



THE THINGS WE BURIED

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.



Catharsis: Soul's Seasonal Lament

In loving memory of Jenna and Rachel [22 Oct 2011].

*There are no words to explain such loss, only words
intended to comfort the hearts of those in disbelief. </3*

Jenifer DeBellis

The last auras of an early autumn
blend into nothing more than a rusted
patina palette. Leaves reduce down
to a skeletal parchment of what was
once vibrant as they fade (as flowers
must also fade and fall away) from

glory to glorious glory. Sometimes
seasons shift out of turn or the story
jackknifes, bobbing upon the edge of
sustaining life and derailing unto death.

Now exposed—in undeniable detail—
are bare, brittle branches that reach
well beyond any healthy extension
will endure indefinitely. For no one
can predict the exact instant tragedy
will transpire, halting time in its steps.

We are conscious in our knowledge
that we are born of the dust and must
return to the dust, just as we are aware
there are no guarantees or bargains that
will buy our way out of living to die.

If to live is to die and to die is to gain,
does this sum explain life's meaning?

Awake, sleepwalking soul, to the sound
of your name as it is called to life with
the same purpose those trees break free
this season's leaves so they may become
the compost feed that fuels next season.
Though some leaves will be released be-
fore they wilt and fade and fall away of
their own accord from the wrath of angry
storms or freak twists and plucks of fate,
they leave in their wake those who must
carry on and fulfill their issue of service
so in due time they too will be the very
sustenance for the path of life to follow.

Peep Show, a Tango

Jenifer DeBellis

Even before the invited spectators wriggle
free from the safety of their second skin¹;

before anxious feet shuffle single file
down a hallway² built for queens and kings;

before the swarm of expectant excitement
drives these voices above a beehive³ vibe:

a release of testosterone pollinates⁴ the air,
tickling my senses, intoxicating my mood.

I close my eyes lest a single ounce of guilt
infect the great reveal—the big striptease⁵.

Pull back the shutter⁶. As pure as the love
that formed these curves, I'm yours tonight.

Spring has sprouted a leak that overflows
with milk and honey in this Promise Land⁷,

diverting ravenous eyes away from the i-
mpending storm. Enjoy now, atone⁸ later.

¹Transparent reptilian shells like wim-
pled latex litter the threshold, biding for
a time.

²For the road is stretched far and wide
while the predicated pathway is narrow.

³Through a convoluted maze this militant
mindscape moves as one in its mission.

⁴This: the blush of vermilion petals
fallen upon fertile earth, one seedling at
a time.

⁵Welcome gentlemen; follow the curves
that fashion these hands, these thighs.

⁶Peel back forbidden's veil; dim the fil-
ter of understanding; freefall into ob-
scurity.

⁷Here lies the tree of knowledge. Par-
take of its fruit and behold this carnal
harvest.

⁸Does not transgression's fine outweigh
what can be upheld in a given lifetime?



Poem inspired
by Giorgione's
Venus Sleeping
Image borrowed from
www.luminarium.org