



*I love Do the Blind Dream?—a wonderful and delightful piece that tastes of Buñuel and Cocteau.*

—PEDRO ALMODÓVAR

# DO THE BLIND DREAM?

*new novellas and stories*

BARRY GIFFORD







*I know Do the Blind Dream?—a wonderful and delightful piece that tastes of Bunuel and Cocteau.*

—PEDRO ALMODOVAR

# DO THE BLIND DREAM?

*new novellas and stories*

BARRY GIFFORD



# Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Do the Blind Dream?](#)

[1](#)  
[2](#)  
[3](#)  
[4](#)  
[5](#)  
[6](#)  
[7](#)

[Ball Lightning](#)

[1](#)  
[2](#)  
[3](#)  
[4](#)

[The Ciné](#)

[The Lost Tribe](#)

[Johnny Across](#)

[Forever After](#)

[Rosa Blanca](#)

[African Adventure Story](#)

[Havana Moon](#)

[Prelude](#)

[1](#)  
[2](#)

[3](#)  
[4](#)  
[5](#)  
[6](#)  
[7](#)  
[8](#)  
[9](#)  
[10](#)  
[11](#)  
[12](#)  
[13](#)  
[14](#)  
[15](#)  
[16](#)  
[17](#)  
[18](#)  
[19](#)  
[20](#)  
[21](#)  
[22](#)  
[23](#)  
[24](#)  
[25](#)  
[26](#)  
[27](#)  
[28](#)  
[29](#)  
[30](#)  
[31](#)  
[32](#)  
[33](#)  
[34](#)  
[35](#)  
[36](#)  
[37](#)  
[38](#)  
[39](#)  
[40](#)  
[41](#)  
[42](#)  
[43](#)  
[44](#)  
[45](#)  
[46](#)  
[47](#)  
[48](#)

[49](#)  
[50](#)  
[51](#)  
[52](#)  
[53](#)  
[54](#)  
[55](#)  
[56](#)

[Holiday from Women](#)

[Life Is Like This Sometimes](#)

[A Day's Worth of Beauty](#)

[The Peterson Fire](#)

[Books by Barry Gifford](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

# Do the Blind Dream?

NEW NOVELLAS AND STORIES

BARRY GIFFORD

SEVEN STORIES PRESS

New York • London • Toronto • Melbourne



For Dan



## Acknowledgments

“The Ciné” originally appeared in the magazine *Post Road* (New York, 2002). The first section of “Ball Lightning” originally appeared, in different form, in the novel *Wyoming* (New York, 2000). This version of “Ball Lightning” appeared in the magazine *First Intensity* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003). “Life Is Like This Sometimes” originally appeared in the magazine *Oyster Boy Review* (San Francisco, 2003). “Rosa Blanca” originally appeared in the magazine *Film Comment* (New York, 2003).

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Daniel Schmid for his editorial expertise and participation in the composition of the story “Havana Moon.”

# *Do the Blind Dream?*



## A NOVELLA

To that girl leaning  
out the window, waving

“A kiss, a bite . . . one who truly loves with all her heart can easily mistake them.”

—Heinrich von Kleist, *Penthesilea*

## 1

*It Was late afternoon* in the bedroom of a house in Fùlmine, a small town close to the sea in the south of Italy. Punctuated by occasional thunder and lightning, rain punished the walls and pounded against a high window. The room was sparsely furnished: a bed, a dresser and a mirror. On the wall over the bed hung a crucifix. Fresh yellow and blue flowers stood stiffly in a vase on the dresser.

In the center of the room rested an open coffin in which lay the body of Beatrice, a woman seventy-six years old at the time of her death the day before. Her face, while not serene, was remarkably free of lines and wrinkles. Next to the coffin, seated in chairs, were two of the deceased woman’s three children, Sandra and Aldo, who was barely a year older than his sister. Both of them were distraught, crying or between bouts of crying.

“Is Cara coming?” Sandra asked.

“Aunt Rosa spoke to her. She was filming in Spain. She’ll be here before they close the coffin.”

“Is Buddy with her?”

“Yes,” said Aldo.

“Good. What time is that?”

“She had to wait until this morning to get a plane to Madrid from somewhere in the North. Then they fly from Madrid to Rome. From there they’ll come by car.”

“I meant,” Sandra said, “what time do they close the coffin?”

“At six. Then we go to the church.”

Sandra looked at her watch.

“It’s only four-thirty. It’ll destroy Cara if she’s too late to see Mamma one last time.”

“How long have Cara and Buddy been together?” Aldo asked.

“Two or three months, I think.”

Aldo stood up and took one of his mother’s hands in his own. He bent down and kissed her face, then her ringless hand before collapsing onto her body.

“Mamma! Mamma!” he cried.

Sandra rose and put an arm around her brother, hugging him. After a few moments he released his mother’s hand and sat down again, as did Sandra.

“Is Papa going to come?” Aldo asked.

“He’d better not try.”

“Rosa would kill him.”

“I’ll kill him.”

Aldo wiped tears from his cheeks and eyes.

“You know,” he said, “he came to see Mamma a couple of weeks ago.”

“No, I didn’t. Why? He hadn’t seen her in years.”

“Mamma asked to see him.”

“Asked? She couldn’t ask.”

A large clap of thunder rocked the house, rattling the bedroom window.

“She spoke his name, over and over,” said Aldo. “Rosa didn’t want to, but she telephoned him and he came. Papa sat with Mamma for three hours. He sang their old songs, recited her favorite poems. I was here.”

“Did she recognize him?”

“I think Mamma always knew what was happening. She was a prisoner inside her mind. I could see it in her eyes, behind her eyes.”

“No,” said Sandra, “I don’t believe it. She was lost a long time ago. Fifteen years—twelve, at least.”

“Cara told me Mamma spoke to Buddy.”

“To Buddy? When was this?”

“It’s true—the last time she visited, three weeks ago, Cara said she was sitting with Mamma on the couch, holding her, stroking her hair. Buddy was sitting in a chair across from Mamma, or standing, I don’t know. All of a sudden, Mama looked directly at Buddy and said, ‘Beautiful.’ She turned and looked at Cara, then back at Buddy, and

Mamma said to him, 'Poor guy.' Then she faded away again."

"No! That's fantastic!"

Aldo shook his head.

"Cara couldn't believe it, either. She said Buddy joked that Mamma felt sorry for him, and despite the sickness she had to warn him, to let him know she knew how difficult life would be for him with Cara."

"Unbelievable."

"Buddy met Papa, too, around the same time. Papa asked him how many children Buddy had, and Buddy told him two."

"Buddy has two children?"

"Apparently. Anyway, Papa said he had six, and Buddy said, 'But I'm not finished yet.' Buddy told me that Papa, eighty years old, sick, barely able to stand by himself, got a dark look in his eyes and said, 'I'm not, either.'"

Sandra grunted.

"He's sick, all right. He's always been sick."

Tears spilled suddenly from her eyes. Annoyed, she fished around in her pockets, found a fresh tissue, and quickly wiped them away.

"Papa had better not try to come," she said.

"He won't. Rosa hates him, and as long as you're here he knows he's not welcome."

Ignazio, Sandra's husband, and Giuliana, Aldo's wife, entered the bedroom and sat down next to their respective spouses.

"I mean it!" Sandra said. "I won't let that monster near Mamma."

"Papa's not a monster," said Aldo.

"You don't know him."

"He's my father, too. What do you mean, I don't know him?"

"You didn't know he had another family! A wife and a child."

Aldo shook his head.

"Nobody knew, not Mamma . . ."

"Of course, not Mamma!" Sandra shouted. "Just like she didn't know about all of his other women."

"Pretended not to know."

"He fucked every girl or woman he met, or tried to. Mamma couldn't keep a maid or a girl to help with us. He even did it with Gabriella."

Aldo stared at Sandra.

"How do you know this? Gabriella moved to Argentina thirty years ago."

“Why do you suppose Mamma would never mention the name of her only sister?”

“You know what happened. When Gabriella was twenty-five she was misdiagnosed with a blood disease and told she had only a short time to live, two or three years; so she went out and slept with every man in town. By the time she found out she wasn’t going to die she’d disgraced herself in Fùlmine. That’s why she had to marry a foreigner, because nobody here would have her.”

Sandra laughed.

“Don’t be a fool, Aldo. Cara and I know the truth.”

“Where is Cara?” Ignazio asked.

“She’s coming,” said Aldo. “She and Buddy should be here any minute.”

“Do they know the coffin will be sealed at six?” asked Sandra.

“They know.”

Noises came from the other side of the apartment. They heard the doorbell ring, then the front door open and close, followed by a rush of voices. Rosa, who had been Beatrice’s caregiver, and in whose apartment she had lived the last five years of her life, rushed into the bedroom.

“It’s Cara,” she said.

Immediately behind Rosa came Cara, followed by Buddy, her American boyfriend. Cara’s face was a mess from crying, but her distress could not disguise her unique beauty. Cara went straight to the coffin and threw herself on Beatrice, sobbing loudly. Sandra and Aldo caressed and held her as Buddy stood in the doorway, watching.

“Mamma! Mamma!” Cara screamed. “No! No! Mamma!”

Sandra, Aldo and Giuliana’s attempts to comfort Cara were futile. She was clearly inconsolable.

“I should have been here!”

“Aldo was with her,” said Sandra, “and Rosa.”

“She died in my arms,” said Aldo.

“Oh, Mamma!” Cara cried.

Ignazio gently guided Cara to a chair. She allowed him to briefly embrace her. The others acknowledged Buddy’s presence with embraces, kisses on the cheeks, handshakes.

“Thank goodness you’re here, Buddy,” said Sandra.

“Cara told me Beatrice stopped eating two days ago.”

“She gave up before the Alzheimer’s. When she found out about Donatella and little Silvio. He made her sick.”

Aldo shook his head.

“Papa didn’t cause the disease,” he said.

“How do you know?” said Sandra. “She might have resisted it longer.”

“Alzheimer’s doesn’t work that way.”

“Maybe it wasn’t even Alzheimer’s,” Sandra said. “She was never tested.”

Ignazio came over to Buddy.

“It must have been a difficult time for you with Cara when Aldo called.”

Buddy nodded.

“She knew it was coming, but she took it hard. Not ever having a chance to hear Beatrice tell her she loved her was devastating.”

Aldo, hearing this, came over.

“My mother was not herself for so many years.”

“I mean even before the Alzheimer’s affected her,” said Buddy. “Cara told me Beatrice never, or rarely, showed her any real affection.”

“The situation was difficult, certainly,” said Aldo.

Rosa came over to Buddy and took his hand.

“It’s so good you’re here,” she said to him. “Without you, I don’t know how Cara could stand it.”

“I don’t want to intrude. Cara insisted that I come.”

“She’d be devastated if you hadn’t. I could see when you were here before how quickly and deeply Cara had become attached to you. She believes in you, Buddy, don’t disappoint her.”

“I’ll do my best, Rosa. But you know, it works both ways.”

“Cara is very nervous,” said Rosa, “but she’s a good girl. And she loves you.”

Sandra was sitting next to Cara, holding her younger sister close. Cara struggled to compose herself.

“I never sleep, Sandra. I think I won’t be able to really rest until I’m dead, too.”

“It’s Papa’s fault, all of it. If I ever see him again, I’m going to put his eyes out.”

Cara pulled away, sat up and fixed the clips in her hair.

“You’ll make me crazy, Sandra. Don’t say that! In front of Mamma.”

“He’s a devil,” said Sandra. “Admit it and you’ll be able to sleep.”

“Sandra, no. He was the one who loved me, not Mamma. When I was three years old one day Mamma was angry at me for something—I wouldn’t eat, probably—and Papa came home. She told him what a bad girl I was, and he picked me up and held me and told me that before I was born I’d been an angel. He caressed my back and shoulders and said, ‘Cara, my little angel, here’s where your wings used to be.’ It’s

why I can forgive him, for everything.”

“Don’t be stupid, Cara. He’s insane.”

Cara stood up.

“Not now, Sandra, don’t! Not with Mamma like this.”

Sandra shrugged her shoulders.

“She can’t hear us.”

“How do you know she can’t? Nobody knows anything about the dead, not even if they’re really dead.”

“Who’s the crazy one?”

“Everybody in this family’s crazy, Sandra. Don’t you see it?”

“How does Buddy put up with you?”

“Don’t talk about Buddy! He’s not your man.”

Buddy and Aldo looked at Cara and Sandra, then resumed talking quietly with Ignazio.

Cara stood up and went over to the coffin. Giuliana guided a chair under her and Cara sat down and stroked Beatrice’s hands. Sandra got up and walked out of the room. Ignazio followed her.

Two men from the funeral home entered the bedroom, dressed in dark suits. One of them was carrying a hammer and a small paper bag, both of which he placed on the bureau.

“In a few minutes we’ll seal the coffin,” he said.

Cara exploded in tears. Aldo rushed over and held her.

“Not yet, not yet,” said the man from the funeral home. “We can wait a little longer.”

He and his companion left the bedroom.

“Remember when you were a kid,” Aldo said to Cara, “and I sold you to my friends? I was twelve or thirteen.”

“Sold me?”

Aldo grinned.

“I was so ashamed later. That’s why I gave you the money.”

“I don’t think . . .”

“You were seven. I made you pull up your dress and pull down your pants. They wanted to see a girl’s pussy. None of us had seen one except in a picture in a magazine. I told you to do it and you did. You don’t remember? ”

“Not really, no.”

“My friends were very disappointed because you didn’t have any hair down there. They said it wasn’t a real pussy.”

Cara and Aldo laughed together. He took out a handkerchief and dried her tears.

“A couple of the boys asked for their money back,” he said, “but I refused. They got angry but I was bigger than they were. Nobody wanted to fight me.”

Cara kissed Aldo on the cheek and he held her close.

“Do you think Mamma knows we’re here?” Cara asked.

“I knew this would be tough, Cara, but it’s even tougher than I thought.”

Beatrice sat up in her coffin. She looked around at the people in the room, her gaze lingering for several long seconds on each person, none of whom noticed her. The last person she fixed on was Cara. Then she spoke.

“So many tears wasted on the dead. But who am I to criticize? How many thousands of times did I want to cry while I was captive in my own body? And now that I’ve been released I have even less freedom. No freedom at all, in fact. Being dead is not like the nuns and priests tell you. But they’re no worse than anyone else, and no worse off. If I could help my children, I would. Poor babies. The longer they live the more they’ll suffer. They’re only beginning to understand.”

The two men from the funeral home entered again. One of them picked up the coffin lid which had been leaning against one wall. The other picked up the hammer and shook several nails from the paper bag.

“It’s time,” he said to Aldo and Cara.

Cara continued crying but stood and caressed her mother, who remained sitting up, her eyes wide open. Aldo did the same. As they were doing this, Sandra came in, walked over to the coffin and kissed Beatrice. The three of them then walked out of the room, accompanied by Buddy and Giuliana.

One of the funeral men placed a hand on Beatrice’s right shoulder. She patted it with her own hand.

“I know, I know,” she said, “I heard him. I won’t give you a hard time.”

Rosa walked into the bedroom smoking a cigarette. She stopped and stared at Beatrice.

“Rosa, give me a drag, will you?”

Rosa walked over and handed her cigarette to Beatrice. Beatrice puffed on it, inhaled deeply, then exhaled. She handed the cigarette back to Rosa.

“Thanks,” Beatrice said.

Rosa kissed her, then stood back a little to allow the men from the funeral home to do their work. She wiped the tears from her face. Beatrice lay back down in the coffin. One of the men placed the coffin lid over her, and then the other nailed it shut.

## 2

*It Was early evening.* The coffin containing Beatrice's corpse was carried out the door of the house by the two men from the funeral home, Aldo, Ignazio and Buddy, and loaded into the back of a black hearse. The two funeral workers got into the car and proceeded very slowly toward the church as the family followed behind, walking in the middle of the street. A light but persistent rain fell. Neighbors and passersby observed the procession, most crossing themselves as it went by. Cara and Aldo walked directly behind the hearse, followed by Sandra with Buddy, then Ignazio with Giuliana and Rosa.

"My mother was very beautiful once," said Sandra. "Did you know that? Did Cara ever show you photographs of Beatrice as a young woman?"

"A few, yes," Buddy said. "She was striking."

"You can't imagine how that man tortured her. If she hadn't been a Catholic, I'm certain she would have committed suicide."

"You mean Massimo?"

"The world would have been better off had my father never been born."

"Then I wouldn't have you," said Ignazio.

"You'd be better off, too," Sandra said to him. "Don't be a hypocrite. You've said it yourself many times."

"Stop this!" Aldo said. "With Mamma in her coffin, can't you quit bitching?"

Giuliana patted her husband's arm.

"Everybody's upset, Aldo. It's difficult for us all."

"Think of how Beatrice is on her way to heaven now," said Rosa. "She's with the saints." Rosa crossed herself.

Beatrice appeared, trailing the others. She stopped in the street as a man came walking toward her.

"Do you have a cigarette?" Beatrice asked him.

The man stopped, pulled a pack of cigarettes from one of his pockets, shook one out and gave it to her. He took out a lighter and lit the cigarette for Beatrice, who inhaled deeply.

"Thank you," she said. "You never know when it might be the last one."

"I always smoke each cigarette as if it were," he answered. "That way I enjoy it even more."

The man put the pack of cigarettes and his lighter back into his pocket, nodded politely, and walked on. Beatrice stood there, smoking.

"Massimo, my husband," she said, "was impotent when we were married. He told

me he'd never been able to have proper relations with a woman. His sister, Claudia, ruined him, he said. Claudia the famous painter, seven years older than Massimo. She made him show her his cock when he was ten or eleven years old, and told him he would never be able to satisfy a woman, not with such a small penis. For some reason, he believed her.

“She was a terrible woman, really terrible. Her first husband, a Spanish writer, killed himself after four years with Claudia. Hanged himself from a chandelier in their hotel room in Barcelona. Her second husband, Gatti, the cellist, could get an erection only by watching Claudia make love with another man. She told me.

“Claudia made Massimo masturbate in front of her and as soon as his little cock got hard she would suck it until he came in her mouth. This began when he was twelve. She told him he would probably be a homosexual, fit only to suck other men's cocks—as if this were such a terrible thing. Even after she had married Javier, Claudia continued this horrible game with Massimo. Javier must have discovered it. Perhaps he didn't, I'm not certain. God only knows how Claudia chose to torture him. Once she had a man in her thrall the only way out for him was suicide, a mortal sin. This way Claudia would take not only their lives but their souls, too. Gatti shot himself one night while she had two men at the same time, sucking one while the other fucked her in the ass. This was the activity she preferred. Massimo said he watched Claudia do it when he was sixteen.

“The public loved her, of course. Claudia's art was revered around the world by the time she was thirty. She was like a movie star. She looked like one, with long wavy, blue-black hair, an enormous mouth and a great figure; tits not too big, prominent ass, nice legs. Her nose was too big, but it made her bold, daring anyone to criticize her, as if she were always ready to attack, which she was. A phenomenon. The tragic deaths of her husbands created sympathy for her from the people. There was no cruelty in her paintings, only tenderness, a quality she could never convey in real life. Tenderness in her extraordinary use of light, Tuscan light, the light she captured from her childhood.

“It took almost one year for Massimo and I to consummate our marriage. He claimed it was a miracle. Only after praying to Saint Anthony could he perform properly. Anthony, the patron saint of lovers. In a way, I wish he had remained impotent, because after this Massimo had no self-control when it came to sex, no judgment. He wanted to make love all the time, but not just to me, to every woman or girl who would have him. Massimo must even have slept with many of his female students at the college. And then there was Donatella, his mistress. Making up for lost time, I guess, and to take his revenge in his way on Claudia—except I was the one who suffered.

“But he never could really have his revenge on her, this I know. She told me that he tried to make love to her once, years later, while she was married to Gatti. He bragged to his sister about his many conquests, telling her how wrong she'd been, what a masterful seducer and cocks-man he had become despite her deviltry. Show me, Claudia demanded, challenging him. She undressed, lay down in front of him and spread her legs. He tried, she told me, but he couldn't. Massimo's cock was dead in her presence. No matter what he did, he couldn't get an erection. She shoved her big

ass in his face and laughed at him. He beat her then, Claudia said, beat her badly, until she bled. Called her a witch. When she didn't try to stop him, Massimo cried, then begged her forgiveness. Can you imagine?

"It was the last time they saw each other. She and Gatti moved to New York soon thereafter, and she never returned to Italy. Claudia was fond of saying in interviews that Italian society was burned out, she was happier in the new world. I wouldn't know about any of this, since I never traveled out of the country. Claudia died ten years ago, of breast cancer.

"Oh, well, I suppose I shouldn't keep them waiting."

Beatrice took a final puff on her cigarette, dropped it, stepped on the butt, and began walking in the same direction as the funeral procession.

### 3

*Seated in the first pew* of the church were the family: Cara, Aldo, Sandra, Ignazio, Giuliana, Rosa and Buddy. Beatrice was seated in the row behind the family, at the end of the pew. The closed coffin was at the front of the church, on a pedestal, strewn with floral bouquets. Next to it was a podium. Friends and relations of the family were seated throughout the church. The mourners sat quietly, a few whispering to each other. A priest entered from a door to one side of the coffin, walked to the podium and stood behind it. Before speaking, he stared—glared—at the son and daughters of the dead woman seated in the front row.

"Beatrice would be astonished to see her children here today," he said. "It took her death to bring them into God's home. It took her death. And this woman, we are certain, having made her peace with Our Father, is safe in Heaven now."

There was movement at the back of the church. A woman approximately Beatrice's age entered, dressed eccentrically: half-formal, half-slovenly, a large, feathered hat. She seemed oblivious to the somber mood of the proceedings, chatting gaily to those seated in aisle seats as she made her way toward the front of the church. It was Camilla, Beatrice's cousin. She shook several hands during her procession. When she came to Beatrice, Camilla looked at her curiously, as if she could not quite place the dead woman, who nodded and smiled courteously to Camilla before returning her attention to the priest. Camilla took a seat.

"Safe and free," declared the priest, "the kind and gentle Beatrice. It is her children who have failed to make their peace with Him. To them, I say, better to go to your homes after apologizing to your sainted mother, and kill yourselves. Not being Catholic is your greatest sin—suicide, in this case, is the only honorable act left to you."

Aldo stood up and shook his fist at the priest.

"How dare you speak this way over the dead body of our mother?!" he shouted. "I'll