

Empty

by Kathy Fish

It rains all over them. Their hair and their clothes droop. Their bare feet slap the pavement. Droplets cling to their noses. They don't duck and run. These kids. Even their underwear is soaked. The place reeks of manure and corn dogs and Tom Thumb donuts. Wet belly buttons and Tiger Boy and diesel fuel and cows and beer and the breath from nostrils of the World's Smallest Horse.

The one boy's hunched over, trying to light a cigarette and the other says *Man, that's the saddest thing I've ever seen.* And the exchange student says, *Ya!* The other boy lugs a large stuffed Homer Simpson whose yellow bleeds onto his shoulder. *Look at us,* the girl says, *we're so unkempt and sorry. We need mothering.*

The boys laugh, but the girl's mom said it to her all the time. She remembers her mom's bed in the dining room, under the chandelier and after she was gone, her dad sitting next to it, eating a tenderloin out of a white bag. *I'm on empty,* the girl says. *I want something good. Also, that cigarette looks like a tampon.*

They'd spent all their money on the freaks and skee ball and pooled their tickets for the Homer Simpson. The other boy plops him onto the plastic cow outside Estel Hall and leaves him sitting there, slightly askew. The others look at him. *What?* he says. *He was getting heavy.*

See that shows what kind of friend you are, the one boy says. He flicks the cigarette and wipes the rain from his face. *A lousy fucking friend.* Inside the Exhibit Hall the 4H-ers play Crazy Eights and Snap. They're sitting on their coolers full of pop and candy bars and sandwiches. They tip back their caps and laugh. Fans blow and the animals sprawl and blink and fart.

The girl says, *I'm cold, let's go in there,* but the boys don't listen, except the exchange student, who says *Ya!* She stands on tip toes, holding his cow-like head in her hands. *Let's go in one of the shops and take something. You could get away with it, you're a foreigner.* (They all want a dog. The one boy has a cat, but he wants

a dog. The girl wants a dog you can carry in your purse and the other boy wants a real dog and he wants the dog to have balls. If they had a dog they wouldn't be here, they'd be someplace better. With their dogs. The exchange student looks at their faces and nods. Dogs!)

