

Tenderoni

by Kathy Fish

My boyfriend and I grab our bikes and pedal across town for a parade which has probably been cancelled anyway. Ahead, Mark's skinny calves pump, his day glo rain poncho flaps behind him like a flag. He stops and gets off the bike and I catch up to him.

"Oh, damn," I say. "A kitty."

"It looks sort of lumpy," he says. There's a drop of rain holding on to the tip of his nose and steam rising from his shoulders. "We should move it."

There's a big to-do for several minutes as he searches for something to push it with. He tells me he doesn't want to use his bare fucking hands and I tell him of course, no one would. He finds a sodden cardboard box and peels off one side of it and shapes it into a sort of scoop.

"These ponchos are worthless."

"Stop goading me," he says. He's trying to work the cardboard under the kitten's carcass. He takes off his sneaker and nudges it. Stuff oozes out, soiling the toe of his shoe.

A car comes and we go back to the side of the road. It weaves around the kitten, but another one comes behind and roars right over it, flattening and severing its head from its body and we go back out and stare at it awhile.

"Put your shoe back on, baby."

He studies my face and tells me if I *have* to smoke, if I'm going *crazy*, I can go clog up my lungs under the viaduct and I tell

him I'm not going crazy yet.

The scoop falls apart in his hands. His glasses are splattered with rain. He pulls them off and rubs his bruised looking face, the new whiskers on his chin. I hate watching him struggle, but he struggles a lot so I'm getting used to it.

"Fuck," he says. "And fuck and fuck and fuck and fuck."

Under my poncho, I clench and unclench my hands. My cigarettes are in my pocket, but I leave them.

"Baby, it seems like there are people whose whole job it is to remove dead animals, like we have here. I feel crummy. And I have to pee. I want to take a bath and go back to bed and sleep for a hundred hours."

"I'm sorry," he says. "This is awful, isn't it?"

The wind stirs up and blows my hood back. The rain comes harder, in waves.

"Only if I'm not still your baby." I swallow rain and move closer.

"Only if I'm not still your tenderoni."

"Oh," he says. He pats my head and he's never patted my head before. He stoops and picks up the kitten's smooched head and its body and the pieces are so small in his hands. Together, we walk to the side of the road and I watch as he chucks them, hard, into a patch of high weeds.

