Gwyneth Runyen

Midday, I Died: In Memory of the Old Me

On April 8th, 2021, midday, Gwyneth Runyen–that’s me–died of a broken heart surrounded by no one; no friends, no family, completely alone. I had received the text earlier that day: my boyfriend was dumping me; I’d find out later, supposedly for another girl. I’d tried to mend my heart back together again, but the stitches didn’t hold, and I bled to death later that day.

All I remember after that is silence. A huge, gaping chasm echoing nothing. Solid, stark silence. My family retrieved my body with few words and my spirit was left to wander the earth.

I guess if this is supposed to be a eulogy there should be a few essential parts: a couple remarks on what kind of person I was, what I’ll be remembered for, that sort of thing. I guess I, Gwyneth Runyen, was a quiet, shy person. I kept to myself but treated people with kindness. Perhaps, in retrospect, I was a little too kind. I let people step all over me. I was a people pleaser. A religious “good girl” at my first college, my eventual place of death. My whirlwind relationship with my boyfriend had left me friendless because I hadn’t had time to get to know anybody else. I’d died nameless and friendless. That’s the kind of person I was. I guess, really, I’ll be remembered for my tragic end and how I deserved better.

After that, I wandered. There really isn’t much you can do as a spirit. Nobody notices you, you can’t experience the pleasures of life quite the same as you used to. It’s hard to when you don’t have a body. But I found solace in a couple people who were kind enough and remarkable enough to listen to a ghost’s story of how they were brutally murdered. They agreed what happened to me was tragic, and mourned my loss of life. These people gave me back pieces of my life… in a way. It was through them I gained enough interest to study again. (There’s plenty of time to do this in the afterlife.) I wandered to Middle Tennessee State University and picked up the books.

I found myself around a type of people I’d never met before: non-judgemental, accepting, carefree people instead of imposing, stiff, overly-religious ones. Slowly, I began to heal. Following the influence of people around me, I started to change. I began to loosen up, cuss a little more. Nobody cared what a fucking little ghost did anyway. I began to explore my sexuality, something that was absolutely forbidden at my first college. And I began to feel… alive.

But the mortifying ordeal of being… human was almost too much for my spirit. I felt like I was being ripped apart, straight down the middle. The grief of my own death washed over me anew. I felt like everyone I’d ever known was mourning Gwyneth’s death as I lurked in the shadows. They missed her. I realized I could never get my life back. That religious “good girl” was gone. I wondered if I was even a good person now, since the version of me that haunted the earth was nothing like the actual me that was now six feet under. Ultimately, I felt in my soul that I was a disappointment. I had never fulfilled my purpose on earth. Taken too soon…

However… with time comes change. Just as with the turning of the seasons, so it is with people. People always change, and so do ghosts. The people I haunted showed me how to be outspoken. To stand up for yourself. I became strong after all I had endured. I became an explorer of the unknown. And as I embraced everything I’d always been afraid to–my voice, my self-expression, my power and passion–I came to life again. And I realized… I never actually died that day. Sure, there was a death. I died to the person I thought I was, the person I was told to be, and the person people shaped me to be, and I became a person true to myself, bold and unafraid, shaped by my own decisions. My life–yes, life, for I was truly alive now–was finally in my own hands. I truly did spend a year wandering the earth before I realized I was still alive, but the shedding of my past self made way for a better me. I was reborn as a phoenix–a glowing, bright fire of a self–into the person I am today. Maybe they did mourn for the Gwyneth they knew, the Gwyneth that was all religion, nothing else, driven by fear. But death gives way to life. And I… am living proof of that. Thank you.