



"Is it- how's my hair look? We gotta-"

"Rollin' in five, four..."

"God *fucking*- you know what? Forget it! Next time, we'll-"

"Rolling!"

In an instant, the irascible vulture transformed his snarl into a saccharine grin. "Hi, and welcome back to another episode of *Where'd They End Up?* here on DJTV! I'm your host, Victor Avoltoio, and today we're gonna be dropping in on some of yesteryear's biggest pop hits! We'll meet our first guest right after the break!"

Vic kept his smile frozen in place until one of the crew members yelled "Cut!" Just like that, the temper he kept bottled up while filming immediately began to flow again. "Now listen here, you little cocksucking weasel-"

The makeup artist butted in with, "I'm a stoat, you-"

"*I DON'T GIVE A FUCK!* When it's time for me to go on, I need to look fucking *pristine* for the camera. Hair, makeup, clothes, everything! That's *your* job to do in between takes! And if you can't do that *one* simple task, the only job you'll get decorating faces is at kids' birthday parties! *Capisce?*" The stoat took a deep breath and nodded in reply. "Good. Now let's move it, people, we've got three minutes to get around the block!"

The crew members scrambled to gather all their gear before following after Vic, who was blithely strutting ahead of them. When they rounded the block, they immediately set their gear back up, and the makeup artist scrambled to fix Vic's hair.

"That's more like it. Seems like I won't be getting you fired *just* yet."

"Rolling in five, four..."

The red light on the side of the camera began to blink, and Vic plastered the smile back on his face. "And welcome back! If you watched our recent documentary *Pops to Flops*, our first star today will

be very fresh in your memory! Those of us who lived through the 90s would know her for hits like 'Pack it Up,' though these days she's known for packing it away instead! As for the rest of you, this clip should get you caught up."

As the crew relocated again, their headphones blared with the sound of a pre-recorded segment of the has-been's ups and downs, with a lot more focus on the latter.

A Los Angeles native, Dahlia Darwin was a fixture on Hollywood stages since the late 1980s. But her big break came in 1993, when her first studio album under the stage name "Sprinkles" was met with critical and popular acclaim. She rode a wave to the top over the next two years and three albums, with her 1995 album Make My Night going platinum, as did her singles "Break Thru 2 U" and "Pack It Up." The latter even got nominated for best female pop single at the '96 Grammys.

The audio suddenly shifted from the narrator's voice to a clip of Dahlia's song:

*"Change myself to fit your fantasies
Is that what you think love is about?
If it is, grab your bag, pack it up...
And get out!"*

The narrator's voice returned, accompanied by a whirlwind of soundbites from newscasters: *She didn't know it then, but that was her peak. After poor sales on her album Blowin' It Up and the disastrous '97 "Pack It Up" tour, Dahlia's career took a turn for the worse.*

*"This just in, word that pop star Sprinkles..."
"...collapsed on stage in London and was rushed to..."
"...cocaine in the bloodstream, and more than three times..."
"...agreed to a plea bargain. She'll be spending the next..."
"...left rehab this morning, to the delight of fans all over..."
"...declined to renew her contract, citing 'creative differences.'"
"Pop star Sprinkles, now going by her birth name..."
"...self-producing all future songs under 'Bear It All Records.'"*

The soundbites continued, but they adopted a more scornful and sensationalist tune. A keen-eared listener could even pick out some comments from Vic in the mix.

*"Dahlia Darwin, in her first concert in over a year..."
"...enjoyed her time out of the spotlight, no doubt!"
"Fans are starting to ask, is that a baby bump, or..."
"...at the Orange County Chili Cookoff, but NOT on stage..."
"From 'Pack It Up' to packin' it away, am I right?"
"...postponed all future in-person concerts indefinitely..."
"Dahlia Darwin's former dietician 'bears' it all in an exclusive..."
"C'mon, isn't 'eating herself to death' a bit dramatic?"
"In her first music video in nearly a decade..."
"...only ever seen from the shoulders up, but her cheeks..."
"...just how big is Dahlia Darwin now?"*

The live feed of Vic returned, this time with the camera mounted on the shoulder of some poor overworked gecko.

"Now that we're filled in on Dahlia, let's go see how Dahlia's filling up!" He started a brisk walk, smirking as he watched the cameraman struggle to keep pace. "Now if there's one place where you can spot Dahlia Darwin these days, it's here, at Donut You Know in the San Fernando Valley! Dahlia's a huge fan of this place, and the owner's a huge fan of her, to the point of naming one of his donuts after her!"

The narrator's voice jumped back in, as pictures of the fried, sugar-coated monstrosity flashed across viewers' screens: *The "Sprinkles Special" is a custom-made, extra-large donut that's nearly five inches wide, with a chocolate and raspberry jam filling. It's topped with strawberry icing, a sugar glaze drizzle, and—of course—plenty of rainbow sprinkles.* If the cameras were still rolling on Vic, viewers would see the visible disgust on his face as the calorie-packed toppings were listed.

At last, they came in sight of the donut shop, which was still swarming with customers in the waning hours of the lunch rush. It being two o'clock on a weekday, there were few customers who actually had the time to sit down and enjoy their meals. All the white-painted wrought iron tables outside were left empty, save one.

At first glance, passersby would be forgiven for mistaking the lone diner for a rather short and furry elephant or hippo, instead of an incredibly rotund koala. She needed two chairs to support her bulk, the velvet-clad blubber of her ass oozing through gaps in the ironwork or spilling over the sides. Her pink tracksuit clung to her legs like the skins of overstuffed sausages, topped by love handles that looked like she was wearing a semi truck tire as a hula hoop. A massive belly filled the entirety of her lap, with its uppermost roll resting on top the table. While her breasts would've seemed gargantuan on a slimmer woman, they were constrained by a white tube top and seemed to be dwarfed by even her pillowy arms.

Even if one were familiar with Dahlia Darwin from her pop star days, they would scarcely recognize her now. The decades (and donuts) had done their damage, and her lower face was buried beneath fleshy cheeks, jiggling jowls, and a second chin. The corners of her mouth and eyes were ringed with wrinkles, which not even her bright makeup could fully distract from. Even her famed platinum blonde hair had strands of grey and white intertwined, concentrated in the roots and slowly seeping outward. Her piggish appearance was further accentuated by the crumbs and sprinkles scattered on her face, chest, and belly as she frenziedly devoured a box of donuts.

Vic moved closer to his target, a predatory smile on his face. When Dahlia *did* notice him, her expression subtly steeled as she braced for impact.

"Dahlia Darwin... is that *you*?!" Vic asked, faux surprise in his voice. "Vic Avoltoio, DJTV, pleasure to meet you!"

"Uh. Huh-uh, Vuh. *gulp* Hello, Vic," she replied, her tone as deadpan as possible. "To what do I owe

this pleasure? I didn't know DJTV let their people have lunch breaks this long."

Vic let out a rehearsed chuckle before continuing, "No, I was just in the neighborhood and thought we'd catch up, go down memory lane."

Dahlia raised an eyebrow incredulously.

"How forgetful of me, you probably don't remember!" Vic playfully slapped his forehead. "I interviewed you back after you released *Blowin' It Up* for KGLB in San Bernadino."

"Oh, I *do* remember! You were that scrawny DJ with the chicken legs! So, what have you got in there now? Silicone? Saline? Synthol?" she asked as she glanced at his almost suspiciously buff calf muscles.

Fury seemed to briefly flash in Vic's eyes, but soon his plastered-on joviality returned. "Nope, just good ol' fashioned cardio! Mind if I take a- sorry, just realized you've taken up both chairs!"

"Mmh."

"Wow, you're sure a fan of those donuts, aren't you, Dahlia?" Vic wasn't wrong; eight of the dozen Sprinkles Special donuts were missing from the box on Dahlia's table, and a ninth was about to join them. "You know how it goes, you are what you eat! And from looking at that," he pointed at her bulging stomach, "you're living up to it!"

Dahlia hardly needed a moment to think before retorting. "I dunno, you've been sucking out souls for years, but you're still as much of a ghoulish as ever."

"Do you find it ironic that you hit it big with 'Pack It Up,' but now you're known for packing it away?"

"Never heard you use *that* joke on air before," Dahlia replied as she popped the last bite of donut number nine in her mouth and licked her fingers.

Vic shrugged in an attempt to appear casual, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Speaking of broke, is it true that you've been having financial problems lately? Royalty disputes, frivolous shopping sprees, ballooning food budget-"

"Yeah, I tried to find someone with experience in handling affairs for stars losing all their money, but all I could find was your divorce lawyer." Dahlia flashed a peppy smile and took a bite out of another donut.

"Do you consider yourself a spiritual person, Dahlia?" Vic asked, his voice dripping with passive-aggressive venom. "Do you believe in prophecy, clairvoyance, visions of the future? Because recording an album called 'Blowin' It Up' before blowing up yourself is *awfully* prophetic, don'tcha think?"

"*gasp* How did you know?!" Dahlia asked with mock-surprise, squishing her hands into her doughy cheeks. "I know this sounds crazy, but... sometimes, my belly tells me the *future*!"

"Like when your next mealtime's gonna be?" Vic muttered under his breath.

"No really, I mean it!" She popped the last of her donut in her mouth and squeezed her love handles, jiggling her belly like it was a Magic 8-Ball made of pudding. After a few moments, a chorus of gurgles erupted from it, and she leaned her head down. She held an ear to her belly and squinted her eyes, as if trying to decipher a message hidden in the groans. The camera crew, of course, focused on her with undivided attention.

At last, she brought herself upright again, and stared at Vic with shock and horror. "It... it said something about *you!*"

Vic decided to humor her and replied, "What did it tell you about me?"

"It said... *it said...*" she strained, trying to wrack her memories for the omen, "*Beware the HR department, Victor, the sexual harassment suits are coming! OoooooOOOOOO...*" she recited in her best spooky voice as she wagged her fingers at him.

"You know what?" Vic threw his hands up in frustration. "I don't have to take this kind of shit! I tried to interview you in good faith, and you act like a clown-"

"Hard not to when you bring the circus to me. Besides, we'd make a killing at a freak show together! Me, the world's biggest non-hibernating bear," Dahlia hefted her belly's top roll, "and you, Niptucko the Plastic Wonder!"

One of the veins on Vic's forehead seemed like it was about to pop. "It's real rich for someone like *you* to be criticizing me!"

Dahlia finished scarfing down another donut and raised an unamused eyebrow. "And what exactly *is* 'someone like me?'"

"I- er- you- *grrrrrrRRRRRAAAHHH!* You don't know what you are? Fine! I'll *TELL* you what you are! You couldn't hack it in the big leagues, so you had a temper tantrum, stormed off, and spent the last twenty years drowning your sorrows in ice cream and donuts like a goddamned *PIG!*"

"Oh, *do* go on," Dahlia said nonchalantly as she munched on another donut.

"And that's the thing! You're so burnt out that you can't even *register* how pathetic you are right now!" Vic was practically screaming now, drawing the eyes of patrons and passersby alike. "You're built like a garbage bag, not to mention how you eat like one, you dress like you ate a trophy wife and stole her clothes, you went from singing chintzy corporate bubblegum pop to singing pretentious overwrought indie pop, and the only way you get on TV is when people are talking about how much of a has-been you are!" He leaned right in Dahlia's face, jabbing his pointer finger into her flabby chest to drive the point home. "You know what you are? A failure. A *fat, bloated, washed-up, fucking FAILURE!*"

His energy thoroughly spent, Vic leaned back and sat on the edge of the table. Dahlia remained unperturbed, calmly swallowing the last of her donut and dusting off her face with a napkin. With an annoying **cr-e-e-e-a-a-k**, she scooted her two chairs back and stood upright, sending an avalanche of crumbs down the sides of her belly. There was a second box of Sprinkles Surprise donuts on the ground next to her, which she bent down and picked up (with some effort).

Dahlia seemed as if she was going to walk away, but turned to face Vic. "So what if I'm a has-been?" she asked calmly and politely. "So what if everyone thinks my music's shit? So what if my clothes are tacky? So what if I'm a landwhale who's quadrupled in size? So what if I eat donuts for lunch? I do all this—wear what I want, sing what I want, eat what I want—because it makes *me* feel good. I do it for my sake, no one else's. None of your shit-talking will ever change that about me. And I bet that fact just *infuriates* you."

Vic opened his mouth to say something, but Dahlia opened her mouth and let out a loud **BUUUURP** right in his face. "Apologies," she said with mock embarrassment, "I can't help it, being a goddamned pig and all."

Leaving Vic to gag and fan the scent of half-digested donuts away from his face, Dahlia waddled away toward the row of parked cars in front of the donut shop. She climbed inside a bulky white SUV with the license plate 'PAKITUP,' whose suspension visibly sat a bit lower once she was inside. With a final wave and a kiss blown to the camera, she backed up and drove out onto the streets of Los Angeles.

"So, what should we-"

"Just cut the fuckin' feed."