

CHLOE DIED THE EVENING OF OCTOBER 15TH. She knew the disease would kill her eventually, but she didn't think she would be around to witness her family fall apart when she took her last breath. She stood invisible in the corner, watching her family grieve: her sisters hugging each other while her father rubbed her mother's shoulders, trying to loosen her grip from the hand of her dead daughter.

Chloe turned away and looked out the window. She couldn't stand to see her mother cry. The doctor came into the room, offering the family his condolences before leading the father and mother out the door to sign paperwork. Her sisters followed behind, leaving Chloe alone to hold vigil over her withered body. She touched it, feeling the cold skin. It was surprising to her that she could feel anything. She didn't think a ghost could feel things. She looked at her body's face, her face. It looked waxy and pale now; all color was gone from her cheeks.

Chloe wasn't sure what to do next. She guessed that she was a ghost. She wasn't sure if she was sup-

posed to stay in the room, but she was afraid to leave her body. She thought there would be some kind of "white light" to greet her, but there wasn't. *Maybe I died the wrong way*, she thought. *Is there a way to die wrong?* She didn't know anything, and there was no one around that could help her. She began to get frustrated.

"I'm too freaking young to die! I'm only 22!" She noticed that her voice didn't echo around the room, like a living voice. It didn't carry at all; it was dead like she was – sound that disappeared the moment it left her lips. She kicked the wall and stubbed her toe. *I've got to be the first ghost in history to hurt themselves AFTER death*, she thought. It made her chuckle, a kind of desperate laughter. Not knowing what else to do, she slid down the wall and sat on the hospital floor. Still dressed in her gown, she could feel the cold marble against her legs. *I guess I'll just follow myself around for the next few days*, she thought. She drew her knees up to her chest and started to cry.

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound...” her family sang three days later. Chloe stood at the back of the church, a spectator at her own funeral. The sanctuary was packed. She didn’t realize she had known so many people. She walked to the front of the room and stood looking at the crowd. Chloe saw her friends Lily and Stephen, their eyes red rimmed and puffy. She noticed that Lily’s pregnant belly was rubbing against the front of the pew. *She’s due in three weeks. I can’t believe I forgot that.* They were standing on either side of Brad, Chloe’s fiancé, who looked like he might collapse. He was as crinkled as his suit. She remembered seeing him for the last time at the hospital. She had convinced him to go to work; she would be fine until he got back. Chloe hadn’t wanted to die in front of him. She hadn’t seen him again until now.

The music stopped, and everyone sat in the pews. She sat down beside her mother. As Chloe hugged her, she felt a chill go down the woman’s spine.

“I miss you, baby,” her mother whispered.

“I miss you too, Momma.” At that moment, Chloe couldn’t feel the wool of her mother’s black sweater anymore. She couldn’t feel anything. She got up and stepped away from everyone. She knew she was crying, even though she couldn’t feel the tears.

The pastor came to the pulpit to give the eulogy and began talking about walking through a valley, fearing no evil and such. Chloe folded her arms, her mind beginning to wander. *Is there a God? If so, why is He letting my loved ones feel all this pain?* Chloe pushed the thoughts from her mind and concentrated on the service again. Looking to her right, she saw Brad, sitting hunched over with his head in his hands. His shoulders heaved with every sob. She wanted to comfort him, but she knew she couldn’t. Instead, she turned away and walked toward her casket.

She looked at her body again, painted with makeup she would never wear, in a dress that she hated. She couldn’t handle watching as her body had been prepared, so she had sat upstairs. She had wanted to kick the funeral director when she

came down and saw what his workers had done to her. *What was his name again?* She tried to remember, but everything was becoming fuzzy. It was like someone had pulled a veil over her memories.

When the funeral procession started, she watched as her friends and family came up one by one to say goodbye. She saw a couple in black, the girl twisting her funeral program until it almost ripped in two. The man had his arm around her shoulder.

“We’re going to miss you sweetie. We’re naming the baby Chloe,” the woman said. She put an ultrasound picture in the coffin before her husband led her away.

Who was that? It took Chloe a moment to remember Lily and Stephen. *What is wrong with me?*

Next came a man in a wrinkled suit. He leaned over and kissed the forehead of the dead girl. *He looks so*

sad, she thought. *Did I know him?* The man started crying and put a rose in the coffin.

“Come on, Brad, I’ll give you a ride home,” Stephen said.

Oh my God! That was my fiancé! Chloe sat down, feeling a little dizzy. *What is happening?*

She glanced around, frightened, knowing no one could help her. Why couldn’t she remember anything? Someone called her name, and she looked behind her.

“Chloe, it’s time to go now,” the figure said.

“Who are you? Why can you see me?”

“Chloe, I’m your messenger. I’m here to take you away from this life and into another.”

“I can’t remember anything. Why can’t I remember anything?”

“Chloe wasn’t sure what to do next. She guessed that she was a ghost. She wasn’t sure if she was supposed to stay in the room, but she was afraid to leave her body.”

“It’s all part of the process, Chloe. When we die, our body dies, but not our mind. Forgetting is the way our mind prepares us to let go of this life. Otherwise, we couldn’t handle the grief.”

Chloe looked at her casket one final time, not recognizing the woman, man, and two young girls clinging to the coffin. She saw the girls hug each other and walk away. Then, the man rubbed the woman’s shoulders, trying to ease her grip from the dead girl’s hand.

Those poor people, she thought. I wonder who died.