

The Dirt

by John Wentworth Chapin

The coffin-sized pit in his basement wasn't freshly dug. "If I was burying Cub Scouts, I wouldn't have let you down here," he joked, his voice thin.

It was pretty logical, but I was too creeped out for logic. Six months together! I said, "The truth."

"The truth? You shouldn't have come down here, you shouldn't put me on the spot like this."

I backed away toward the stairs, gripping the railing behind me, waiting for him to grab an axe; instead, I saw self-righteousness melt into tears.

"You think I'd *hurt you*? I'm the same person," he blubbered. "You loved me five minutes ago."

I didn't answer.

"I dug it four years ago, the day I found out I was positive." He waited for me to speak, like this was some answer. "I laid down in it. Pretended I was dead. It... it was good."

"You're not going to die," I reminded him. "Not now."

"Duh," he said. "You said you'd love me no matter what."

I let go of the railing. "It's spooky! You could have told me."

"Tell you I think I should break up with you, just to spare you eventual doom?" He gasped for air and pulled away when I touched his neck.

I climbed into the pit and beckoned, arms open. He wiped his eyes and breathed deeply, then climbed down. I put my arm around him and imagined our future as I held him in the dirt.

