

"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.

"Sure," said Carol, their eyes sparkling like Carol's zircons, although they both knew Fred would never see Martha's closet. It had been six years since Fred had gone out for beer — and never returned. They'd heard he'd moved in with a 28-year-old widow.

"When he comes home," Martha said, almost reading their minds, "he'll have his creases extra-straight."

"Terrific," they said, eager to go home.

When the doorbell rang, Martha opened the door. It was Fred.

Edie and Carol opened their eyes wide as their drooping mouths.

"I got the beer," Fred said.

"Come see your shoes," said Martha, leading Fred by the hand into their bedroom.

#### DRESSING MARIA

When Maria Mello died, her sisters agreed: Maria's casket should be open for the two-day viewing service at Cabral's Funeral Parlor. They did not agree on how Maria should be dressed.

"Her blue dress is perfect," said Olivia. "Her favorite one with sequins that she wore dancing."

"You want Maria buried in a dance dress?" Carmen said. "Mother of Mercy! I never heard such a thing."

Olivia had graduated from Warwick Community College and considered herself modern. "Maria loved that blue dress," she said. "And her hair should be pinned up with her diamond barrette."

Carmen made a sign of the cross. Her olive skin blanched white. "Maria should wear the black dress she wore to Church. And her hair neat and plain. She's going to visit God — not Alfie's dance hall."

"The blue dress," Olivia insisted.

"The black dress," said Carmen, wedging both hands on wide hips.

Finally, Olivia suggested, "How about this: Monday — the viewing — Maria can wear the blue dress; Tuesday, she can wear black."