

front of the T.V. with their nutcrackers and feast.

But they made the mistake of throwing some of the scraps to their chihuahua, Ginger, who liked the taste. It turned her into a hunter, until one of the crabs she was out yapping at grabbed her forepaw and tried to drag her to a watery grave, where she was to become his supper.

Juanita turned the tables, though: Ginger's yips of pain and terror brought Juanita out of the house to scoop her baby, crab still attached, out of the lagoon, and she dashed the crab to smithereens on the patio. Ginger limped around lapping at the snotty entrails that had been splattered across the cement.

THE DISCONCERTED BLUES, Part 1

Nichole was disconcerted when she found out that she was pregnant, but she thought maybe she could turn things to her favor by telling her mom that Doug, her mom's boyfriend, was the father, and then maybe Mom would finally kick that low-life out of the house and help take over raising the kid when it came. But the plan backfired. Mom took Doug's side, called Nichole a little slut and threw her, bodily, out the door, tossed a couple of changes of clothes out behind her. Then Nichole's mom and Doug got into a nasty fight that had Doug — after the shoving match, the shattering of glass — leaving the house the same way Nichole had, a flock of his shirts and pants flying over his head in a jumbled formation then dropping down silently on the lawn.

THE DISCONCERTED BLUES, Part 2

Nichole's mom called her ex, Nichole's dad, and told him what had happened with Doug and Nichole. Nichole's dad said, "I'll kill that fucker," and hung up before Nichole's mom could reason with him.

THE DISCONCERTED BLUES, Part 3

Doug spotted Nichole storming up Chasin Street, sinking in and out of the black shadows of the broken canopies of the curb-side Brazilian pepper trees. He pulled the car up in front of her, jumped out and stood in the middle of the sidewalk, blocking her path. As she tried to cut around him he grabbed her wrist and said, "If I'm gonna get blamed

for touching your precious young ass, I wanna get some of it." He tried to pull her to the car, but Nichole struggled, kicked at his crotch. Doug saw it coming, angled his leg in to block the kick, taking the pointed toe of her shoe on the knee, a spot that proved almost as painful as the intended target. He let her go and limped over and sat down on the curb, involuntary tears in his eyes. A porch light blinked on, and a voice said, "Hey pervert, I just called the cops on you."

THE DISCONCERTED BLUES, Part 4

Brett was disconcerted when Nichole called him from Trina's house to tell him about the results of her pregnancy test. "You haven't been fuckin' anybody else, have you?" "Oh God, no!" Nichole almost shouted. "What do you think I am, anyway?"

THE DISCONCERTED BLUES, Part 5

Nichole's dad waited on the porch. When Doug limped up the sidewalk, Nichole's dad fired three times, and Doug skipped backwards and crumbled down onto the lawn.

THE DISCONCERTED BLUES, Part 6

Trina and Nichole sat on Trina's bed, drinking cokes and smoking cigarettes. Trina said, "You better hope it was Brett and not Thomas. If it was Thomas, it's gonna be pretty obvious." A fresh tear seeped out of Nichole's eye. She sipped her coke, nodded her head and said, "I know."

THE RECEPTION, Part 1

At the wedding reception of Brett and Nichole, Maid of Honor Trina and Best Man Troy sneak off to Troy's car and make love in the front passenger seat in the bright daylight, the sun's blinding glare bouncing off a hundred facets of the surrounding car window glass, blinding Troy as he comes.