

Airin' Our Dirty Laundry

By Lewis Routh

Place: Juanita's Washateria, Mayhaw, Tejas, a small Southeast town even by Texas standards, near the "Big Thicket," a densely forested National Park. Texas has a 32% Hispanic population; but Mayhaw's percentage is 60% and no one knows why — it just is. Though the Hispanic population of Mayhaw is predominantly of Mexican heritage, there are many mixed-race, and even some Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and American Indians all of whom are finding their place on the social ladder of Mayhaw. Mayhaw, like all of Southeast, Tejas, is hot in mid-summer.

Time: the present, early morning in mid-summer. It is hot and humid and the oppressive heat of the day is augmented in the Washateria.

Characters: (NOTE: This was written as a one-woman show)

Corita Destina-- half white (father) half Indian-Mexican (Mother) Speaks English with a Texan/Spanish accent and uses "Spanglish"

Carmen Alonzo - Puerto Rican by birth; but she's lived in this country for many years. She's still a beauty. As a teenager she won many beauty pageants and spent much of her time smiling and cutting the red ribbon and opening businesses.

Feme Nina Brillanté -- A full-blooded Mexican, she gets respect from both whites and Mexicans because she owns a business, Brillante's Bakery. Feme is a lesbian, is happy-jolly, loves to laugh and is a large woman whom most would call fat.

Edwina "Big Ed" Cantrell -- An American, probably of German descent if one would trace her roots back three generations. A large woman, manly and dresses as such. She doesn't walk, she swaggers; yet she has a very feminine soul.

Doris Crappé-Upton -- She is white — just ask her. Wealthy, by Mayhaw, Texas standards, and is easily the leading socialite, which is just the way she likes it.

Crystalline Gemstone -- a descendant of the well-to-do Fisher family who earned their fortune in the Beef Business, Crystalline changed her name out of shame. As a vegetarian, she could not condone the "slaughter" of animals. She allows her naturally curly hair to grow wild and unabandoned and she dresses like a gypsy fortune-teller in a B-grade Werewolf movie.

Juanita Gonzales-Perez -- full blood Hispanic, she owns Juanita's Washateria. Life has not been this woman's friend, but rather than burden her, it has made her stronger.

Scene: The Mayhaw Washateria. At upstage center, there is a large dryer with a hinged door. Characters may open this door and retrieve clothes from it -- the inside of this "dryer" is accessible from the back

and can be "loaded" from backstage. At down left and down right are Formica-topped counters with metal "hairpin" legs, popular in the 60's or 70's — these counters are used to fold clothes. At right, next to the folding table is an altar — obviously homemade — with candles on small risers (as on stair steps) characters will light a candle to talk with Juanita. These are the only IMPORTANT set-props needed for the play, but we could also see the usual accoutrements one would find in a Laundromat:

a bank of plastic chairs with "bucket-seats,"
soap, bleach and fabric softener dispensers,
the large wire-basket on wheels,
large trash cans
signs warning "Do Not Overload Washers" "Do Not Put Rubber Backed Materials In Dryer" "No Fabric Dye" "Please Remove Lint From Dryer" "Last wash load must be in by 7 PM" "We Reserve The Right To Refuse Service To Anyone" etc.

None of these "props" are new; but appear to have been in the Laundromat since it opened the 1960's. At rise, as lights come up, Corita Destina enters. Corita is weary from dealing with all the kids in her Day Care Center. She wears a housecoat and has her hair perpetually in curlers. On top of the curlers is a knit cap, which she thinks disguises the fact she is wearing curlers. NOTE: All characters speak directly to the audience as if the audience were Sugar Jenkins, a local Mayhaw, Tejas resident who has just had her hair done and is currently trying another diet plan.

Corita Destina

Fulton, Fenton don't you two go runnin' off. Now, I bought you BOTH your very own *Orange NeHi Soda* and you promised you'd be good. Heaven-forbid, twins would have to share the same *Orange NeHi*. Well, Fenton if Fulton has cooties, I guess that means since you're twins, you got a dose of 'em, too. No, you can't play with Juanita's Altar. You want God to strike you dead right here in this Washateria? You boys stay right here besides me. Okay. Okay. Stop screaming. You can play with the Soap Dispenser; but if somebody wants to buy some soap, y'all get outta the way.

(To herself)

Why-the-hell anybody would wanna buy those crappy little boxes of soap anyway is beyond me.

(She opens the dryer door, and removes clothes,
taking them down left to fold.

As she begins to fold the clothes,
she sees Sugar Jenkins)

Hola, Sugar! Sugar! Miss Jenkins! SUGAR JENKINS! No, over here. Over here! It's me, Corita Destina. Corita. *Jesus, Maria y*

José, Sugar, are you blind and deaf? *Jesucristo, Cha Cha*, for a minute there I thought I'd fallen into a *Twilight Zone* show, where the old Day Care owner is *completamente invisible*. She begs and begs for someone to see her — talk to her — an adult — PLEASE — but no one can see her except her kids at Day Care — and they just taunt her and tease her and make her life miserable — and — oh, that's the way my life really is; ain't it? Why don't you spot treat them skid-marks over here, Sugar, while I fold my Larry's socks. I don't use *Spray-N-Warsh* myself. I use *Hot-Shot*. *Hot-Shot* knocks the crap outta skidmarks. They don't say that on the commercials. What? Goin' out? Oh, you mean my curlers. Hell, no, Sugar. I ain't goin' nowheres. My hair has been in curlers since The Kennedy Assassination. We may call it a DAY Care; but I got some Night Care business, too. Ms. Benito leaves her two girls with me at night when she works the graveyard-shift at the *Taco-Bell*. Why-the-hell anybody would wanna eat a Buritto Supreme at four in the mornin' is beyond me. Oh, no the kids is fine, they just wear on my nerves a little. I should-a listened to *Mamita* when she told me to get myself a education. Oh, I was educated all right! I got my education in the back seat of Larry's '58 Impala. I always was a sucker for those *muy macho* guys in their lowriders. I been spittin' out babies ever since. *Jesus, Maria y José*, Sugar, them kids ain't all mine — it's a Day Care! I think Mr. Maurice got a little of that blue rinse in your *Diet Coke*.. Me & Larry would-a had to start fornicatin' when we was in grade school to have that many damn kids! Them kids belongs to a whole slew of Mayhaw residents who's too damn lazy to raise 'em their-selves. That's the whole problem with the world, Sugar, ain't nobody watchin' their own kids. They is too busy workin' at a career, so's they can have the necessities: two cars, \$100 tennis shoes, a one week vacation to Disney World, and underwear with some asshole-celebrity's name on 'em. So, it's either me or the TV raisin' the kids of Mayhaw, Tejas. I guess they figure I must be smarter than the TV. No. It ain't no different here in Mayhaw than anywheres else — except here in Mayhaw the kids here ain't got nothin' to do! Heaven-forbid, you don't think kids would go to work pickin' Mayhaws like you and me did when we was kids? No, today's kids don't work. Both parents gotta work, just to make ends-meet and the parents never tell their kids "NO" cause they only get a little "quality-time" as it is and that would bruise their fragile little psyches. Oh, no! They don't wanna spoil their "Quality Time" so they spoil the kids instead. Durin' day care, there's so many of 'em — all I got time to do is make certain

they don't poke somebody else's eye out, or somethin. When they're old enough for public school there's so many of 'em — the teachers barely have time to teach 'em to read. And who's teachin' 'em good manners? Or not to lie? Or steal? Or cheat? Or not to hit? Not the TV. The TV is teachin' 'em: the only way to be a survivor in this game is to lie and cheat and steal. So, to me, it looks like we're raisin' a bunch of ill-mannered, lyin', cheatin', gun-totin' thieves, that think the whole world owes them a damn livin'! No, Sugar, I mean it! Think about it! Did they have metal detectors at the doors when WE went to school? No. And why not? We had Wally and Beaver, that's why! We had Opie Taylor! We had Princess and Bud and Kitten! Those kids never did nothin' wrong. Oh, Beaver might get stuck up on a billboard inside a giant cup of coffee; but there was always a moral at the end of the show. "Don't go climbin' up a billboard, just to see if there's coffee in that big cup! 'Cause that's fucking stupid." I think *Mami y Papi* need to spend a little less career time makin' *dinero* and some more "Quality Time" makin' a point with a butt-paddle. Don't worry about bruisin' their little psyches — bruise their little hineys instead. Oh, I don't mean beat 'em regular, like a dinner bell, or nothin', just once a day when they deserve it. Kids — even little ones — need to learn there is consequences to their actions. Me? No, not me. I can't spank those kids. Are you kiddin', Sugar? I cain't even raise my voice at 'em, their parents would jerk 'em outta my Day Care and send 'em to *Guadelupe's Trailer Tot Camp* — even though she cain't speak good English and weren't even borned in America like me. Guadelupe's from Cuba. So, most of her customers are the Puerto Ricans and, of course, the other Cubans. She got most of the single parent kids — she gets government assistance. No, I don't get no help from the government — I get help from my Larry. My husband Larry. Yeah, that's him. But don't call him bald to his face, he thinks that comb-over makes it look like he's got hair like Elvis! My husband's watchin' the kids while I'm at the Warshateria. Larry don't like watchin' them kids, but he hates warshin' clothes even more, so today he's the Warden at *Destina's Day Care*. Except little Fenton and Fulton. Yeah, them Fisher twins is a regular handful. They was at Guadelupe's for a while; but she couldn't handle 'em good like me. Heaven's to Betsy, them Fisher Twins is a mess. No wonder Mr. Fisher's wife ran off. They said she ran-off with the *Piggly-Wiggly* Manager from over there at Koontze. Koontze, honey — thirteen miles west of here. Mrs. Fisher is hopin' to live the good life in a big city; but I think she'd

just been terrorized by those twins so much, she just finally said, "Sayonara!" Which is Japanese for, "Adios!" Larry always says, "I'll mind the Day Care; but you gotta take them Fisher twins with you, Coritta." 'Cause the last time they like t'set fire to the settee with his *Zippo*! No, they're over by the Soap Dispensers. They like to pull the knobs and check the coin return for quarters.

(She looks for them.)

Well, they was over by the Soap Dispensers. Where the hell could a couple of four year olds get to so fast?

(Points)

There they are.

(Sees what they're doing)

FENTON! Get down from there! Put that bleach down! That bleach don't belong to you! Well, whatever your name is! Fulton, put that bleach down! It don't belong to you either! Okay, so it DOES belong to you! I don't give a rats-patootie if you DID use your own buck-fifty to buy it, it don't give you no right to be a-pourin' it into Miss Gemstone's warsh! I know she's a hippie-freak, but don't do it. Well, don't do it no more then! Put it down. And get down off-a that warsher. Okay, okay, you can pour it into the sewer-drain; but don't eat none of it; it's toxicated. Cain't you two just sit here and read these magazines? Look, here's your favorite *Guns and Ammo*.

(Back to Sugar)

Lord- Gawd, them twins'll be the death of me yet. I wish *Papa José* or *Mamita* had them twins for about fifteen minutes. They'd get the ass-whuppin' they need. My *Papa José* would walk through the room and just whollop me for no good reason and he'd say,

(say this in Spanish first, then translate.)

"That's fer what you did that I didn't know nothin' about!" My *Mamita* never laid a hand on us. If we did somethin' bad, she'd just cry. Big old deep sobs that took her breath away. She spent half her life cryin' over somethin' or somebody and the other half wishin' she'd never been borned. Sometimes, I think the beatin' was better'n the cryin'. Even now, I wish she could-a been happy for just one single solitary day in her life; but I guess she just spent so much time bein' sad, it was too danged hard for her to have a good time. Misery is a little too addictive, if you ask me. It's easy to let your personal perspective of this rotten world get the best of you, and the feelin' you get from complainin' is the most addictive feelin' you ever had. "Nobody wants to hear about your unhappy life," that's what I always told her. "Nobody wants to hear about your miserable life." But she never stopped

complainin'. She died alone, in a concrete-block, one-room house she called "her bunker." Miss Pageant, her landlord, said she'd been cryin' for two days, 'bout how lonely she was. And I called ever' single solitary day! Well — almost every day. Once a week at least! I even told her she could come live with me and Larry; but thank *Dios* she said, "No, you don't want an old beat-down carcass like me around." Then she'd cry. All she ever did was watch the news and the weather channel — neither of which ever has anything "happy" to talk about. There ought to be one TV station that would show nothin' but "good news." I know there's *nice* stories out there. You know, "Boy Scout helps old lady across the street." "Joan Rivers has face lift that works." Good news. Honey, you've already spot treated that pile of shorts. You're kind-a loosey today, ain't ya, Sugar?

(Knowing smile.)

You started a new diet; didn't ya? I thought so. When did ya start this one? Yesterday? A whole pound? Well, that's fabulous! Honey, one pound ain't nothin' to be ashamed about; it's good! It's a start ain't it? One pound at a time, that's the way to do it. I've been on a diet for two weeks and all I've lost is fourteen days. Which diet plan are ya tryin' out this week? *Weight Watchers*? Oh, they's the best one. They advertise on the TV a lot more than *Jenny Craig*. And they run their commercials durin' the good shows — *Maury Povitch* and *Regis and Whoever-the-hell-that-new-girl-is-now-that-Kathie-Lee's-gone*. *Jenny Craig* is the crappy one. *Jenny Craig* runs theirs durin' *Jerry Springer* and Monica "I-Blew-the-President" Lowenstein is their new spokesperson. No, I mean it! Who'd want to put that whore on TV and think that people would listen to her? Well, apparently *Jenny Craig* would! Oh, I know! Ain't that *Jerry Springer* the most vile show ever? I watch it all the time. Who'd wanna go on national TV and tell the whole world, "I'm sleepin' with my husband's transvesti-tized brother?" They just want to be famous — to tell ever'body, "I was on TV" and get their fifteen minutes of flame. Yeah, that's what Andy Warlock called it — "their fifteen minutes of flame." I'm glad you give up on that *Subway Sandwich Shop* diet. I know that geeky-lookin'-freak lost somethin' like 8,000 pounds or somethin' but that cain't be healthy. Eatin' nothin' but them hero sandwiches all the time. Especially the way they make 'em over at the *Subway* by *Wal-Mart*. Two little triangles of white cheese, three paper-thin slices of pecker-O-nia and a couple-a pinches of shredded lettuce — Hell, that ain't a proper dinner! And what the hell is that white cheese? That white cheese cain't be real.

Cheese ain't white — cheese is yellow! Then you're supposed to warsh it all down with a *Diet Cok* that's so big you could soak your feet in it! Shit-fire and save matches, Sugar, if the Good Lord a wanted you to be thin eatin' that kind-a crap, He'd make ya puke after every meal, like He did Karen Carpenter.

(Sees the twins again)

Fulton! Or Fenton! Which ever the hell one you are, put that bra back in that warsher! Did you hear me? I don't care if DOES look like a sling-shot, it ain't yours t'play with! Feme Nina! Feme Nina! One of them damn Fisher twins has done stole your double-D brassiere outta your *Maytag*! Boys, ya better put that bra back before Feme Nina calls "Big Ed." — Feme Nina, call "Big Ed." — Fenton, don't you "sass me!" I KNOW "Big Ed" is a woman, but she'll knock the crap outta anybody that puts their grimy hands on Feme Nina's double-D's — whether she's in 'em or not!

(Back to Sugar.)

You know, Sugar, one of these days I'm just gonna snap and you'll be seein' my face on *America's Most Wanted* and John Welch will be tellin' America 'bout these two darlin' twin boys slaughtered by the demented owner of *Destina's Day Care* in Mayhaw, Tejas. And I'll finally get my fifteen minutes of flame. Oh, look, speakin' of the devil, here she comes.

(She crosses to the altar beside Juanita,
and lights a candle, saying a silent prayer.

Then she speaks to Juanita.)

Buenos Dias Ms. Gonzales-Perez, kind-a hot in the *Mayhaw Washateria* today, ain't it? Well, Tejas is always hot this time of year. 'Specially durin' one of them *El Ninos*. I light a candle for myself — to keep me from killing one of my Day Care kids. You look kind-a tired, Ms. Gonzales-Perez, ain't ya sleepin' too well? You can have that dryer over there, if you can get Fulton or Fenton to get out of it.

(Shouts)

Boys! Boys! TWINS! Get your brother outta that dryer. I don't care if it is your buck fifty, get out of it! Let Ms. Gonzales-Perez have it, she needs it to dry her customer's clothes. This is her Warshateria, Fenton, not you and your brother's personal amusement park. I don't give a rat's-hiney if it IS on "fluff" get out of it! Now!

(Looks pitifully at Ms. Gonzales-Perez.)

I may have t'kill one of them yet, just to let the other one know I mean business. Oh, now don't get all teary-eyed on me. There ya go, Juanita, you can have that dryer there.

(As Ms. Gonzales-Perez goes,
she crosses back to Sugar.)

You take care now, and — Ms. Gonzales-Perez — don't let them awful stories bother you none.

(Back to Sugar.)

Ya know, Sugar - do ya know WHY Juanita Gonzales-Perez is lookin' so tired and weary? Maria's comin' home today. Maria. Her daughter. That's the Gospel Truth. Why do you think that altar is blazin' away? Comin' home for good and all. I read that in the *National Informant*. Yeah, it come out yesterday and it was on the front page. I read that all the time, so I was practically the first in the country to know about it. Maria's coming home. That's enough to worry the weight off ya, ain't it? No, I think she's comin' home for permanent. *Maury Povitch* is tryin' to get Juanita and Maria on his show on account of her sensational story. No, it's the truth. My sister was here the other day when they called, and she heard Juanita answer the pay phone and she heard her say, "No, Maria and me don' wanna be on *Maury Povitch*." Can you believe she don't want to be on TV? I thought about callin' 'em myself — you know, 'cause I know Juanita personally and all and — it bein' my church and everything — and I was here when Maria killed him and everything. Oh, it just flabbergasted everyone at the church. There was so many votives lit, it looked like the sun was risin'! That had to empty that "offerin' box" twice. Christ-on-a-crutch, how long has Maria been gone anyways? Ten — fifteen years, at least! Yeah, she was over at — Oh, look who it is! No, outside. Good Gawd, Sugar, don't be so damn obvious! It's Doris Upton. You know, *Upton's Department Store*? Mr. Upton's wife, Doris. She married good; didn't she? She married a whole damn department store. Don't you 'member her? She was Doris Crappé.

(Pronounced Crap-Pay)

In school, we always called her "Crappy" — which she hated. Oh, *Jesus, Maria y José*, she's lookin' in here. What the hell is she lookin' in here for? Act natural, Sugar. Fold somethin'!

(Corita begins to sing a little commercial jingle to herself.)

Oh, *mi Dios!* Carmen Alonzo ran smack dab into Doris Upton! Carmen Alonzo, the Puerto Rican with the boob-job. She married good, too — her husband owns a store — which is a good thing for Carmen 'cause her career is buyin' stuff. Look at Doris run! She's done touched a big-titted Puerto Rican and she's gone. Heaven's to Betsy, what the hell was Doris was lookin' in here for?

(Shocked.)

Look! Carmen's comin' in here! What's she comin' in here for? She's got her own washer & dryer! Oh, yes she does! Hell, she

made certain everybody in Mayhaw knew she had her own washer and dryer. Just 'cause she was Yam Festival Queen ten years ago and ever'time a new store opens they call her to cut the red-ribbon in her short skirt and her big titts. Have you noticed, every year her skirt gets a little shorter? By the time she's 40, it'll be a belt! She never tells folks she's from Puerto Rico, but you can tell by her accent she ain't American like us. Oh, there goes Doris Upton again, walkin' by and sneakin' a peek in here. You know, those Upton kids is real screwed up. Doris is a terrible mother. Bradford, that's the boy — he's the oldest — he went to work right outta high school at his old man's store. He's in Women's Sports Wear — even when he AIN'T on the job, if you know what I mean. He's got a awful drinkin' problem. No, it's a fact! Larry saw him at AA! He only got to Step Six when he went t'drinkin' again and Sheriff Boyd pulled him over and he was wearin' a *Liz Claiborne* pants suit. Yes, he's got good taste and Sheriff Boyd said he looked stunning. Ever'body in Koontze County knows he likes t'wear women's clothes — well, Sheriff Boyd told 'em, that's how — I don't know, I guess 'cause Sheriff Boyd feels he should let good folks know when there's a "potential danger" in the community. He's just doin' his job. And that daughter of theirs! Gillian Upton. She lost her \$1500 retainer; and guess where they found it? Downtown at the *Eye of Ra Tattoo Parlor*! Shit, Sugar, that girl — she's got so many tattoos, she looks like a road map to hell!

(Speaks sweetly to Carmen as she passes.)

Buenos Dias Carmen, kind-a hot today; ain't it? I never seen you in Juanita's Warshateria before — oh, ain't that a shame. Is it under warranty? Well, call Jorgé and tell him to fix it. He's the best repairman in Mayhaw — if not the whole of Southeast Tejas. And he's from Puerto Rico, too. Did ya'll happen to know each other? Well, I guess Puerto Rico is big, even for an island. You have a nice day, Carmen — stay cool!

(To Sugar.)

She is so shallow. Did you see how she looked when I hinted she was from Puerto Rico? She's tryin' to pass for Mexican; just 'cause she married that Shoe Store owner, Paul Alonzo, and everybody know's he had his eye on me. I don't care if it was in grade school, Sugar! Paul and me was sweet on each other and everybody knew it. And that blonde wig. Of course it's a wig, Sugar, no REAL Puerto Rican ever had blonde hair!

(See's the twins into trouble again)

Fenton and Fulton Fisher! That's a laundry cart, not a go-cart!
Get outta there! You want me to rip your head off and crap down
your neck? Get outta there! Now!

(To Sugar.)

I'm tellin' you, blood will be spilt today. I'm gonna find myself on
Judge Judy explainin' why I had to kill one of those twins. "No, I
HAD to, Judge Judy, I had to kill one of 'em — just so they didn't
out number me no more!" Lord-Gawd, Sugar, does your husband
have an incontinence problem? Well, ya been spritzin' *Spray-N-
Warsh* on them skid-marks in them boxers for nigh on five
minutes! I think any more is just plain wasteful! Your head's
spinnin'? Well, go eat somethin'! Fuck, *Weight Watchers*! Head
on over to the *Taco Bell* and get the runs for the border! Yeah, I'll
watch your stuff. No, it'll be safe, Sugar. — Sugar — listen to me
very carefully, you need to eat somethin' — you're losin' your
mind. Do you really think Juanita or Carmen is gonna come over
here and steal your husband's crappy boxers BEFORE you
warsh 'em? Go get yourself a burrito.

(She watches Sugar go,
sees one of the twins doing something shocking.)

Heaven's to Betsy, Fulton, don't use the "F-word" it ain't polite.
Well, I'm an adult and adult's can use the "F-word" if they need to
make a point.

(She crosses to light another votive
and to speak again to Juanita.)

Ms. Gonzales-Perez? I light this candle for you and this one I light
for Maria.

(Tenderly.)

Juanita? Oh, Juanita, my heart is just breakin' for you, Honey. I
heard that Maria's comin' home today. *The Maury Povitch Show*
wants to interview me, since I know the new priest personally and
all — Oh, now, Honey, don't cry like that, it reminds me of my
poor dead *Mamita*.

(She exits left, following Juanita.)

Carmen Alonzo

(She enters wearing a very tight, very colorful, very stretch fabric print skirt and
matching tube top. The bright colors certainly catch our attention, but even a blind
man can enjoy Carmen's approach as her bangle bracelets announce her approach
like sleigh bells at Christmas. Her hair is blonde and big. Carmen is carrying a
laundry basket, filled with damp — not wet — clothes. She puts damp clothes into the
dryer. She's very particular about the routine of putting clothes in the dryer. She turns
all t-shirts inside-out, she shakes-out permanent press shirts, pulling and stretching
them in all directions, etc. Carmen is a beauty, though her wardrobe choices make
her look cheap. She has that allure which most men simply describe as intoxicating,
showing as much cleavage as possible. She wears her beauty well, using her charms

when needed and looking through heavy lashes often. As she pulls a pair of stretch-pants, readying them for the dryer, she sees Juanita. Tries to get her attention.)

Pssst! Juanita? Chhh Chhh Chh! Juanita!

(She crosses to the altar, to Juanita,
lights a candle, says a silent prayer.)

Juanita, why don't you tell that Corita Destina to go to hell? Oh, I am so sorry, Juanita. I thought everyone in Mayhaw, Tejas know who I am. I am Carmen Alonzo, Mayhaw Festival Queen -1997.

(Disappointed.)

Oh. You didn't go that year? That's too bad. I was the first Latina to win Mayhaw Festival Queen and 1997 was the first year they used the BIG trophy. Do you know *Alonzo's Shoe Store and Repair*? That's MY trophy in the window. *Si*, with the *Birkenstocks* hanging on it.

(Glad she has finally hit on something.)

My husband, Paul, owns *Alonzo's Shoe Store & Repair*.

(Showing her shoes.)

I got these shoes there. Brand new. \$85. I made Paul send all the others like these back — so I have the only pair in Mayhaw, Tejas like these. \$85. And that's COST! They'd be \$150 for anyone but me. What? My shirt? This isn't a shirt, it's a tube-tops. Christina Aguilera, she made these popular again. And J-Lo did, too. Yeah, "tube-tops" that's what they call it. 'Cause it's a tube covering your tops. Oh, you like it? What? What keeps it up? A City Ordinance!

(she laughs at her own joke)

A City Ordinance. That was a good one. No, I don't never come in here before today. I have my own wash and dry machines at home. They was free but they cost like \$500 — each! You see, when I was Yam Festival Queen 1995 — Did you see that pageant? No? What you do for funs, Juanita? — in 1995, I was the first Latina to be Yam Festival Queen — *Snyder's Appliance and Hand Tools* opened for business next door to the shoe store and Mr. Snyder asked me to cut the red ribbon. Yes, that was a honor. I was the first Latina to cut the red ribbon for a business which wasn't owned by a Chicano. So it was a real honor, Cha Cha. When I opened *Snyder's*, Mr. Snyder gave me a wash and dry machine — worth \$500 — each. First, he give me a pat on the back — a little lower than I expected. I know! Mrs. Snyder wasn't very happy about it either — and I got a new wash and dry machine for my trouble. That piece-of-shit dryer broke today and I already put these things in the washer, so I bring them here to dry them. I've opened a lot of new businesses in Mayhaw, Texas. Just one white business. Hispanic businesses, Latino businesses and Chicano businesses, mostly! What's the difference? Oh, Cha

Cha! Where you been? I use this speech as my talent in the Jr. Miss Latina Beauty Contest. Lolita Consuella Dolores Bonita won, 'cause her talent was salsa dancing and her top slipped down. Like she didn't plan that! My talent was public speaking to enlighten the masses; you know? Everyone can salsa-dance till their top slips down; but not everyone can public speak.

(She takes her "Beauty Pageant Stance" and recites.)

"Hispanic? Latino? Or Chicano? Which is correct? In this day and age, when everyone wants to be "PC" — that means "politically corrected" — and use the right label on people who aren't white. Sometimes the different words to choose are confusing them and giving them a headache. Has this happened to you? Well, I —
Carmen Lucia Francesca Amana

(An aside to Juanita.)

This was before I became an "Alonzo."

(Back to speech.)

I — Carmen Lucia Francesca Amana has something simple for your minds. The word "Hispanic" comes from the word España, which was the country that led the conquest of the New Worlds and whose language and cultures has been dominated Latin America. The word "Latino" comes all the way from ancient Rome and some say it's more inclusively because it is including Latin American countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico — and —

(she can't remember the other one, so she adds)

other less fortunate countries. "Chicano" means "Mexican-American," and not all the people denoted by this term like it. When speaking of peoples from various other Spanish-speaking countries, "Chicano" is an error for "Latino" or "Hispanic." Only "Hispanic" can include people with a Spanish as well as with a Latin American heritage; and only "Latino" could logically include Portuguese-speaking Brazilians. That is why God, in His Almighty wisdom, put me — Carmen Alana — here, to clear this up for you. Thank you." A lot of Chicanos don't know this, Juanita. See, you are Chicano, borned in Mexico, right? I thought so. You can be Chicano or Hispanic or Latino. But someone like Corita Destina, she wasn't borned in Mexico; but in Tejas. Her father, being white and her mother, being part Indian and part Mexican, makes Corita either Hispanic or Latino; but never Chicano, like you; or even Latino like me. I light a candle for her. Oh, that Corita Destina makes me so mad. Well, for one thing she is constantly making the point about me being from Puerto Rico, as if that's a bad thing. I light a candle for Puerto Rico. I haven't lived in Puerto Rico since I was ten! And my folks moved to Mayhaw,

Tejas when I was twelve, 'cause there was too many Cubans in Florida. Oh, you know my folks, everybody knows my folks, they have the Amana Mayhaw orchard out on Highway 69. That's the one, with the big stand out front. Mamasita makes the best mayhaw jelly in Texas. We moved here from Kountse, Texas — Gateway to the "Big Thicket" National Park. You know Kountse! That's the home of Hoover and Starr. You never heard of Hoover and Starr? Hoover and Starr is the only legally married Armadillos in the U.S. No, I'm as serious as a cold-sore! The mayor owns an armadillo museum and Hoover and Starr are his pet armadillos. Somehow — tell me it's NOT 'cause he's the mayor — they got a certificate from the court which allowed them to get married — legally. There's billboards announcin' it for miles no matter which way you're comin' into Kountse, you can't miss hearin' about 'em. Hoover and Starr has been on the news — coast to coast. They're pretty famous — for armadillos. I light a candle for Hoover and Starr. Oh, look. There's Feme Nina from the bakery.

(She crosses over to the folding table, to Feme Nina.)

Buenos Dias Feme Nina. How's the bakery business? Oh, when Mamasita heard I was coming downtown, she said, "You get me one of Brillante's cakes — one of the *normal* ones!"

(They laugh.)

Yes, Mamasita, don't like to see those cakes shaped like that. She says, "I could never eat a piece of that. It's nasty."

(They laugh.)

Who ordered that "*el grandé*" (Spanish word for "penis") cake in the window? No, I just come by there, it is right in the front window. Mr. Maurice?

(They laugh.)

That is just like him!

(To Feme Nina)

Feme, your washer is out of balance.

(Crosses back to altar, to Juanita.)

I light a candle for Feme Nina's cakes. Juanita, do you know Mr. Maurice? Oh, he owns the beauty salon, *Mr. Maurice's Belle d'Salon*. I go to him all the time. You know he is from Cuba? Oh, yes, he is a Latino. His name was Jesus Cordoba! Not *Jesus* (pronounced "Hay-Suess") but *Jesus* (pronounced "Gee-Zus"), He had it legally changed to Maurice, 'cause it sounded more French, and everybody knows French men named Maurice can do hair better than Cubans named Jesus. I light a candle for Maurice. I go to him because he has that private back room and I can have my hair removed back there. No, not the hair on my

head, Juanita, the hair on my face and — other places. Paul calls me "monkey woman!"

(She laughs)

No it's the truth! I have that one eye-brow. Pluck pluck pluck, every day. I look like Frida Kahlo or a Neanderthal — one of the two! I have hair growing in places that even men don't like to have hair growing!

(She laughs.)

I think I personally have kept *Nair* in business since I was eight! I light a candle for *Nair*. Oh, I've tried everything! Shaving, waxing, depilatory-creams — you name it I've tried it! Sometimes, I think God must have a sense of humor, Juanita. He says, "Let's make this girl very beautiful — but with a mustache!" Mamasita, thinks it is a sin for a woman to shave. Mamasita's got a mustache and goatee that my Papa says tickles!

(She laughs.)

Mamasita's sister, Tia Rosa, told her, "Shave! You're beginning to look like Fidel Castro!"

(She laughs.)

Papa always works the Mayhaw Stand, and keeps Mamasita in the house making more jelly or jam or syrup. He says, "Gringos don't want to see some *Séñora* with a beard. It scares away business."

(She laughs. She sees someone out front.)

Juanita, who is that woman out front? The one in the tailored suit? Who would wear a suit in this heat? I almost knocked her down coming in this morning. She was walking along and she just stopped, right in front of me. I know I've seen her. That's a nice suit, isn't it? I bet that suit is \$100 or more. And that's cost! At first I thought she was a member of the *Hispanic Business Women's Network*, they always "dress-up" you know, when they go shopping downtown. But she is too — *Anglo*.

(Tries to get Feme's attention.)

Pssst! Chh Chh Chh! Feme! Feme Nina.

(Wags a "come-here-finger.")

Who is that Anglo in the \$100 suit? Oh, *Upton's Department Store*. Oh!

(To Juanita.)

She's Mrs. Upton's Department Store. No, I don't shop there. They were rude to me once, back when it was a discount house. I went in and they took one look at me, shopping in the Young Miss New Spring Fashions — I was trying to find a new gown for The Miss Southeast Texas Beauty Pageant — I came in second runners-up — and got a silver pin worth \$25 — and this cow of a saleswoman at Uptons, she says, "The bargain basement is

down stairs." Bargain Basement? Do I look like a bargain basement shopper to you? Well, maybe today I do — in my "go to the Washateria clothes;" but when I go shopping downtown — I look good. So, I just walked out and I never been back. I buy my clothes in Dallas or Atlanta, when my husband goes to market for new shoes. Of course, I get all my shoes at *Alonzo's* — at cost. These cost \$85! Oh, I told you that already? They're nice aren't they? And they're worth a lot more. Mamasita says it's a good thing I married Paul Alonzo, 'cause I've always liked shoes. Paul says my shoe collection would make Emelda Marcos green!

(She laughs.)

No, I don't know who she is either. I light a candle for my shoes. I do love shoes. Open-toe — those are my favorites. Paul says I have beautiful feet. He would know, too, he handles women's feet all day. He says mine are so soft. I soak them in *Nair* to keep the hair off my toes and I paint my toe-nails every other day. Mamasita says, "If God had wanted you to have red toe-nails, he would have made them that way." I try to tell her, I am only trying to be stylish and Tia Rosa says, "You are just following fashion, Carmen." Well, fff fff! Fashion can be bought! Style one must possess!

(She laughs.)

I light a candle for style. Oh, speaking of style, look who it is. Crystalline Gemstone. She dresses like the fortune teller in the werewolf movies. At least she's not a lesbos like Feme Nina though. Her color choices are all wrong, too. They don't just clash, Juanita, they wrestle with each other! And fringe. Fringe hasn't been in fashion since the twenties! You know who her parents are; don't you? Mr. and Mrs. Fisher. *Fisher Meats*. She is an embarrassment to her family. She's vegetarian!

(Surprised that this makes Juanita cry.)

I light a candle for the embarrassed family. Juanita, what did I say? Cha Cha, don't cry.

(Following her out.)

Juanita, I didn't mean to make you cry. No, I didn't even know you had a *loco* daughter.

Feme Nina Brillanté

(Enters. Feme Nina is a round little woman with a big smile and a happy personality. She is wearing her white polyester pants and baker's jacket. She crosses to the dryer, removes aprons and hand towels and crosses to the table to fold them. She sees Juanita, crosses to light a candle and speaks to Juanita)

Good morning, Ms. Perez. Feme Nina. Feme Nina Brillanté. Yes, from the bakery. No, it was slow today, so I thought I'd wash some towels, uniforms and aprons.

(She smiles as Juanita walks away.
Sees Sugar, crosses to her,
to fold her towels.)

Hey, Sugar. I seen you talkin' to Corita Destina. Poor thang. *Destina's Day Care* is the ruination of that woman. She used to be the sweetest person. The kind that would just do anything for you. You 'member, in school? It was always Corita that was organizin' somebody's surprise party. Now, all she talks about is the different ways she can kill off one of those kids. It's down right scary. Can I ask you somethin', Sugar? Well, I hadn't seen ya at the Bakery in a week-a-Sunday's. Are you on another diet? I knew it. Our profit/loss ledger red lines every time you go on one of them diets of yours and we always end up with a slew of marked-down, day-old cinna-buns. No, I ain't mad at ya! Heck, I'm always dietin' myself! "Big Ed" — I mean — Edwina, hates it when I diet. She says, "Just cause you wanna lose weight, why should I suffer?" She's always fussing at me, I told her just this mornin' that I wish I was still pretty, like I was in high school, and d'ya know what Edwina said? "When you graduated, you should-a just broke your mirror."

(Laughs.)

I bet you a dollar to a doughnut, I can tell you which diet you're on! No, I'm serious. I can tell. Want me to tell? *Weight Watchers*, right? No, I did NOT over hear you and Corita talking — the Great Feme Nina Brillanté knows! Oh, Sugar, I feel like Sherlocks Home! You see, *Weight Watchers* has that damn Buddy Boot Camp system, where — when one joins — they drag about half their friends along with 'em. So, it didn't take a whole lot of psychic debility for me to figure out that you joined *Weight Watchers* — 'cause when you quit comin' to the *Brillanté Bakery* so did fifteen of your closest friends. Oh, you don't got to apologize. Heck, I been there myself. I had thirty-two Boot Camp Buddies when I started out, now I'm down to four. They've all gone "A.W.O.L." —

(This is such a good joke, she can barely contain herself.)

"Absent Without Leftovers." But I'm hangin' in there — and over here and back there. I'm on a roll now!

(She laughs till she cries at her own jokes.)

Have you lost any weight yet? A whole pound? No, kiddin'? I THOUGHT your face looked thinner! And isn't it nice to be able to eat whatever you want? I saw you eat that burrito over to *Taco Bell*. How many points is that? How many? Honey, you won't get to eat again till next Tuesday. "Big Ed" — I mean Edwina — says, "At the end of every diet, the path curves back toward the

trough." Don't look now, but Crystalline Gemstone has just found out someone put bleach in her *Maytag*. Like her clothes would even LOOK damaged. No, half of 'em is tie-dyed! Look, she's rubbin' her head with a rock. Crystal — rock — whatever — it's still kind-a weird, you know? Some people think it's 'cause of all the drugs she used in the '60's and '70's. I don't think that though; I think she's always been fucked-up. Remember in school? Crystalline — who was known as Gladys back then — put twenty-seven green beans up her nose and had to be rushed to the hospital. Yep, Gladys Fisher — Crystalline Gemstone — same person. She's always been fucked-up. You wanna hear the really weird part?

(This is impossible for her to imagine.)

She don't eat cake. Not at all. She'll eat the bark off a birch tree, but she cain't eat cake. The Library cain't plant nasturtiums in the front flower bed without Miss-I'm-a-hippie-freak Crystalline Gemstone thinkin' it's a damn smorgasbord! Yeah, she's fucked-up all right! Corita says she seen Crystalline eat a pine cone — right off the tree — and then refuse a Christmas cookie 'cause of all that sugar. You know somethin' else I know? You been to see Mr. Maurice for the full treatment, ain't ya? I KNEW you did! Well, first off, no one — and I mean no one — does hair like Mr. Maurice. You can spot his creations a mile off! Just like his jingle says,

(she sings his commercial jingle)

"No one can do hair... like Mr. Maurice... let him tease you, let him please you... No one gets it UP... like Mr. Maurice!" I just love that little song and the way he cha-cha's across the TV screen with that little poodle-dog of his. 'Course it don't sound near as good alcapulco, without the violins and conga drums and stuff. Mr. Maurice loves my cakes. If it weren't for him and those Bachelorette Parties I'd be pretty-much outta business. My "Adult Cake" product line. It weren't MY idea at all. But "Big Ed," I mean, "Edwina" — she's my — "special friend" — she talked me into making the first one. It was for one of Mr. Maurice's friends in Houston. Oh, shoot Houston is close compared to Dallas and Austin! He even took a cake over to New Orleans! With a baby cooked inside! Oh, no, Sugar, not a REAL baby, a little tiny plastic baby-doll, for Mardi Gras. Yeah, it's some kind of weird voodoo thing, I think. But Mr. Maurice is keepin' us financially afloat with his orderin' "Adult Cakes." He even paid extra for one that — about half-way up — curved to the left! For one of his "bent friends!" "Big Ed" keeps puttin' 'em in the front display

window, and I keep puttin' 'em in the INSIDE display case. At least that way, we only offend the folks who actually come in to buy somethin'.

(She laughs at her own joke.)

That's a good one, ain't it? Only offend the folks who actually come in to buy somethin'.

(Pointing)

Look, that's Doris Upton. Yeah, the one in the tailored suit. Nice suit. That's the third time this mornin' she's looked in here. I'd sure like to get her business. Especially her Garden Party *soirees*. Can you imagine the bakery bill for all them puff-puffs and eclairs? Oh, I'm sorry, Sugar, am I makin' ya hungry? Yeah, my eclairs is good; but my puff-puffs is famous. Bill Clinton used to order them cream-filled puff-puffs and long-dongs. Yeah, I wish he was President again. The economy was a lot better then. He spent less money on defense and more money on long-dongs and ever'body was a lot happier. Ole' G.W. wouldn't know a long-dong if it was right in front of his face.

(She crosses to altar, lights candle,
speaks to Ms. Gonzales-Perez.)

Hola, Juanita. Juanita, do you think you ought to go outside and ask Ms. Upton if she needs somethin'? Ms. Upton. From *Upton's Department Store*? That's her right there, in the tailored suit. Yeah, she's the one with the tattooed daughter and the transvestibule son. No, that ain't gossip, Juanita, ever'body already knows it. Sheriff Boyd told me that he personally...

(Juanita cuts her off)

Well, suit yourself, but Ms. Upton keeps on lookin' in here and actin' like she's tryin' to get up the courage to come inside. As if *Juanita's Mayhaw Washateria* just ain't a fittin' place for her ilk!

(Watching Ms. Gonzales-Perez exit,
she crosses back to Sugar.)

Ain't that a shame, Sugar? Poor old Juanita Gonzales-Perez. She's had her fair share of shame; ain't she? Corita told me Juanita's daughter, Maria, is comin' home today. Yeah, she read it in the *National Informant*. You can tell it's true, too. That altar is just a blazin'! I never read the *National Informant* myself — except the headlines while I'm waiting in line at *Fern's Grocery Mart*. It's been twelve years since Maria was put in that — "hospital." I know. Corita told me *Maury Povitch* is gonna have her on his TV show and get her opinion of the whole mess. Yeah, she knew the priest. Corita Destina on TV — that's kind-a excitin': ain't it? Corita says she cain't believe they didn't give Maria "the

chair," but Maria's lawyer said, "She don't need execution, she needs help" and I guess he was right.

(She looks concerned at Sugar.)

Is somethin' wrong, Sugar? Well, your eyes kind-a rolled up into your head for a minute and it was kind-a scary — like the *Day of the Dead* or somethin'. You're hungry ain't ya? You run on over to the *Brillanté Bakery* and tell Beatrice to give you a long-dong. A glazed long-dong'll cure anything.

(Something startles her.)

Maira y José ne nyuden en este momentoá, what's that racket? *Jesuscristo*, I thought I was shot! I cain't believe Juanita Gonzales-Perez lets Crystalline put her crystals in the dryer. Juanita lets people just walk all over her since her daughter was "put away" in the "nut house." Crystalline says "tumbling crystals in the dryer energizes their healing powers." Well, it might and it might not. Personally, I think it's a load of crap — and noisy — and messy. Have you ever had the misfortune of puttin' your clothes in a dryer AFTER Crystalline Gemstone has "energized her crystals?" Those lint filters ain't strong enough to suck that crap outta there! One dryer load after a "crystal energizin'" and you'll sparkle like a drag-queen at the Mardi Gras! I'm gonna go tell Juanita Gonzales-Perez that she's just gotta stand-up for herself now and then — and tell that hippe-freak, Crystalline Gemstone, that she can just energize her rocks somewheres else!

(Going)

Juanita! Juanita! Did you hear? Corita's gonna be on *The Maury Povitch Show!*

(She exits)

Edwina "Big Ed" Cantrell

(Enters, wearing men's jeans, a T-shirt with an open plaid flannel shirt over it. Her hair is very short. She stops at the altar, but does not light a candle, only speaks to Juanita.)

Juanita, you okay?

(crosses, speaks to Crystal.)

Hey, Crystalline. Energizin' your crystals again?

(Feeling a stone.)

Oh, yeah, that's nice.

(She crosses down to the folding table at left)

And cold as a stone. Hey, Sugar. Ain't this Feme Nina's laundry? Yeah, I thought so. Come on over here with me, this table's filthy! Looks like somebody's dropped long-dong lemon cream all over it.

(She tastes it.)

Yep, that's what it is all right! Ain't nothin' that yellow except long-dong lemon cream.

(Big Ed takes clothes to folding table stage right.)

Was you here earlier when them damn Fisher twins was wreckin' havoc all over the place? Damn, that Corita's got her hands full with them screamin' brats at Destina's Day Care. It's enough to make a person eat their young. 'Specially those Fisher twins! Yeah, Feme Nina called me on my emergency cell phone. I carry an emergency cell phone now, while I'm out makin' deliveries for the *Brillanté Bakery*. I LOVE my truck! I put them big wheels on there myself. I like bein' high-up off the ground. It makes them low-riders look like kiddie-cars, and I can deliver clean out to the Senior Center now, even though you have to cross Sluice Creek. Yeah, Mayhaw, Texas is becomin' a regular metropolis now. Growin' in all directions and they're makin' plans to widen the highway where it cuts through town. Yeah, puttin' in a center turn lane and everything, so's people can get into *Wal-Mart* without backin' up traffic. Sheriff Boyd says the State might even put in a traffic light if anybody else gets killed at that intersection. Who? Feme Nina? Oh, I seen her. She's out back givin' Juanita Gonzales-Perez an ear full of advice. Feme Nina's all about givin' folks advice; but she needs to take some of that advice herself if you ask me! Well, like her diet plan for example. Damn *Weight Watchers* Boot Camp Buddy system callin' all hours of the night. I thought she was havin' an affair! But it was just some fat ass broad with an urge to scarf-down a whole *Sara Lee Double Chocolate Layer Cake!* And them recipe swaps. *Fondue!*

(She THINKS she's saying, "mon dieu!")

There cain't be any thing good in a recipe that starts out, "This tofu entree..." I keep tellin' Feme Nina, I love her just like she is. I like a woman with some meat on her. Take you for example. No I mean it. You look great! Fat!? You're not fat, Sugar! You're round and luscious. There now, I've done gone and embarrassed you! Well, I didn't mean to. Girl, you turned as red as a tomato and twice as juicy!

(Laughs.)

Oh, look at her go now! Red, red, red, red!

(Looks at her more closely.)

You know what? I never noticed it before but you've got a really pretty face, Sugar. No, it ain't your new hair-do. Honey, that ain't a "hair DO;" that's a "Hair DON'T!" I don't know how Mr. Maurice convinces women to have their hair done up like that! It does not "slim your face" it looks like your head has an erection. Plus, you can tell Maurice was drunk last weekend, 'cause your up-do

leans a little to the right. Just take out all them hairpins and let it hang. No, I'm serious, it'll be better, really. You're a beautiful, full-bodied woman and there ain't no reason for you to go forcin' yourself to be different. A flower's meant to bloom — that's all — with whatever color it's supposed to have. Tryin' to make a daisy look like a rose, just makes the daisy look stupid. I been tryin' to tell Feme that for years now. She ain't fat; and even if she is, I still love her. Hell, I wouldn't have married her if I wanted her to change. Well, no, it ain't a LEGAL marriage. Hell, Sugar, this is America! And worse; this is Texas! No, only heterosexuals of the opposite sex — and armadillos — can get legally married in Texas. Yeah, two women can't get married; but armadillos; that's different!

(She sees someone outside.)

There's Doris Crappé-Upton outside again. Feme Nina told me she was pacin' back and forth in front of *The Mayhaw Washateria*.

(Waves to Doris.)

Come on in, Doris! Oh, look at her run! I guess she don't like lesbians bein' too friendly. I think I'll go rescue Juanita Gonzales-Perez from Feme Nina. Poor old Juanita. You know the tabloids is still houndin' her. Even after they carted her daughter off in a straight-jacket. But, that's what happens when your daughter kills a priest; ain't it?

(She exits)

Doris Crappé-Upton

(Enters, wearing a tailored suit, and has that "regal carriage" that says "Money." In a nervous twitter she crosses to the down right altar.)

Are you Juanita Gon—? Sugar? I remember you from Santa Anna High School. Santa Anna High School. I can't believe that I, a Daughter of Texas Independence, attended a High School named for a Mexican dictator! And why *him*? Why not William B. Travis? Or Sam Houston? Or Jim Bowie? At least they were white, upstanding Texan-Americans. William B. Travis. William B. Travis will positively always be remembered as the Texas commander at the Battle of the Alamo. I'm a direct descendent, you know — on my mother's side. My great-grandmother was a Travis, though she said William B. Travis deserted the family. Anyway, I remember you from High School. Everybody called you "Sugar" — though I can't fathom why. You look — different. You were so skinny in school, I always thought you were sickly. That's correct; but I'm Doris Upton now. Yes, that was ME; but it's pronounced "Crappé." There's an *accent grave* over the "E." Yes,

Wallace Upton — Junior — married me in 1968 and took over the family business when his father, Wallace senior retired. I haven't seen you since — well, since Upton's quit being a discount house. No, that was my idea. I positively insisted. I told Wally, I am not about to go to the Garden Club and answer questions about what clearance items are headed for the bargain basement this weekend. I mean, really! Can you imagine? Upton's might as well be a thrift store! *Wal-Mart*? Never been there. Yes, I guess a Super Center must be something to see. We still move in separate circles, don't we? My family home is out in *Belmont Estates*. It's the largest lot of course, and the pink stone exterior was quarried in Italy in the same place they acquired the blocks for the Vatican. No, it's not pink anymore, we had it painted last year. Yes, "celery" is THE color this year. The house has been in the Crappé-Travis family for 110 years. I've had it completely restored to its original heritage of course; but it's been updated with the latest in modern conveniences. Security was my main priority, of course, with all the alien immigrants around and all, and I have the latest technology. Cameras everywhere, all motion-sensor activated. Coming home is like walking onto a movie lot. Lights, camera, action. Just like a movie lot. Except for automatically calling the police. They don't do that on movie lots, I guess. Well, you be certain to tell your friends that we're protected. Do you know where Miss Gonzales-Perez is? No, I checked "out back," she's not there, just the two — uh — lesbians — from the bakery loading laundry in a truck. Edwina — the one they call "Big Ed" — the one that looks like a man? — Spoke to me. Can you imagine? I just ignored her. That positively is not proper; is it? No, I mean it's improper that she looks like a man; not that I didn't speak to her. And those cakes they keep displaying in the bakery window. They're positively pornographic. I've called Sheriff Boyd several times; but he isn't about to do anything as long as they keep giving him free doughnuts. He doesn't do anything about anything that's practically a crime. He's more interested in spreading gossip about — well, the good people. Well, I didn't mean my son — exclusively. Mr. Maurice did your hair; didn't he? I thought so. I always try to book him in the middle of the week, after his weekend hangover wears off. It always leans, when he's got a hangover; doesn't it? It suits you though. When it's that high, it slims your face; you know? And that is such an interesting color. I never go for those colors, myself. I try to use natural hair colors; but that looks real nice — on you. Real unique. Oh, my. Is that that hippie freak over there?

What's her name again? Crystal-Lite? Crystalline, that's it. Stupid name. Crystalline Gemstone. She made it up herself; you know. Well of course she did. She was Gladys Fisher before. I knew her mother quite well. Caroline Fisher. She's one of THE Fishers. Before she ran off.

(Can't believe that Sugar doesn't know who the Fishers are.)

The Fishers. *Fishers Meats*? They live out in *Belmont Estates*, too. Well, she did before she ran-off. In one of the smaller lots. Caroline Fisher was the sweetest woman in the whole world and her daughter is positively an embarrassment to the family. Well, she's a vegetarian for one thing — Which is positively a slap in the face to a family who owns a meat market! And look at her clothes. She looks like a gypsy or something. Don't let her see me. Well, she'll probably want to talk to me — or something equally as horrid. She cornered me at the Daughters of Texas Independence Fund Raiser last month and she kept trying to rub crystals on my face. Oh, 'cause I told her I had a headache — but I was just trying to observe propriety and take my leave. "I'm sorry, Dear, I'd love to stay and chat; but I positively feel one of my migraines coming on." She kept wondering what my "chi" was and I thought she was saying, "Cheese." So, I answered "brie." She positively laughed like a braying mule. Everyone turned to look and they saw us together. Can you imagine? I was positively mortified, you know? I wish Miss Gonzales-Perez was here. I absolutely must speak with her. No, it's a very personal — a positively delicate — matter.

(Surprised that Sugar guessed the nature of her "personal matter.")

As a matter of fact, it IS about her daughter.

(Stunned.)

What did you say? Maria's coming home? When? Today? Oh, my goodness! You don't think the media is coming, too; do you? Well, I can't be caught dead in a Washateria, Sugar! Why not? Because my husband owns *Upton's Department Store*; that's why not! Especially with hippie-Crystal-what's-her-name in here, too. That's all I need. "Garden Club president found in washateria with Gypsy, film at eleven." I had no idea that Maria Perez was coming home. Hasn't she caused Mayhaw enough embarrassment? I mean the whole state of Texas saw it on *PBS* — oh, they did that exposé *When Children Kill*. Every time I'm at market in Atlanta or Dallas and I say I'm from Mayhaw, Texas — they always go, "Oh, did you know that little Mexican girl that killed that priest?" As if I would even speak to a Mexican. They should never have let her out of that hospital. She'll kill us all, I'm certain of it. I mean, if she'd kill a priest — a man of God — she

wouldn't bat-an-eye about killing a leading socialite like myself. What? Where? Right there; the one lighting the candle? Well, she hardly looks Mexican at all. Thank you. No, I'll introduce myself.

(She crosses to the altar)

Miss Gonzales-Perez? You don't know me; but... well, yes. I AM Mrs. Upton, I guess everyone knows ME. Well, I wasn't "pacing back and forth" I was just walking by — several times. Miss Perez, I need to ask you a rather personal question. Can we talk privately? "Out back?" But it's so — dirty — back there — with the lesbians and all. No, I guess this is okay. Light a candle? Well, I'm a Baptist and — oh, all right.

(She lights a candle.)

What? A prayer? Oh. I see.

(She blows out the candle,
re-lights the candle, and says a silent prayer.)

First off, I didn't know your daughter was coming home today. I am so sorry. Oh. You're glad? Well, of course you are. She IS your daughter. No matter what they do, they're always our children aren't they? She's cured then? Well, yes. I guess she must be; or they wouldn't let her out; would they? Yes. Perhaps I should get to the point. This is — well, this is about my daughter, Gillian. Well, since you've had your fair share of — difficulties — with your own daughter, I thought you might help me with my — uh — problem. I mean, it's not really the same, since your daughter was brought up Catholic and we're Baptists. I mean, you've never heard of a Baptist being possessed and needing an exorcism; have you? I've always said Catholicism and spicy foods would make anyone feel possessed. But — Well — You see, for quite a while now, my daughter — Gillian — has been getting tattoos. Some of which are rather vulgar. Colorful, but vulgar. And recently — she's — she's gotten herself — pierced. Pierced. Rings and silver bars mostly. I guess. I haven't actually seen any of them myself; I positively won't allow her to wear any of them in the house. "Not under my roof," I always say, and the metal detectors always let me know when she comes in. But she seems to delight in announcing where her latest silver ring is. The other night at a dinner party I was giving for a new charity I'm organizing — we're trying to get a symphony orchestra in Mayhaw. Your people like music, right? I mean this is classical music of course, not Salsa or Marry-Chats-Kees — classical music. Yes, we think it would be nice, too. Anyway, at this dinner party, with just the right people; you know business owners? Oh, you're a business owner? Oh. Well, I will absolutely HAVE to add your name to the list; won't I?

(An uncomfortable little laugh.)

Anyway, at this positively elegant, catered dinner, Gillian looks up from her soup, with it leaking from the hole in her lip, and says, "I just put a new ring in my ...(Labia)..." — well — I can't repeat it word for word. But she's pierced a place on the female anatomy which I didn't even know existed! Margret Courtney had to explain it to me. Her husband's a gynecologist, so she absolutely MUST know. I positively do not know what to do and I thought you might be able to help me. Because you've been through this type of trauma before. You know, with Maria and all. Well, I'm not certain lighting a candle will actually help the situation. — Yes, I DO try to take it one day at a time; but sometimes a whole week will positively attack me all at once; you know? Well, I — I thought maybe you could tell me how to get Gillian hospitalized. Like you did for Maria. Only, perhaps with a little less media coverage, of course. Self-mutilation is clearly a sign of some disorder; right? I thought — excuse me? What do you mean, you reserve the right to refuse service to anyone? I see your sign, Miss Gonzales-Perez. I'm not illiterate. I am clearly not here to perform some menial chore like washing clothes, I'm — well! You'd better keep that child of yours under lock and key, Miss Gonzales-Perez, I'm warning you. I know Sheriff Boyd personally. And this —

(Indicates the altar)

This is positively and absolute fire hazard!

(She blows out some candles and exits)

Crystalline Gemstone

(Enters wearing an outfit which makes her look more like a gypsy than the "spiritual healer" she believes herself to be.

She goes to dryer, removes her crystals, crosses to altar.)

Hey, Juanita. Oh, what's the matter?

(Sets her crystals down.)

Did Ms. Upton bring you down? I tried to tell her; her "chi" is all messed up. Her aura is positively black, Juanita, black. Take this crystal and rub it on your forehead in tiny little circles. Well, it just came out of the dryer. If it's too hot, blow on it. Right in the center of your forehead. That's it, try to picture in your mind some pleasant scene. Or just a color that you like. What's your favorite color?

(Disappointed in the color chosen.)

Well, red isn't really the best. Perhaps you should try to picture a pretty scene in your mind. Like a tropical oasis. Mango trees. Something that makes you happy. Maria as a baby?

(Still disappointed.)

Well, how about that tropical oasis? You know green trees, sparkling water. Let's do that; okay? I'll go over here and let you find your inner-peace. Close your eyes, now. See the trees? See the water sparkling? Now rub the crystal. That's it.

(Takes her crystals and crosses to table.)

Hey, Sugar. Poor Juanita. Maria's comin' home today and Juanita's all up-tight about it. They should-a never made Maria go to that hospital. Crystals and introspection could have cured her. I'm certain of it! Her whole problem was brought on by sexual tension, she wasn't possessed by the devil. She didn't need an exorcism, she needed a healing crystal — or maybe an ear-wax candle. Her whole problem was brought on by Catholicism and guilt. No, it's true. You know how those Mexicans believe so strongly in religion. That's why their country is so screwed up. I mean, they have altars in their Washaterias! Well, yes, I do; but a Meditation Room and an altar are two entirely different things. For one thing MY candles are scented. I know Maria was only eight when she killed that priest, but I could tell by her aura it was sexual. I don't believe in the Devil anyway. I mean, if I believe in the Devil, then I have to believe in God, too, and God is just too transitory. If God created this beautiful world, why did He abandon it? I mean, when I create a macramé plant hanger, I put it where I can see it and admire it. I put a plant in it and then I water the plant and sing to it. I don't walk away from it and let the plant just fend for itself. Plants weren't made for that! They need someone to water them and sing to them once in a while. No, I don't believe in God. I believe in Mother Nature. Maria was just manifesting the sexual tension inside her. That's why she said such vile things. And all that vomiting? Meat, pure and simple. Maria just needed to find contentment and harmony in her life. And I think Doris Upton brought her negative energy in here and messed up the "chi" of the Washateria. Ms. Upton places way too much importance on material things. Plus, I guess you know she redecorated her house out there in *Belmont Estates*, without even thinking about *Fung Shui* or anything! Negative energy everywhere. Not that she's ever invited me in, or anything; but you can just tell by the way she walks that somethin's wrong. Speaking of which — What's wrong with your hair? Well, it's like the Leaning Tower of Pizza, or somethin'. Mr. Maurice? Why would you even allow that man to touch your hair, Sugar? Your hair is a living thing. It wants to be set free. How would you like it if someone came along and pinned you down, and sprayed you with lacquer? Well, your hair doesn't like it anymore than you

would. You should never force "living things" to be something they're not. Let them be free and allowed to grow on their own. Corita Destina is positively ruinin' the kids in this town. Threatening them with bodily harm and cursing. It pains me so to see children in her care. Our children are our future and we need to teach them by example. Eating healthy foods, which "mother earth" provides in abundance. Not fast-food like they serve at *Taco Bell*. Oh, I saw you over there, Sugar. Putting all that junk food in your body — you might as well eat poison! It's absolutely full of chemicals! Organic. That's the way to health. You put chemicals in your body and chemicals on your hair and you wonder why you're so unhappy? Oh, you say you're happy; but I know you're not! Always dieting. You have to learn to love yourself for who you are. Fat and all! You have to learn to say, "I have a big ass and I'm glad." If you spend all your time trying to be something you aren't, you'll waste the person you already are.

(Firmly answering a direct question.)

No, I told you — I don't believe in God, Sugar. Well, I think there might be a God — or a Goddess— somewhere, who doesn't remember that we're even here. I mean, think about it. Before we had a monotheistic religion — a belief in one God — we had several Gods. There was the God of War, and the Goddess of Love and the God of this and the Goddess of that. And every single one of these Gods and Goddesses demanded sacrifices. Burn a little wheat for this one, slaughter a lamb for that one, and pretty soon, the masses are all out of bread and veal, and they're all going, "my wealth is all going up in smoke — paying homage — making sacrifices." And some really smart pious men decided, "I know, if we just had ONE God to sacrifice to, we wouldn't be so wasteful with all our stuff." So, the one God idea was created and before you know it, even that little sacrifice to that one God was thrown out, too. Replaced with lighting votive candles. And all we're left with is a God who at best is apathetic to us. He— or she — is too busy being omnipotent to bother with all of us peons. If there is a God, He's probably really pissed-off seeing us ruining this pretty blue planet He made. Now, think about that, while I go see how Juanita is doing.

(She crosses to the altar.)

Do you have any scented candles, Juanita? Well, this one's pretty.

(She lights a tall candle with painted "window-pane" sides)

Are you feeling better now, Juanita? I'm sorry, were you praying? No, I'm sorry if I disturbed your prayer. I hope God answers you.

He never answers me: I know that. I always feel like He just lets His machine take a message. "Hola, this is God, I'm not in right now; but if you leave your name and number at the beep, I'll get right back to you." Well, I guess that's not funny to somebody who was just praying. I'll run along. No, you keep that crystal and when ever you're feeling a little stress, just place it on your forehead and make those tiny little circles. Let me get you some incense outta my car. I think some lavender should improve your "chi."

(She exits)

Juanita

(Enters wearing her "work clothes" which are merely comfortable in the heat of a Washateria in Tejas. She lights a candle at the altar..)

Hola, Sugar. I am Juanita Gonzales-Perez and you are my friend, no? Then why you no speak to me? Everyone else who come in here today speak to me; but you — you no speak to me. Troubles? *Si*, I got troubles. All peoples got their troubles, Sugar. Ah, you see me and that is enough for you. You listen and that is enough for you. You no have to talk. Yes, light a candle for my troubles. That is very thoughtful. You see them big front windows? Many years ago — before I need this altar — Maria was just a little thing, sitting right here, looking through that big plate glass with the big red letters on it. And she say, "Mama read that to me." And I read it out loud — just as proud, " Mayhaw Washateria - Juanita Gonzales-Perez - proprietor." And she look at me with her eyes like diamonds — and a big smile on her face and she say, "Mama, we are on TV!" She think that big plate glass is a television because every person walking by would look in here — the same way folks can't pass a TV set, without looking at it. Now, Sugar, you been listening to these — ladies all day, and I been listening to them all day, too. And after listening to them talk to you and listening to them to talk to me, I decided, they are just — well — they are just like TV commercials. Now — I mean that in a nice way. The commercials interrupt your show; they just make you wait a minute or so until your show come back on. And once in a while, the commercial actually say something you need to hear. Corita say she is going to talk on the *Maury Povitch TV Show*. I think that would be good. — for her at least. It would mean a lot to her to see herself on TV. I would like to see her on TV, too. 'Cause my TV has something this Laundromat don't have — it has many many people who watch it and that is

what Corita needs. But Corita make me realize something and for that I am grateful to God for sending Corita to me. She make me realize that no matter how screwed-up your kids are, it don't do Mama no good to cry — they still be screwed-up. And Feme Nina — dear old, fat and happy, Feme Nina. I think she's right. I should stand up for myself now and then and I will tell Crystalline Gemstone she can't use my dryers to energize her rocks — just as soon as Feme Nina admits she's a *lesbian* and quits making cakes shaped like a

(use Spanish word for "penis.")

And "Big Ed" — ya know, Sugar — I like "Big Ed." I don't know why I like her. I just do. Maybe because she look like a man and has a heart like a woman. The world could use more men like that! Speakin' of women, that beauty, Carmen Alanzo, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. I thank God for sending her to me, too, and explaining how we are either Anglos, or Chicanos, or Latinos, or Homo's — when all this time I thought we were just human beings. And Mrs. Wallace Upton — well, she must be something special! I mean — How many women do you know who give birth to their own ancestors! And the nicest thing I can say about Doris Upton is that she deserve every one of 'em; but mostly she deserves herself. Wealth is like someone who pours water into a pot of unbaked clay — it slowly trickles away. And God sent Doris Upton to me today, to let me know that even people with lots of money can have kids that's screwed-up. Then there's Crystalline Gemstone — Hand me a rock. Please. And God sent her to me today to show me that some folks think they have all the answers — and they don't even wait to hear the questions. One good rock could cure her, I am certain of it! These women come in here to day and they light a candle for themselves. For their own troubles. And then God sent me you, Sugar. I like you. No, I not saying that 'cause you are here. I mean it. I like you. You don't talk — you listen. You light a candle for me — for my Maria — for my troubles. And you no speak — you listen. And that's nice. God should make a whole bunch of listeners like you. Everyone come to you and tell you of their lives, and how they see the world, and how they would fix it. And you know — they won't do any of the things they talk about, they only need to hear themselves talk. They leave, confident that they COULD make a difference, if they wanted to go to all that trouble and you make them think they are right. Even when you know they not right. You know they don't want conversation, just an audience to admire them. And that's what we all want — an

admiring audience. Just people to look in the front window at our little lives — like a TV show — just once a week, or when we have a special guest — and laugh a little bit — or cry a little, too — and hope to be invited back. That's all anybody wants.

(she lights a tall, colorful candle)

Religion is a candle inside a multicolored tall glass. Everyone looks through their own favorite color, but the candle inside is always there — always the same — lighting the way for hope.

(She sees Maria standing in the door.

There's a catch in her voice as she hides the tears.)

Oh, look, Sugar! Look who is on our TV show today. It's our special guest today — Welcome home, Maria.

(lights fade as she opens her arms to embrace her daughter.)