

Synopsis of *28 Days*

The film's main character is Gwen Cummings (Sandra Bullock), a successful New York writer living life in the fast lane. An alcohol and drug addict, she also spends her time hopping from dance club to bar to hangover with her boyfriend Jasper (Dominic West) – handsome, magnetic and equally attracted to this life of debauchery. As the movie opens, the two get drunk at a club, go home, have sex, and put out a fire with wine. The next day, after showing up late and drunk for her sister's, Lily's (Elizabeth Perkins) wedding, Gwen drinks even more at the reception and ends up collapsing into the wedding cake. Promising to replace it, Gwen takes off in a limousine to look for a bakery and instead finds herself crashing the car into somebody's living room.

Gwen is given a choice between prison or a rehab center. She chooses a 28-day rehab program at a place called Serenity Glen. There, Gwen comes face to face with a totally different world from what she has been used to – cell phones are not allowed, and patients are expected to partake in rituals like chanting and singing. A world-weary city girl, Gwen is determined not to conform. She doesn't think she belongs there or that she has an addiction problem. She doesn't like the way that the head nurse, Betty, or her counselor and former addict himself, Cornell, treat her. Nor is she particularly excited about her new set of "friends" – fellow rehabbers who include her roommate, Andrea, a teenage junkie who's been in and out of rehab; Bobbie Jean, a Southern housewife; Roshanda whose addiction has led to communication problems with her children; Daniel, a former doctor whose addiction cost him his practice; Oliver, who's always trying to seduce all the women; and Gerhardt, an insecure and gay German stripper. In fact, Gwen is determined to leave as quickly as possible without letting the center's therapists and patients get to her.

When Jasper shows up for a little rendezvous from rehab, Gwen returns to the center drunk, thus breaking their rules. As a result, Cornell orders that she be removed from rehab and sent to prison to serve out her time. Facing that consequence, Gwen realises she has to clean up her act and decides to partake in the center's activities. As she physically participated in the cleaning, lectures and group therapy sessions, she also opened up emotionally to the other patients. She began to acknowledge her true feelings, take an interest in the lives and predicaments of others, and even develop a close friendship with fellow rehabber Eddie Boone (Viggo Mortensen), a professional baseball pitcher who arrives at the centre with his own set of problems. When Andrea was due to leave the rehab centre, Gwen even managed to assemble a cast and put together a play from Andrea's favourite soap opera for her as a going-away gift.

Nonetheless while her "social" life seemed to be improving at the rehab centre, her personal life remained as tumultuous as ever – she was still constantly plagued by nightmares of her drunk and negligent mother, harassed by Jasper's repeated attempts to relive their former lives, unable to confront her past and unable to bridge the chasm that had developed between Lily and herself. Just like before, she was attempting to cover up her own pain by becoming the life of the party.

However, with Andrea's sudden and devastating passing, this façade was abruptly shattered. Having gone through the profound and sobering experience, Gwen was unable to hide behind her mask any longer. She begins to re-examine her life and through the companionship of the group, Gwen gradually loses her cynicism and begins the long struggle to take back her life.

Analysis of the Patient – Gwen Cummings

At the beginning of the film, we are introduced to Gwen and her life of debauchery – taking drugs, getting drunk, hopping from club to club and basically partying really hard. To make matters worse, she turns up late for her sister's, Lily's wedding and succeeds in completely ruining the party as well as her own reputation in front of all the guests. Despite the gravity of the occasion, the disapproval of the guests and her sister's obvious misery, Gwen hardly seemed to notice her own wrongdoings. At this point in the film, Gwen comes across as someone who is insensitive and self-centred, and disregards the feelings of those around her.

These qualities are carried through to her initial days at the rehab centre. She saw herself as being different, and perhaps better than all the other patients. When caught for taking off with her boyfriend and returning drunk to the rehab centre, she tells the counsellor Cornell, that unlike the other patients, she can control herself and stop drinking anytime she wants. She was also arrogant and aloof, keeping to herself, refusing to participate in the centre's activities and answering questions with monosyllabic replies. She refused to conform to the rules of the establishment, and as an act of defiance, when told that she is being fined a dollar for not making her bed and tidying her room, she paid five dollars, and said, "tell you what, here's five dollars, I don't plan on cleaning all week."

However, as the film developed, we begin to see that Gwen's "tough" exterior and her "couldn't care less" attitude are just her way of trying to disguise the pain that she is feeling inside. In many ways, Gwen is heavily into denial, and as a result of that, she is also very defensive. As mentioned before, she denies that she has a drinking problem. Also, while it is apparent to outsiders like her fellow patients, Gwen refuses to admit that Jasper is probably not the ideal partner for her in the long run. Her mean façade is her way of keeping people at arm's length so that they do not threaten to bring up any aspect of herself that she is unable to deal with. This is especially true of her past. In many ways she is also refusing to acknowledge that what happened during her childhood has scarred her mentally and emotionally.

We can see that despite the years, Gwen is still tormented by events from the past. Subconsciously nightmares of herself as a little girl and her constantly drunk and negligent mother still constantly plague her. On a conscious level, she steers clear of the topic at all costs, even flying into a rage and insulting fellow rehabber and good friend Eddie when he innocently brought it up. She later apologises to Eddie for losing her temper, citing her reason as not wanting to rehash her "entire disgusting life history" in front of him. It is as if she is consciously trying to forget about her past. She is estranged from her sister, and rather than confronting the issues that are bothering her, she chooses instead to escape by drinking and taking drugs. In her own words, she says, "give me a pill, a shot, anything," anything to take away the pain that she is feeling. In retrospect, her fear of raking up the past may be a reason why she has chosen Jasper as her boyfriend. All he seems to be interested in is having a good time. In that way, he is safe to be around for he neither probes into her past nor her psyche.

Like the crying clown, another defence mechanism that she employs is comedy. Cornell promptly picked this up on their first meeting when he asked her, "do you use humour to deflect things when uncomfortable?"

As part of the mystery that shrouds her past, it is later revealed that Gwen's father had left her, her mother and Lily when she was very young, and unable to cope with it, her mother had taken up drinking. From her antics that appear in Gwen's dream, her mother seemed to have suffered from mania, even to the point of endangering the lives

of her children at times. Ultimately, she drank so much that she died from complications. This also happened when Gwen was still a young child. As such, Gwen may have developed issues with abandonment. As a child, she may even have developed the notion that it was her fault that her father left or that her mum died, that she was abandoned because she was unloved or unlovable.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, she has carried this idea into adulthood, for in the course of the film, she reinforces it with self-deprecating remarks like "I am a pain in the ass" and "I'm sorry I make it impossible to love me". Also, when her fellow patients advise her against marrying Jasper, her reply was, "I know he's not perfect, but he's the one person that will show up on my birthday, and he'll say 'I'm glad you were born'." The words "one person" seems to suggest that other than Jasper, Gwen feels that no one else cares about her or loves her, not even her only remaining kin, Lily. This could be a contributing factor to another aspect of her – the inability to ask for help.

Perhaps because she had to grow up without her parents and with a sister who saw her as competition, she had to learn from a young age to fend for herself. Coupled with the probability that she feels either unloved or unlovable, she may hence feel reluctant to sought the aid of others. Once again, this trait was identified by Cornell, who in exasperation, even went to the extent of making Gwen wear a placard that read "confront me if I don't ask for help."

Another characteristic of Gwen is that she is extremely restless. For one, she has chosen to be a writer, a job which would no doubt need her to be constantly on the go, especially living in a fast-paced city like New York. We also get a glimpse of her wild partying nights on the town, hopping from one club to another, drinking and taking drugs. Her chosen partner is also very much like her, always on the move and up to something. In the serene environments of the rehab centre, Gwen seems like a fish out of water. Stuck in that place and with nothing to do, she gets edgy and filled with angst, only too glad to get away when Jasper comes on visiting day. Even her manner of speech is quick and fiery; she speaks her thoughts as they come, the words rolling off her tongue. This behaviour is made all the more obvious when placed next to characters who are a lot calmer and more composed than her, for instance, Eddie, Cornell and Lily. Eddie for one pointedly said, "I bet you can't sit still and be quiet for one minute," and she did not prove him wrong.

Gwen's restlessness seems to stem from the fact that she can't bear to be alone and left to her own thoughts. She openly admits to it when it seems most likely that Cornell was going to transfer her to prison for having broken the rules of the centre. With regards to jail, she says, "It's not that I do not want to go. I can't go," she continues, "I cannot breathe. I think I know that if I go to jail, I will die, and I do not want to die." While it is understandable that nobody wants to be imprisoned, it seems rather far-fetched to think that she will die from going to jail. In fact, Gwen was so terrified of being sent to prison that for the first time since she entered the centre, she broke down all her defences and pleaded with Cornell to give her a second chance. Once again, this desperation of not wanting to be left alone seems connected to the fear of her past resurfacing to haunt her.

The main theme of the film revolves around the grieving process. If we were to follow the conventional model, this would entail five stages – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. In Gwen's case, she effectively lost both of her parents over a short period of time when she was very young. While we are not told whether she had received counselling to deal with the loss, one thing that is obvious is that she has definitely not complete all five stages of the process. Instead she alternates between the first four stages – angry at times, depressed at others, and constantly in

denial. Until her final days at the rehab centre, she has never really accepted what had happened. However, with the death of her roommate, she was made to face the bereavement process yet again. This time, in the surroundings of a supportive environment, she was able to achieve the final stage of acceptance not just for the loss of Andrea, but indirectly, that of her parents' as well. Finding comfort and healing, she was finally able to move on and live the life she really wanted.

Key Characteristic Symptoms

1. Fear of death when alone. (Mental)
2. Yet to resolve issues from the past. (Mental)
3. Denial / Attempts to escape from reality. (Mental)
4. Feeling unloved or unlovable / Forsaken feeling. (Mental)
5. Attempts to hide discomfort with humour. (Mental)
6. Becomes angry when confronted. (Mental)
7. Arrogant and contemptuous (Mental)
8. Physically restless due to internal agitation. (Physical General)
9. Sleep interrupted by nightmares. (Physical General)
10. Desires for alcohol and drugs. (Physical General)

1. Fear of Death When Alone

When Gwen was told that she was being transferred from the rehab centre to jail, she was so terrified that for the first time, she let her guard down and pleaded with Cornell, the counsellor. In her own words, she says, "A person should be able to be alone right. A human being should be able to just breathe and I can't breathe. I think I know that if I go to jail, I'll die and I don't want to die." While most people are afraid of going to jail, it is unusual to think that one will definitely die from being imprisoned. Thus in Gwen's case, this fear of death seems to stem not from the thought of going to jail itself, but rather, from being locked up all by herself in a confined space. In such a situation, she will be well and truly left to herself and her own thoughts. She is probably afraid that the re-emergence of her memories when left alone will drive her over the edge.

Possible Rubrics:

- ⌘ Mind – fear – death, of (§ 125)
- ⌘ Mind – fear – death, of – alone, when (§ 125)
- ⌘ Mind – fear – death, of – impending death; of (§ 125)

2. Yet to Resolve Issues from the Past

As mentioned earlier, it would seem that despite all the years that has passed, Gwen is still alternating between the first four stages of the grieving process without actually having accepted the loss of her parents. This could be due in part to the sudden nature of both losses, especially so when both her father left and her mother died when she was still a very young child. From one of her flashbacks, we also witnessed the abrupt nature in which the news of her mother's death was told to her and Lily. The informant had merely said, "I'm going to be straight with you, your mother has passed." To this Gwen had replied, "Just slap her real hard and she will wake up." This indicates to us that even from the start, Gwen had not accepted the reality of what had just happened, and perhaps never really did in the time that followed.

As a result of this, she is still constantly plagued by memories of her mother in a drunk stupor, involving Lily and Gwen herself in dangerous and reckless activities like using a table as a sled. These images constantly emerge in her mind and she is unable to stop them.

We also know that her father's disappearance and her mother's death must have affected her so much that they took their toll on her later life as a teenager and adult as well. When asked to talk about it, she refuses by saying, "Why? So that I can recount the last 15 disgusting years of my life to humiliate myself?" It would seem that she was never really able to move on with her life.

Possible Rubrics:

- ℞ Mind – grief – past events, about (§ 145)
- ℞ Mind – grief – silent (§ 145)
- ℞ Mind – dwells – childhood, on his (§ 111)
- ℞ Mind – dwells – past disagreeable occurrences, on (§ 111)
- ℞ Mind – dwells – recalls – disagreeable memories (§ 112)
- ℞ Mind – thoughts – tormenting (§ 251)
- ℞ Mind – thoughts – tormenting – past disagreeable events, about (§ 251)
- ℞ Mind – memory – active (§ 183)
- ℞ Mind – memory – active – past events, for (§ 184)

3. Denial / Attempts to Escape from Reality

For one, Gwen is heavily dependent on alcohol and drugs, means which she probably employs to escape from the memories that haunt her and the reality that she has created. In fact, right from the start of the film, she matter-of-factly points out that she has no recollection of her wild partying ways from the night before.

Even after she has been sent to the rehab centre, she writes to Jasper asking him to smuggle in some drugs for her during visiting day. She says, "the whole here but not here illusion will be much easier to sustain with a little chemical help." As in her normal life, she would rather take the easy way out.

Also throughout the film, each time that Gwen meets with a setback, her first impulse is to reach for the pills. For instance, when her sister Lily told her that she makes it impossible to love her, she immediately pops a pill with champagne. Later when Cornell made a decision to transfer her to prison and she was not able to talk her way out of it, once again she storms back to her room to reach for the pills that were hidden in the tissue box. Each time she faces a situation that she cannot handle, all she wants to do is to escape and not have to deal with it.

Denial is her strategy for dealing with the loss of her parents as well as her drinking problem, which as far as she is concerned, does not exist. She tells Cornell, "I don't belong in jail, I don't even belong here [in rehab]. Yah I know I drink a lot, I know I do because I'm a writer and that's what I do, we drink. I'm not like those people out there. I can control myself, I could if I wanted to." And in a most literal sense, she physically escapes from the rehab centre [which she sees as the problem] on visiting day.

Possible Rubrics:

- ℞ Mind – escape, attempts to (§ 114)
- ℞ Mind – grief – deception, from (§ 145)
- ℞ Mind – alcoholism – grief; after (§ 8)

4. Feeling Unloved or Unlovable / Forsaken Feeling

Earlier in the analysis of Gwen, I had suggested that as a result of the departure of both her parents over a relatively short period of time, she might have developed issues of abandonment. As an extension of this, since it happened at a very young age, she might even have internalised it and developed the notion that she was partly responsible for their leave. She may have thought that she was either unloved or unlovable.

This may have been reinforced by her relationship with her sister. In the film, Lily revealed that even as children, rather than looking out for her younger sister (who only had her as a remaining kin), she had saw Gwen as competition and thus never included her in activities. She pointed out that while she walked home with her group of friends, she had often seen Gwen walking home all by herself. Lily also added that not only did she not take care of Gwen, she often told her what a pain in the ass she was. As a result of this, what has developed is a very strained relationship between the two sisters and this is demonstrated throughout the film – from Gwen forgetting about Lily’s wedding to Lily walking out on a family therapy session with Gwen.

Forsaken by her parents and effectively her sister, Gwen has no doubt carried with her feelings of being unloved or unlovable through to her adult life. In the film, she often makes self-deprecating remarks like “I’m such a mess”, “I am a pain in the ass” and “I’m sorry I make it impossible to love me.” Also, while she probably knows in the back of her mind that Jasper is not the ideal partner for her, when criticised by her fellow rehabbers, she defends him by saying, “Do not tell me to give up the one person that matters to me. I know he’s not perfect but he’s the one person that will show up on my birthday and he’ll say ‘I’m glad you were born’.” By repeating “one person”, she seems to exclude Lily, reinforcing the idea of being abandoned even by her only remaining kin.

Possible Rubrics:

℞ Mind – forsaken feeling (§ 140)

℞ Mind – forsaken feeling – beloved by his parents, feeling of not being (§ 140)

5. Attempts to Hide Discomfort with Humour

In addition to alcohol and drugs, another way that Gwen attempts to hide her true feelings is through humour. Cornell quickly picks this up and confronts her by asking, “Do you use humour to deflect things when uncomfortable?” As a matter of fact, she does, and the following are some incidences that she attempts to do so:

- When she knows that she is terribly late for Lily’s wedding, she says, “Thank god for fast cars!”
- When she can’t recall the name of a fellow bridesmaid, she refers to her as “the bridesmaid with the make-up and the dress.” And when all she got as a response was how late she was, she added, “she has no sense of humour, but she is really good at telling the time.”
- When the head nurse Betty inspects her belongings upon arrival, Gwen makes sarcastic remarks like “Oh an eyelash curler, what am I going to do with that? Stab myself?”
- When embarrassed that she had to approach a stranger for a cigarette, she made light of the matter by saying, “Look I don’t know how much money I have in my bank account but it’s all yours if I could just borrow one of those cigarettes.”
- When Cornell told her that patients generally come to rehab to curb their addictions, her reply was “Oh well, I try not to run with the pack.”

5. Attempts to Hide Discomfort with Humour (continued)

- When Cornell reprimanded her, she mockingly replied, "Are you always this charming?"
- When Cornell tries to comfort her by telling her that God never dumps more on us than we can handle, she retorts by asking "Oh is that available stitched on a pillow somewhere?"
- When told she is being transferred to jail, she still makes a joke of it.
- When faced with an uncomfortable phone call with her sister, she tries to alleviate the tension by asking Lily, "Hey what happened to our fun and friendly sister report?"
- During equine therapy, she makes fun of the process by saying "our therapist today (with reference to the horse) is a very large smelly beast of burden."
- And finally, even when she is about to seriously plead with Cornell about the jail transfer, her initial remarks were about how dirty the carpets were and how they are responsible for a lot of major health problems.

Possible Rubrics:

℞ Mind – jesting (§ 171)

℞ Mind – jesting – everything, makes jest of (§ 171)

℞ Mind – laughing – sardonic (§ 175)

℞ Mind – laughing – serious matters, over (§ 176)

℞ Mind – witty (§ 269)

6. Becomes Angry when Confronted

Gwen's usual way of handling confronting situations is to escape. However, in an immediate situation, she could lose her temper and even get quite abusive, especially if she feels threatened. This behaviour is seen throughout the film. For instance, when Cornell told her that she is being transferred to prison, she lashed out at him, saying, "You twelve-stepping geek, what do you know about me? Nothing! You don't know a god damn thing about me."

Later on, when her therapy group gave her a hard time for not being sent to prison, she also lost her temper at them, saying, "I'm having a bad day. I'm having the worst damn day in my whole damn life! So if it's not too much to ask of you people, could you just back the fuck off?" This time her outburst was met with applause. Her anger was viewed as constructive because she finally revealed her true emotions rather than bottle them all inside.

Oftentimes when Gwen is enraged, one thing she always points out is that other people do not know anything about her. This is probably true, ironically though she is the one who is shutting others out. She is afraid to let people get too close for fear that they will expose her past and her vulnerabilities. For instance, when Eddie revealed some personal secrets about himself to her and asked that she do the same, she quickly got upset and lost her cool. Perhaps he had pried deeper than she was comfortable with, and when he persisted in questioning her, she had insulted him by saying, "Are you dense? Did your mother drop you on your head? I said no."

Possible Rubrics:

℞ Mind – anger – answer, when obliged to (§ 10)

℞ Mind – anger – beside oneself, being (§ 10-11)

℞ Mind – company – aversion – friends, of intimate (§ 39)

7. Arrogant and Contemptuous

I placed this as the least important mental symptom because I believe that like all of Gwen's other antics, this outwardly arrogant attitude is really a cover-up for her insecurities. As seen from the film, she is particularly guarded against people that she just met, or new situations that she is not used to.

For instance, upon arriving at Serenity Glen, she grunts and derisively says, "Oh this is perfect." It only took her all of one second to decide that she must dislike the place. When Jasper tried to console by telling her the alternative would have been jail, she sarcastically replies, "Oh, that's worse?" We know that though she says this, it must not be what she is really thinking because later on in the film, she is petrified by the idea of being imprisoned.

Gwen continues to be haughty throughout her first few days at the rehab centre. She looks bored at group therapy sessions, refuses to chant and sing, does not participate in conversations at mealtimes and gives monosyllabic answers when spoken to. Her body language reflects this as well, her arms are crossed, which indicates that she is trying to shut other people out, or that she has no interest in them or what they are saying. As an act of superiority and defiance, when Roshanda wanted to fine her a dollar for not making up her bed and room, she condescendingly gave her five dollars and said, "tell you what, here's five dollars, I don't plan on cleaning all week."

Also, she sees herself as being better than the other patients at Serenity Glen. She thinks that unlike them, she is able to control her alcohol, and does not have a drinking problem.

Possible Rubrics:

- ℞ Mind – haughty (§ 146)
- ℞ Mind – contemptuous (§ 48)
- ℞ Mind – cynical (§ 51)
- ℞ Mind – laughing – sardonic (§ 175)
- ℞ Mind – mocking – sarcasm (§ 193)
- ℞ Mind – speech – sharp (§ 236)
- ℞ Mind – delusion – better than others, he is (§ 62)
- ℞ Mind – delusion – superiority, of (§ 94)

8. Physically Restless Due to Internal Agitation

As mentioned previously, from her choice of work to her partner to her lifestyle, Gwen's life is marked by constant movement. At the start of the film, instead of a continuous flow, what we see is a fast sequence of fleeting images of Gwen and her night on the town. This is soon followed by the image of the fast speeding taxi that Gwen is in as she rushes to her sister's wedding. From this, we get the impression that Gwen's life itself is probably composed of rapid erratic episodes. Speed seems to govern her entire being – from her actions to her speech patterns.

As such, when she is first placed at Serenity Glen, she is like a fish out of water. As the name suggests, the rehab centre is marked by a sense of peace and calm, where things happen slowly and methodically. Used to the fast life, Gwen is totally uncomfortable with this drastic change in the pace of living. As the film progresses, the reasons for this physical restlessness begin to emerge.

8. Physically Restless Due to Internal Agitation (continued)

Gwen is haunted by painful memories from her past and these often appear when she is alone and quiet. We thus suspect that the reason why she keeps her life so busy is because if she keeps her mind occupied, there will be no chance for these recollections to surface. However, in a place like the rehab centre, where one is encouraged to delve into one's psyche, and given all the space and time to do it, Gwen finds herself once more at the mercy of her memory. Again she tries to busy herself to shut out those thoughts; in one scene, she compulsively folds gum wrappers from day till night, and in another, she was so desperate to silence her mind that she climbs out of her window onto a tree in the hope of retrieving some drugs which she had earlier threw out.

Later on, we see that Gwen is aware of this destructive side to her restlessness as she breaks down and pleaded with Cornell to change his mind about transferring her to prison. In her own words, she says, "There is something wrong with me. What kind of person jumps out of a window because she can't sit still?"

Possible Rubrics:

- ℞ Generals – restlessness (§ 1864)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness (§ 211-212)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – alone, when (§ 213)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – internal (§ 215)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – women, in (§ 216)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – move – must constantly (§ 215)

9. Sleep Interrupted by Nightmares

On several occasions, we see that Gwen's sleep is disturbed by visions of herself when she was a child, and also memories of her mother who was constantly in a drunk stupor. In one such dream, she and Lily had just returned from school, and an aunt or neighbour had broken the news to them that their mother had passed away from an overdose.

Possible Rubrics:

- ℞ Sleep – waking – dreams, by (§ 1597)
- ℞ Sleep – waking – fright, as from (§ 1598 – 1599)
- ℞ Sleep – waking – fright, as from – dreams; frightened from (§ 1599)
- ℞ Dreams – mother (§ 1630)
- ℞ Dreams – repeating (§ 1634)
- ℞ Dreams – rousing the patient (§ 1635)
- ℞ Dreams – death – relatives; of (§ 1617)
- ℞ Dreams – nightmares (§ 1631)

10. Desires for Alcohol and Drugs

From the start of the film, we know that Gwen is heavily dependent on drugs and alcohol. As discussed, the reason for her addiction might be to drown out the memories of her past that preoccupies her mind. Additionally, in one scene from her visions, Gwen see her mother, drunk as usual, saying "well, I'm glad to see that you girls are having fun, because if you are not having fun..." As if on cue, Gwen and Lily replied in unison, "what's the friggin' point?" From this sequence, we sense that this idea of "having fun" has been instilled in the girls by their mother from a tender age.

10. Desires for Alcohol and Drugs (continued)

In Gwen's case, she may have taken the idea on board and followed in her mother's footsteps.

Possible Rubrics:

- ℞ Generals – food and drinks – alcoholic drinks – desire (§ 1781)
- ℞ Generals – family history of – alcoholism (§ 1779)
- ℞ Mind – drugs – desire (§ 108)
- ℞ Mind – alcoholism (§ 8)
- ℞ Mind – alcoholism – grief; after (§ 8)

List of Rubrics

After carefully matching Gwen's character and personality to all the possible rubrics, the following list comprise of rubrics that I think best fit her picture. I have also chosen them based on the degree of certainty, the size of the rubrics and whether the rubric describes the symptoms correctly.

- ℞ Mind – fear – death, of – alone, when (§ 125)
- ℞ Mind – grief – silent (§ 145)
- ℞ Mind – dwells – recalls – disagreeable memories (§ 112)
- ℞ Mind – memory – active (§ 183)
- ℞ Mind – escape, attempts to (§ 114)
- ℞ Mind – forsaken feeling (§ 140)
- ℞ Mind – anger – answer, when obliged to (§ 10)
- ℞ Mind – company – aversion – friends, of intimate (§ 39)
- ℞ Mind – contemptuous (§ 48)
- ℞ Mind – mocking – sarcasm (§ 193)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – alone, when (§ 213)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – internal (§ 215)
- ℞ Mind – restlessness – move – must constantly (§ 215)
- ℞ Sleep – waking – fright, as from (§ 1598 – 1599)
- ℞ Dreams – repeating (§ 1634)

Top Three Remedies

Having filled out the repertory sheets, the remedies that scored the highest both in terms of the total number of points as well as the total number of symptoms they cover include:

- ARS Arsenicum album
- BELL Belladonna
- HYOS Hyoscyamus niger
- IGN Ignatia
- LACH Lachesis
- LYC Lycopodium clavatum
- NAT-M Natrum muriaticum
- NUX-V Nux vomica
- PHOS Phosphorus
- PULS Pulsatilla
- SULPH Sulphur

I then referred to several material medicas to obtain a better understanding of these remedies. Based on my analysis of the case, and the information that I got from the material medicas, I conclude the top three remedies that best fit the case are:

- IGN Ignatia
- LACH Lachesis
- NAT-M Natrum muriaticum

Differential Diagnosis

Lachesis

Lachesis covered 7 symptoms with a total score of 13 points. This includes:

- 3 for "mind – memory – active"
- 2 for "mind – forsaken feeling"
- 2 for "mind – contemptuous"
- 2 for "mind – mocking – sarcasm"
- 2 for "sleep – waking – fright, as from"
- 1 for "mind – grief – silent"
- 1 for "mind – escape – attempts to"

Vithoukas describes the essence of Lachesis as "an over-stimulation seeking an outlet," whereby an "inner agitation must be expressed either through the physical symptoms or through behaviour or speech". (Morrison 1993) This is certainly true of Gwen, whose silent grief spurs her to indulge in alcohol and drugs, the result of which is an externally loud and boisterous personality. The Lachesis patient is also described as "arrogant", "loquacious" and has a "sarcastic wit and can be cutting even to his friends or physician." (Clarke 1901, Morrison 1993) In fact, "the more cause for fretfulness, the greater the inclination for humour, jest and satire" is found in the typical Lachesis patient. (Allen 1889) All this is accurate of Gwen, whom we saw in many serious circumstances trying to hide her discomfort by telling jokes and making light of the situation. When she first arrived at Serenity Glen, we also saw many instances where Gwen can be very sharp-tongued towards her fellow rehabbers and her councillor, Cornell. Another symptom of Lachesis is "strong-minded and opinionated", such that the patient can be disputative, "contentious and obstinate, so that he quarrels with everything about him." (Vermeulen 2002) Once again, these traits are seen in Gwen

with regards to her behaviour towards the other patients and Cornell. She is unable to tolerate any suggestion and criticism offered by them, and maintains the position that they do not know her at all. To add to that, Lachesis patients "cannot bear to be under the authority of another person; he doesn't tolerate restrictions". (Morrison 1993) These characteristics could not be better exemplified than when Gwen first arrived at the rehab centre. She was haughty not only to Cornell, but also Betty, the head nurse, and even Roshanda, who tried to get her to clean her room. In addition to the above, two other Lachesis mental symptoms which aptly describes Gwen include "complaints from grief" and "alcoholism or drug addiction". (Morrison 1993)

However, in Sankaran's view, the main symptom of Lachesis is "the problem of jealousy, or how to get the better of a rival, especially in the situation of male-female relationships or in the sphere of sexual relationships." He further describes the Lachesis patient as someone who "has to compete against a person with better qualities", whose "survival depends on her being one-up on her rival" and who "becomes so engrossed with the competition [that] for the time being, she has to shut off from work." (Sankaran 1997) All of the above-mentioned qualities do not describe Gwen, who on the contrary to being competitive, is so apathetic with regards to life that she needs stimulants to get through the day. In addition, another main symptom of Lachesis is fanaticism, whereby the patient is "full of religious insanity" and even believes herself to be "under superhuman control." (Kent 1904) The patient may feel "compelled to do things by spirits", "she may tell of going into a trance" and "her talk can be clairvoyant or prophetic." (Kent 1904, Sankaran 1997) Once again, these symptoms are not part of Gwen's picture. Moreover, while some material medicas mention grief as part of the Lachesis remedy, it does not feature prominently. It is thus not an accurate portrayal of Gwen because in my opinion, grief is the underlying cause behind all of her other symptoms.

Natrum muriaticum

Natrum muriaticum covered 9 symptoms with a total score of 17 points. This includes:

- 3 for "mind – memory – active"
- 3 for "mind – grief – silent"
- 3 for "mind – dwells – recalls – disagreeable memories"
- 2 for "mind – forsaken feeling"
- 2 for "sleep – waking – fright, as from"
- 1 for "mind – contemptuous"
- 1 for "mind – anger – answer, when obliged to"
- 1 for "mind – restlessness – internal"
- 1 for "dreams – repeating"

Not only does Nat-m cover many of the symptoms that Gwen presented with, it is also one of the three "grief remedies", which also includes Ignatia and Phosphoric Acid. Deep grief and sorrow are hallmarks of Nat-m, such that "when a loss occurs, the patient experiences abnormally prolonged grief and depression." (Morrison 1993) It is said "to these individuals, time is not the 'Great Healer.' On the contrary, it serves only to crystallise the past." (Coulter 1988) To make matters worse, these patients often experience their grief silently, and may even "resort to drug use to help numb [their] emotional pain." (Morrison 1993, Sankaran 1997) All of these symptoms are true of Gwen. We see that even years after the events have happened, she is still tormented by thoughts and dreams of her mother's passing. In her attempts to avoid their re-emergence, she does turn to drugs and alcohol for relief.

Another symptom that features strongly in the Nat-m patient is the feeling that “she will be let down or betrayed or disappointed by the person her trust depends on, or by the one she loves.” (Sankaran 1997) This feeling of abandonment is echoed by Gwen herself when she describes Jasper as being “the one person that will show up on [her] birthday and... say ‘I’m glad you were born’.” In the film, Gwen’s father did forsake her, and in the same way, she probably felt abandoned by her mother when she too passed away.

In line with this feeling of being betrayed and forsaken, Nat-m patients have “a fear of being emotionally hurt or disappointed,” and are hence reserved and closed. (Sankaran 1997, Vermeulen 2002) “They have an appearance of self-assurance, almost of opposition” and are constantly on their guard. They desire solitude, and consolation may bring about defensiveness, irritability and even anger. (Clarke, 1901, Sankaran 1997, Vermeulen 2002) Yet “at the same time, there is a tremendous insecurity with a fear of being alone.” (Sankaran 1997) Once again these characteristics accurately describe Gwen. On the one hand, she rejects any help from her fellow rehabbers and councillor, and even gets angry with Eddie when he attempts to get her to talk about her addiction problem, yet on the other hand, the notion of being left alone in a prison cell terrifies her so much that she even fears she will die from it.

On the whole, it would seem that Nat-m is the correct remedy for Gwen. However, on closer inspection, there are a few characteristics of Nat-m that are found wanting in Gwen. For one, Sankaran says, “*Natrum muriaticum* patients are very organised. They are independent and dependable. They care a lot about structures like the house, relationships, date and timings.” (Sankaran 1997) In Gwen’s case, this could not be further from the truth. In the film, we see that her house is a mess, things are strewn all over and the place is generally untidy. She carries this behaviour with her to the rehab centre. When told to tidy her room, she would rather pay a fine than do it. In addition to her physical environment, Gwen also does not bother to organise her social life. The most obvious example is that she turns up late for her own sister’s wedding where she’ll be one of the bridesmaids.

In addition, Sankaran suggests that Nat-m patients believe the reason that people abandon them is because that there is something wrong with them. As a result of this, they do their best “to be nurturing and caring”, going out of their way for others. (Sankaran 1997) Once again, this is not true of Gwen. Quite the opposite, she goes out of her way to avoid getting too close to others for fear that they will rake up her past and grief. In fact, at times she goes to such extremes as to appear haughty and arrogant.

Ignatia

Ignatia covered 7 symptoms with a total score of 10 points. This includes:

- 3 for “mind – grief – silent”
- 2 for “sleep – waking – fright, as from”
- 1 for “mind – contemptuous”
- 1 for “mind – restlessness – move – must constantly”
- 1 for “mind – escape – attempts to”
- 1 for “mind – mocking – sarcasm”
- 1 for “dreams – repeating”

As in the case of *Natrum muriaticum*, Ignatia is also one of the major grief remedies. The characteristic that sets Ignatia apart from *Natrum muriaticum* and Phosphoric acid is that there is “an element of spasticity and hysteria in the grief state”. (Morrison 1993) In Gwen’s case, although her emotional excesses (as seen in the beginning of the film)

are seemingly brought about by alcohol and drugs, she is precisely trying to use these stronger substances to mask the upheaval that her grief stirs up within her. We know this because when left to her own defences in the rehab centre without access to alcohol or drugs, she becomes edgy and is filled with nervous anxiety. On one occasion, she was so restless that she climbed out of her window and onto a tree in an attempt to retrieve some pills she had earlier threw out. In the extreme, Gwen fears that if confined to a prison cell, she will die from restlessness. Kent describes this as a “momentarily hysterical excitement of the mind, in which the balance is lost” and we find this to be true in the case of Gwen. (Kent 1904)

As with the case of Nat-m, Ignatia is marked by grief that is “stuck or lasts excessively.” (Morrison 1993) It is said “the full depth of sorrow and grief which we find locked in the heart of an Ignatia patient can be enormous, unendurable” and once again, this grief is silent and the patient is haunted by “involuntary reflections on painful and disagreeable things.” (Clarke, 1901, Morrison 1993) As with Nat-m, all these symptoms match Gwen’s picture. Similarly, much like the Nat-m patient, the Ignatia patient feels disappointed, which often causes her to become “bitter and even hardened”. (Morrison 1993, Vermeulen 2002) In Gwen’s case, this is reflected in her cynical attitude towards her stay at the rehab centre, her relationship with her sister, and her life in general, which she describes as “empty” and “disgusting”.

Also though really vulnerable inside, it is often hard or even unfeasible for the Ignatia patient to release her feelings. Instead, these emotions get locked inside her. Often “this cramping of emotions leads to defensiveness and may cause the patient to act in a rude, suspicious or challenging manner towards the prescriber.” (Morrison 1993) Once more, this description fittingly describes Gwen and her relationship with others, for instance in the case of Eddie. She is obviously very fond of him and respects him, yet when he urges her to talk about her past, she loses her temper and insults him.

Yet another mental symptom of the Ignatia patient that corresponds to Gwen’s personality is that “the least contradiction excites rage” and like the Ignatia patient, she deals with contradiction by going away and being alone. (Clarke 1901, Kent 1904) Ignatia is also described as being “one of the most dramatic of types... and to be dramatic, one needs an audience.” This trait presents in Gwen, from first dancing rowdily on the dance floor with Jasper at Lily’s wedding to her dramatic collapse onto the wedding cake. Her inclination towards drama is also seen in her rendition of the TV soap opera for Andrea’s departure.

Final Choice of Remedy

My final choice of remedy is Ignatia. Although it did not score the highest in total number of points or symptoms, when I analysed Gwen’s case, and matched it to the information in the various materia medicas, it emerged as the remedy that best fitted her picture. As seen in the above analysis, not only did Ignatia cover many of Gwen’s presenting symptoms, more specifically, it is a prime grief remedy. As mentioned, this is of utmost importance, as I see grief being the underlying cause for most of Gwen’s other symptoms which includes alcoholism, disappointment, defensiveness, bitterness, and hysteria.

Since Lachesis did not really cover the grief aspect, I decided it could not be the most accurate remedy for Gwen as it excluded a large part of her symptom picture. I was thus left with Natrum muriaticum and Ignatia. In many aspects, these two remedies were very similar and both dealt with many of Gwen’s personality traits. Through reading various materia medicas, I found that many of them share the opinion that

Ignatia is the acute grief remedy while Natrum muriaticum is the chronic one. This was initially confusing for me because while it is true that Gwen's grief was long-standing, I had felt strongly that the overall picture of Ignatia matched Gwen's symptoms more than that of Natrum muriaticum. This confusion was cleared when I came across a passage written by Sankaran, in which he says, "if this grief is 'new' or fresh in mind (even though several years may have passed), the patient will need Ignatia; when it is 'old', has become a scar, provoked only when touched or prodded (even though it might be just a few days after the incident), Natrum muriaticum will have to be given." (Sankaran 1997) In Gwen's case, the former is true – she is constantly plagued by her grief, and needs no help in triggering it. One suspects she has in fact never worked through it or come to terms with it, and thus as much as she desires to, she is unable to let it go. In Sankaran's view, the terms "acute" and "chronic" are not defined by how long it has been since the incident that caused the grief, but rather, how fresh the memory of it is in the mind of the patient. In this way, there is no conflict in my choice of Ignatia as the "acute" grief remedy for Gwen.

Another reason for my choice of remedy is that while there were certain characteristics in Lachesis and Natrum muriaticum that clearly clashed with, or completely opposed Gwen's personality, these were not present in the Ignatia remedy. To a certain degree, most of the main Ignatia symptoms could be found in Gwen. Having said that, I must stress that I am referring primarily to the mental symptoms as that is the area that the film focused on. There is little information on the physical aspects of Gwen.

For the abovementioned reasons, I find that on the whole, Ignatia is the remedy that best matches Gwen's symptom picture, and that is my final choice of remedy for her.

Ignatia

Nature of the Substance

Ignatia is made from the seeds of the *Ignatia amara* plant, which is native to the East Indies, China and the Philippines. The plant is a tall woody, climbing shrub with long, twining branches and white flowers, scented like jasmine. The fruits are the size and shape of a medium-sized pear. Each seed pod contains about 10 to 20 seeds. These seeds contain strychnine, a potent poison that acts on the nervous system. The seeds are separated from the pulp and powdered to make the homeopathic remedy. (Lockie et al 1995, Vermeulen 2002)

History and Background

The *Ignatia amara* tree obtained its name from Ignatius Loyola, a Catholic priest who founded the Jesuit order. The natives of the Philippine Islands were aware of the medicinal values of the seeds, and were in the habit of wearing them as amulets for the prevention and cure of all kinds of disease. It was a Spanish Jesuit Father, Georg Kamel, who introduced the seeds into Europe in the 17th century. It was in the *Ignatia amara* seeds that the French chemists Caventou and Pelletier discovered strychnine in 1818. (Lockie et al 1995, Vermeulen 2002) In conventional medicine, the seeds were once used to treat gout, epilepsy, and cholera. (Lockie et al 1995) A polycryst, Ignatia was fully proved by Hahnemann himself, and he published the findings in the second volume of *Materia Medica Pura*. (Smyth 2003)

Appearance and Type

Ignatia types are usually thin, dark-haired women. They often present with a sunken face, cracked lips and bluish circles around the eyes. They have a strained expression and are prone to facial ticks and grimaces. They have a tendency to blink, sigh or yawn repeatedly, which may be seen as a sign that they find it hard to release their deep emotions. The weak areas of their body include the mind and nervous system. (Lockie et al 1995)

Physical Generals

- Sensation of a ball in inner parts, especially a lump in the throat.
- Pains in small circumscribed spots. Pains better for pressure.
- Spasms
- Paradoxical symptoms – e.g. sore throats which are better for swallowing, laughter when sad.
- General and local complaints better for travelling.
- Tendency to faint.
- Oversensitive to pain.
- General aggravation from eating sweets, having coffee and alcohol.
- Desire for sour and acidic foods, as well as indigestible foods.
- Ameliorated by the rain.
- Insomnia from grief, jerking of limbs on falling asleep, repeating dream, especially around grief issues.
- Aversion to tobacco smoke or smokey rooms.
- Chill with thirst but no thirst with fever. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

Modalities

Worse: Grief, anger, worry, fright, cold air, open air, odours, touch, coffee, tobacco, consolation, slight touch, winter, walking fast, morning, on waking. (Vermeulen 2002)

Better: Change of position, lying on painful side, profuse urination, if alone, pressure, hard pressure, warmth, swallowing. (Vermeulen 2002)

Mental Picture

- Ailments after grief.
- Introspection, brooding. Bear sufferings silently.
- Ailments after romantic disappointments.
- Easily hurt feelings; easily offended.
- Conscientious about trifles; feelings of regret and remorse.
- Sighing, especially common in older patients.
- Desire to avoid crying, giving way to sobbing.
- Aversion to consolation; desire to be alone.
- Stormy relationships filled with recrimination. Jealousy.
- Alternating moods – laughing to weeping.
- Laughing involuntarily over serious matters.
- Hysteria or hysterical symptoms.
- Fear of birds or chickens. Claustrophobia.
- Desire for and amelioration from travelling.
- Great defensiveness and touchiness.
- Rude or suspicious and doubting patients. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

Particulars

Head – Perspiration only on the face; perspires first on face or lip. Headaches after grief. Headache with pain that feels like a nail driven into head. Better for lying on the painful side, with profuse urination and by heat. Worse for emotions, odours, coffee and tobacco. Pain is erratic, changeable, and comes and goes quickly. Alopecia, especially after grief. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

Face – Twitching of muscles and eyelids. (Smyth 2003)

Mouth – Tendency to bite tongue or inner cheeks when speaking or chewing. (Morrison 1993)

Throat – Feeling of a lump in the throat, which cannot be swallowed. Tendency to choke. Sore throat when not swallowing or swallowing liquids. Sore throat that is better for swallowing solids. Whispery voice, cannot speak loudly. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

G.I.T – Emptiness in the stomach that is not made better by eating. Vomiting that is better for eating indigestible foods, but worse for bland, simple foods. Bulimia. Rectal spasms, fissure, haemorrhoids, prolapse. Constipation felt more in the upper abdomen. Hiccoughing paroxysms. Sensation of poker or knife in the rectum. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

Respiratory – Dry, spasmodic cough. Coughing increases the desire to cough. Irresistible paroxysm of cough without signs of illness. Sighing. Yawning. Constriction or sensation of weight in the chest with dyspnoea. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

Female – Dysmenorrhoea. Amenorrhoea. Black menses. Confusion during menses, can't think straight. (Smyth 2003)

Heart – Palpitations, especially from grief. (Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003)

Extremities – Twitching, spasms, convulsions, especially after emotional upheavals. Chorea from fright, grief, teething, worms. Paralysis from hysterical causes. Epilepsy after grief and mortification. (Smyth 2003)

Skin – Itching nettle rash. (Smyth 2003)

Causations

Grief, fright, worry, disappointed love, jealousy, old spinal injuries. (Clarke 1901)

Keynotes

- Ailments from anger, anger with silent grief, disappointment, disappointed love, fright, reproaches, and shame.
- Critical, intolerant of contradiction; expect others, especially partner, to be perfect.
- Feelings of regret; self-reproach.
- Hysteria.
- Disappointments result in inner sensitiveness, but tries to keep it in.
- Silent grief and brooding.
- Consolation aggravates; desires to be alone.

Keynotes (continued)

- Contradictory and alternating states.
- Involuntary sighing.
- Laughing involuntarily over serious matters.
- Tendency to eat away stresses.
- Bitterness.
- Oversensitive to pain.
- Perspiration only or mainly on face, especially during eating.
- Aversion to open air.
- Worse for sweets, alcohol and coffee.
- Better for warmth, physical exertion, running, walking fast, profuse urination, while eating.
- Sensation of lump in throat.
- Twitching around mouth.
- Pains in small spots.
- Headache ends in yawning and vomiting.
(Morrison 1993, Smyth 2003, Vermeulen 2002)

Remedy Relationships

Complementary – Natrum muriaticum, Sulphur, Calcarea carbonica, Sepia officinalis, Apis mellifica (Morrison 1993)

Inimical – Nux vomica (Morrison 1993)

Potency and Dosage

For Gwen: I would recommend a single dose of Ignatia in the M potency.

I chose a relatively high potency (as opposed to a low potency) for the following reasons:

- The disease itself produces strong symptoms, thus we have to match the high vibration of the disease with a high vibration in terms of potency.
- I am relatively confident of the match of the remedy to Gwen's symptom picture. However, as mentioned previously, we do not have her whole picture, just mainly the mental symptoms, thus I will not give her higher than an M potency.
- The disease has been affecting Gwen for many years. Being deep and chronic, it thus requires a higher potency.
- The condition is predominantly mental; being deeper and closer to the central characteristics of the condition and remedy, once again, it requires a higher potency.
- Gwen herself is a sensitive individual. Her initial indifference is actually a façade precisely because she is easily affected by those around her, and thus feel it necessary to distant herself. However, later in the film, when she lets her guard down, we see a side of her that cares deeply for people and are able to reach out and touch them.
- Gwen has a history of drug use, which once again, may make her more sensitive.
- Gwen is physically strong and energetic. She is not weak, frail, elderly or debilitated.

Possible Reactions

1. Improvement in all areas. All symptoms are better physically, emotionally and mentally.

In this case, I will do nothing. I will repeat only when there is a clear return of major symptoms. I will change the remedy only when it is very clear that the whole symptom picture has changed, or if after waiting an appropriate amount of time, repeating the original remedy brings no further change.

2. There is a quick, marked aggravation followed by a rapid amelioration on all levels.

This is an indication that the remedy is a good fit, and that the patient has a strong vital force. Thus once again, I will do nothing unless it is very clear that the vital force has forgotten the message. I will be very reluctant to change this remedy; any other remedy given to this patient is probably a complementary remedy.

~ End ~

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