

Kitty Love

by Jack Swenson

Our next door neighbor is in love with his cat. His wife sits in our kitchen crying her eyes out. My wife comforts her. "There, there," she says, and pours the poor woman another glass of wine. "You should see them together," she says. The animal is shameless. She lies on her back and offers her belly to him to be scratched. She wiggles and purrs and looks up at him with her eyes half closed. "And what does he do?" my wife asks. Our neighbor bursts into tears anew. She refuses to say. Our imaginations run wild. Does he tickle her tummy? Does he scratch her ears? Does he pick her up with his bony hands and give her a kiss on her adorable little nose? His wife won't say. She sits there in her chair with her hands folded, her eyes downcast, and shakes her head, whipping her short red curls from side to side.

My wife gives me the signal to leave, and when I have exited the room, she slides the kitchen doors shut. I glue my ear to one of the doors, but I can't hear what they are saying. Some minutes later, they emerge, and my wife says she is going to walk home with Denise. She'll be back in a bit, she says.

"Well?" I say when she returns, but she isn't talking. However, the look on her face tells me that she has a plan. I keep my mouth shut. I figure I'll find out what's up soon enough. I hope it isn't murder. Barney is well off; if he were to have a fatal mishap, his widow would do very well for herself.

My fears are ungrounded. What my wife has in mind is more like an intervention. We will have a little talk with Barney, she says. "You mean you and me?" I ask. My wife scowls. "Of course," she says. I smile brightly.

And so we have a talk with Barney. He denies everything, of course. But my wife keeps after him until he confesses. He weeps. Yes, yes, he says, he loves the animal. He's always had a thing for females with whiskers and pointed ears. He promises he will break off the affair. And, he swears, it will never happen again.

That night in bed my wife asks me if I think he'll keep his word. "Oh, sure," I say. "Barney's a stand up guy." "Mm," my wife says, and she rolls over and goes to sleep.

I do not tell her when later that week I peek through the curtains in our dining room one evening and through the window of the house next door I see Barney holding the cat in his arms. They are cheek to cheek, moving in a circle. They seem to be doing a slow waltz.

