

Puppet On a String

by Jerry Ratch

Spring break that year, (1963) I spent nearly every minute with Lynda. Her taste for sex was unquenchable once we'd gotten started. We did it in every position possible. The sitting position in the front seat of the car, which my brother Herb had to explain to me. Then Herb suddenly accepted a job in California, and moved out to L.A., urging me to come out there next fall and go to school at UCLA.

One night I was on top of Lynda in the back seat of my car. We were in a forest preserve parking lot somewhere in Glen Ellen. The windows were totally steamed up, and we were going at it so hard that there was a sudden tremendous rip inside of her. We looked at each other, and I pulled out. When I looked down, the condom was only a ring of latex rolled around the base of my penis. We'd ripped right through it, and I had already shot a whole load inside her. We both understood in a heartbeat what that meant, and we were speechless.

That was when I told her I might be going to UCLA in the fall. And that this was not a good time to go getting ourselves pregnant.

"But, what if I am, Jerry?" she asked, looking up at me. "Huh? What then?" We were sopping wet. Pools of our mutual sweat lay on her belly and on her chest.

"I . . . I don't know. We'll have to get you some help. I'll ask around."

"What will I do, if you go out to California?"

"Don't worry," I said. "We'll think of something. Don't worry."

I asked everybody if they knew anyone in the abortion business, or if there were any pills that could be had that would do anything. Only Roger Miller said he knew someone he could ask about this sort of thing. I went back downstate to Urbana and began counting the days until her period was expected. I waited every day,

but heard nothing from Lynda, or Miller, or anybody else. I didn't know what to do.

I phoned my brother out in L.A. But all he said was to come out there to go to school, that I could stay in his family room on the couch. Everything was all set, and they were expecting me. Forget about getting somebody pregnant, he said. I had years of school ahead of me. Just make sure it got taken care of, that's all, and get my butt out to California where things were really happening. Already Herb was investing our family's money in some kind of real estate venture that was going to make us all as rich as could be, and then none of us was going to have to work anymore. We could retire in no time flat. It was going to be a sure thing, he said.

That was Herb. I don't know, honestly, who between us was the more trusting soul. I think it ran naturally in our family.

Then the letter came that I was hoping for. Lynda wasn't pregnant. Miller had gotten her some pills from this shady doctor. She'd taken the pills, and she got terrible cramps that made her real sick, and she threw up and started bleeding like a stuck pig. But they worked, and she wasn't pregnant.

That night I went out to a beer bar with another student friend of mine, a math genius named Newton. We were both in this advanced math class. We started drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon beer from a shot glass in order to get drunk faster. We kept drinking until the bar closed. Then on the way back to the dorms we spotted these tall banks of bushes, and I threw myself into the bushes as far as I could, backwards. Next thing I knew, Newton was doing the same thing. We'd get out of the bushes, line up on the sidewalk, and leap up and backwards with as mighty thrust as we could muster, throwing ourselves into the bushes.

"She's not pregnant!" I kept yelling. "She's not pregnant!"

"What? You got somebody pregnant?" Newton asked.

"Jerry, you sonofabitch! You mean you had sex with a girl? You bastard! You've been holding out on me!"

We kept throwing ourselves into the bushes. We were really wrecking them. Two huge body-sized gaps had appeared in the bank of bushes.

Finally I was exhausted. I let myself lie on the top of the bushes, and they held me off the ground while I looked at the full deep throw of stars that were in the sky. I was happy with myself. I had accomplished something. I had become a man, and had escaped the consequences. And, and — I had dodged a very big bullet.

But I was very much in love with this girl, and I knew it deep down inside. Part of me wished that it hadn't come to such an abrupt end with the child we might have had. Part of me, maybe a huge part, wanted to be her husband, wanted to father children with this sexy Swedish girl who knew how to leech the heat out of me, who knew sex as no one else knew sex on this planet, and who knew how to make me hunger for it like I was her little walking, talking man-sized puppet on a string.

