

The Invisible Corpse Candle

by strannikov

What're these confounded pathologists doing and thinking these days? Mortician Spilda Grimes had to smack the abdomen underneath the sutures of this one to settle the organs with whatever less prominence was possible, otherwise, she'd have to rip the cadaver open to manually rearrange all the organs that'd been removed and replaced by the local pathologist. This bulge was not going down, of course not, hell no.

She took no frustrations out on her client, he was in no sense to blame, but she never found re-suturing a cheery task.

After all the unpleasantness was over in the receiving room, Spilda emerged from her protective garments once she'd gotten the embalming fluid going. She stepped through the swinging doors down the odorless tile hall to her office, last on the right, to check on the handling status of this new arrival.

This body came with special instructions for handling, for some reason.

First thing, she called their backhoe operator, it was almost 1:45 p. m. and the designated cemetery plot sat on a farm two counties over, at least a thirty-minute drive each way, fifteen minutes on the telephone just getting directions across.

The account was pre-paid in full (and in fact: the decedent had paid for all services over two years prior): technically, a refund would be due, and Spilda made a technical adjustment to the account on the spot.

Satisfied with the account status and better satisfied with another account's status, Spilda strode back down the hall to assess the fluid injection. A sickening smell reached her before she could reach the pair of swinging doors.

On the receiving room floor embalming fluid was dripping thick with its sick mentholated formaldehyde scent, fortunately the drain was catching the worst of it but the floor would have to be cleaned. But the stainless steel gurney where she'd left the cadaver not twenty minutes earlier was now empty, and the tubes kept spurting globs of embalming fluid until she cut the pump off.

The body is missing, it's gone!

No one else was on staff this Friday afternoon, not unusual, but Spilda was beside herself and beside herself, too, unable to guess what might have happened. She sat exasperated staring at the empty gurney for another twenty minutes, then decided she had to call Mr. Boniface, the mortuary director.

Because the mortuary stood outside the town limits, sheriff's deputies would have to respond to the call but did not arrive until after four p. m. Spilda was not hysterical by that time, but her confusion had clearly not helped her demeanor. Her eyes stared wide with panic, her teeth chattered intermittently with impressive intensity, and with her ineffectual stabs at the air she completed the portrait of distracted mania.

In point of fact Spilda had to be sedated before any manner of sensible interrogation could ensue. As it was now after five p. m. Friday, an ambulance was summoned to dispatch Spilda to the Middletonburg Hospital for an overnight stay, with a new deputy posted outside her room as a precaution.

Later that evening Spilda was not comforted awaking in a hospital room, and by the time she passed the dozing deputy to reach the nurses' station, three orderlies had to be summoned to return her to her room and restrain her until another dose of sedative could be administered, which the deputy woke long enough to witness.

By the time she awoke hours later, Spilda was in enough of a daze that she found herself surrounded by four men, one the sheriff himself, for her first formal interrogation.

“What happened?”

She explained, taking care in her partial stupor not to mention any adjustment to any account.

“And where was this missing body supposed to go? We never found any file on your computer that could've told us anything, no paperwork from Middletonburg Hospital certifying conveyance of the body to your facility, and of course we can't yet be sure about which body the pathologist might've released to you.”

This deepened the mystery for Spilda all over again, since she remembered seeing the account information on her computer, clearly recalled having both the hospital's burnt-orange conveyance sheets and the pathologist's electric fuchsia release papers on her clipboard: but she could not remember the name of the deceased, and this distressed her with so much force and suddenness that they had to give her another sedative injection for the night.

No one yet had any cause to inquire of the Boniface Mortuarium backhoe operator, who well before Spilda's final injection of the day had returned home to dose himself with a six-pack of beer over an evening of pizza and televised baseball, he loved watching the Cubs lose.

Spilda seemed fully recovered from the shock as she awoke Saturday morning, but it also seemed that it might take a few hours yet for her to recover fully from all the sedation. Nevertheless, the Sheriff was again on hand to question her.

“What about the backhoe operator?” Spilda blurted out before another interrogation could start.

“What about what backhoe operator?” the Sheriff wanted to know.

Calls were made, the backhoe operator summoned from his garage, his information was taken, and the sheriff of the county two counties over was called to dispatch a deputy to the cemetery identified by the Boniface backhoe operator.

Spilda rested and was told to expect her discharge from the hospital at about 11:00 a. m.

Fortunately for Spilda, the deputy sheriff two counties over did not call back until after she'd left Middletonburg Hospital at around 11:20 a. m. The deputy's report was almost as disconcerting as Spilda's initial report, though the deputy had no genuine cause for comparable emotional distress.

A dead fellow, fresh from visiting a pathologist but never embalmed, was found lying at the bottom of the grave dug barely nineteen hours earlier.

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