

BLOWN

(a dark comedy short for grown-ups)

Adrian Baldwin

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First Edition

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Body text set in Georgia

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

First published in 2017 in *Gruesome Grotesques 2: Vampires, Werewolves & other Beautiful Monsters* (an anthology)

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(a dark comedy short story)

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Should you ever find yourself travelling along U.S. Route 82, roughly halfway between the small towns of Winona and Kilmichael in Montgomery County, Mississippi, you will surely spot Donny's Truck Stop.

Oh, the bar-and-grill looks kinda quaint in a good ol' boy kinda way with its sun-baked signage, peeling paintwork and wide dusty forecourt, but just like those tumbleweeds: keep on rolling, do *not* stop.

Just in case.

In case it's time for a beautiful monster to raise its head again.

Presently, the only customers in Donny's Truck Stop are two overweight truck drivers, both male, each as dog-ugly as the other. They sit a table or two apart but could just as easily have chowed down together, these brothers of the road. One belches, deep and resonant; the other rubs his bulging gut - and the two dip their heads to each other, no words necessary. Then, as if to prove the narrator unreliable, Trucker One speaks:

'Yep, that'll do it,' he concludes, sucking leftover beaver tail from a back tooth.

(No, really: Beaver Tail Gumbo, it's an actual thing!)

Trucker Two nods, pushes aside his plate, now devoid of pork belly and taters.

'Hey, honey!' he calls. 'Could use another kaw-fee over here, darlin.'

In less time than it takes Billy Bob, the tooth-sucker trucker, to run pudgy fingers through greasy hair and reset his Arizona Wildcats baseball cap, a waitress appears with a coffee pot ... DAISY, announces her name badge; as good a name as any.

Daisy's appearance is mid-forties, fine featured and undeniably shapely; *extremely* pretty once, no doubt - but tired-looking now, with barely enough get-up-and-go left to drift from table to kitchen and back again.

Wordlessly, she refills Pork Belly's coffee cup.

Gumbo clicks his fingers; seems he'd like a fill up, too.

Daisy sidles over and pours.

'Aw, come on now, how about a little friendly smile fer ol' Billy Bob?' winks Gumbo. 'I done et all ma beans,' he quips.

Daisy moves her mouth. Not so much a smile as a smirk - heck, a sneer if anything.

Billy Bob thinks about patting her butt. Would he get away with it? A hard slap to the face would be a small price to pay, but a pot of hot coffee in your lap? Not worth the risk. Not when there were, most likely, a whole horde of hookers just a short drive from here; on the big parking lot opposite The Lightning Bug Motel, up where Route 82 hits Interstate 55 - Exit 185.

'What's with the dark glasses, darlin? Late night? Or did yer boyfriend give ya a whuppin?'

Daisy snorts. 'Any man raises his hand to me and it'll be the last thing he ever does.'

She peers over her shades then produces a smile, but Billy Bob isn't buying it; the smile seems more threatening than friendly.

'Well, you ain't no huckleberry,' he mutters.

Daisy tilts her head, aims a stern face. She says:

'So, can I git ya anythin else, cowboy?'

A fat red hand scratches under the Wildcats cap.

'Yeah, I'll take me a cold one to go,' he decides. 'Hotter than blue blazes out there.'

Billy Bob is correct: it's a scorcher outside, furnace hot, even in the shade.

'That it?' sniffs Daisy.

'Yup.'

'You done too, FedEx?' - a reference to Pork Belly's cap and uniform. The colour and logo match the livery of his truck parked out front.

'You can call me Bubba, darlin. We're all friends here.'

Daisy moves her mouth. 'Uh-huh.'

Bubba wipes his beard with a forearm, thinks a moment ...

'Mudslide Sundae,' he drawls, decided.

Daisy scribbles on her notepad.

'One root beer, one Mudslide, comin up.'

On the kitchen side of the serving counter, Don Junior, current line cook and one-day future owner, watches Daisy haul ass back behind the counter, ponytail gently swinging. She bends to an under-the-counter fridge, extricates a beer and a pre-prepared dessert, straightens up, holds the cold bottle against her forehead for a few seconds then ambles back to the customers.

'Gonna take me a smoke break in a minute, Chief,' she calls out.

Don Junior hates Daisy. He hates the way she calls him Chief or Boss. To his ears it always sounds sarcastic and mocking and disrespectful. Mainly, though, he hates her because he'd like to get his hands on her killer body and fuck her brains out, but hasn't got the balls to make a move. She'd say No, anyway, he just knows it.

'Okay, steppin out, Boss,' calls Daisy, lighter held aloft, heading for the rear door. 'Back in a tick.'

The way she rolls and smokes her cigarettes by the dumpsters out back, grates him too; disgusting habit - stinky ashtray-breath all over the customers after she returns (which is usually quick, to be fair, but even so).

No smoke breaks when I'm in charge, thinks Don. And he'd surely be in charge any time now; just as soon as

granddaddy and present manager, Donny Senior, an already far from well man, kicks the bucket.

(Don Junior's father, Donald J. Tyler, Donny Senior's only child, went missing over eight years ago. No note, no nothing, not a word; one day he was here, the next he wasn't; just *poof*, and he'd gone. With Donald J. officially declared 'Presumed Dead' in absentia a year ago, Don Junior alone stands to inherit the Truck Stop.)

Old-school Donny Senior might believe Daisy's lady-assets keep the truckers coming back, but Lord when *he's* boss - the *real* boss - things will change! And she's always swearing. Thinks nobody hears her when she's lighting up her cigarettes but Don Junior hears. Tits and ass be damned, no woman should cuss like that; killer body or no. Not even when she's doing the nasty in her trailer with whoever. Probably a dirt-poor cousin! Bloody rednecks. That's if Daisy even has any family. Despite working here for weeks, the waitress is still a mystery to Don. All he knows for sure is: she's a sarcastic bitch; she likes a beer or three; often looks like shit in the mornings (presumably if she's had a long night after picking up some young gun in Dixie's Bar); and when his waitress is home alone, she watches crappy soaps all evening - all of them; is hooked on the damned things. Maybe she even watches them when she's got company - *while she's fucking!* It wouldn't surprise Don Junior. Not in the least.

Old, dark thoughts return: like how he'd love to break into her trailer late at night, wake her from her beer-fuelled snoring and knock her around - a lot! A *real* whuppin; until she broke - then he'd force himself on her. He'd porn fuck her like the haughty bitch he reckons she is; make her squeal like a stuck hog! Hell, she'd surely enjoy it if she wasn't so dang cold and standoffish; didn't have a downer on silly little things that don't really matter: lack of height, back hair, a rotten tooth, that kind of thing. And, when he'd blown his beans up her - at least twice, maybe three times, in Don's warped mind - he'd strangle her then set fire to the filthy fucking trailer, and

no-one would be any the wiser. Not a soul would miss her. Heck, he'd even hang around, brush shoulders with the trailer park's other resident rednecks, and watch it burn.

Prick-teasing trash!

Don watches her now from under his receding hillbilly hairline. (For all Don's railing against what he sees as 'rubes', he's just as hick as any of them, maybe more so.) He sucks his rotten tooth as Daisy slips Gumbo's and Pork Belly's bills onto their tables; notes how the truckers crudely scan their waitress's tight body, neither of them making any attempt to hide the fact as they finger the crumpled dollars within their billfolds. And Daisy doesn't seem to care about the eyeballing. Just ignores their lecherous attentions. Does she even notice anymore? Don reckons she enjoys it really, the furtive, leering glances and sly scrutiny. He thinks all women secretly love that kind of stuff; which is why he doesn't feel so bad when *he* checks her out - which, though he'd deny it, is every chance he gets. Oh yes, Don Junior studies Daisy a lot; always has - every day since that afternoon she first walked in and asked if the place was still hiring. She'd seen the sign. Don saw how she was happy to flirt with the truckers in her first week or two - at least, she appeared to be - until she realised it didn't improve her tips. No matter how many times the truckers grunted smutty suggestions, openly pinched or patted her rear end or brazenly squeezed a thigh, they'd never leave more than a buck or two. Chump change usually. Truckers are the worst tippers - period. Everyone knows that. And, as if proof were necessary:

'Cheer up, darlin,' winks Billy Bob. 'Here's a tip fer ya.' And he drops an extra dollar onto the table.

'Really, a whole buck? Yer too kind.'

Sarcasm, for some, can be difficult to master - but not for Daisy. She'd mastered it as easy as she had the southern drawl, prevalent in these parts.

'Sorry, darlin, but there is a recession, ya know.'

‘Tell me about it,’ mutters Daisy. Her long painted fingernails scratch up the money then she walks to the FedEx guy’s table. She raises her sunglasses an inch and stares at the money Bubba has laid down: payment in full bar a few cents.

(As a side note: Don Junior had told Daisy she wasn’t to wear sunglasses to work but Donny Senior overruled him; said she could on account of her so-called ‘sensitivity to bright light’. Junior thought that was bullshit. She just thinks she’s better than everyone else, he believed. Pot kettle black.)

‘Keep the change,’ grins Bubba.

Wordlessly, her unseen eyes drilling into Bubba’s skull, Daisy collects the cash.

Then, as Daisy turns to walk away, he grabs a pawful of her backside and squeezes hard. Billy Bob laughs and grunts a hearty ‘Yeah!’ of approval, perhaps now regretting he hadn’t done the same.

But how will she react? Don Junior is still watching closely. She’s supposed to grin and bear it. Them’s the rules. Unwritten but binding nonetheless.

Donny Senior, a much older, skinnier, dustier version of Don Junior, hands Daisy her wages for the week. Paltry but welcome all the same.

Daisy folds the thin envelope and slips it into a back pocket of her cut-off shorts.

There follows an awkward silence in which Donny Senior exchanges a look with Don Junior, peering in from behind the counter, Don’s high forehead sparkling under the kitchen lights.

‘What’s up?’ asks Daisy, though she suspects she knows already.

‘Fraid we’re not gonna need ya back tomorrow, Daisy,’ explains Donny Senior.

'Oh, yeah?' Daisy adjusts her sunglasses. 'So, Monday then?'

Donny forms an uncomfortable grin and says:

'How about we call you when things pick up?'

'Pick up?' glares Daisy.

Donny twists his lip. 'Dagnabbit, girl,' he fusses. 'We got to let ya go.'

'Ya do, huh?'

'Ya leave us no choice,' bleats Donny.

'Ya punched a customer in the face, Daisy,' smirks Junior.

'He grabbed my crotch, Donny!' snaps Daisy.

'I thought it was yer ass,' frowns Donny. He glances at Don.

'Ass first,' hisses Daisy. 'Then crotch. And it was full-on, Donny. I mean the fucker's fingers were—'

'I'm sure, I'm sure,' panders Donny. 'But even so.'

Daisy looks from one to the other and back again.

'Well, fuck me, don't this beat all?'

'And that's another thing,' grouses Donny. 'The cussin - it's just not—'

'Not what?'

'Ladylike,' suggests Junior.

'Oh yeah? Well, fuck you, Donny. And fuck you too, Don, fer takin that fat-ass trucker's side. Ya know I got me a bruise the size of a gator egg on my pussy *and* my behind from that motherfucker.'

Donny Senior flinches at 'motherfucker'. Junior shakes his shiny head. *Trash*, he's thinking. But neither says a word.

Daisy huffs in disbelief.

'We gotcha these here beers,' offers Donny Senior at last. He taps a six pack on the counter. 'As a kinda leavin present.'

'Pfft, *leavin present*,' mocks Daisy.

'Call it one of them there Golden Handshakes.'

Daisy makes a face. 'And you ain't even jokin,' she says.

'Ya don't wan'em?' grills Junior.

‘Fuck yeah, I wan’em.’

Daisy takes possession of the beers and the three stand there, staring at each other, a charged silence hanging like a haze in the heat.

‘Well, I guess that’s that, then,’ sighs Donny eventually.

‘Un-fuckin-believable,’ glowers Daisy.

Then she turns on a heel, heads for the exit, and after a few strides, holds up a middle finger.

‘I know y’all watchin my ass,’ she calls without looking back.

‘Don’t let the door hit it on the way out,’ replies Don Junior.

‘Fuck you, Don,’ cusses Daisy. ‘Guess yer gonna have to git yerselves a new waitress to lust over. Am I right, boys?’

Daisy’s raucous laughter slips away into the shimmering afternoon.

A whiskery, ancient hobo jerkily pushes a loaded cart along a bumpy, dirt sidewalk.

‘They live among us,’ he advises Daisy when she passes. ‘Ya know how?’ he breathes. She stops. ‘Cos they look just like us.’

Daisy throws her hands wide. ‘I’ve known it fer years,’ she agrees.

The hobo waves her in. Daisy steps closer. He checks no-one else is listening - Daisy’s green eyes, green flecked with gold, peer at him over her sunglasses - then he puts red-rimmed, red-veined eyes back on his audience of one.

‘But see, they ain’t like us,’ he hisses quietly. ‘They *ain’t* the same. Not underneath.’

‘Ya got that right, old timer.’

‘They beam down,’ he continues. ‘That’s how they git here.’

Daisy makes a face. ‘That ain’t how we git here.’

'Them there space vee-hickles they got over in Nevada - Area 51?' He coughs, wheezy and hacking, before adding: 'That's just a CIA smokescreen.'

'If you say so.'

'But what do they want, these aliens?' (He pronounces it *ay-lee-yens*.) The hobo hawks on the ground. 'That's the real goddamn question.'

Daisy lowers her voice: 'Don't ya know?'

She leans close, as if about to share a secret, which maybe she is. Her long fingernails grip the cart.

'We feed offa *you guys*,' she informs the hobo.

He leans back, wide-eyed.

'All those missin people everywhere,' poses Daisy, 'where do ya reckon they go?'

The hobo shakes his head then raises wiry eyebrows and points skyward.

'Nope.'

Red eyeballs scan the area: pawn shop, liquor store, laundromat, strip-joint ... a cattle-truck packed with prime beef, standing shoulder to shoulder, crosses the intersection. Then the hobo's attention settles back on Daisy and he shrugs.

Daisy points down.

'They do *not* bury'em!'

'Now who said anythin about buryin?'

'What then?' blinks the hobo. 'Throw'em in a sewer?'

'Somethin like that.'

'Well, shit,' spits the hobo. He nods, slow and thoughtful. 'My friend Larry, he disappeared a while back. I reckon they stored him in an underground bunker somewhere. Am I right?'

'Well, now, I *could* tell ya, old timer ... but then I'd be forced to kill ya.'

But the hobo is no longer listening: he's stepped back his weather-beaten shoes and is studying the earth between himself and Daisy. 'Holy crap, is that ... is that where they sleep when they ain't walkin among us?' He bends over for a closer view. 'Right beneath our feet?'

‘Well, *I* don’t,’ shares Daisy. ‘I live in a trailer.’

The hobo straightens up, suddenly proud. ‘Nuttin wrong with that.’

‘See, I like to hide in plain sight. We all do. And that’s how it’ll be - until, ya know, there’s enough of us.’

The hobo narrows bloodshot eyes.

Daisy raises her sunglasses ... then winks.

‘Oh now, yer just teasin,’ rasps the hobo. ‘But I ain’t no crazy fool,’ he tells her. ‘And one o’ these days—’

A blast from a Colonel Bogey horn and a pick-up truck pulls up sharply at the kerb, young gun at the wheel.

‘Hey, Daisy!’ hollers the kid.

Daisy rolls her eyes behind her sunglasses. ‘Whatcha want, Cody?’ she challenges.

‘We was wonderin ...’

Cody’s long-haired passenger, another college-aged fella, leans forward and presents himself. He makes a peace sign before elbowing Cody. ‘Ask her.’

‘I know, I know,’ bleats Cody.

‘Oh yeah, what was ya wonderin, Cody?’ sighs Daisy; she isn’t in the mood for teenage high-jinx. Not today.

‘Me and Floyd here, well, we was wonderin ... bout a spit-roast?’

‘Why, whatever do you mean, Cody? Ya mean, like a barbecue?’

‘Aw come on now, ya know what we’re askin. It could be a quick one.’

‘Now, what did I tell ya last time you asked?’ says Daisy. ‘I don’t do that kinda thing.’ She elbows the hobo and tells him quietly: ‘Not no more.’

‘Ya sure?’ asks Floyd. ‘We got ten bucks witch yer name on it right here.’

‘I said no, *Floyd*.’

Daisy starts walking.

The pick-up truck keeps pace alongside.

‘What if we made it twenty?’ hollers Floyd.

‘Can’t you boys find no college girls to play with?’

‘Well, yeah,’ laughs Cody, ‘but they ain’t got—ya know—yer experience like.’

Daisy keeps walking.

The pick-up keeps rolling.

‘We got beers in the ice box.’

‘I got my own beers, Cody.’

Daisy turns left, around a corner.

Cody’s pick-up turns too.

An eighteen-wheeler big-rig passes noisily on the other side of the road dragging a cloud of dust behind it.

‘Ya wearin any panties today, Daisy?’ shouts Cody. ‘Under those tight, skinny little shorts of yers; betcha ain’t - hot day like today.’

Up ahead, off to the right, a freight train whistles past.

Daisy turns left again, into the trailer park.

Daisy’s on the bed, feet up, boots kicked to the floor. She swigs from a beer bottle, eyes focused on an old, tiny, portable television set (bent coat-hanger for an aerial) perched on top of the unit which separates the sleeping area from the kitchen section. The fuzzy black-and-white picture, the only current light source, casts a twitching eerie glow that bounces unstable shadows within the space.

Presently, the channel is beaming a low-budget Mexican comedy/soap/drama. The actors’ performances are as unconvincing as the sets, and yet Daisy appears captivated by the show; she laughs along raucously in tandem with the canned studio laughter. Her laugh is surprisingly guttural and deep, not like you’d expect from a slim white woman at all; it’s almost unearthly - ‘ay-lee-yen’ as the hobo might say.

The combined hilarity, hers and the audience-machine’s, echoes loudly within the trailer; a trailer devoid, it seems, of most of the usual, basic human comforts and conveniences. There is a sink, but no sign of

cutlery or dishes; there are curtains (purple, currently drawn), but no cushions and not a single lamp - oh, and no carpet, only Linoleum.

A Mexican woman is shouting dramatically, hysterically, in Spanish, at a man she has just caught kissing some other woman. Her scolding rant bellows for an age. Then, after a final slap to the cheek, the harangued man is allowed to respond.

‘Espera, ella es tu hermana?’ he asks.

‘Si!’ shrieks the woman. ‘Ella es mi hermana!’

‘Estas casado?’ shrieks the sister. She too slaps the poor schmuck’s face. ‘A mi hermana!’

The television emits chuckles and chortles. Daisy snorts and convulses. ‘Mi hermana,’ she parrots. But then the screen suddenly fizzes, fizzes, and dies.

‘Motherfucker!’ bleats Daisy.

Sitting in the quiet darkness, Daisy stares at the blank screen. She sniffs the smoke now permeating the trailer, sighs deeply, and then drains the last of her beer.

Eventually, Daisy turns her head and stares at the wardrobe. Though it’s pitch dark, she can see the few clothes hanging inside through the gap in the slightly open door. And one in particular: a blue - *black* to our eyes - low cut top. She eyeballs it intensely, without looking away, as if she has a difficult decision to make.

Thank you for reading the sample

BLOWN appears in

**Gruesome Grotesques Vol. 2 Vampires, Werewolves,
and Other Beautiful Monsters**

- available on Amazon in print and eBook