

# Piece of Mind

by

Emma Wood

**Contact:**

[wood.emma.e@gmail.com](mailto:wood.emma.e@gmail.com)

0411059797

<https://newplayexchange.org/users/16534/emma-wood>

**Synopsis**

When Gwen and Allie open a daring business venture to shore up their meagre retirement savings, they unwittingly open a Pandora's box with it, threatening their investment, their reputations and even their friendship.

**Characters**

**Gwen** - 50s/60s

**Allie** - 50s/60s

**Rowena** - 70s/80s

**Tess** - 20s (*could also be a male character: **Josh***)

**Clients:** (*can be double cast*)

**Ella** and **Ed**

**John** and **Julie**

**Margot** and **Michael**

**Pre-recorded videos:**

**Older M/F couple**

**Younger M/F couple**

**Single woman** 30s-50s with **a dog**

**Casting notes:**

Tess can become 'Josh' if a young male actor is preferred. Change references from 'daughter' to 'son' and pronouns.

If a smaller cast is preferred, the clients in Scene Four are cameos that could be doubled with Tess/Josh and Rowena.

A stage manager who can act could also be cast in some or all of the client roles in Scene Four.

If you cast 4 women in the lead roles, you may need a man to play the clients.

**Script notes:** Some words may not ring true in all countries. For example: 'Bloody' might play better as 'damn' or 'darn' in the USA. 'Boxers' might be 'jocks', 'fucketty fucksticks' could be 'Holy shitballs'. You may substitute specific words appropriate to your location.

### **Setting**

*An uncluttered room, in shades of white. A place of peace. A beautiful open casket is central. The casket should not obscure the body or face of the 'deceased' from the audience. Flowers may adorn the room.*

## Scene One

*(In the casket lies Allie, draped in linen, motionless. Gwen is standing sombrely at the foot of the table with a large brown paper package. After some time, she gently places the package down. She views Allie tenderly.)*

**GWEN:** Allie. Darling friend. It's me. I don't really know how to do this. I never thought you'd go like this. No warning. I'm unstuck. Unprepared.

*(After a beat)*

There are things I need to tell you. I wish I'd told you sooner - when you were...

*(After a beat)*

Do you remember when we first moved in together, way back when we were training? You were so funny, so glamorous. And wild. I admired you. Adored you. Instantly. You can't imagine. I was this shy girl new to the city and you - so full of daring - of energy -

*(SHE screws up her courage.)*

Those boots. You remember those boots you owned? Thigh high, red leather - gorgeous. You used to joke they were more important to you than life itself. I thought you'd never get over losing them. You swore you wanted to be buried with them. And now I can finally set it right.

*(After a beat)*

I have them. I took them.

*(SHE turns to look carefully at Allie's face, which remains motionless)*

I didn't plan to. You were out one night, like most nights. I wasn't. Like most nights. I only meant to put a little toe in one and the next thing I knew I was wearing them and it just felt so good. I was a whole new person in those boots... a better person... the kind of person who goes out at night. A lot. So I kept them. I meant to return them but I left it too long. I couldn't admit what I'd done. Not then. But now...

*(SHE bends to pick up the package. A slight twinge of pain from her back crosses her face. SHE unwraps the paper. Inside is a shoe box. Suddenly, ALLIE sits up.)*

**ALLIE:** Please tell me it's true! *(GWEN stares at ALLIE in shock)* Do you really have them? *(After a beat)* Pass me the damn box! *(GWEN does. ALLIE opens it to reveal a pair of scuffed old boots, not red.)* Oh Gwen - that was - that was just mean!

**GWEN:** You said you wanted to be tested! The whole point of this was to see whether you could maintain a corpse-like silence no matter what you heard.

**ALLIE:** I know, I know. Damn it. *(After a beat)* So, you didn't then?

**GWEN:** Didn't what?

**ALLIE:** Steal my boots?

**GWEN:** I can't believe you don't trust me.

**ALLIE:** Odd story to invent.

**GWEN:** Odd, or ingenious?

**ALLIE:** That's the same as genius, right?

**GWEN:** Right.

**ALLIE:** So confusing. *(Beat)* Sorry. It was just hard.

**GWEN:** That was the point. Silence is the point.

**ALLIE:** I was silent. For a while.

**GWEN:** A very little while.

**ALLIE:** I'm only human. You try playing dead. It's not as easy as it looks you know.

**GWEN:** How hard can it be? Just lie there and pretend you are in heaven!

**ALLIE:** If I was in heaven, the boots would be here. Whose are these dirty old things anyway?

**GWEN:** They're mine. I never wear them anymore.

**ALLIE:** I can see why. I'm surprised I didn't smell them.

**GWEN:** I lined the box in case.

**ALLIE:** Wow. Well prepared. I'm impressed.

**GWEN:** I'm taking this seriously.

**ALLIE:** I noticed. That was a great story. Nostalgia, guilt, yearning. Really high stakes stuff.

**GWEN:** Why thank you.

**ALLIE:** You sure you wouldn't be better off just writing a novel?

**GWEN:** Pivoting from nurse to novelist at this age?

**ALLIE:** I could be your agent. I'll only take 30%.

**GWEN:** Pretty steep for a beginner.

**ALLIE:** We'll both be beginners. The parlour could double as your writing garret when we have light bookings.

**GWEN:** Hey! Enough thought bubbles. We're trying to launch a business, remember?

**ALLIE:** Right. Unlike any other business, anywhere!

**GWEN:** We hope. If we do this right, it could change lives.

**ALLIE:** Right.

**GWEN:** Help people release painful truths they've sat on for years.

**ALLIE:** Help people release their hard-earned cash in our direction...

**GWEN:** Whoa. We're getting ahead of ourselves. We need to stay focused. Launch is in two days.

**ALLIE:** Faaaaark..!

**GWEN:** It's not like you didn't know that.

**ALLIE:** No. But it seems a teeny bit more real all of a sudden.

**GWEN:** Well, we failed round one. Let's get back in the saddle.  
*(She attempts to swing a leg into the coffin and can't do it. Gasps a little.)*

**ALLIE:** You ok there?

**GWEN:** *(with effort)* Footstool. One that looks a million dollars but only costs ten. Can you note that?

**ALLIE:** *(pulling note pad out of her bra)* Roger that.

*(Gwen is bracing herself to try again but hesitates.)*

**ALLIE:** You need a hand?

**GWEN:** I'll manage.

**ALLIE:** (*Falsely bright*) You know what? Just stay out. I don't need a turn. We got the picture.

**GWEN:** It didn't work. That's not a good picture.

**ALLIE:** God, you're such a worry wart. The real test run is launch. Let's talk linen.

**GWEN:** Linen?

**ALLIE:** Yeah. It tickles. Big distraction. For the clients.

**GWEN:** That was your take-out? Linen?

**ALLIE:** Hey! It matters. Call yourself a nurse.

**GWEN:** And nothing else struck you?

**ALLIE:** Well, yeah. Of course.

**GWEN:** Like what?

**ALLIE:** Well, all those fabulous things you said about me. What were they again? I'm going to write them down. (*She pulls out her notebook.*)

**GWEN:** (*indicating linen*) And this is the distraction?

**ALLIE:** Hold up - I'm concentrating. Glamourous... gorgeous...

**GWEN:** That was the boots.

**ALLIE:** Yeah, but by association. Ummm - wild..

**GWEN:** Give me strength...

**ALLIE:** Help me out. What else was there?

**GWEN:** I don't know. I didn't write it down. I just spoke from the heart.

**ALLIE:** See, that's your talent. I have to write things down if I want to remember them.

**GWEN:** You haven't prepared a story, have you?

**ALLIE:** Sure I have. I just need to compose myself.

**GWEN:** OK. Take your time. *(Beat while Allie stalls with a slow inhale and exhale.)* Can we get on now?

**ALLIE:** Oh - sure! But seriously - it's not much. Don't even get in. You can just, you know, stand beside it if you want.

**GWEN:** Really Allie?

**ALLIE:** Look, I just couldn't think of much, ok?

**GWEN:** Let's hear what you've got.

**ALLIE:** Ummm. Ok. *(She flips through the notebook nervously, buying time.)* Got it. *(Beat.)* Ready?

**GWEN:** Uh huh!

**ALLIE:** *(wooden delivery)* Hello Gwen. It's me. I'm sorry you're dead. *(After a beat.)* Ummmm... I need to unburden myself of a few little things... *(back to normal voice)* Oh fucketty fucksticks. This just isn't my forte.

**GWEN:** That was it?

**ALLIE:** Yeah. So? *(Gwen bursts out laughing.)* What?

**GWEN:** You're just - you cannot be serious. That was appalling!

**ALLIE:** Owch!

**GWEN:** How long did that take to write?

**ALLIE:** I don't know. Maybe half an hour?

**GWEN:** No, I mean really?

**ALLIE:** Really!

*(Allie joins in laughing now. The ease of a long friendship is seen. Finally they finish.)*

**ALLIE:** So we can just skip my turn, right?

**GWEN:** What? No. We can't. Clock is ticking. Let's get it right. *(She turns to the coffin again as the lights go down.)*

**ALLIE:** But what do I say?

**GWEN:** I don't know. Make it up and make it good.



**Scene Two**

*The room has additional furniture: a tea stand and a foot stool. Allie is beautifying the tea stand. Gwen is awkwardly holding the door open with one hand and a foot stool with the other; Tess manoeuvres in an armchair.*

**GWEN:** Steady - steady.

**TESS:** Gwen. I'm good.

**GWEN:** Sorry.

**TESS:** Hold the door open further will you?

**GWEN:** Oops, sorry. *(She does, then grimaces and gasps a little, showing signs of strain.)*

**ALLIE:** You right over there?

**GWEN:** *(Tightly)* Yep.

**TESS:** Are we good?

**GWEN:** Yes - go, go, go.

**TESS:** I'm going. *(She clears the door. Gwen quickly releases it and hides her pained face from the others.)*

**ALLIE:** Love your work Tessie.

**TESS:** How many times Mum?

**ALLIE:** What? Oh - sorry. 'Tess'.

**TESS:** Not five anymore.

**ALLIE:** Got it. Never again.

**TESS:** Whatever. Where do you want it?

**GWEN:** *(Recovered)* Oh, just over here, with the chairs.

**TESS:** Ok. *(She places it then takes a few steps back then turns to find herself uncomfortably close to the coffin and recoils.)*

**ALLIE:** You alright?

**TESS:** Yeah.

**ALLIE:** You sure?

**TESS:** Yeah. It's just - that -

**ALLIE:** What?

**TESS:** The coffin.

**ALLIE:** What's wrong?

**TESS:** It's a coffin.

**ALLIE:** Don't worry, there's no one in it. Yet.

**TESS:** Have you -

**ALLIE:** What? (*Tess indicates the coffin*) Oh yes! Quite comfy actually. You want to try?

**TESS:** Mum...

**ALLIE:** What?

**TESS:** Just - no. Ok?

**ALLIE:** Why not?

**TESS:** Have you two thought about the - uh...

**ALLIE:** The what?

**TESS:** Well, the, uh, unpredictable emotions that lying in a coffin might bring up?

(*Beat.*)

**ALLIE:** Of course. / **GWEN:** Er...

**ALLIE:** It'll be fine. We have a pamphlet prepared for clients. They know what they're walking into.

**TESS:** A pamphlet.

**GWEN:** She raises an interesting point...

**ALLIE:** But we want people to be in a - well - a sort of an elevated emotional state, right? They can't unblock decades of resentment if they feel all loaf of bread about it.

**TESS:** Loaf of bread?

**ALLIE:** You know, banal. 'Can you get us a loaf of bread, love.'

**TESS:** Ummm - ok. Your business is your business I guess.

**ALLIE:** It'll be fine. It's adults only.

**TESS:** And no adult ever behaved badly.

**ALLIE:** Enough from you two doubters! You'll put a hex on it!

**TESS:** Ok, ok.

**GWEN:** *(Beat. Checks her watch.)* So shall we get on?

**ALLIE:** Just say the word.

*(Beat.)*

**GWEN:** Meeting declared open. Let's hear what you've got.

**TESS:** Ummm - standing?

**GWEN:** Sure.

**ALLIE:** I'll just be in here. *(She perches on the edge of coffin, then fakes a lean in, making ghostly noises.)*

**TESS:** Mom!

**GWEN:** Allie!

**TESS:** What did we just talk about? It's a sensitive environment. Not a stand-up comedy act.

**GWEN:** She can't help herself.

**ALLIE:** Sorry. Ok. I'm ready. *(She stands with Gwen.)*

**TESS:** Right. I've got a few things to show you. Do you want the good news or the better news?

**GWEN:** There's good news?

**TESS:** Absolutely.

**ALLIE:** Really?

**GWEN:** Wow. That's great. Let's hear it.

**TESS:** Well, I've been creating content across all platforms, you know, building excitement about this weird but red-hot idea. I've been hashtagging like an influencer on 'roids -

**GWEN:** Ummm - just a little refresher course on hashtags?

**ALLIE:** I've tried, Tess.

**TESS:** Hey, no problem, it's not everyone's wheelhouse. So, hashtags are used on the socials..

**GWEN:** Socials?

**TESS:** Social media.

**GWEN:** Ah - got it.

**TESS:** They're used to connect like-minded people. So I started simple, you know, #newbeginnings, #finalwords, #bucketlist, #yolo..

**GWEN:** Hey, I know that one.

**TESS:** Rock out, Gwen. And I used a few images and teasers, and then I started linking your profiles, highlighting your background in health. I emphasised mental health to up your cred a bit.

**GWEN:** Oh, that's not really my area..

**ALLIE:** Or mine.

**TESS:** Doesn't matter. Your average bot won't look into it too deeply, just makes this seem a bit more - you know - professional.

**ALLIE:** So, are people interested?

**TESS:** Ummm, yeah. It's totally blown my expectations.

**ALLIE:** Oooh!!

**TESS:** Yeah. The account I set up for you -

**GWEN:** We have an account?

**TESS:** You have several.

**GWEN:** Oh god.

**TESS:** I'm managing it, don't worry.

**GWEN:** Oh good.

**TESS:** Anyway, it's got heaps of engagement, not just likes, but comments and shares, which matters more -

**ALLIE:** Just nod and smile. (*Gwen does*)

**TESS:** Ok, skipping the detail - let's get to the number that actually matters. Your followers.

**ALLIE:** Ooh - can we guess?

**TESS:** If you want.

**ALLIE:** You first Gwen.

**GWEN:** 16.

**ALLIE:** Urgh. So glass half empty. 116!

**TESS:** Ye of little faith. This is the better news I alluded to. In two weeks of posting, your combined followers across all platforms is 981.

**ALLIE:** No way!

**TESS:** Way.

**GWEN:** That sounds like a lot.

**TESS:** It is a lot.

**GWEN:** But how did you do it?

**TESS:** Honestly? Free shit. People love it.

**ALLIE:** But what?

**TESS:** I offered free half hour sessions on launch day.

**ALLIE/GWEN:** Really?

**GWEN:** You didn't know about this Allie?

**ALLIE:** No.

**TESS:** Surprise! You just got to get them in.

**GWEN:** Ok...

**ALLIE:** Initiative. I like it. So how many bookings?

**TESS:** Nineteen couples and one single, and a whole bunch who want to watch.

**GWEN:** They can't watch!

**TESS:** I told them that. But I offered an alternative: champagne and canapes over the coffin after the sessions. #coffincanapes.

*(Beat)*

**GWEN:** Why would they want that?

**TESS:** Everyone's after something unique these days. Something they can generate interest with on their own feed. And this is about as unique as it gets.

**ALLIE:** Oh my goodness! It's going to happen!

**TESS:** It is going off.

**GWEN:** Wow.

**TESS:** Fist pump.

**GWEN:** What? *(Allie and Tess fist pump. Gwen gets it, then joins in.)*

**GWEN:** Just one thing though. Do you think nineteen is a few too many for the launch? I mean we only had a couple of hours in mind, and then there's - what was that thing again?

**ALLIE:** #coffincanapes!

**GWEN:** Yes, that. So that'll have to be half an hour at least... won't it?

**TESS:** Gwen, totally. I've got the applications from all couples here and I thought you two should select six.

**GWEN:** How will we choose?

**TESS:** I asked them to submit a video pitch.

**ALLIE:** Oh, fun!

**GWEN:** So what are they like?.

**TESS:** Ummmm... colourful.

**ALLIE:** What do you mean?

**TESS:** You'll see. *(She unlocks her phone. A projection appears on the wall. 'Peace of Mind' is the holding screen.)* I've just arranged a random selection, so there's no judgment from me, ok? *(She reveals the first couple in a freeze frame at start of video. They are older and all we can see is their chins and up their noses.)*

**ALLIE:** Dear god.

**VIDEO:**

Woman: Is it on?

Man: I think so.

Woman: Can they see us?

Man: I don't know.

Woman: Oh no look - that's us there. Lift it up - like young people and those selfie things.

*(The angle of the phone is dramatically altered and their whole faces come into view peering into the centre of the screen, confused.)*

Man: There we are. *(He waves at her and she waves back. They're delighted at their tech triumph.)*

Woman: Let's do a sound check. Ready? *(Loudly)*  
HELLOOOOOO!

Man: Ow - calm down will you? The mikes not broken. Yet.

Woman: I didn't know you were a tech expert!

Man: You don't think I'm an expert at anything.

Woman: What? Oh come on. It was a joke.

Man: An insult is what it was.

Woman: Oh here we go again...

Man: Don't start on that. I won't have it.

**GWEN:** Cut! *(Tess does.)* Enough. I can't bear it.

**ALLIE:** I don't know - seems like maybe they really need some coffin time.

**TESS:** Maybe shortlist?

**GWEN:** What did you actually ask them Tess?

**TESS:** Why should we choose you to win a free session in 15 seconds or less?

**GWEN:** Fail on all grounds. Next.

**TESS:** You got it.

*(Tess plays next video.)*

## **VIDEO**

Woman: *(Onscreen with her dog.)* Hey - I'm Jacqui. This is Buster. We're not a couple. Just in case you thought - well. You know. Anyways... you just get us today because our man slash owner is too busy. Again. It's driving me crazy. I mean I love my gorgeous pooch, but you know. Love my man more. Actually I should keep my voice down, he's on a zoom call. Again.

Man's voice: Can you keep it down in there?

Woman: Oh sorry honey, I didn't know you could hear me...

*(Phone is dropped and barking is heard)*

Buster! Shhh! Give me that - Buster!

Man's voice: What the hell...!

*(Video suddenly stops)*

**ALLIE:** No dogs.

**GWEN:** No way.

**TESS:** OK. So, for this next one, maybe see them before you hear them..

**ALLIE:** Why?

**TESS:** You'll see. *(The next couple are revealed as a still in medieval style dress ups.)* Duuuuude!!!

**GWEN/ALLIE:** Ummm...

**GWEN:** What's with Sir Lancelot?

**ALLIE:** And Lady Boobs-a-lot?

**TESS:** Do you want to hear what they say?

**ALLIE:** No!

**GWEN:** Briefly.

**Video:**

**Boobsalot:** Made you look. Ha!

**Lancelot:** Thanks for this awesome opportunity. So hectic!!! We're cos-players. We love to dress up, get down and party.

**Boobsalot:** But lately our competitive vibe has created some issues.

**Lancelot:** ... and we need to find the love again.

**Boobsalot:** Being performers, we're better at talking than we are at listening.

**Lancelot:** Really hoping the coffin might shut us up...

**Boobsalot:** So we don't shut down.

**Both:** So choose us! You won't regret it.



**ALLIE:** Oh my god.

**GWEN:** What's a cosplayer?

**TESS:** They dress up as their favourite characters and hang out with others who do the same. I know, right? But it's pretty mainstream these days.

**GWEN:** If you say so.

**TESS:** Yes or no?

**GWEN:** Ummm...

**ALLIE:** No.

**GWEN:** What she said.

**TESS:** Ready for more?

**GWEN:** I don't know if I can face it.

**ALLIE:** Are any of them sane?

**GWEN:** Can we just do a ballot?

**ALLIE:** You're the marketing guru. What would you do?

**TESS:** I'd get a range of age groups here. Word of mouth is gold. The more chatter the better.

**ALLIE:** Good. I agree.

**GWEN:** Can you just choose a few and tell us nothing?

**TESS:** I can do that.

**GWEN:** Thank you.

**ALLIE:** Yeah. Thanks sweetie. Make sure you invoice us.

**GWEN:** Er - yeah. Maybe after we get a few paying customers?

**TESS:** No problem at all.

**GWEN:** Oh - just one thing. You've spelled 'peace' wrong in your video thingy. Is that in all the social stuff too..?

**TESS:** Hey?

**GWEN:** It's just - it's meant to be like 'piece of cake'.

**ALLIE:** Oh yeah.

**TESS:** I thought it was peace of mind?

**GWEN:** Yes, but it's a pun. You have to give a piece of your mind -

**ALLIE:** - to get peace of mind.

*(Beat)*

**GWEN:** Get it?

**TESS:** Uh - yeah. But...

**ALLIE:** Just say you love it. Gwen's very proud of her punning.

**TESS:** I love it!

**GWEN:** So you can change it?

**TESS:** Yeah - I guess. It's just - all the handles, the hashtags, the email addresses - uh, the signage for outside - it'll take a bit of doing.

**GWEN:** Oh god.

**ALLIE:** Will it be too painful?

**TESS:** No. I can do it. I'll have it ready for launch.

**GWEN:** Thank you.

**TESS:** Anytime. Uh - I'll have add it to my invoice.

**GWEN:** Of course.

**ALLIE:** Invoice. So professional. It's like we're actually opening a business.

**TESS:** You'd better be! How else am I going to skim profits off the top?

**ALLIE:** *(Drily)* So proud of my girl.

**TESS:** Back at you. Ok - work calls. Real work. I mean...

**ALLIE:** We get it.

**GWEN:** Thanks for coming.

**TESS:** All good. Later.

*(Tess exits.)*

**ALLIE:** Well. Wow.

**GWEN:** Yeah. Big wow. She's done well. I can't believe it.

**ALLIE:** I know. How about our numbers?!!

**GWEN:** Yeah. Hard to believe. Let's not count our chickens. All those people, they might be - you know - that thing she said before -

**ALLIE:** Which one?

**GWEN:** When they're fake people.

**ALLIE:** Oh. Bots?

**GWEN:** That one.

**ALLIE:** No. Tess knows what she's doing. It might be huge!

**GWEN:** God I hope so.

**ALLIE:** Can you imagine if it actually works? Like, makes some money?

**GWEN:** I don't know. Can it be this easy?

**ALLIE:** Maybe it can! Maybe we're CEOs of the world's hottest start up!

**GWEN:** Whoa there. We haven't got a single paid booking.

**ALLIE:** Not yet! But after the launch, and some more carefully crafted social media bollocks, we might really be in business.

**GWEN:** Do you really think we'll...

**ALLIE:** That zeitgeisty magic you read about in magazines. We'll be a virus!

**GWEN:** I think you mean 'viral'.

**ALLIE:** Can you imagine? No more night shifts! *(During this she has been rapidly moving about the room adjusting flowers, and now stops at the coffin and looks carefully at the angle of placement.)*

**GWEN:** I won't miss those.

**ALLIE:** Nooooo way. *(Beat. Still absorbed in assessing coffin angle.)* I mean we'll probably have to keep an oar in at the hospital while we build up here. But once we're booming we

can march in, tell the head nurse where to stick it, and come count the money!

**GWEN:** Allie... about that...

**ALLIE:** *(She attempts to shift the coffin slightly to re-align it.)* Hey, can you give me a hand with this?

**GWEN:** What's wrong with it?

**ALLIE:** It's wonky.

**GWEN:** Don't be silly, it's fine.

**ALLIE:** It's bothering me.

**GWEN:** Allie.

**ALLIE:** Yeah?

**GWEN:** I want this to work.

**ALLIE:** I know. Me too. *(Still trying to shift the coffin)*

**GWEN:** I mean - I need it to work. I'm not going back.

**ALLIE:** I just meant for a little while, to keep solvent...

**GWEN:** Can you stop doing that? It's fine! *(Allie turns in surprise.)* Sorry.

**ALLIE:** Where did that come from?

**GWEN:** Sorry - it's just - I can't go back. Not now. Not in a month. Not at all.

**ALLIE:** Why?

**GWEN:** I've got nothing left to give.

**ALLIE:** I hear you. But it's just temporary. The final stretch.

**GWEN:** No. I'm finished there. *(Beat.)*

**ALLIE:** Gwen. What are you trying to tell me?

**GWEN:** It's my back...

**ALLIE:** Oh no...

**GWEN:** It's bad. And getting worse.

**ALLIE:** No, no...

**GWEN:** I'm struggling with the - with the basics. Bending over. Lifting. Even holding that door open before -

**ALLIE:** Darling. You should have told me. Have you seen anyone?

**GWEN:** Yes. Everyone. Chiro, physio, osteo - tried it all. It's costing half my salary. And it's only band aid relief.

**ALLIE:** Come here. *(They hug)* Please don't worry. This will take off. I can feel it.

**GWEN:** Yes.

**ALLIE:** Say it like you mean it. It will take off.

**GWEN:** *(limply)* It will take off.

**ALLIE:** Ok. Well I believe you, even if you don't.

**GWEN:** There's one other thing I need to tell you.

**ALLIE:** Oh no. What now?

**GWEN:** It's just that, ummm, it's 3 o'clock...

**ALLIE:** ...that's it?

*(A knock on the door)*

**GWEN:** No. That's it. You can set your clock by her.

**ALLIE:** By who?

**ROWENA:** *(outside door)* Hello?

**ALLIE:** Oh, you didn't...

**GWEN:** Shhh! She asked for a private visit before launch.  
*(Beat.)*

**ALLIE:** Why am I here?

**GWEN:** She wants to meet with both partners. As our only investor I could hardly refuse.

**ALLIE:** Visit or inspection?

**GWEN:** Well - it's a fine line.

**ALLIE:** Not with her.

**ROWENA:** *(outside door)* Gwendolen?

**ALLIE:** Fuck me...

**GWEN:** Language.

**ALLIE:** My sincere apologies 'Gwendolen'!

**GWEN:** I'll handle this. Alright? She means well.

**ALLIE:** Really?

**GWEN:** I need to believe it.

**ALLIE:** Uh-huh.

**GWEN:** *(To door)* Won't be a minute! *(To Allie)* Here goes. Just be yourself. *(Heads for door, then turns back.)* Actually, don't. I'll talk. You smile. Take some notes or something, alright?

*(Allie shoots Gwen a sublime smile and clasps her hands sweetly. Gwen takes a deep breath, opens the door and ushers Rowena in.)*

**GWEN:** Rowena. Sorry to keep you waiting. Thank you for coming.

**ROWENA:** I said I would.

**GWEN:** Of course. And it is appreciated.

**ALLIE:** Hello Rowena.

**ROWENA:** Alison.

**ALLIE:** It's Allie.

**ROWENA:** Oh. Yes. *(Beat)* Well?

**GWEN:** Well - this is it.

**ROWENA:** Very white.

**GWEN:** Yes - that's the intention. *(Beat)* What do you think?

*(Rowena is walking slowly around the room.)*

**ROWENA:** The colour. I assume you're going for heavenly, which is deeply cliched, but probably appropriate.

**GWEN:** Yes, that was our instinct.

**ROWENA:** And did your instincts consider the other possible - uh - ?

**ALLIE:** Vibe?

**ROWENA:** *(Beat)* Inference.

**GWEN:** Which is?

**ROWENA:** Ghostly. Or worse, sterile.

**GWEN:** Ah. No. Interesting. Allie, would you..?

**ALLIE:** *(She holds up the note pad)* Noted.

**ROWENA:** Flowers - don't overdo. It's not a day spa. Make the men feel welcome too. And women who don't wish for that - that -

**ALLIE:** Girly vibe?

**ROWENA:** Hyper-feminine ambush.

**GWEN:** Good point.

**ROWENA:** Perhaps some art instead. Carefully chosen. I can assist with that. *(Standing near the casket)*. Where did this come from?

**GWEN:** A friend of mine is a funeral director. It's on loan.

**ROWENA:** I see. That explains it.

**GWEN:** What?

**ROWENA:** Isn't it a bit...

**GWEN:** Yes?

**ROWENA:** Vivid?

**GWEN:** That's what we're trying to create.

**ROWENA:** The feeling of being dead?

**GWEN:** Well - dead enough to - to -

**ROWENA:** Yes?

**ALLIE:** To buy in.

**ROWENA:** I thought that's what I was doing.

**ALLIE:** Well - you're an investor.

**ROWENA:** 'The' investor.

*(Beat.)*

**ALLIE:** My mistake. But we need our clients to buy into the idea of being - you know...

**GWEN:** At death's door. At least.

**ROWENA:** It's a fine line.

**ALLIE:** Life and death?

**ROWENA:** No. Illuminating and horrifying. Which are you aiming for?

**GWEN:** Uh - illuminating.

**ROWENA:** Very well. Let's see it then.

**GWEN:** What?

**ROWENA:** How it works when clients arrive.

**ALLIE:** But we haven't got any yet.

**ROWENA:** You play the clients. I'll observe the session.

**GWEN:** Now?

**ROWENA:** When better?

**GWEN:** Good. Good idea. Allie, shall we...?

**ALLIE:** Oh - sure. Let's do it. *(They exit the door. Beat. They enter solemnly and walk towards the coffin. Pause. A hushed conversation begins.)*

**ALLIE:** After you.

**GWEN:** I thought we were...

**ALLIE:** No - like before. You know - with the boots.

**GWEN:** But we've done that. It's your turn.

**ALLIE:** Do you want it to be good, or not?

**ROWENA:** Have we started?

**GWEN:** No. Can we try again?

**ROWENA:** It's your operation, not mine.

**GWEN:** Right. We'll be back.

*(They exit. There is another hushed and frantic conversation outside the door, then Allie enters alone and calmly takes her place on the bed, carefully pulling up the sheet so only*



*her face is visible. Beat. Enter Gwen, who moves to the coffin.)*

**GWEN:** Allie. Darling. It's me. I don't really know how to do this. I've never been in this position before. Never thought you'd go like this. *(Beat)* There are things I need to tell you. And although it's too late... I still find that I need to say them aloud. Because I've been living with a lie since -

**ROWENA:** Stop.

**GWEN:** Stop? What's wrong?

**ROWENA:** What is this?

**GWEN:** Well - this is the introduction to my...

**ROWENA:** Your what?

**GWEN:** Well, my spiel. *(Beat)* A sort of ... confession.

**ROWENA:** I don't understand.

**GWEN:** That's what clients are meant to do in here.

**ROWENA:** Confess?

**GWEN:** Well - not necessarily. But to unburden themselves of whatever they need to say. To release the truth.

**ROWENA:** But what's the purpose of that? Why not just go to confession?

**GWEN:** Well, because not everyone's Catholic. And it's not about religion. Or absolution. The point is that the other person hears it.

**ROWENA:** Good grief.

**ALLIE:** Am I still dead?

**GWEN:** I'm not sure.

**ROWENA:** But that's absurd. It could lead to absolute mayhem.

**GWEN:** It's meant to lead to resolution. One person reveals the things they've been scared to say during the relationship, then they swap places and the other person does the same.

**ALLIE:** Then they have a cup of tea and - you know.

**ROWENA:** Resolve everything? Just like that?

**GWEN:** Sorry, I thought I'd explained the concept. I mean I know I was brief but - what did you think was going to happen?

**ROWENA:** Never mind that for now. Let's just try your little concept again, shall we? I don't think you've given it full consideration. I'll play this time. Gwen - get in the coffin. I'll do the talking. Allie, you watch.

**GWEN:** Er - alright. Allie, may I?

*(Allie vacates the coffin for Gwen. Rowena exits, then re-enters and comes to the coffin, glaring down at it.)*

**ROWENA:** Well. I've been waiting for this moment a long time, I can tell you. It's a bit unfortunate I'll admit, because you're hardly old, but my goodness what a waste of space you were when you were alive. *(Allie audibly reacts; Rowena glares her down.)* There's something I want you to know, merely for the satisfaction of saying it out loud. It's about your dog. Streudel. Ridiculous name. I know you've pined for her, which beggars belief. But it's time you knew the truth. After Gary threw you out, I opened my home to you. What a mistake that was. I wasn't happy about the dog coming. I've always hated yappy dogs, but I knew you were in difficult circumstances and it was the right thing to do. I'm your only family. But by god, it drove me mad. So I paid a desperate young man I know to run her over. He wasn't happy about it, but he needed the cash, and I paid him handsomely. It was either throw you onto the street or do away with dear Streudel. It had to be done, and it was quick. I thought you should know.

**ALLIE:** Stop. Stop! What are you doing?

**GWEN:** *(Sitting up slowly)* Rowena...

**ROWENA:** Yes?

**ALLIE:** Is it true?

**GWEN:** You can't just... that's not what we...

**ROWENA:** Now do you see?

**GWEN:** See what became of Streudel?

**ROWENA:** No! See what chaos might ensue from this hare-brained scheme?

**ALLIE:** So - it's not true?

**ROWENA:** Of course it's not jolly well true!

*(Pause.)*

**GWEN:** Strange thing to make up with no time to prepare...

**ROWENA:** Oh, I thought about it. But I never actually did it. I don't know any desperate young men. The story doesn't even hang together, and still you're up out of the coffin in half a minute, more upset than you could have imagined. Is this the happy resolution you have in mind for your clients?

**GWEN:** Not quite this, no...

**ALLIE:** They'll walk away with PTSD!

**ROWENA:** Well what did you think would happen?

**GWEN:** I think we thought they'd -

**ROWENA:** They'd what?

**GWEN:** Behave decently.

**ROWENA:** Oh, my dear. With so many decades behind you you're still so naïve.

**GWEN:** I need a moment. *(She exits. Pause. Rowena looks critically at the flowers and re-arranges them.)*

**ALLIE:** Rowena...

**ROWENA:** Hmmm?

**ALLIE:** That was savage.

**ROWENA:** I didn't have much time to think. As she noted. And the point needed making. This is a very dangerous set up. It needs to be carefully handled.

**ALLIE:** Carefully handled. Like - just then?

**ROWENA:** You can't just play around with people's deepest emotions on a rent-a-room basis. You've got to take some ownership of this.

**ALLIE:** And as an investor...

**ROWENA:** The investor...

**ALLIE:** The investor, what do you suggest?

**ROWENA:** (*Gwen quietly re-enters during this speech and stands by the door without being noticed*) I assumed, from the garbled explanation Gwen gave me weeks ago, when she sought my financial backing, not for the first time either, that what you were doing here was giving people the opportunity to hold a so-called 'living wake'.

**ALLIE:** Which is?

**ROWENA:** An opportunity for the dearly not-quite-departed to hear the loving words they would otherwise miss at their own funeral. A dress rehearsal if you like.

**ALLIE:** And you think that would be more cathartic?

**ROWENA:** Certainly. A focus on the good someone has done in a long and productive life, rather than morbid introspection and picking over ancient misdeeds and ruffled feelings.

**ALLIE:** But that's a completely different concept.

**ROWENA:** Yes. A superior one.

**ALLIE:** That's not our vision.

**ROWENA:** Your vision?

**ALLIE:** Yes! We want to provide a unique opportunity for people to say whatever they need to say without interruption. To clear the air and press reset.

**ROWENA:** I think we all saw what can happen with that model. It's a Pandora's box. A pre-scripted eulogy - preferably screened beforehand - is much more likely to lead to warm feelings. If healing relationships is your honest aim, why not focus on the positive?

**GWEN:** (*startling them both*) That's true. It's a good idea. I hadn't thought of that.

**ROWENA:** Well. I'm pleased to hear you say so. You're welcome.

(*Beat*)

**GWEN:** Can we test run it? Rowena - I wonder if you'd like to..?

**ROWENA:** I'm too old for climbing thank you.

**GWEN:** Allie can assist. And surely it's older people who might be more willing to consider their own living wake? I would appreciate your input, and you'll have deeper insight if you experience it. And as your only niece, I'm best placed to deliver the eulogy.

*(Beat.)*

**ROWENA:** Very well. Only in the interests of supporting a better business model.

**GWEN:** Thank you. Allie would you..?

**ALLIE:** Well - if you really want to try this..?

**GWEN:** I do.

*(Allie awkwardly helps Rowena into coffin and arranges.)*

**GWEN:** Right. Let's see if your idea works better. *(Beat. Gwen takes a position.)* Rowena Higginbotham was born during a period of great sorrow and deprivation. Brought up by a young mother with a father absent at war, later killed, life was not easy. Rowena had an older sister, my mother Grace, and food and resources were meagre. However, a great deal of leeway was extended to her as she grew, in consideration of the fact that her early life had not been easy. Many in her generation were determined to bring joy into the world as they grew older My mother was one of those. Sadly, Rowena was not equal to her example. She made her way in the world of finance, exercising her shrewd mind to amass a great fortune, but little love. She did try, at times, to extend benevolence by giving small gifts, or more often, loans, to relatives who had suffered misfortunes. I used to appreciate what I thought was largesse, until one day the penny dropped. I saw that I had put up with a great deal too much, not because of the money, but because having lost my dear mother I yearned for the one family connection I still had. I thought her rare gifts signified love. I later realised that they were about control. *(Rowena starts slightly, and her jaw drops)* And so I decided to tell her that I didn't need her anymore. That she could take her stinking loan and shove it, because I'd rather live a life without an aunt at all, than have one who worked so steadfastly to bring me down and make me feel like I was ten years old and stupid to boot. Ladies and gentleman, I give you Rowena Higginbotham, a life stewed in bitter juices.

*(Pause. Gwen turns away. Allie is aghast. Rowena is completely still.)*

**ALLIE:** Umm - I think we're finished. *(Beat)*. You can get up now. *(Beat)*. Rowena? Rowena? Gwen, she's not moving.

**GWEN:** Rowena. It's time for you to leave. *(Pause)* Rowena? Rowena! *(To Allie.)* This isn't funny. *(Beat.)* Jesus. Can you check?

**ALLIE:** Can't you? You're a nurse too.

**GWEN:** Please Allie. I can't. I said way too much.

*(Allie nervously approaches Rowena who is lying slack jawed and gives her a little nudge. No response. She moves a finger to her throat to test for a pulse. Rowena suddenly opens her eyes and glares at her. Allie gasps and jumps back.)*

**ALLIE:** Holy shit.

**ROWENA:** Get me up. *(Allie does)*

**GWEN:** Rowena, that was -

**ROWENA:** Cruel? Uncalled for?

**GWEN:** Something like that.

**ROWENA:** Touche. *(She takes her time gathering her clothes, her bag and her dignity then moves towards the door. She turns.)* Well, I trust you now glean what might be unleashed with your little brainwave here. Good luck girls.

*(She exits. Allie puts her face down into the soft linen on the coffin. Gwen slumps to the floor facing the audience, leaning against the podium.)*

**GWEN:** Streudel...

*(Allie reaches a hand down over the coffin and Gwen takes it.)*

**Scene Three**

*(The room is darkened. Gwen is asleep in the coffin, sheet pulled fully over her face and body. After a moment, Allie enters with Tess. They speak in relatively hushed tones due to the dark and ghostly atmosphere.)*

**ALLIE:** Oh crap. I've forgotten where the light switches are.

**TESS:** Ummm - creepy. Can we find them quickly - ?

**ALLIE:** I'm trying. I haven't opened up before. Gwen always comes first.

**TESS:** Where is she?

**ALLIE:** I don't know. I hope yesterday didn't... no, she'll be here.

**TESS:** You sure? It sounded pretty shocking.

**ALLIE:** It was. It was ghastly. But it's Gwen. She won't let me down. *(She is feeling her way round the walls.)* You want to help me out?

**TESS:** Nope. I'm staying right here.

**ALLIE:** Why?

**TESS:** Umm - that.

**ALLIE:** What?

**TESS:** Coffin's still there.

**ALLIE:** It won't bite you Tessie, it's just a coffin. We're all going to end up in one you know.

**TESS:** Mum. Can you not -

**ALLIE:** What?

**TESS:** Just - turn on the lights will you?

**ALLIE:** They must be on that wall near you - just feel your way.

**TESS:** Ok. I can do that. *(She glances around, shudders a little. Then gets a hold of herself, switches on the torch on her mobile and heads for the far wall.)* Nothing. *(She turns, now facing the coffin, which in the light of her*

*phone is a ghostly vision. She sees the shape in the coffin and flinches.) Mum.*

**ALLIE:** Yeah?

**TESS:** What's with the dummy? That's even creepier.

**ALLIE:** What do you mean?

**TESS:** Like you don't know.

**ALLIE:** What are you talking about?

**TESS:** Talking about that.

**ALLIE:** *(Looks over at coffin. It's dark. Tess holds up her mobile to reveal the shape under the sheet.)* Oh my god!!

**TESS:** Is this a joke? *(ALLIE shakes head in mute terror)* Where's the fucking light switch?

*(Tess' phone rings and she frantically tries to find and mute it. Before she succeeds it rings again. Gwen slowly rises groaning, sheet still over her head. Allie screams, Tess screams and hides behind Allie, then realises her cowardice and steps in front of her.)*

**TESS:** I have a knife!

**GWEN:** What...what the...? *(Fighting the sheet, she finally succeeds in untangling it from her face and emerges wild eyed and terrified. Tess and Allie are screaming.)* What is it? What is it?

**TESS/ALLIE:** Gwen!

**TESS:** What the hell -

**ALLIE:** Oh my god. Thank god.

**GWEN:** What's happening? Is this a dream?

**ALLIE:** *(On her knees).* I wish it was.

**TESS:** Mum - Mum. It's ok. Come here. *(She helps Allie up. Beat.)*

**GWEN:** What's wrong with my head?

**TESS:** Jesus, Gwen.

**GWEN:** What?



**TESS:** What are you doing in there?

**GWEN:** I don't know! What time is it? What just happened?

**TESS:** I have no idea. But do you happen know where the fucking light switch is?

**GWEN:** Behind the flowers.

**TESS:** Thank you. *(She switches on the lights. Beat.)* So... slumber party, hey?

**GWEN:** Oh - yes. I guess I didn't go home. I can't even remember what - *(Tess clears her throat and gestures towards a half empty liquor bottle on the floor in front of the coffin.)* Oh. That's what happened.

**ALLIE:** Gwennie?

**GWEN:** Yes Allie?

**ALLIE:** Can we not do that again?

**GWEN:** Sure. Good plan. I'm sorry.

**ALLIE:** Tess?

**TESS:** Yes mum?

**ALLIE:** Do you really have a knife?

**TESS:** No mum.

**ALLIE:** Thank god. But thank you for being - you know.

**TESS:** Anytime. Soooo...

**GWEN:** Oh god. My head. *(She lies back in the coffin.)*

**TESS:** Gwen - no. Get out of that thing. *(She helps Gwen sit up and clamber out of the coffin. Gwen wobbles as her feet hit the ground.)*

**GWEN:** Coffee - please?

**TESS:** How about water for a start?

**GWEN:** Have we got any?

**TESS:** I brought some. Here.

*(Tess fetches a bottle of water from her satchel and passes it to Gwen, who drinks deeply. Tess grabs it and drinks too.)*

*Allie grabs the bottle of liquor off the floor and drinks deeply.)*

**TESS:** Mum. *(Allie drinks more.)* Mum! It's 9 o'clock. *(She takes the bottle.)* Everyone ok now?

**ALLIE/GWEN:** Yep.

**TESS:** Well that's good, because your first client arrives in ten minutes.

**ALLIE:** Shite!

**GWEN:** No.

**ALLIE/TESS:** No?

**GWEN:** We're not opening. This is the worst idea I've ever had.

*(Beat)*

**TESS:** Ummm - so about that... people are pumped. Phone doesn't stop! See? *(It starts ringing. She rejects call.)*

**ALLIE:** Little bit late for cold feet Gwen!

**GWEN:** I can't. One session and I'm estranged from my aunt. God knows what state she's in.

**ALLIE:** She's not in a state. She's a monster.

**GWEN:** Anyone who walks in here could be a monster! We have literally no idea what could be unleashed.

**TESS:** *(She's been listening to voicemail.)* Ok so, inconvenient timing, but your first clients are here and they want to start early...

**ALLIE:** What? / **GWEN:** No!

**TESS:** I'm going out front. I'll buy you 5 minutes, maybe ten. You two need to sort your shit out now. Ok?

**ALLIE:** Ok.

**TESS:** And I don't know if you remember this, but I have a day job, so after holding back the hordes, I'm going to work. Late. Again. When I come back later I'd love some good news. Ok?

**ALLIE:** Ok. *(Tess exits. Silence.)* Gwen. *(Silence)* Gwen!

**GWEN:** Yes?

**ALLIE:** I can't believe you spent the night in here. I think you're in shock.

**GWEN:** No.

**ALLIE:** You slept in a coffin.

**GWEN:** Yes.

**ALLIE:** You need a shower and a coffee and a huge hug, but not now. It's show time. So get up, and get sorted.

**GWEN:** I said no. I'm sorry - but I cannot be part of this. It's a lawsuit waiting to happen.

**ALLIE:** It's just a launch! If it all turns to shite we can reassess after!

**GWEN:** No. I'm sorry. I am. But it's already shite. And I'm out. *(She heads towards the door.)*

**ALLIE:** Gwen!!! *(Gwen pauses. They hold each other's gaze. Gwen hesitates.)* Don't do this to me.

**GWEN:** Don't do the launch. Come with me.

**ALLIE:** No. Stay with me. *(Gwen turns and moves to exit.)*  
Gwen!! I need you. *(Beat. Then Gwen turns back reluctantly.)*  
Thank you.

*(A knock at the door.)*

**ALLIE:** *(Checks her watch.)* Holy mother of god. Who comes early to their own funeral?

*(Calling out sing song)*

Won't be a moment! *(Scans room.)* Fucketty fuck! Look at this place!

*(She rearranges the sheet and stands back to examine. Not happy. She yanks it off and looks for somewhere to put it. Gwen is standing as before, unresponsive. Allie shoves the sheet at her. Knock at the door.)*

Gwen! Go out there and figure out who's first.

*(No response from Gwen. Allie moves her towards the door.)*

Look at me. Pick a couple. Any couple. Then knock three times. Ok?

*(Gwen nods slowly and Allie nudges her out the door. Allie does some hasty breathing exercises, achieves minimal zen state. Three knocks at the door.)*

One moment!

*(She pastes a smile on, before opening the door and graciously indicating the space.)*

Welcome.

*(Music underscores a brief transition. Allie ushers in the clients who take their places: Julie in the coffin, John standing. Gwen stands robotically at the door. Allie exits and pulls Gwen off with her. The older couple are fully revealed.)*

**Scene Four**

*(John stands solemnly at the foot of the coffin. Time passes. Julie clears her throat. Time passes. Julie leans up on an elbow. John clears his throat and looks at her meaningfully. She lies down. Time passes.)*

**JULIE:** John. *(Silence. Time passes.)* John!

**JOHN:** Shhhh. *(Time passes.)*

**JULIE:** John. *(No response)* Aren't you going to say anything?

**JOHN:** No.

**JULIE:** Why are we here?

**JOHN:** Why do you think?

**JULIE:** To finally lift a lid on some of our problems.

**JOHN:** That's not why I'm here. I doubt it's even possible.

*(Beat.)*

**JULIE:** Then why?

**JOHN:** For an hour of peace! Now shut up and lie down.

**JULIE:** Don't speak to me like that!

**JOHN:** I can speak however I want. It's my turn!!

**JULIE:** John!

**JOHN:** This was your damn fool idea. Now play by the rules!  
*(Beat. She lies down. He gets out his phone and sets a piece of quiet classical music. He takes a chair and reclines and very deliberately relaxes. After a beat she puts her head up. He opens one eye. She lies down.)*

**JULIE:** How did you know?

**JOHN:** Thirty years.

**JULIE:** Doesn't make you psychic.

**JOHN:** Makes you very predictable.

**JULIE:** John - this is not what I had in mind at all-

**JOHN:** What you had in mind doesn't matter right now. It's not your turn!

*(Beat. She lies down.)*

**JOHN:** And close your eyes. *(She does.)* 28 minutes to go.

*(Beat)*

**JULIE:** I hate this song.

**JOHN:** I know. *(He turns up the volume.)*

*(Another brief transition in which John and Julie exit. The classical music fades. Gwen enters and tidies the coffin and checks room in a robotic manner, then exits. Some contemporary upbeat music plays. Allie opens the door and graciously ushers in Ed and Ella before disappearing. Ed has a tripod with a phone on it.)*

**ELLA:** Has she gone?

**ED:** Totally.

**ELLA:** Do you think she might come back?

**ED:** Nah. We've got a whole hour. We're good. We are so good.

**ELLA:** Ok. So...

**ED:** So... are you ready? *(He places tripod near coffin.)*

**ELLA:** Ummm - I thought I was. But -

**ED:** What?

**ELLA:** Can we just - like - check the room?

**ED:** For what?

**ELLA:** I don't know. Hidden cameras.

**ED:** Are you for real? Did you see that chick, who let us in? She's like, older than your Mum.

**ELLA:** Yeah, so?

**ED:** Babe, that is not her wheelhouse.

**ELLA:** You never know...

**ED:** Yeah you do. Sometimes you just know. OK?

**ELLA:** Ok...

**ED:** Now come on - we've only got an hour. Don't want to waste a second.

**ELLA:** It just doesn't feel like I thought it would. I thought it would be really hot - but it's actually, like...

**ED:** What?

**ELLA:** Creepy.

**ED:** Babe. When you get your clothes off, it'll be hot.

**ELLA:** Promise?

**ED:** Promise. Here, you want me to go first?

**ELLA:** Yeah... ok.

**ED:** *(Taking his shirt off.)* Ok. Now you.

**ELLA:** *(She undoes her top button)* Hang on. What if it shuts?

**ED:** Ella - come on. It won't shut.

**ELLA:** Well - you can be pretty - you know.

**ED:** Pretty what?

**ELLA:** Full on. Like, physical and stuff.

**ED:** You told me that's how you like it.

**ELLA:** Oh - it is. But I don't want to get locked in that thing.

**ED:** Could be extra hot.

**ELLA:** I don't rate suffocating in a coffin!

**ED:** I've heard suffocation is pretty wild you know...

**ELLA:** Ed! No. I'm up for wild, but not completely stupid.

**ED:** Babe - you worry too much.

**ELLA:** I just want to check.

**ED:** Ok - first get your top off, then I'll check.

*(Beat. Ella undoes a couple of more buttons on her top)*

**ED:** Mmmm...

**ELLA:** That's it. Till you check.

**ED:** Fine. *(He climbs into the coffin.)* Shut it. *(She does, gingerly.)* Ok now open it. *(She does nothing.)* Not funny!

**ELLA:** You open it - we need to know you can do it from the inside.

*(Beat. Then the coffin opens a little and his boxers fall out. He twirls them a little then flings them away. She laughs.)*

**ED:** Ok?

**ELLA:** Ok.

**ED:** Now get in here. And press record. I can't wait to watch this back.

*(Ella does, then starts to unbutton her top. Transition. Lights fade and the couple exit. Popular music of the 80s plays (perhaps: I Just Died in your Arms Tonight). Allie enters to check room and plump flowers. Gwen silently ushers in Margot as lights come up and the music fades.)*

-----  
**ALLIE:** Thank you Gwen. I'll take it from here.

*(Gwen doesn't respond and stands awkwardly.)*

**MARGOT:** Is she alright?

**ALLIE:** Absolutely. Just, uh, solemn. Setting the scene, you know! She takes her job very seriously.

**MARGOT:** Uh... ok.

**ALLIE:** Thanks Gwen. *(Gwen remains so Allie goes into overdrive to distract Margot.)* So! Are you sure you want to start the session without your husband?

**MARGOT:** Oh yes, he'll be along soon. He just texted.

**ALLIE:** I could possibly ask another couple to come ahead of you..?

**MARGOT:** No, definitely not. A few minutes to calm myself could be just what the doctor ordered.

**ALLIE:** I'll just send him in then. Shall I knock first?



**MARGOT:** Yes, please do. And make sure to send him in alone.

**ALLIE:** Certainly. *(She starts to exit)*

**MARGOT:** Are you taking her with you?

**ALLIE:** Oh, ha ha, of course! *(Turns back towards Gwen and suddenly notices a pair of male boxers dropped on the floor near the coffin and gasps.)*

**MARGOT:** What is it?

**ALLIE:** Oh - nothing - nothing at all. Here - why don't you take a seat while you wait?

**MARGOT:** Very well.

**ALLIE:** *(Moves swiftly towards the boxers and stands in front of them.)* Alright then - best of luck! Hope it's cathartic!

*(She quickly picks up the boxers and attempts to scrunch and hide them behind her back but recoils as she realises they are sticky.)*

Aaaargh!

**MARGOT:** *(Turning to see Allie holding the boxers in front of her.)* Are you sure you're alright?

*(Allie quickly swoops them behind her back and waves them madly at Gwen who is behind her. Gwen looks on, uncertain what to do.)*

**ALLIE:** Ah-ha-ha - me? Absolutely! You just relax and breathe in the serenity!

*(She backs up towards Gwen and hands her the boxers.)*

**GWEN:** Urgh...

**ALLIE:** You left your hanky Gwen!

**GWEN:** It's sticky... *(She throws them back to Allie. Allie throws them back to Gwen and wipes her hands as best as she can.)*

**ALLIE:** Aha ha ha, yes well.. let's not leave it lying about then!

**GWEN:** *(Holding the boxers up to examine them properly)* Oh my god.

**ALLIE:** *(Moving about wildly to hide the boxers from Margot's view, then grabbing them again.)* Come on then, this is our cue..!

*(She pushes Gwen out the door madly, trying to obscure the boxers whilst also keeping them at arm's length.)*

**MARGOT:** Absolutely barking mad. *(She takes a moment to check they're really gone, then hoists herself into the coffin and settles comfortably, closing her eyes. Beat. A knock at the door. Margot remains completely still. Beat, then Michael walks in.)*

**MICHAEL:** *(looking around curiously but not yet seeing Margot.)* Margot? Hello? That's funny.

*(He checks his text message.)*

141 Simon Street, yep. Margot?

*(No answer, he sends a text, and it beeps from the direction of the coffin. He turns and sees her lying in it.)*

Oh my - my god.

*(He rushes to her and reaches out, then draws back.)*

Margot..? Margot! What is this - what's happening?

*(Beat. Then he rushes to the door.)*

Hey! Hey!! Come here - please come..!

*(Allie enters with Gwen dragging numbly behind.)*

**ALLIE:** What is it? What is it?

**MICHAEL:** She's - she's -

**ALLIE:** She's what?

**MICHAEL:** My wife is - she's dead.

**ALLIE:** Oh come on. We're not part of this.

**MICHAEL:** What? What do you mean? My wife is dead. Look at her!

**ALLIE:** No she's not. I just spoke to her.

**MICHAEL:** What? Who are you - what is this place?

**ALLIE:** Look - just calm down. You're taking the role play too seriously. So is she, actually. She's doing a stellar job there. Wish I'd done that. Now come on. You haven't got long, so don't waste your turn.

**MICHAEL:** My turn? What are you talking about? My wife is lying dead in a coffin and you're - what are you saying? Where am I?

**ALLIE:** Are you being funny?

**MICHAEL:** Please tell me what's going on!

**ALLIE:** Oh my god. Did you not know what you were coming for?

**MICHAEL:** A surprise. That's all she said.

**ALLIE:** No!

**MICHAEL:** Will you tell me what is going on!

**MARGOT:** *(Suddenly sitting up.)* Hello Michael.

**MICHAEL:** Gaaaaah!!!!

*(He blanches and cowers, completely losing his composure and falling to the floor, looking at her in terror.)*

**MARGOT:** *(to Allie)* You can go now.

**ALLIE:** But you can't - this isn't it at all -

*(Gwen is numb with shock.)*

**MARGOT:** This is exactly it. Exactly what we needed.

**MICHAEL:** Margot - what are you doing?

**MARGOT:** I needed to know.

**MICHAEL:** To know what?

**MARGOT:** That you would care.

**ALLIE:** Oh my god...

**MICHAEL:** You set this up? You set me up to think you were... ?

**MARGOT:** I thought we needed a shock. Better to die for a moment than to keep on withering for more wasted years.

**MICHAEL:** That was - this is - you're appalling.

**MARGOT:** Michael. I needed to know whether you still loved me. That's why I asked you here. Now I do.

*(Beat.)*

**MICHAEL:** I did. Until a few minutes ago. I'll never recover from this... this unforgivable stunt. You've obliterated my love. It's gone.

**MARGOT:** No - Michael - no. Once you recover you'll see what this really means...

**MICHAEL:** It means the end.

**MARGOT:** No - no! It means the passion is still there. You were - you were a man possessed when you thought I was gone.

**MICHAEL:** Yes. I was. And now I'm empty. You killed it. I never knew something so precious could die so fast. But then I never knew you could be so cruel. Goodbye.

**MARGOT:** *(Clambering out of the coffin)* Michael - no!

*(Michael heads to exit but finds Gwen dumbly blocking the door.)*

**MICHAEL:** Who are you? What madness is this?

**ALLIE:** Gwen. Move!

*(Gwen does. He exits.)*

**MARGOT:** Oh god. *(The enormity of what she's done strikes her.)*

**ALLIE:** Ummm - hanky?

*(Beat.)*

**MARGOT:** I blame you. This - this is the most dangerous - reprehensible...

**ALLIE:** Hey! You forged his signature! The understanding is that both parties knew exactly what would happen in here.

**MARGOT:** You're mad. Dangerous. Both of you.

**ALLIE:** Please leave.

**MARGOT:** I'll leave alright. But expect to hear from my lawyers.

**ALLIE:** What? You tricked your own husband into thinking you were dead! You've brought my business into disrepute. Maybe I'll get a lawyer of my own!

**MARGOT:** You'll need one. And, if you don't mind me saying, 'business' is a rather grandiose word for this chaotic little outfit. It's like Of Mice and fucking Men. Without the men. (*Indicates Gwen.*) She needs help.

*(She exits)*

*To read full script please contact Emma*

*[www.emmawoodplays.au](http://www.emmawoodplays.au)*