

Tatters

by Jack Swenson

When she opened the door, he said hi and introduced her to his friend, a bottle of J.T.S. Brown. She laughed and told him to come in before he fell down. They sat on the couch, and he tried to unbutton her buttons, but she fended him off.

That night when he got home, his wife asked him where he had been, and he said he went to a meeting. "I missed you," she said. "I missed you, too," he replied.

Before bed, they went outside on the deck and smoked cigarettes. It was still August, and the weather was mild, but when Jake joined Kate outside, he shook with the cold, and his teeth chattered like bones.

In the morning, when Jake woke up, he lay in bed watching one of their cats play a game that she played every morning. The cat, a calico, first chased the other cats off the bed, then, immensely pleased with herself, she lay down on top of the comforter and began to chase her tail.

When Jake got out of the shower, his wife was still in bed. Jake went into the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee. He thought about his friend, Pat, who had colon cancer, survived, then five years later, was diagnosed with cancer of the liver.

That evening when she got home from work, Kate asked Jake how he was feeling, and he said fit as a fiddle. They went to bed early, and when Jake finished brushing his teeth, the bedroom was dark, and his wife was already asleep.

