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Puppet Master

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RYDER DIETZ

Puppet Master

20

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Soil loosened up as Jake poured water onto it. He had kept track of the weather to make sure he could dig a deep enough hole. The night the weights dropped in his apartment there had been raging storms followed by two days of dreary rain followed by three sunny days. A bit of water at night was all it took to create the perfect digging conditions. Dark clouds covered the stars and moon and served as a reminder for how little time he had. Five days ago the storm had wound strings around him. The weather tried to be his master and Jake only obeyed out of necessity. The strings had been pulled into tight knots, though slack remained. If he could dig his holes and get out of the forest, he would be free of his so-called puppet master. Every string would be severed.

He emptied an entire can of Febreeze between the two weights he brought out with him, currently hidden beneath bushes. Jake pulled the smaller but heavier weight out of hiding. It was the same way his father had done whenever they played hide and seek. He set the weight next to the hole. It could wait to enter because Jake had to inspect the hole first. Leaping down, the smooth walls blurred for a second. Six feet deep.

This hole was the first of its kind. It wasn't like the holes from his childhood, made with his sister on the beach. Buckets of sand were used to craft the biggest sandcastle. His sister might still go to the beach but he wouldn't know, they hadn't talked in years. The hole wasn't like the one he sat in during middle school to watch the stars with his father. Jake had kept the constellations in the back of his head but the city's light blocked out nearly every star. He wondered if his father still stared at the sky. Holes that weren't even like the ones he dug in high school to hide from all the bullies. It didn't matter what the holes were made of, blankets, dirt, or straw. They formed a shield. It proved to be worthless against their words. Nothing like the hole Jake made with his boyfriend, curled up to be away from the world while his favorite band played in the background. Music was loved, memorized, then lost. The strings burned his fingers when he tried to fill the quiet. The holes Jake dug as a young adult were secrets. The first one buried the worst mistake he ever made. Accidents didn't make for good enough excuses. He knew there'd be more of these holes to come, commanded by the brewing storm above.

Climbing out of the hole, the first weight sat waiting for Jake. He wrapped both hands around the straps to slowly lower him into the hole. No sound came when Jake let go. Laid to rest beneath the petals of his boyfriend's favorite cherry tree. Dirt and flowers would act as his blanket for eternity. Only a trunk to be a marker.

With the hole now erased, Jake repeated the process. A rotting log was fine enough for the second weight. He found no need to check the depth of the second hole. Crooked and crumbling, much like the apartment he currently called home. A far cry from his old, country-side home, perfect as the first hole he dug. He tossed the weight in. Jake covered it in whatever rot was lying around—evidence of struggle now deleted by mushrooms and dead leaves.

Light filled the forest as lightning struck a tree and left nothing but a blackened trunk. Jake then noticed the charred x that spread away from the roots. Drops of rain began to fall as the slack of the strings vanished. For a moment, Jake struggled against the taught strings and tried to ignore his puppet master. Rain came down in torrents and gave him his next command. He gave in as the strings started pulling him back to the brightly lit metropolis. There was one more thing to bury tonight.



