



## THE THINGS WE BURIED

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*Jenifer DeBellis*

Remember when we were young and days seemed longer than our list of problems? How, come morning, we'd disappear into the woods behind your house only to resurface for cameo appearances at family dinner tables? Then again when deep male voices shouted for us to come in for the night?

You told me everything would work out as long as we stuck together.

Remember when we began burying things in those woods? How, no matter what, we never ran out of ideas for things to secrete?

At first, the hole we dug was little, about the size of our childish dreams. We were enthusiastic as we buried Bazooka wrappers, the plastic bands from our ring suckers—the ones we said an oath with before tossing in—and our pathetic progress reports, freshly snatched from our mailboxes.

It wasn't long before the hole grew bigger. It had to accommodate cigarette butts, beer cans, and eventually Uncle Ted's empty Zig-Zag boxes. Our list of life ambitions went into the hole for safekeeping. We buried condoms and their empty wrappers—these dominating the space for a long time before, in our frustration of their malfunction, we gave up using them altogether.

When our greatest fear threatened to ruin our future, you assured me we shouldn't spend the rest of our lives paying for

our mistake. You insisted my tear-filled reaction was only a hormonal surge. We opened up the hole and allowed my tears to fall into its womb before closing the earth back up on them. Then we promised not to talk about it anymore. “Let the dead bury the dead,” you said.

That fall, you shocked us all by going off to college. I won’t lie; it was hard to believe you could just leave like that. Come Christmas, when you postponed coming home *again* because you didn’t feel like facing your father’s drunken outbursts, I began taking it personal. I contented myself when you promised to come home in the spring.

After you left, I visited our spot in your backyard often. I kept our traditions alive by bringing little mementos to bury. There were cigarette butts, which were the same in number even though only one of us was here smoking them. Then I added the locks of hair I kept when I chopped it all off. Yes, I remember how much you hate it short, but I was desperate. Yet, looking back, I hated it short, too.

It was hard to visit our hole after you didn’t come home for spring break. No matter how much we’d piled into that shallow grave, the blubber of those old rubbers was all I noticed once the dirt was pulled away. I eventually stopped sneaking to the back of your yard and began a hole in my own yard.

Originally, I buried our usual paraphernalia in my backyard hole. When you stopped writing back, I began digging new holes. One to bury the letters I’d been holding on to. Another to bury that ring you made me in shop class. Next was the hole for my birth control dispenser—the cause of my thirty-pound weight gain that you reassured me only enhanced my sexiness.

Rough mounds of disturbed earth littered my yard. Angry dirt would sputter as the mower moved along, causing the machine to kick back or jerk to the side. Uncle Ted began beating the “good-for-nothing damn dog” to teach him a lesson for digging up his yard. I made sure to dig at night once Big Ted was safely snoring. Let him beat the shit out of the dog for a change.

I buried my irritation in holes the size of small graves. And I didn't stop there. I opened the earth wide and buried my disappointment, my naiveté in thinking I was special, and eventually, I buried our dreams. Sometimes, I buried my head in the cold earth to cool the burn of monotony that dominated my days.

When your dad told Uncle Ted you were coming home for a visit, I began to feel guilty for some of the things I'd buried. I ran to dig up your letters, but the mower had gotten to them first. And your metal ring is forever lost. I knew you'd understand, so I let all of that go.

Imagine my surprise when you showed up *with her*—her perfect mound of a belly glowing through her overstretched shirt. You can't possibly blame me for burying my hands deep inside my pockets when she extended her hand toward me. Or for not being able to recall a single thing either of you said in those first moments of introduction.

Once our eyes met, I finally understood the pity registering from yours. It filled me with emptiness. In that moment I hated you, and buried this hate deep inside, hoping to fill the hollowness.

Whenever I remember that look of contempt, I discover more hate that needs to be buried. Yet the hollowness continues to deepen. It's about the size of a small grave now, but I can't seem to stop digging.