

Afterlife Goes On

By Haiden Sayne

Gail hated being dead.

Not that she was overly fond of her life either but death was just so utterly... boring. As horrible as living could be, it was still filled with wonders. Like cheese. Oh, how Gail missed cheese, especially her delicious favorite, Pepper Jack cheese. However, it's quite difficult to appreciate the memories of food without a digestive system. All that remained to Gail now was her skeleton, something that perplexed her quite a bit.

How could she think without her brain? How could she move without muscles? Gail could even see without her eyes. What did that make her? Maybe she was a soul, living energy, or something completely different. These questions proved fruitless though, as Gail could find no answers. Least of all from Bobbie.

"What are you doing out here, Gail?" Bobbie came across Gail on the edge of a cliff, staring at the starless sky as she often did. She turned toward Bobbie then, without saying a word, returned her gaze back to the sky. Bobbie let out a maniacal laugh, bones rattling, and sat down next to Gail.

"Come on, Gail, let's go do something!" Bobbie exclaimed.

"I am doing something."

Bobbie frowned at Gail, a difficult feat to perform without a face, "Thinking is 'doing something'?" Gail continued looking at the sky, "Sure, why not?"

"Thinking is boring! I thought we left boring stuff on the other side. Let's go play with the others!"

"Boring? The fact that I can think without a brain gives me a lot to think about. For instance, trying to figure out your gender is much more interesting to me than playing with undead children." Bobbie laughed, bones rattling again, "What does it matter? I could have been a boy or a girl, gay or straight, light or dark skinned, you know what still happened? I died!" Bobbie gave Gail a faceless smile and, uncharacteristically, had a thought, "Hey, why don't we go talk to The Mayor? You can ask some questions and I'll have something to do! What do you say?" Gail sighed, "I don't know, I don't really-" Bobbie grabbed her arms, "Come on! I'm compromising." Gail relented, "Fine" before being jerked into the air by Bobbie's excitement.

And so the two skeleton children set off toward The Mayor's office. It was not a very long journey but even a brief walk like this one could unveil more mysterious for Gail. There were trees here yet no sunlight or water. Gail was also confident that there were no nutrients in the soil for either. Perhaps whatever sustained Gail also sustained the plant life that she and Bobbie now passed. Another question to add to a growing list.

While Gail continued her thinking on undead trees and such, Bobbie skipped about, rather happy not to be alive. "This is so much fun! We should travel more often."

"It's not much further is it, Bobbie?"

"We're already here, silly!"

Gail hadn't noticed that the ground beneath her feet had changed to stone a few minutes ago. She looked up to see an open gate in front of her. Gail had never been here but she recognized the words hanging over the gate, letting all travelers know that they were welcome. The two skeleton kids were entering Downhill City.

For a town inhabited by the deceased, Downhill City was quite a lively place. Several times the children had to dodge the movements of Downhill residents going about their busy unlives. Gail was beginning to regret leaving her cliff. Fortunately, The Mayor's office was close to the town's gate.

As the kids walked up the steps they were greeted by The Sheriff. "Morning, children. What are you up to?" Bobbie, chipper as usual, responded quickly, "Oh, yes mam, Ms. Sheriff! Gail wants to ask The Mayor a few questions?" Gail remained silent as The Sheriff crossed her arms, "Ah, I'm afraid The Mayor isn't seeing anyone today, as usual." Though she had no expectations, Gail was still disappointed.. The Sheriff continued, "Maybe I can help. What's wrong, Gail?" Gail nervously began, "Well, Sheriff, there's just so much I don't understand about our life on this world. I just keep feeling that there's much more out there."

"I think I can help," said The Sheriff with a smile. Gail was puzzled, "What do you mean?" The Sheriff smiled, "For centuries I've been trying to convince The Mayor to leave our lands but he's afraid of The Knights." The children were very aware of The Knights, the winged warriors that stood on the edges of their land. Everything beyond was a mystery.

"I've heard rumors of an exit from this world beyond The Knights." Bobbie gasped as Gail asked, "An exit to where?" The Sheriff shrugged, "No one knows but I bet the answers you seek are out there. How about we get past those flying pansies and find out?" Bobbie nodded at Gail who sighed heavily, "Alright, Sheriff, let's go."

And so the three skeleton travelers set off to find answers. The closest border was only separated by a large hill. Bobbie, jovial as ever, ran up the hill ahead of the others. "That friend

of yours is energetic for a dead kid." Gail smiled, "Yeah, Bobbie is always ready do stuff, unlike me." The Sheriff laughed, "Seems like you prefer thinking."

"I do!"

"Hey, Gail," Bobbie said over the hill, "I think we're here."

The others quickly joined Bobbie. Gail could see several Knights with their backs toward them, armor shining and flaming swords drawn. "Follow my lead, children." The Sheriff moved toward the nearest Knight. "Excuse me, sir, mind if we get by." The Knight spun around, extending his wings. "None may leave, return to your home." The Sheriff attempted a frown, "Aw, that's just too bad." She drew a sword of her own and charged the Knight, yelling as she did, "Run, children! Keep going!"

The kids ducked Knights as they descended upon The Sheriff. Gail ran faster now than she ever had while alive. She stopped only to look back at The Sheriff putting up an amazing fight. Bobbie place a hand on Gail's shoulder, "Come on, let's get you to The Exit."

The skeleton children traveled for miles finding nothing. Finally, they entered a forest just as a dark figure jumped out of leafless tree. "Stand behind me, Gail!" Bobbie yelled, fists raised. In front of them stood a human-sized jackal clothed in a black hood. Behind him, Gail could see an enormous golden scythe. "Calm yourselves, travelers, your long journey is over. If you wish it."

Bobbie smiled, "We haven't been traveling all that long, really." The hooded jackal smiled himself, "Oh, but you have. We have been searching for you for so long." Gail stepped closer, "Searching for us? Me and Bobbie?" The jackal laughed, "Not specifically, but your kind,

yes. My people have been charged to shepherd the dead through this waiting place to their final destination."

Gail would have had a heart attack if she wasn't already dead. "There is more after this?" The hood jackal smiled but hung his head low, "Yes, and I must apologize. For centuries, The Knights have hid humans away from us for their own twisted reasons." Bobbie leapt up, pointing, "Then you have to help us! They are only several miles that way." The jack raised his scythe and howled loudly. Soon there were hundreds of the hooded jackals, all with their own golden scythes. "Then we shall meet them in combat and save your people."

And so the children and the hooded jackals returned to their borders. The jackals struck against The Knights, destroying with them ease. The Sheriff, who bravely distracted The Knights, joined the kids. "Children! What are these things?"

A hooded jackal bowed to The Sheriff, "We are the shepherds of the undead. We've come to liberate you from The Knights." The Sheriff drew her sword, "Then let's get on with it!" She ran with the jackals along the border, fighting winged Knights as they went. One stayed behind with the children.

"Now, would you like me to escort you to The Exit?" he asked. "Yes!" Gail said immediately. "Not me." She turned to Bobbie, "What do you mean?" Bobbie smiled, "I'm going to stay and help beat up The Knights." Though she couldn't, Gail wanted to weep, "Well it is 'something to do', isn't it?" The children embraced. "I'll miss you, Mr. Bobbie. Ms. Bobbie?" Bobbie laughed, bones rattling, and ran to join The Sheriff. "Are you ready?" The jackal asked. Gail nodded, "Okay."

After a while, the two made their way to a glowing tear in a mountain. The Exit. "Do you know what's inside?" The jackal looked warmly, "I'm afraid I do not." Gail sighed heavily and smiled, "Good."

And so Gail walked through The Exit and though she didn't know what was ahead, she was comforted by the familiar taste of cheese.