

Lorraine and the Groundhog

By Harriet Norris

Lorraine Smallwood had seven children whom she loved. However, she had loved her five husbands and many boyfriends a little bit more, when they were around. Most of all, she loved her Cadillac, whichever new one she had at the time, and Lorraine always had a new one. Lorraine lived with her three youngest children and her fifth husband, Bob, in a nice, well-groomed, family neighborhood. Her large ranch style house sat on a slope with a concrete driveway running past the left side of the house. The driveway curved gently down to a large patio on the back at basement level. This was not used as a patio, but as a parking pad. Lorraine didn't like to barbeque or sit outside so the concrete patio was a great place to park and have her car washed. From the patio, there was an entrance into the basement, where Lorraine had her beauty shop. Her customers parked in the long winding driveway or on the street. Her Cadillac always got the patio. The garbage cans resided on the patio, too, against the back of the house. The kids did garbage duty, Lorraine never wanted to touch it or be outside long enough to mess with it. Lorraine didn't like dirt, garbage, anything smelly, or anything outdoors.

One morning in the dead of summer, Lorraine was sipping her coffee, looking out her kitchen window to the back yard and patio. Some animal had torn into the garbage and made a mess all around and on her car! What was worse, it had left garbage up on the hood of the car, surrounded by dirty, greasy little paw prints! She was horrified! She stormed into her son's bedroom, yelling, "Chester, get up! Get up! Some damn animal has torn up garbage all over my car! You have to go out with me and wash it off." Chester, who was used to these tirades, just mumbled and rolled over. Lorraine smacked him on the back of his head and yelled again, "I said, get up, now!" Chester did get up, rubbing the back of his head. He knew better than to ask for

breakfast first. He threw on some shorts and outside he went. Loraine changed from her bedclothes and followed him out. With Chester picking up the trash, Loraine connected the hose and filled a bucket with water and soap. Even after the car sparkled, she was noticeably upset, mumbling to herself and slinging around the sponge and bucket. "I'll find that animal. I'll kill that thing," Loraine said repeatedly to herself.

That night Loraine had Chester secure the trash can lid with a concrete block. The next morning there was no trash spread around, but there were dirty little paw prints all over the hood and roof of her car. She and Chester washed it again. The third night Loraine got up several times in the dark to turn on the lights shining on the patio. Nothing happened until just before dawn. Loraine saw paw prints again! *Damn! Missed it again. I'll catch it next time. It won't hide well enough. It won't run fast enough. It will die.*

Getting up an hour before dawn the fourth day, Loraine flipped on the patio lights and there it was! A big groundhog, sniffing around on the hood of her Cadillac, leaving muddy prints everywhere. The lights scared the groundhog and it took off down through the back yard. It disappeared about thirty feet down the bank. *It must have a hole back there. I can trap it now.* Loraine thought, as she gripped the countertop and leaned toward the window for a closer look.

As soon as daylight broke Loraine grabbed Chester out of bed and the two of them found the hole the groundhog was using. It was the drainage pipe coming from the gutters on the house. Being a dry summer so far, the groundhog's hideaway hadn't yet been flooded. It was living blissfully unaware that a heavy rain could wash it away. Chester was ordered to put a piece of wood in front of the pipe and plant two concrete blocks firmly into the ground to hold the wood in place. "That ought to do it," she said.

"But it will die in there," said Chester. "That could be a problem."

“Exactly,” answered Loraine. “We will give it time to die then take away the blockade. A good rain will take care of the rest.”

Half right—the poor thing died, after starving inside the series of drainage pipes that ran up to the patio and then branched off to both the left and right gutters and under the basement floor. They all joined near the drain on the patio. The groundhog must have been searching for a way out or food and followed the pipe under the basement before going to groundhog heaven just a couple of feet from the basement drain. Soon a horrible smell filled the basement, clearly coming from the floor drain. Loraine poured Clorox and water into the drain thinking that would solve the problem. It didn't, so she proceeded to add more Clorox. The smell still came back. Loraine could not have this smell in the basement, in her beauty shop, wafting upstairs at all hours.

She turned to Bob for a solution. “You have to do something,” she ordered. “This will ruin my business.” Not that she had that many customers anyway, especially when she was married. It seems most of her customers were men. When she was married, she didn't need the extra money. Besides husbands don't like potential rivals hanging around. It was hard for Loraine not to attract men. Although a bit chunky, or buxom, she had a pretty face, glamorously styled, platinum hair, and perfect makeup. She always smelled luscious.

Bob determined that the cover of the basement drain was welded to the drainpipe so they could not push out the dead groundhog with any sort of long pole. They tried to use the hose, but the groundhog's body blocked the flow and caused the water to back up. Fearing the stinky water would back up onto the basement floor, they stopped that experiment. Then Bob had a brainstorm. He had a friend, Woody, who was a fireman. He would borrow a fire truck and use the fire hose to flush out the dead groundhog. That should be powerful enough to move the

groundhog forward and not cause the water to back up. Chester started to express some worry about this method.

“Uh, I don’t think that’s a good idea,” he said politely. Before he could go on, Loraine interrupted.

“Bob knows what he’s doing!” she cracked in a mean voice. Chester didn’t say anything else.

Later that day Woody showed up with the fire truck. Loraine had to move her Cadillac forward to make room. Woody pulled the fire truck down the driveway, partly onto the patio. It was a beautiful day; the Cadillac was clean and shiny, sitting there with the top down. *A beautiful sight*, thought Loraine.

Woody and Bob dragged the fire hose through the basement door and placed the nozzle directly against the drain cover. Bob, Chester, and Loraine were all instructed to work together and hold the nozzle firmly in place, while Woody went to start the water flow. They felt the hose vibrate and soon a violent flow of water shot out. It was all the three of them could do to hold the nozzle in place. Woody came back into the basement in to help them. At first, some water backed up around the drain, then suddenly shot into the drainpipe free and fast. They all smiled with satisfaction. After about five minutes, they decided the groundhog corpse should be in the woods and Woody went to turn off the water.

It seems whoever put in the drainpipes never considered that a more or less solid object would ever be stuck in there. They had used ninety-degree turns to attach the pipes from both gutters to the pipe that ran to the backyard. There was another ninety-degree turn toward the patio drain that led back under the basement in a straight line, coming downhill. Of course, no one knew how the drainpipes had been laid out. Well, no one but the groundhog, who was of no

help at that point. The water flow pushed the bones and hide to that patio right angle turn and formed a plug. The water and the rest of the groundhog had nowhere to go but up and out of the patio drain, right next to Loraine's Cadillac. Unknown to those inside holding the nozzle, water and gushy, disintegrated groundhog parts flew into the air with a force only a fire hose could generate. It was like a gruesome, stinky, fountain, shooting six feet into the air and landing directly onto and into the topless Cadillac. The soul of the groundhog was surely in animal heaven, but the soft, liquid, earthly remains were in Loraine's maroon Cadillac. In the seams of the soft, dove gray leather upholstery. In the fibers of the plush, light gray carpeting. In the folds of the black canvas convertible top.

When Woody went out to turn off the water and saw the mess, he didn't say a word, but immediately began to roll up the fire hose for a quick getaway. Bob started to help him, but when he stepped outside, he froze in his tracks. "Oh, my god, my god! I'm a dead man!" He looked like he would start to cry at any minute. "Don't you take that hose away," he ordered. "We have to clean this mess."

Woody could barely speak. In a whisper, he said weakly. "I don't think it will help." As his voice returned he said, "Dear god, keep Loraine inside until we figure this out." It was too late. Loraine burst out of the basement door, beaming with satisfaction that she had defeated the dead groundhog. Then, she saw her Cadillac. At first, she began to, sort of, cry. A moaning sound like a sick cat came out of her throat. That turned to a growling noise that rose in pitch to a scream, then another scream, and four or five more. Finally, she collapsed against the house. After thirty seconds or so, she glared at Bob and Woody with bloodshot eyes and said in a low voice, "Fix this, or else."

Lorraine went back into the basement. Chester had heard everything and already exited through the upstairs to his friend's house down the street, where he stayed for two days. Lorraine went to her bedroom, locked the door, and stayed there until the next day about noon. After pacing awhile, Bob called the Cadillac dealer and offered up his savings account. Woody drove the fire truck away, quickly. Someone from the Cadillac dealer brought a tow truck to pull away the stinky Cadillac. Bob spent the next morning at the dealership signing away his current and future assets. Later in the day the dealership delivered a brand new, champagne beige hardtop Cadillac with taupe leather seats and fawn brown carpeting. Peace was restored temporarily. After that, the garbage can was always secured with a concrete block. The drainpipes were rerouted at considerable expense, and a wire mesh cover was installed over the outlet pipe. The new Cadillac would have its own disaster in the future.