

THE LIFE WE LIVED

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The Life We Lived by Matt Fox

Scene 1

Opening – A funeral parlour

Female corpse (Hannah) lying on table. Michael, a funeral director enters and starts to brush the corpse's hair. He does this for a while and then puts a ribbon in the hair. He spends some time in silence generally fussing over the corpse's hair.

Finally he speaks

Michael: As she wasn't Catholic this whole exercise probably seems pointless.

He then pulls out a makeup bag and starts to put foundation, blusher, eye shadow and lipstick on the corpse.

Michael: The family might come and see her I suppose. But she was very young. They might find it too much. Too sad. Such a waste of a potential life. She's not had any children, so there aren't even grandchildren for her parents to treasure.

Michael carries on with the makeup; he clearly knows what he's doing.

Michael: She was 25. Absolute prime of life. I'm sure I read that the 30s are a woman's sexual peak. I'm not sure whether that means it's when they're most suitable to breed, or just when they're most up for it? Shame to die before your sexual peak.

Apparently men hit their sexual peak at 18...so I'm 2 decades past mine already.

Michael stops making up the corpse and grabs his crotch.

Michael: (to his crotch) Might as well chop you off and bury you with the corpse... **(back to himself)** Wouldn't make much difference, that sort of action has been distinctly limited recently. Working with the dead's probably a bit of a turn off...formaldehyde and body fluids...and not the fun type.

Sometimes I do prefer the dead though, quiet, still...and not in a necrophilia way if that's what you're thinking. It's not that the dead are going to mind or anything, but from the limited sexual experience I've had, I think a partner being warm is an important element of the whole thing. I have no moral objection to shagging corpses...seems to me to be a very sensible way for the sexually unconventional to get out whatever it is that they need to get out...it's just the cold that I'd struggle with.

Though...

Michael grabs the breasts of the corpse

...it does give a certain firmness that some might enjoy.

He holds the corpse breasts for a moment.

I mean I could...I've got the very rare gift that so few people have...access whenever I like to a whole swathe of different human bodies; young, old, male, female...even children if I was so inclined.

Lets go of the corpse

But I'm not. An utter waste of an opportunity, but there you have it...

Michael goes back to making up the corpse

There's also obviously the cannibalism thing. It's another one which though generally viewed as distasteful is actually, assuming you're not killing people in order to eat them; pretty harmless. Almost eco-friendly when you think about it? Turning 10 stones of dead meat into human fuel. Think of the cows and sheep that wouldn't have to be slaughtered. Think of the farmland that wouldn't be used up for grazing. Think of the starving humans that could be fed. When you consider it, it's actually obscene that we don't eat the dead. We simply waste what must be millions of tonnes of perfectly usable human flesh every year, and just feed it to the worms...or even worse, just burn it and send the energy up into the atmosphere to do nothing but increase global warming. Human being's not eating each other may be directly robbing the polar bears of their habitats, raising the sea levels and causing the whole world to get hotter....

But again...call me a wimp, call me a follower...it's just not for me...and I'd need some extra training anyway....

Michael picks up an eye shadow brush and starts to run it over the body in a mock dissection.

Cheeks...pig cheek are absolutely delicious; they've got that lovely fatty gelatinous quality to them...obviously for slow roasting. Scrag end, shoulder, flank, rib, belly, sirloin, rump, leg, calf...trotters...

And there'll be some offal in there as well, liver, kidneys, heart, lungs, tripe, sweat breads...I'm with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall on the nose to tail thing...seems so wasteful otherwise.

Michael pauses and looks at the corpse for a little longer

But no...not on this one. Maybe I'll get the nerve to one day...but I doubt it, I've never been much of a radical or trend setter.

Pretty girl...lovely face...a smile that would have lit up rooms and charmed the birds from the trees, as my dad used to say. It's always sadder when the pretty ones die...especially when they've not been able to pass on their beautiful genes...sad for humanity really.

I remember meeting her long ago...when we were very young.

Scene ends

Scene 2

The set remains the same, but the situation is different. The corpse table is now a bench that Hannah lies on. Michael leans over her.

Michael: Why are you lying there?

Hannah: (after a pause) I'm hiding

Hannah remains still in the corpse position

Michael: Why?

Hannah: Cos I don't want anyone to find me

Michael: But why? What have you done?

Hannah: Nothing...well almost nothing.

Michael: But you can't hide here forever...I'm sure whatever you did or didn't do isn't that bad. Do you parent's know where you are?

Hannah: Nope...it's them I'm hiding from.

Michael: Did you break something?

Hannah: Nope...

Michael: Steal something?

Hannah: Nope...

Michael: Did you have a row with them?

Hannah: Nope.

Michael: Bad report from school?

Hannah: Ha! No...I'm a genius.

Michael: Then what?

Hannah: I shot my brother.

Michael: You what?! With a gun?

Hannah: Yep...

Michael: You shot your brother with an actual gun with actual bullets.

Hannah: Well pellets.

Michael: (relieved) Oh...you mean a BB gun...

Hannah: No, an air rifle.

Michael: Bloody hell...

Hannah: You shouldn't say that, it's impolite.

Michael: So is shooting someone with an air gun.

Hannah: It was just my brother...he deserved it...he was being a dickhead.

Michael: Now who's being impolite?

Hannah: There's no other word I can think of to describe him.

Michael: So is he hurt?

Hannah: A bit...shot him right in the balls.

Michael: Christ...that's just bad manners. Did he yell?

Hannah: Yeah...yelled a lot...I think boys do when you shoot them in the balls.

Michael: So your parents are angry with you then?

Hannah: Yeah...it's understandable I suppose.

Michael: Will your brother be ok?

Hannah: I'm sure they'll sort him out at the hospital. Can't be the first time it's happened.

Michael: You live round here then?

Hannah: Yeah...few streets away. You?

Michael: Yeah...my dad's a funeral director.

Hannah: That's a horrible job...hanging round with dead people all the time.

Michael: its ok when you get used to it...everyone needs someone to look after them when they're dead.

Hannah: You'd be better looking after the living. I wouldn't fancy it...

Michael: It's one of those things that run in families...like being a farmer or a butcher or something.

Hannah has lost interest.

Hannah: I reckon it might be safe to come down now...they'll be at the hospital for a good few hours. Gives me time to pack.

Michael: Where you going? You can't be more than 12?

Hannah: 11 actually...but I think its best I get going...it'll save being yelled at when they get home.

Michael: I don't think that's a good idea. Your parent's will be much more upset if you run away. You should just apologise and say you won't do it again.

Hannah: But I can't guarantee that...what if Sam's a dickhead again?

Michael: All little brothers are dickheads...but it's no reasons to shoot them and run away from home.

Hannah: Do you have a brother then?

Michael: Got 2, one older, one younger...the younger one's definitely a dickhead.

Hannah: Have you ever shot him?

Michael: No...but I did once hit him in the face with a piece of wood. There was blood. I got a major bollocking for that. But we got over it in the end...he does have a small scar though.

Hannah: Well I'll see how I feel...I don't actually have any money, so I'd be walking.

Michael: If you ever need to talk to someone then just shout.

Hannah: No offense, but my mum told me to stay away from creepy old men...I'm sure you understand.

Michael: I'm only 19. But seriously, your parents will be cross, but they'll get over it...they might take the airgun away though.

Hannah: Might stop me shooting him again...

Michael: Do you need me to take you home?

Hannah: Creepy old man thing again I'm afraid...I know where I'm going though, don't worry.

Michael: OK...just look after yourself.

Hannah: Yep...

Scene ends

Scene 3

Hannah reverts back to being the corpse on the table. Michael goes back to his funeral director tasks.

Michael: I haven't met that many kids in my life...not live ones anyway; but I quite liked her. She was right though, the creepy old man thing is a problem, especially if you work in the funeral business. I saw her about a bit, but didn't try and talk or anything...it's just one of those social no nos.

I wondered what had happened to her. As far as I was aware her parent's hadn't beaten her to death, sent her to a convent school or done any other kind of terrible thing. I'm guessing she'd been told off and grounded, and that was the end of it. Just another funny family event, which they're now remembering fondly.

Michael stops again and looks at the corpse.

At least they don't have to see her like this...

I don't think life remained that rosy when she got older...not sure what happened exactly...but her arms a bit of a giveaway. It's a strange old thing. I see dead bodies all day long, and I usually know absolutely nothing about them.

I've made her look pretty though, painted over the tracks, covered the scratches and scars. Even if I did eat dead people, I couldn't have eaten her...

He snaps out of this reflection.

We need some beer.

He then scrabbles about the room and finds a box of beers. He opens one and sits down next to the corpse. He addresses the corpse

Michael: I'd offer you one, but it looks like you're done for the night. Lovely you've made an effort though. Nice dress, hair...the ribbon's very pretty.

(addresses the audience)

The firearms incident won't have been our only proper meeting...living in the same small town you're bound to bump into each other. It's a statistical certainty. You use the same shops, the same streets. We all grow up and mature. The 11 year old eventually grows into the 20 year old. Develops opinions, drinking habits...tits even. I'd have been 28...just about to take over from my dad and run the business...what a prospect for a girl.

Scene ends

Scene 4

Music starts to play to signify a pub. Hannah suddenly stands up and moves to a different part of the stage. She addresses Michael.

Hannah: Its proper shite in here isn't it.

Michael: Sorry, are you talking to me?

Hannah: Well I'm looking at you aren't I?

Michael: Yes...sorry what did you say?

Hannah: This place is utterly wank.

Michael: You're not wrong there...but there's nowhere else to go is there. We should have moved away.

Hannah: Agreed...small towns are the worst places on earth.

Michael: Well...there's war zones, places hit by famines? They're probably worse?

Hannah: War zones would be more exciting...you'd never know if you were gonna live or die...

Michael: That's not generally seen as a good thing.

Hannah: You don't want to just go along with public opinion...have we met before?

Michael: Not sure...we might have, years ago...

Hannah: Yeah I thought so...I was in trouble.

Michael: You'd shot someone.

Hannah: Yeah I remember. Christ I was a tiny kid then...were you grooming me?

Michael: What, for a chance encounter in a pub years later?

Hannah: Paedophiles are famous for their organisational skills.

Michael: Funny.

Hannah: You gonna buy me a drink then?

Michael: You not with anyone?

Hannah: No one I can't ignore.

Michael: Still the same as you were when you were 11 then...a lone wolf.

Hannah: I'm not an army sniper. Just one of those people that doesn't need constant approval. It's probably an alien concept for you.

Michael: I'm here alone.

Hannah: By independent I didn't mean a friendless loser. Who goes to the pub on their own? They only do that in boring films.

Michael: I had a bad day.

Hannah: Did someone die?

Michael: Several...but that's normal...it was an admin cock up that bugged up my day.

Hannah: Several people dying is ok, but an administration error is a big problem? That's a fucking weird job you've got. I hope you're not a doctor.

Michael: No, dead people are my living...which I realise sounds a little morbid.

Hannah: Are you a hangman? Grave robber? Nazi prison guard? Any of the above?

Michael: Undertaker.

Hannah: Oh yeah...I remember now...that's a creepy thing to do. Does it make you popular with the ladies? Nothing like a corpse in the kitchen to put you in the mood for a shag.

Michael: It is a tough one to mention when chatting someone up...most people don't get turned on by corpses.

Hannah: Weirdos.

Michael: I could show you around a coffin some time if you fancied?

Hannah: That's without a doubt the weirdest come on I've ever had.

Michael: I'm serious; I'll show you what I do. You might find it interesting. Have you ever seen a corpse before?

Hannah: I'm 20 years old...

Michael: I'd seen plenty when I was 20.

Hannah: Well I didn't grow up in the chamber of horrors.

Michael: It's just death, the most boringly certain part of life. I don't know why people get so weird about it. I love dead people, they look so content, so unconcerned about the worries of the world. And they don't have opinions about things.

Hannah: Opinions are annoying I'll give you that...

Michael: The dead are a silent audience you can run things past, but never actually get an alternative viewpoint from. In many ways they're miles ahead of people still breathing.

Hannah: I like you...you're odd.

Michael: I'm honest.

Hannah: No, you're odd...and I like it. You don't ascribe to the normal rules of engagement. It's refreshing.

Michael: Does this mean the coffin tour's on then?

Hannah: Now let's not get ahead of ourselves...I'm not the sort of girl that gets into a coffin on the first date...

Michael: We live in modern times...you're an independent woman.

Hannah: Black's also slimming...

Michael: What?

Hannah: Undertakers wear black don't they?

Michael: Are you calling me fat?

Hannah: No...but it's a good career if you got fat...even fat blokes look ok in a black suit.

Pause

Michael: Where you planning on going once you're done here then?

Hannah: Normally I'm too pissed to go anywhere...I just get a cab home and pass out on the sofa...we could head to the Wheelers though?

Michael: I'm nowhere near drunk enough for that...it's a meat market for 14 year olds and sex offenders.

Hannah: Suit you down to the ground then...didn't I call you a creepy old man the first time we met?

Michael: I don't remember.

Hannah: Yeah, I definitely did...I remember...you looked worried.

Michael: Funny that...how much trouble did you get in for the shooting incident?

Hannah: Some...well lots actually...the air gun got binned.

Michael: Your brother ok?

Hannah: He was yeah...

Michael: What was his name again?

Hannah: Sam...Sammykins if he was being a complete tosspot.

Michael: I bet he likes that...how old is he?

Hannah: He died actually...when he was 12...

Michael: God, I'm sorry...I didn't know.

Hannah: It's fine...it was a good few years ago now...and before you ask it wasn't from another gunshot wound.

Michael doesn't say anything.

Hannah: It wasn't really from anything. He just died. Went to bed one night and didn't wake up. One of those 'Sudden Death Syndrome' things. The post mortem said he'd had a heart condition...something to do with the thickness of his heart wall. Apparently it's inherited.

Michael: My dad probably did the funeral.

Hannah: Yeah probably...I don't really remember.

They sit in silence for a bit

Hannah: You do a lot of kid's funerals?

Michael: Some...they're pretty rare in the grand scheme of things, but you always get a few.

Hannah: Does it affect you?

Michael: A bit...though I've hardened to it. I do always feel sorry for the parent's though...even after all these years in the death business.

Hannah: Yeah...I felt sorry for mine. They've never been quite the same since. The practical stuff was really hard, arranging the funeral, clearing his stuff...they even went into his school to explain things to his school friends...I thought that was the bravest of all...facing all the 12 year olds who hadn't died and trying to tell them not to worry about it. I respected them for that.

Michael: Did the airgun incident come up at the funeral?

Hannah: It did actually...people laughed...weird to hear laughter at a kid's funeral.

Michael: It happens more often than you'd think...especially when people start to tell stories. Kids tend to have had hilarious lives, even if they've not lived that long. Sometimes, I do wonder whether life should be quality over quantity. Why not have 12 amazing years instead of 90 crap ones...

Hannah: I'd have rather he'd have had a few more...I do miss him, even though he was a little dickhead.

Michael: That's what you called him the day we met...

Hannah: And I stand by it...but he was a dickhead I loved...only person I'd ever felt any responsibility for.

Michael: No one can predict random heart defects...

Hannah: I know...just a shitty piece of bad luck.

Pause

Michael: Well this certainly killed the mood...guess my chances of getting laid are completely out the door now...

Hannah: That's little brothers for you...even annoying from beyond the grave

Michael: You ever heard of something called Momento Mori?

Hannah: No.

Michael: Well it sounds a bit weird, but basically it's something they used to do in the nineteenth century when taking photos was really expensive. When someone died, you could arrange for a photo to be taken of them as if they were still alive. Sometimes living people even posed with their dead relatives...

Hannah: That is indeed weird...why on earth would you do that?

Michael: Because otherwise you could bury them and never have any record of what they looked like. Human memories are generally pretty terrible...do you remember what your brother looked like?

Hannah: Of course I do.

Michael: Even without looking a photo? Do you remember every part of his face, his eyes, the exact colour of his hair?

Hannah: Well I remember what he generally looked like...

Michael: But you can look at photos to check the detail.

Hannah: Well they didn't have colour photos back then...so no one could check someone's hair colour, even with a picture.

Michael: That's true...but they could remember the person, remember what they loved about them...I think it's a lovely thing to do.

Hannah: But you like corpses...

Michael: I do...I don't think people should be afraid of them. They're just people who've stopped living. I was actually thinking of starting a Memento Mori thing with the funeral business...for the more adventurous clients. Could be quirky and retro...like having a horse drawn hearse.

Hannah: You're a freak...

Michael: So not a goer then?

Hannah: I don't know...give it a go...see if anyone else in the world thinks it's a good idea.

They sit in silence

Michael: The Wheelers then?

Hannah: Nah...why don't you show me your coffins.

Michael: If you're sure?

Hannah: Of course

She gives him a light kiss and gets up to leave

Hannah: You ever slept with someone in a coffin before?

Michael: No...I'm not really sure there's room...

Hannah: Wimp...the corpses won't mind.

Michael: Well you only live once I suppose...

They both exit the scene.

Scene ends

Scene 5

Michael enters the scene. Hannah is again lying on the table, in the same pose as the opening of play. Michael this time however has a camera with him. Several years have passed. He quietly fusses about Hannah moving limbs around, adjusting her head and generally getting her ready for a picture.

Michael: (to audience) A photo of the dead needs to be perfect...especially if it's going to be the lasting memory that people have of them. It was easy for the Victorians; they were still in general awe that you could take photos at all. You could have turned out any old shite and they'd have loved it. The 21st century's a different matter though, people expect quality. They all think they're professional photographers and their Instagram snaps are art. In fact, ironically, the only person I know that doesn't think they're an amazing photographer is me, and I'm the one trying to make a business out of it.

Hannah suddenly speaks

Hannah: Did the course not help then?

Michael: I don't know...I think it might have been a case of 'those who can't, teach' to be honest; as frankly I'm not sure what I got for my money. Seemed mainly to be an opportunity for the guy running the course to show off his pictures to the class. It was quite funny when he asked what type of photography we were interested in though.

Hannah: What did you say?

Michael: Still life

Hannah: Well your subjects will be still....not so much alive though.

Michael: Bowls of fruit are technically dead when people paint them. I think this is the same thing.

Hannah: Yeah...almost...

Michael: OK..hold still then...try and look dead.

Hannah: Why am I pretending to be dead when there are two perfectly good corpses in the next room?

Michael: I'd feel bad about doing it without their permission.

Hannah: I don't think they'll mind.

Michael: Shh...if you're going to be a professional then you should be a professional. There are codes of practice...now hold still.

Hannah lies completely still and Michael takes a picture. He then looks at it on the camera screen.

Michael: Well it's getting better...

Hannah: Good enough to sell to people?

Michael: Maybe a few more practice shots first...thanks for doing this by the way.

Hannah: Well I'm the one who said you should try it...

Michael: The funeral business is a little conservative. People like what they know. Probably not a bad idea to try and bring some new stuff in.

Hannah: What did your dad decide to have when he died?

Michael: Oddly, for a man who'd spent his whole life doing other people's funerals, he wasn't at all bothered about his own. We obviously did the full bells and whistles for him, mainly because we had all the stuff here anyway. Nothing fancy though, just a standard hearse, black suits, crying family, the usual stuff.

Hannah: I wish I'd met him.

Michael: He was a good guy...a nice dad. It was the fags that were his downfall, never quite managed to give up, and then it was too late to.

Hannah: Would you have wanted a picture of him, post death?

Michael: God no...I think it's a horrible idea.

Hannah: But something you're happy to sell to other people?

Michael: Yeah...I'm sure other, more interesting people will like it. Dad looked absolutely awful when he died anyway, chemo isn't kind.

Hannah: Would you take photos of me when I'm dead?

Michael: I might not even know you when you're dead. You might have emigrated to Australia or be living with Nepalese monks by that point.

Hannah: Well assuming I'm not doing that, and assuming whatever this is, becomes something more...would you take my picture when it's all over and I'm lying in a box?

Michael: I don't know...I might not be able to. I might die before you, I might have motor-neurone disease, I might have hanged myself in the kitchen...

Hannah: If you ever have to choose between suicide and breaking up with me, then go for breaking up...

Michael: I'll bear that in mind.

Hannah: But...would you make me look beautiful, iron out some of the wrinkles and take one last picture of me?

Michael: If it meant that much to you I would.

Hannah: Thanks...

Michael: One for the grand-children to take to school for show and tell I suppose.

Hannah stands up and kisses Michael.

Michael: You do realise that's a really odd thing to be pleased about. Most women make you promise to be faithful and kind and not beat the children...

Hannah: Most women are twats.

Michael: You're probably right. Though I'm inclined to believe that most men are as well. I've always preferred the general population dead rather than alive. At least when they've stopped breathing they can't insist of being interested in boring cars, boring jobs and boring opinions.

Hannah: You're not exactly Mr exciting are you?

Michael: No...but being boring isn't about being unexciting...in fact lots of people who think they're exciting are incredibly boring. It's about not being predictable. Not being so blandly indistinguishable from the rest of the population that you might as well just have been cloned. You're not boring.

Hannah: Well no...clearly...but I'm not a particularly functioning member of society either.

Michael: That's why you're not boring. Blandly functioning without making a ripple or mark in the world is diabolically awful.

Hannah: Killing a room full of people is diabolically awful...being dull is just being dull.

Michael: I've sat through more funerals than almost anyone you're likely to meet. Funerals are the time when the sum total of your entire life's achievements should be on show for all to see. Where those who love you can revel in your worth as a human being. 90% of the ones I sit through are for people whose mother's might as well have smothered them at birth. They've done nothing interesting and the world's not going to miss them.

Hannah: I presume you don't tend to mention this during the wake?

Michael: Not usually. I don't know. I just see people at the very end, when they've done everything they were going to do and that's it. It's not the fact that someone has died that's depressing...it's that they never actually did anything with the life they lived.

Hannah: They were probably happy though...most people are happy I think.

Michael: Most people think they're happy, and justify not doing the things they want...but I bet, just at that moment before they black out forever and they know that the end has come, they think 'bugger...well that was an opportunity wasted'.

Hannah: You run a business that you took over from your dad...nothing you do is creative or interesting. You're exactly the sort of person you're talking about.

Michael: I know...and I hate it. I stand at the back of those funerals and watch another day drift by me. I see a dull life brought to a close and see myself in the same position in the future. It's pretty damn bleak.

Hannah: Well why don't we try and make sure that your last thoughts aren't just regret? What is it that you think people who have lead full lives do?

Michael: See things, travel, eat good food, do something creative, make some kind of mark on the world...and fuck a lot.

Hannah: Well we've got one of those things covered...

Michael: All couples stop shagging each other eventually...

Hannah: Only if they don't see it as important...you clearly do and we'll make sure that it's never not part of what we do...even if it means video cameras and sex swings...

Michael: But I can't travel, I run a business, I can't just leave it and piss off round the world....and I'm not sure I've got a single artistic bone in my body.

Hannah: You know what the worst trait that most people have is? It's not being boring...it's not being brave enough to be interesting. Nothing you've said is beyond the realms of possibility, you're just finding excuses. You're just as bad as all those poor sods who die having worked in the same job for 40 years and got nothing out of life. This Momento Mori thing is creepy, weird and way beyond the normal concepts of taste, but it is undeniably creative. You're reviving an old artform and you're doing it entirely without thought for public opinion.

Michael: Isn't that generally seen as a bad idea?

Hannah: Only if you want to make money out of it. If you want to be a trend setter, remembered throughout history for doing something new and unexpected, then it's exactly what you should be doing.

Michael: Trend setter might be going a bit far.

Hannah: The point is, if you want to be free and genuinely happy then you need to do the things that you want to do, and worry about the money later. It's not like you've got kids or anything.

Michael: I quite like kids though...I probably should have included them on my list of things.

Hannah: But you didn't...which sort of suggests they're something you think you should have, rather than something you want to have. The world's a very full place and there are plenty of people squeezing out more than enough children to keep the human race going. Your skills lie at the other end of the life cycle.

Michael: I don't kill people.

Hannah: No, but you make death more palatable...you euphemise it for people, so they can pretend its dignified and calm, rather than painful and terrifying. You clean up the remains of people so that their loved ones can see them in a manner which they'd like to remember them, rather than how they ended up. You sew up wounds, reattach limbs and cover over all those marks and scars which show how damaged everyone actually is...in fact Momento Mori or not, you're probably one of the most creative people I know...and there's nothing remotely interesting about human's breeding.

Michael: Can I least put breeding in the maybe pile? Just in case I run out of things to do?

Hannah: You can...but you'll need to find someone else to do it with...I'm not getting stretch marks for anyone.

Michael: Fair enough...I'll get a breeding wife as well...

Hannah: As long as she's not here for conversation then that's fine.

Michael: A non-breeding wife would be a good first step in my polygamous empire.

Hannah: My god it's like something from Jane Austen...

Michael: It's not dissimilar...

Hannah: So was that an actual proposal?

Michael: Well I'm not entirely sure...maybe...

Hannah: So not only was it the single least romantic thing that a person has ever said, it was also entirely without prior thought or consideration...

Michael: Yes...

Hannah: Well in that case, I'll say yes...why the hell not. The first step in your drive to be exciting. We can always get divorced if everything goes tits up can't we?

Michael: Henry the 8th did make that possible.

Hannah: Well good old Henry...helping people to get married on a whim for 500 years.

Michael: This probably needs a toast or something.

Michael exits. Hannah then reassumes the 'dead' position and waits for him. He re-enters carrying a bottle of beer and two mugs.

Michael: This will have to do I'm afraid. I never quite got round to buying champagne flutes...Hannah?

Hannah: Just working out the best position for my photo.

Michael: We've already done all the test shots I need.

Hannah: I mean for the actual photo...at the end. If I leave it until I'm dead then I won't be able to choose how I look.

Michael: Why don't you just have a drink with me? We can worry about the position you'll be in when you're dead later on...

Michael hands Hannah a cup and opens the bottle of beer. He pours them both some. Hannah sits up and Michael sits with her

Michael: To weddings and stuff.

Hannah: To weddings and stuff.

They clink cups and drink. They kiss.

Scene ends

Scene 6

Scene opens with Hannah lying back on the table. Several more years have passed. Michael enters in a panic

Michael: Oh god Hannah...this can't happen. This can't happen to us. Not to our life. Everything for us is so good. This can't happen now.

Hannah: It has happened though...it's too late to fix it.

Michael: But why us?

Hannah: Why not us? We're not special, we're not above these things. We're just two people. We didn't even want her anyway.

Michael: Don't say that. She wasn't planned, but I wanted her. I was ready for her.

Hannah: I didn't. I never have...but I miss her now she's gone.

Michael: Didn't even get to hear her cry...

Hannah: She'd gone before they got her out...oxygen shortage.

Michael: She suffocated?

Hannah: She never took a breath...she just didn't work properly.

Michael: We should name her.

Hannah: Why?

Michael: Because she's our baby...surely you can't be this cold.

Hannah: She's not real though...she never even laid eyes on me. She's just a pile of useless blood and bones that we just need to bury in the ground. Completely pointless.

Michael: I can't do this...I don't know how you can say these things.

Hannah: Cos we didn't even know her...she's just as anonymous to us as the millions of people who die everywhere else in the world.

Michael is in tears

Michael: You felt her moving though, you knew she was there. She reacted to your voice.

Hannah: That's not the same thing...I was just a vessel and something broke and the cargo was ejected, dead and pointless. It's just evolution. The genes in her weren't good enough to get passed on.

Michael: You're just drained from the day. You don't mean any of this. You're in shock.

Hannah: Tell yourself that if you want. If it makes you feel better.

Michael: I want to call her Emily.

Hannah doesn't react and just lies there looking at the ceiling.

Michael: I'd been toying with it for a while. I assumed you'd have some names you wanted, but I had Emily ready to suggest and argue for if required. I like names that have an eternal ring to them. I think Emily does. It's existed for centuries and always seems to be around. Not a name that goes in and out with fashion. I also thought it was one which would suit her throughout her life. Nice for children, nice for adults. You can imagine Emilys aged 2 and Emilys aged 80, and everything in between.

Hannah: I'm sorry.

Michael: What?

Hannah: I'm sorry I lost your baby.

Michael: It's not your fault. Just terrible luck...even with modern medicine sometimes babies die.

Hannah: I always thought you weren't bothered about kids.

Michael: I wasn't...until I thought we were having one. Did you never feel anything?

Hannah: I felt sick a lot. I felt bloated. I felt faint when I tried to walk up hills.

Michael: But did you feel anything towards her?

Hannah: I don't know...I tried not to. Getting pregnant really was a mistake. I'm just too much into our life to have room for anyone else. I think I resented her a bit.

Michael: But she would have just been an extension of our life, a human version of our relationship.

Hannah: She'd have been a crying, shitting, cause of stress that would have probably led to divorce.

Michael: She'd have been ours though...proof of us after we were gone. That's what I liked the most about having her.

Hannah: Isn't just the fact that we existed enough? That we were together whilst we were alive. You don't need to leave proof.

Michael: But otherwise how will anyone know I haven't made the whole thing up...that everything we have isn't just the product of my imagination. A child would be undeniable proof of the life we lived.

Hannah moves and sits with Michael

Hannah: There are photos, emails, even probably the odd letter if you wanted the people of the future to know who we were.

Michael: It's not the same as a life though, not the same as someone who can tell anecdotes about you, and who loved you unconditionally.

Hannah: No child loves their parents unconditionally.

Michael and Hannah sit in silence

Michael: Do you need to stay here and be looked at?

Hannah: I don't think there's much wrong with me physically...though they want me to stay overnight.

Michael: What about mentally.

Hannah: I'm sure they'll want to get me looked at. People seem to think it's quite a big deal.

Michael: Odd that.

Hannah: Yeah.

Michael: I'll look after you

Hannah: I know.

Michael kisses Hannah's forehead.

Scene ends

Scene 7

Michael is sat on his own in front of the empty corpse table. Several more years have passed. He has a plane ticket in his hand. Hannah's absence is very obvious.

Michael: This is a mistake. I can't just leave everything.

After a pause Hannah suddenly breezes into the room

Hannah: We're packed and ready.

Michael: I can't do this

Hannah: It's just getting on a plane. Millions of people do it every day.

Michael: It's not the plane. It's the leaving.

Hannah: We've discussed this. It's time.

Michael: But what about the business. It's been in the family for 3 generations. I can't just abandon all that history.

Hannah: It'll still exist. It just won't have you running it. You've sold it to good people. They're even keeping the name.

Michael: But I won't be here. Someone else will be washing the bodies, dressing them, getting them ready for their big day. They might not do it right.

Hannah: The corpses won't mind...there are thousands of undertakers around the country. You're not the only person who can deal with the dead. You've done your time and you can leave.

Michael: What about Emily?

Hannah: She's dead.

Michael: But who will visit her?

Hannah: She's dead.

Michael: But her grave needs flowers...it needs someone to clean the bird shit from the stone.

Hannah: Emily's dead...she doesn't need anything.

Michael: I'd feel bad for her.

Hannah: She wouldn't know...that grave means nothing to her...it's just there for us.

Michael: People will think we don't care.

Hannah: But we do...so fuck what anyone else thinks. No child of ours would want us to limit our lives for something as stupid as tending a gravestone...the dead are dead. The living are the ones who need attention.

Michael: Australia's a long way away.

Hannah: Its 24 hours on a plane...no one's asking you to sit in a boat for 6 months. Australia's not just somewhere for convicts anymore...and we don't have to stay forever...

Michael: It'll be the first time I've left Europe.

Hannah: And that's why we have to go...I promised you that I wouldn't let you become one of the grey masses...I don't want you to sit on your deathbed and resent your life. I'd feel responsible. It's time to live life...what's the worst that could happen?

Michael: Plane crash? Being bitten by terrifying spiders? Killed by snakes?

Hannah: Lost in the outback and raped by horny bushmen?

Michael: If they've not seen anyone for a while. I might be over worrying.

Hannah: Maybe just a little...it's ok, it's your inner autistic kid...I'll help you through.

Michael: And you reckon the Aussie's will go for Momento Mori? It worked in the UK because British people are naturally perverse. Australian's might find it too weird.

Hannah: Australians made Priscilla Queen of the Desert and Dame Edna...I think they'll be fine with something a bit off the wall.

Michael: I have got photographing the dead down to a fine art...the corpses in my pictures look better than most living people.

Hannah: You're the epitome of business diversification...everyone in Australia is going to want a picture of their dead granny hanging on their wall soon.

Michael: Thank you for this...thank you for pushing me to do these things. I'd have never done anything without you.

Hannah: Its fine...just take a nice picture of me when I'm dead...like you promised.

Michael: As long as I don't die first.

Hannah: You won't.

Pause

Hannah: Come on then you silly sod. We're packed and ready to go, and there's no other possible thing you can need to do to put off leaving. The new owners want to move in here today, so we need to get out. It'll be easier if you're not here.

Michael: You're right about that.

He pauses

Michael: Can you just lie here one last time?

Hannah: There's no time for a corpse slab shag...

Michael: Just lie here a second...you've spent more time of this table than any of the dead people.

Hannah: Mainly posing for your disturbing pictures.

Michael: Oddly it's the place I most associate with you....does that make me weird?

Hannah: Yes it does....there's no denying it....but as it's a fairly harmless perversion I'll do it for you this one last time.

Hannah lies on the slab in her standard 'dead position'. Michael leans over and brushes her hair, just like he did in the first scene. Hannah lies still with her eyes closed. When he's finished fussing over her he leans over and kisses her lips.

Michael: You're perfect.

Kisses again. Initially she doesn't react. He pulls away and then she grabs him by the collar and pulls him back down to her for a further kiss.

Hannah: (releasing him) Weirdo.

Hannah then rises from the table and taking Michael's hand, removes him from the room. The room is left empty for a moment.

Scene ends

Scene 8

Empty stage with the same set up as the previous scene. Twenty years have passed. After a moment Hannah and Michael creep into the room with all the appearance of burglars. Michael crashes into the corpse table.

Hannah: Shh you great oaf.

Michael: Has this been moved?

Hannah: Nope...it's in exactly the same place as the day we left it. Looks like nothing's been changed at all.

Michael: I always said the set up in here was perfect. Is there a body on the slab?

Hannah: Nope...corpse free. We really shouldn't be in here. This isn't our place anymore.

Michael: I just wanted to see it one more time. See if it's changed. There's a huge amount of our life in this room.

Hannah: We could have just come down in the daytime and knocked on the door. I'm sure they wouldn't have minded showing us round.

Michael: It wouldn't be the same...we'd be guests and I wouldn't be able to poke about.

Hannah: So breaking and entering is clearly the better option.

Michael: We used a key...I must have forgotten to mention the spare one I kept under the paving slab. Surprised they've never bothered changing the locks.

Hannah: I imagine they didn't think we'd have travelled from the other side of the world to sneak around a funeral director's parlour we used to own.

Michael: Weird being back though...feels like no time has passed at all.

Hannah: It's been 20 years...almost to the day in fact.

Michael: Must have been thousands of bodies pass through here in that time. There'll have been some young ones that weren't even born when we left.

Hannah: Well that's a lovely thought...nothing like dead children to make you feel you're home.

Michael: Wonder if he kept up any of the Momento Mori stuff? It was quite the thing to do when we left. Was a shame the Aussie's never really went for it.

Hannah: Oddly conservative bunch those Australians...especially since they're all descended from criminals.

Michael: You've been waiting 20 years to say that haven't you.

Hannah: Maybe...but I'd only say it to you...

Michael: One of the joys of being in a couple...we did ok in Oz though didn't we?

Hannah: Yeah...it was nice...and the spider thing is complete bollocks.

Michael: Ha, yeah. I'm glad you made me go. I'd have still been here doing this if you hadn't. Life would have remained exactly the same. I'd have wasted it.

Hannah: Sometimes you just need a kick up the arse.

Michael: So what sort of trouble would two old sods like us get into for letting ourselves in a building we used to own with a secret key we hadn't told anyone about?

Hannah: We'd probably avoid prison.

Michael: Not the worst crime that's happened this evening I'd imagine.

Hannah: So is this welfare tourism then?

Michael: What?

Hannah: Flying into the UK to take advantage of their systems without paying for them.

Michael: Is that a thing?

Hannah: Tabloids think so. We haven't paid UK tax for two decades.

Michael: Probably then...though I don't think anyone's ever complained about ex-pats doing it...we have a moral right I believe.

Hannah: Because we happened to have been born on this piece of earth...which we then decided we didn't want to live on any longer? Not sure there's much there you'd call moral.

Michael: I think it's being English...we can give ourselves a moral right to everything.

Hannah: Well moral or not, I'm going to take full advantage of the free healthcare...and if it doesn't work out at least I can die in my home country.

Michael: The Aussie system's ok...you'd have been fine doing it there...it's not like we'd moved to the states.

Hannah: It's not as good as here though. I want the best for my illness.

Michael: You'll be ok...the doctors were optimistic.

Hannah: That was just the upward inflection of their accents. **(in Australian accent)** “It’s terminal cancer I’m afraid love. Your insides are literally destroying themselves in front of your eyes. You’ll be dead in a year”.

Michael: No one said that. They said there was a good chance you’d be fine.

Hannah: They did...weirdly I feel fine. Wouldn’t even know there was anything going on in there if they hadn’t done a scan. I wonder when stuff starts to hurt? I’ve always wondered that. If you lose a limb or your eyes stop working then you know about it. With this I’m just not sure. Do I start to feel tired? Do I start to piss blood in the mornings? Does a tumour shaped bulge appear under the skin?

Michael: I think you’re getting ahead of yourself. You’ll be fine. It’s the 21st century and we’re in the western world. You’d have to be pretty bloody sick to actually die.

Pause

Hannah: Should we go to the grave?

Michael: She’d be 25 now.

Hannah: Yeah...we could be grandparents.

Michael: One of the old guys who drove the hearses here used to say ‘The worse thing about being a grandparent is that you have to be a parent first’.

Hannah: Well we missed both bullets then.

Michael: Why would we want to visit the grave? You’ve always said the dead are dead...

Hannah: They are...it’s not for Emily...I really don’t seem the point of sentimentality about death. She’s gone and there’s nothing we can do about that.

Michael: Then why go?

Hannah: Well it’s the only bit of land in this country that we still have a claim on. The only place where we’ve got any roots left.

Michael: Our dead daughter’s grave?

Hannah: Yeah...our combined genetic material is buried in the ground there...

Michael: I think being with me might have overly hardened you up to death...you are allowed to think of people as more than just the sum of their parts...especially family.

Hannah: I was always like this...ever since my brother died. It’s clearly just an act you understand...a coping mechanism...but it works for me. The alternative is to cry every time they’re mentioned and be completely useless. If you tell yourself that the grief is all for you then you can stop yourself.

Michael: I know...sometimes we need these acts to get through things. Being raised by a funeral director meant that it was second nature. Have a professional stance and don’t let the feelings in...there’s nothing you can do about what’s happened.

Hannah: I do wish she'd lived though...despite what I said at the time. Imagine what we could have told her, the places we could have taken her. We could have brought her up in Oz and had a reason to stay there.

Michael: Put down some roots somewhere other than a UK graveyard.

Hannah: It did always feel like we were on holiday. It was lovely but we were always drifting. I think you can be too free sometimes. Weather was good though.

Michael: It was...I will miss the campervans and beautiful people of Byron Bay. It's nice to be back though isn't it? Even in these circumstances.

Hannah: Yeah it is...I'm older and sicker, but it is nice.

Michael: (indicated corpse table) Do you know how many times we had sex on that table?

Hannah: More than I care to remember...it used to give me terrible bruises on my knees and elbows.

Michael: Do you remember the time I split my lip when we fell off?

Hannah: Yeah...you told everyone you'd been in a fight.

Michael: They didn't believe me...I've always been more of a lover...

Hannah: You have...even if it's a slightly feeble one.

Michael: We have to work with what we're given...I've always tried hard.

Hannah: Men with smaller penises always do.

Michael: Cow

Hannah kisses Michael and he pushes her to the table.

Hannah: Be careful you don't do your back in.

Michael: You be careful you don't dislocate your hip.

Scene ends

Scene 9

Same setting several hours later. Hannah and Michael are sat on chairs with cups of tea.

Hannah: That was embarrassing

Michael: Yeah...there were more police in here than I'd have thought was necessary.

Hannah: My feet weren't even touching the floor when they barged in.

Michael: My back held out though.

Hannah: Nice of the new owner to make us tea.

Michael: Yeah...he's lost a lot of hair since he bought the place.

Hannah: Yeah...you've aged a lot better.

Michael: I've literally never been caught shagging before....I'd assumed I was old enough to have completely avoided it.

Hannah: One more thing to tick off the bucket list I guess.

Michael: You can't be that sick. Sick people don't go at it like the clappers like you did then. I reckon it's probably just wind.

Hannah: Its cancer I promise...and I've got a note to prove it and everything. You reckon if they give me chemo my hair will fall out? I've never been one for scarves.

Michael: You've never shaved your head before...think of it as another bucket list thing.

Hannah: Aren't I supposed to only do that whilst sat in a bath of beans for Comic Relief?

Michael: It's more punk if you do it because of cancer.

Hannah: You're too old to use the word punk.

Michael: You think we should wait around for a chat with the owner then?

Hannah: It would be embarrassing.

Michael: We should give him back the key though. Say a final goodbye to this place.

Hannah: Yeah we should...I'm probably old enough to take a little embarrassment.

Michael: I wonder if he ever needs anyone to drive a hearse for him?

Hannah: You're not seriously considering working back here again?

Michael: Only casually...I'm too old to do the hard stuff. But the occasional driving or pall bearing job might bring in some extra cash. We don't have much in the way of money do we?

Hannah: You might find the life insurance kicks in at some point.

Michael: Don't be cynical...I'd prefer to be poor and with you than rich and alone.

Hannah: You're very sweet.

Scene ends

Scene 10