

WRAITH WORK

PATRICK VINCENT WELSH

The gravedigger lost his passion for his work.

It faded once they forced him to start using the bulldozer. He missed the wood of the shovel and the worms of the dirt, so he retired. As a retirement gift they gave him a spot in the ground for use when the time came.

He walked with his replacement, a young man named Ellis, who feared the dead but needed the money. He was a new father and his baby boy ate endless jars of orange slush and the orange slush was expensive.

They walked together until they reached the iron gates.

“Don’t get spooked. It’s just bones,” said the gravedigger, adding before walking into retirement, “When you see me next I’ll be in a box. Be gentle. Good luck.”

Ellis complained to his wife that the graveyard terrified him, but his words were in vain. She pushed him to work for an entire year until he quit on the day of his boy’s first birthday.

"Where in the hell are you going to work now?" his wife yelled.

"Someplace without ghosts," Ellis muttered, walking out amidst his son's cries, knowing that there was no place truly free from ghosts, not in America, not in the South.

After six months of her husband's moping unemployment, Ellis's wife took the boy, moved in with her brother, and she stopped calling herself Ellis's wife.

Several weeks later at Bess's diner, Ellis ran into Henry Barnes, a high school friend.

They ate and had several cups of coffee. Ellis told all about his woes, the past eight lonely months, the lack of company and Food and Child.

Henry ate and listened patiently. He paid for both of their checks and stood to leave, saying, "You wouldn't be against some light cleaning, some paperwork, things like that, would you?"

"Hell no."

Henry handed him a business card, saying, "Give yourself a good shave and I'll introduce you to my boss Monday. The job's yours, just shave."

Ellis smiled with a golden gratitude that was lost in the glare of the sun beaming off the toaster, the counter, the walls. He looked down at the card:

*Henry Barnes, Maintenance Supervisor, Poinsetta County
Morgue*

Ellis called his wife, and said, "I want you to come home. Bring Jack. I've got a job. I've missed you more than anything ever. I can't say it right, but I've missed you."

"You've said it right enough."

The Poinsetta County Morgue was terribly haunted. Ellis was chased every night by phantoms of all shapes and sizes and tempers. He swung at them with his broom. He kicked at them. He yelled at them. He hid from them. Every night. For years. For the boy.