

Estranged

by Jack Swenson

When Earl's wife disappeared, he called his old friend Tom and told him. No, he didn't know where she was. She just up and went. He hadn't seen her for two weeks. He figured she was at her ma's. She'd be back, he said.

Six weeks later she was still missing. He didn't like it that he had to cook his own meals, but otherwise it was okay. He kind of enjoyed living by himself. It was nice and peaceful. After dinner he drank Jack Daniels and watched TV. He slept on the couch if he felt like it.

One day that winter he went into town for his annual check up, and a few days after that, he had to go back. More tests. Then the doc called him and told him he had cancer. The doc said they could cut it out or use radiation. He told the doc he wanted to think on it.

When he got home, he called Tom again. Tom was a Texas boy, too, but now he lived in California. He told Tom about the cancer. Tom wanted to know what he was going to do about it. Nothin', Earl said. They ain't cuttin' on me, he said. And they sure as hell weren't gonna shove no seeds up his ass.

Tom asked about Mavis, and Earl told him she was still missing. It didn't bother him none. Had he told the sheriff? Hell, no! She'd turn up, he said.

And she did. The next morning he couldn't sleep, and he got up earlier than usual and went outside. There she was, down by the barn. She looked at him, and he looked at her.

"Where you been?" he asked. "Nowhere," she replied. She opened a door on the side of the barn and went in. Of course, Earl thought. Why hadn't he thought to check the loft? It was all nice and homey now since the remodel.

