

the hall when Nadine said to Ruth, "We've been thinking of having him fixed."

Ellis stepped out of the shower and there was Nadine's stupid dachshund, Rusty, looking at him with a gleam in his eye, looking specifically at his thick, hairy calves. He said, "Beat it, you dumb mutt."

But Rusty, aroused, wasn't going to be stopped that easily. Ellis tried to stop the little dog's charge with a quick snap of his wet towel, but he missed. Rusty clamped onto Ellis' lower leg like an elongated barnacle on a white, hairy pier piling, and started humping.

"OH JESUS H. CHRIST," Ellis shouted. He danced down the hall to the living room on one foot, spinning, cursing, and shaking his afflicted leg, screaming, "GET THIS GOD DAMNED MUTT OFF ME."

Nadine looked down into her coffee cup, blushing, while Ruth roared, "ELLIS, YOU BASTARD, LEAVE THAT DOG ALONE."

#### CLETE AND JUANITA DROP BY TO CHIT-CHAT

Ellis paid the delivery guy, including a stingy tip, and brought the pizza inside.

Ruth set up the T.V. trays while he opened the box and fixed a big pitcher of wine coolers.

Then the doorbell rang. Ellis looked at the pizza, then at the door. The bell rang again, insistent. Ruth looked through the curtains: it was the neighbors, Clete and Juanita, looking hungry. She whispered to Ellis, "Hide it."

Then she opened the door, "Clete and Juanita. What a pleasant surprise. Oh, and Ginger too. Boy, it is our lucky night."

Ginger was Juanita's Chihuahua. She pranced into the house, leading the way for her owner, would've bitten Ellis on the ankle if the leash had been two inches longer. "My, it smells good in here," said Juanita.

"I'll say," said Clete.

"Our new air freshener. You like it?" said Ellis.

"Smells Italian," said Clete.



"It is," said Ellis.

Ginger sniffed the air.

Everyone settled in, made themselves comfortable. The men talked football, the women talked drapes. The pizza cooled in its hiding place, the little pools of grease trapped in the craters formed by the curled up pepperoni slices congealing into waxy circles, like tiny lakes freezing over in the winter.

Ginger, pacing back and forth, straining at the leash, finally located the source of the tempting aroma. She stuck her nose between the bottom of the couch and the rug, rooting like a small, spindly-legged pig.

"What is this dog after?" said Juanita, pulling at the leash.

"Maybe something crawled under there and died," said Clete.

Ruth caught Ellis' eye. Ellis shrugged his shoulders and blushed. Ginger, relentless, hooked a tooth into the pizza box and started scooting backwards.

#### RADIATOR BLUES: PART ONE

Glenda got in a fist fight at the swap meet with a small, hairy, ape-like man over the price of a cheap, Korean-made blender. Her husband, Bob, embarrassed as all get out, pulled her off the poor bastard before she could beat him to a bloody pulp.

In the truck on the way home she became so foul mouthed and abusive that Bob stopped on a freeway overpass, pulled her out of the cab, hit her a couple of times, then pushed her over the guard rail.

She hit the freeway and bounced before being run over by Raul Rodriguez in his '68 Pontiac Catalina. She ended up in the ivy on the bank on the side of the freeway. Raul kept on driving, a steady hiss of water coming out of his radiator where her knee had smashed the grill into it.

Bob got back into the truck and headed home, wondering what, for Christ's sake, he was going to tell the kids.