Myron were separated, you know, last year when you moved out to the Peabody Hotel? Everyone said it was because of Dylan. It wasn't just Lizzy. I bet I heard that from fifty people.

Susan! You've been gossiping about me with fifty people? I thought we were friends! Trying to dig into all my private

business, exposing things.

Come on, Patsy. I just want some tips now, I'm not looking for you to expose your feelings to me at all. I just want the inside track if I decide to get close to him myself. No need to get all upset.

Patsy began to reach around her on the floor. She almost growled, I think it's time to leave this conversation. Where's my purse? Susan, you're crazy, and I don't want to talk with you any longer. Don't call me either.

Hey, Patsy, people are staring at us. Don't get all freaked out. We'll talk about something else. No need to leave in a huff. We've been friends too long for that. Come on, have the rest of your tea and you still have a Madeleine. Don't leave. Sit back down.

Well, okay, Susan, if you won't mention him again. I can only stay another half hour, though. I'm meeting Myron for cocktails. By the way, I don't know for sure, as I said, but I think it's useless for you to lay out snares for the man. He's seeing no one. He has stopped going out with women recently.

He's disillusioned, you think, Patsy? So many babes acting crazy over him, acting like he's the only man worth pursuing? Is he jaded?

Disillusioned? It's possible, Susan. So many of them tried

to lure him in with sex and then, once they thought he was tied up with them, they tried to manage his act, tell him how to do his songs. Dylan is successful, not a beginner. He knows how he wants to do it, down to the last song he picks, the last twitch on stage.

Personally, I wonder if they were trying to make him seem less down-to-earth, make him seem more refined? Susan, he would never put up with that. His fan base loves the country style and they would drop him if he started putting on airs. He has the sense to realize that. So, he stopped putting the Old Babes and the Young Babes on his list and as far as I know, he went cold turkey.

No, I'm sure he couldn't be gay. Have you ever seen him look at another guy? Have you ever seen how he can't keep his hands off the women? Just look at the guy. No way. He just wants to be himself, not to take directions from any rich old babes or pretty young babes, that's what I think. He finally turned away from pushy women.

But I been thinking lately, what if he needs a hand, wants to get one of the rich old babes to co-sponsor a charity event or something? I think he'd get an earful if he called Glenda and he'd get the silent treatment from Cheryl, she sure has mastered the art of haughty spurning, right? And none of the others would find it convenient to come to his aid. Just a little too cool, just a little too rude in the exit lines, and Mr. Dylan has closed all his doors behind him. He can stand on his own two feet, doesn't really need any help

from those babes anyway, he thinks. I guess he's right. He has that big old place and as much money as anyone could spend and he's famous. So, that's why no one understands Dylan Faston.

Born, became a biologist, bored, became a blogger for women in science, a memoirist, then a creative writer through MFA at SDSU. I'm a big-eyed, short, aging hippie mom with a tall husband and two tall grown children. Despite all culture's evidence, I believe people belong in nature.

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