

SHERIFF

42 BEST LITTLE WHOREHOUSE IN TEXAS

(The OTHER GIRLS ALL respond.)

MISS MONA. Alright, girls, why don't you run on up to your rooms and get ready to eat.

(The GIRLS wander off into other parts of the house as MISS MONA goes to the SHERIFF to find out what in God's name is upsetting him.)

START

SHERIFF. Did you see that God damn TV show last night?

MISS MONA. You know me, Ed Earl, I was home studin' my Sunday School lesson last night.

SHERIFF. Well, I was out in the cedar breaks all night myself lookin' for moonshiners, but I heard about it first thang this morning. It's all folks is talkin' about all over town.

MISS MONA. Well if they're talkin about television they're givin' me a rest.

SHERIFF. Naw, now! That's where you're wrong! That little television idiot that's always stirrin' up a stink? He told ever'body watchin' the news last night that you was runnin' a whorehouse, here in Gilbert.

MISS MONA. Did what?

SHERIFF. Hail, yes! Announced it right out loud! right on the goddamn news!

MISS MONA. Yeah, it was prob'ly news to a couple of tourists and all Texans still takin' their suppers outa high chairs. *(Beat. Then with interest.)* Did he call my name?

SHERIFF. Not only that, the sumbitch called mine!

(MISS MONA laughs.)

MISS MONA. He did?

SHERIFF. Now Godamit, Mona, you are takin' this thing too light. You forget what you're sellin' out here. But if that little television idiot goes on stirrin' folks up it's a liable to mess up your playhouse. Mine too, for that matter. I've stuck my neck out from Hell-to-Georgia protectin' you and there's some folks just might get to thinkin' it's because of them campaign contributions you give me.

MISS MONA. *(Teasing.)* Ed Earl, we both know that ain't even half the story.

SHERIFF. Me and you knows that, sure. And we also know that if you was not runnin' a clean place out here I'd close you

down, faster than goose shit would run through a tin horn. But what about them forty-six hunderd voters out there? A office-holder's gotta make ends meet just like ever'body else, and naturally he's gonna turn to his friends.

MISS MONA. Well, naturally.

SHERIFF. But the public don't unnerstand how politics works, no better than pigs unnerstands kissin'. Naw, Mona, if loose talk gets started you and me could both wind up with our tails in a crack.

MISS MONA. Aw, Ed Earl, would you come over here and sit down?

SHERIFF. Well hell yes!

(MONA takes him by the hand and sits him down in her wheelchair.)

MISS MONA. You've got to learn how to relax. I know what you oughta do. Why don't you go unlock all that bootleg whiskey you've confiscated, see, and then you can call out the old church biddies in their fruit hats, and let 'em stand around clappin' and a 'singin' about Jesus, while you come in with a great big sledgehammer, and break it all up? It always worked before.

SHERIFF. Naw, you can't hardly git folks to come out to a whiskey-breakin' no more. Not if Lawrence Welk is on. Shit, I ain't caught me a peepin' tom in Lanvil County in twenty-two years, 'cause they're all at home watchin' the Goddamn television.

MISS MONA. Ed Earl, how are folks in town takin' all this?

SHERIFF. Well, okay up to now. They pointin' out how you always sponsor the Americanism pageant over to the high school.

MISS MONA. I hope somebody mentioned that I pay double taxes on this place as Miss Mona's Boarding House.

SHERIFF. Yeah but you let that television idiot keep on runnin' off at the mouth and folks'll start crusadin'. Preachers'll start gettin' everybody worked up, and the schoolteachers and the Jaycees, and I'll hafta spend so much time stompin' out grass fires I'd just as well to sell my huntin' dawgs.

MISS MONA. Ed Earl, don't you forget that one half of the police officers and two thirds of the lawyers in the state of Texas grew up right in this house. I think it'll all blow over in time.

SHERIFF. Goddamn goddamn television anyhow. Hell, their

ain't nothin' on it but meddlers and pryers and a buncha football boys jitterbuggin' in the end zones . . . You 'member, you 'member how nice and peaceful things used to be Mona? That was when you was still a workin' girl out here for Miss Wulla Jean. (HE *laughs.*) Why hell, back then when one a them little pissant nickel newspaper editors around here got it in his craw to crusade, I could always stop it by just threatenin' him. But goddamn, how in the hell am I gonna threaten Mike Wallace or Walter Cronkite? They'll be in this thing next.

MISS MONA. Aw, Hunny, now don't you worry . . .

(GINGER *runs ONSTAGE, interrupting the conversation.*)

GINGER. Sheriff! Sheriff! You better make tracks! The Mayor called. He's fit to be tied. There is a T.V. man down at the courthouse lookin' for you. (GINGER *exits.*)

SHERIFF. T.V. man? I'll betcha it's that Melvin P. Thorpe bastard. I better get on down to the courthouse steps.

MISS MONA. Well now, that must be some sorry reporter looking for you down at the courthouse.

SHERIFF. (HE *gives her a warning look.*) You know this Goddamn job ain't no fun no more? Hell, there was a time when law and order meant somethin'. But now, you gotta read folks their rights to 'em til you go half blind and fill out a stack of goddamn papers that a show dog couldn't jump over. I've got me half a mind to give this job back to 'em.

MISS MONA. Well, there's some say that you've got too rich for the job.

SHERIFF. Goddammit, Mona, that ain't funny. All I've got is my pension and my good name.

MISS MONA. And your cadillac and your cattle ranch . . . and how about that fishin' lodge down at Padre Island?

SHERIFF. Huh. Women'll drive you crazy if you'll let 'em. (THE SHERIFF *exits out the ramp.*)

MISS MONA. Bye, bye Ed Earl. Y'all come back . . .

(The spot holds on MONA briefly after his exit and we see her concern.)

BLACKOUT

END