

After an editor held his short story a year, coaxed two re-writes, then rejected it with a form letter, he raved "I oughta buy a .45, fly to Manhattan, walk in her office, and decorate it with what passes for her brain." But when, years later, she called to offer him a big advance for his next book, he told his friends, "Aw, screw the bitch," and signed.

"Faced with a test of principle," he said, "I sink to the occasion every time."

— Charles Webb

Los Angeles CA

UNTITLED

"You're right my dear," Carmen said, "I was once a model." She patted her gray curls with the tips of her mottled but still slender fingers. "The reason you think so is because of the way I carry myself. You probably noticed how I hold my knees together and turn my ankles out ever so slightly. And the way I gesture with my hands gracefully like this."

"You act like a model on television," said Betty.

"You see, the reason I carry myself this way so...naturally...is because I'm from Royalty." Carmen said. "Portuguese Royalty."

"Gee," said Betty. She'd been a nurse's aide for six months at Hilldale Nursing Home, but she'd never before met anyone Royal.

"It's my father's family. He's the one from Royalty. His family is one of THE Portuguese families." Carmen surveyed her violet nail polish. "Everyone said I resembled my father's family. I don't delude myself; I know I'm not beautiful. But there was always something about me, something...aristocratic, maybe. Even today they're still after me to model."

"Oh, you are beautiful. Especially for your age," Betty said, as she helped Carmen from her wheelchair onto her bed.

"Beauty is more — much more — than looks," Carmen said sternly. "It's the way you arch your back. And the way you hold your neck, pulled up like this. That's very important. Never forget your neck."

"I won't," Betty promised, extending her neck.

"You see, Dear, you have...a disadvantage. Eu sou criada com cultura. You understand: I was born with cultivation." Carmen sighed delicately. "But you come to see me every day, and I'll teach you as much as I can. As if you were the daughter I never had."

"You're like a Queen," said Betty, as she slipped a clean johnny over Carmen's shoulders. "Do you have a title or something? Like Lady Di?"

"My father, of course, had a title," Carmen said frowning. "But I've...forgotten exactly what it was. You see, he didn't permit us to use it, anyway. He didn't want us to be loved for being Royalty. He wanted us to be loved for who we really were: plain folks at heart."

THE CLOSET

Eddie and Carol tiptoed into Martha's house hesitantly, suspecting they knew why she'd frantically summoned them over.

"Come see the closet," said Martha, eyes so intense they threatened to self-destruct.

On no, thought Eddie and Carol, their suspicions confirmed. Here we go again.

"Did you fix Fred's clothes?" Eddie asked cautiously.

"I did the best job ever," said Martha. Then she blushed and stammered. "Well, I think it's the best. Do you think so?" She led them into her bedroom and flipped open the closet doors. "Look! I starched the collars stiff. Pressed his ties and lined everything up — the way Fred likes — brown suits together, white shirts next to tan ones...."

Eddie and Carol stared at the clothes lined up perfectly, polished shoes underneath. She's turning into a Fruit Loop! they thought. Still: Martha was their younger sister.

"Beautiful," said Eddie.

"Fantastic," said Carol, their smiles smooth as Eddie's polyester blouse.

"Do you think Fred will really like it?"

"Absolutely," said Eddie.