

Before you leave

A 2-hour-long game for two players about grief, communication and the memories that remain after you've lost someone.

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We have been a couple. We had moved in the same apartment and we were making plans about our future together.

And you've died.

Maybe it has been an accident. Or illness. Maybe it has been something else.

It doesn't really matter, even if it still hurts so bad: I'll just have to learn to live without you.

But for now, I remember the moments we've spent together. And somehow, I feel that remembering you is bringing you back.

In *Before you leave*, two players will play the role of a couple. One of them, the *deceased*, died but will be temporarily brought back into existence by the memories of the *widowed*.

Inspirations

- *Les Petites Choses Oubliées* by Sylvie Guillaume and Christoph Boeckle
- *Ghost* by Jerry Zucker
- *Always* by Steven Spielberg
- *PS I Love you* by Richard LaGravenese
- *The Fountain* by Darren Aronofsky
- *The Sixth Sense* by M. Night Shyamalan
- *Brown Bunnies* by Vincent Gallo
- *I say a Little Prayer* by Tor Kjetil Edland
- *Snow* by Matthijs Holter
- The track *Over the Distance* from the video-game *Ouendan*
- *Kishibe no tabi (Journey to the Shore)* by Kiyoshi Kurosawa
- *Journey* by thatgamecompany
- *Breaking the ice* by Emily Care Boss

Setup

In order to play *Before you leave*, you need:

– A place with at least two rooms.

One of the room will be the *outside* room and the players will use it to pretend the characters are outside, to play the scenes outside the apartment. The other room will be the *inside* room.

If you can play in a real apartment, that's even better. Just decide before play which room will be considered to be the *outside* room, the rest of the apartment being used for the actual inside scenes.

– Six or seven items from daily life.

They must be brought into the game by the player who will play the *deceased* and scattered before play across the apartment or the inside room.

Also, they must be obvious, don't play hide and seek. You should even use some black ribbons to make them stand out even more.

– Some post-its.

The *deceased* will use them to communicate during a scene.

Before play (~15 minutes)

The relationship

You don't have to know everything about the characters before playing, in fact it's best to play to find out about them, but you can decide already some details together:

- What are their names?
- What are their ages and genders?

And maybe:

- Where is their apartment?

It's best and frankly simpler to play nowadays.

At that point, you don't need to know how the *deceased* died.

If you are not playing in a real apartment, take the time to describe together the fictional apartment.

Safety

There are only two players and no facilitator role *per say* because this game is about intimacy.

The two players will have to touch each other's hands and shoulders. It is possible that the game will end with the two players in each other's arms. Discuss with your gaming partner to know if these physical contacts are allowed. If not, decide together of other limits. Instead of touching shoulders, you may touch elbows; instead of taking the other into your arms, you may only shake hands. Either way, it's perfectly fine.

During the game, if you want to interrupt the scene because you feel uncomfortable, you can say "CUT" and the other player must stop immediately what he or she is doing. Take a moment to discuss what happened and made someone uncomfortable before continuing the game. You may even decide to stop playing. Either way, don't be judgmental and try to understand the problem.

Exploring our memories (~1h15)

The game begins in the couple's apartment. The *deceased* has died and the *widowed* is alone, wandering around and living their daily life.

The *widowed* will trigger precious memories that they shared with the *deceased*. But memories are subjective, aren't they, and the point of view of the *widowed* may be different from the *deceased's*.

However, these memories will somehow summon the *deceased* but their presence will be faint at the beginning, their means of communication limited and frustrating. This will change during the course of the game though and the *deceased* will be able to better interact with the *widowed*.

First memory: moving in the apartment

What the *widowed* can do

The *widowed* will narrate a memory about the moving in the apartment. Before they begin, they can wander through the apartment without touching the items.

The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed a couple of minutes.

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* must follow the *widowed* during that scene and stay behind them. Try to stay close, like if you were stalking on them.

The *deceased* can only clap their hands, but only once (don't play "one knock is yes, two knocks is no"), each time they want to express something during the recollection, for example disagreement.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *outside* room.

They cannot face each other.

They cannot touch each other.

Transition

The scene ends when the *widowed* finishes their narration.

Second memory: an item (1/4)

What the *widowed* can do

The *widowed* chooses an item and narrates a memory somehow related about it. You should mime using this item for a moment before the recollection, if possible.

For example, you can choose a book and start browsing it.

The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* stays behind the *widowed*.

During the *widowed*'s recollection, they will use post-its to write down single words and single words only, not sentences, no punctuation, no preposition. You should stick them on a flat surface, on the same spot, or, for more dramatic purpose, you can stick them across the room.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *outside* room.

They cannot face each other.

They cannot touch each other.

Transition

When the recollection and the writing are done, the *deceased* touches the shoulder of the *widowed*. The *widowed* can now take the time to look at the post-its.

Third memory: an item (2/4)

What the *widowed* can do

As in the previous scene, the *widowed* chooses an item and narrates a memory somehow related about it.

You should mime using this item for a moment before the recollection, if possible.

The *widowed* can be face-to-face to the *deceased* and look into their eyes.

The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* can stay in front of the *widowed*.

The *deceased* can shake their head or make facial expressions to show their feelings.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *outside* room.

They cannot touch each other.

The *deceased* cannot talk.

Transition

The scene ends when the *widowed* finishes their narration.

Fourth memory: an item (3/4)

What the *widowed* can do

As in the previous scene, the *widowed* chooses an item and narrates a memory somehow related about it.

You should mime using this item for a moment before the recollection, if possible.

The *widowed* can be face-to-face to the *deceased* and look into their eyes.

The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* can stay in front of the *widowed*.

The *deceased* will be allowed to talk at the end of the recollection. They can contradict or add something to the recollection but cannot exceed a couple of minutes.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *outside* room.

They cannot touch each other.

The *deceased* cannot express their feelings.

The *widowed* cannot react to the *deceased's* speech.

Transition

The scene ends when the *deceased* finishes their narration.

Fifth memory: an item (4/4)

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* brings to the *widowed* a last item and describes it, establishing it.

For example, they can hand a book saying “that’s the book I hated so much” or a kitchen knife saying “that’s the kitchen knife you’ve been always so afraid to use”.

The *deceased* can then stay in front of the *widowed*.

Lastly, the *deceased* will be allowed to talk at the end of the *widowed*’s recollection. They can contradict or add something to the recollection and express their feelings, but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

What the *widowed* can do

When the *deceased* gives the *widowed* an item of their choice, the *widowed* narrates a memory somehow related about it.

You should mime using this item for a moment before the recollection, if possible.

The *widowed* can be face-to-face to the *deceased* and look into their eyes.

The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

The *widowed* can reach out for the hand of the *deceased* at any point during the *deceased*’s narration and touch their hand for a brief moment.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *outside* room.

They cannot touch each other unless noted otherwise.

The *widowed* cannot react to the *deceased*’s speech.

Transition

The scene ends when the *deceased* finishes their narration.

The *deceased* takes the hand of the *widowed* and leads them into the *outside* room, as if they were going outside the apartment.

Sixth memory: an important place outside the apartment

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* describes an important place for the couple, establishing the scene of the recollection.

For example, they can describe a church, saying “it’s a small church where we have attended our first wedding together” or a bridge, saying “that’s the bridge where we had our first kiss”. Don’t forget to describe smell, sight, sound and also feelings about that place.

The *deceased* can move freely and you should try to act as if you were playing the scene from the recollection, if possible.

The *deceased* can also hold the *widowed*’s hand.

As in the previous scene, the *deceased* will be allowed to talk at the end of the *widowed*’s recollection. They can contradict or add something to the recollection and express their feelings, but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

What the *widowed* can do

When the *deceased* describes an important place for the couple, the *widowed* narrates a memory somehow related about it. The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

The *widowed* can move freely and you should try to act as if you were playing the scene from the recollection, if possible.

The *widowed* can also hold the *deceased*’s hand.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *inside* room.

They cannot touch each other unless noted otherwise.

The *widowed* cannot react to the *deceased*’s speech.

Transition

The scene ends when the *deceased* finishes their narration and brings back the *widowed* to the apartment.

Seventh memory: an important outsider

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* describes someone important for the couple, and may establish the scene of the recollection in general.

For example, they can describe a third person, saying “your mother has hated me from the very beginning. Remember when we had that conversation, just after this awful dinner?” or a lover, saying “and then I found these love letters from that woman, waiting for you to come back from work” or a child, saying “our little baby boy looked exactly as you, right? That first night, when we came home from the hospital, we were listening to his noisy breathing, fearing they would have stopped”. Try to describe that person with some physical details and also some character behaviors. You can also set the scene but remember that the memory is mostly about that person, the location is not the main focus here.

The *deceased* can move freely and you should try to act as if you were playing the scene from the recollection, if possible.

The *deceased* can also hold the *widowed*'s hand.

As in the previous scene, the *deceased* will be allowed to talk at the end of the *widowed*'s recollection. They can contradict or add something to the recollection and express their feelings but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

What the *widowed* can do

When the *deceased* describes an important person for the couple, the *widowed* narrates a memory somehow related about it. The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *widowed* but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

The *widowed* can move freely and you should try to act as if you were playing the scene from the recollection, if possible.

The *widowed* can also hold the *deceased*'s hand.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *inside* room.

They cannot touch each other unless noted otherwise.

The *widowed* cannot react to the *deceased*'s speech.

Transition

The scene ends when the *deceased* finishes their narration and brings back the *widowed* to the apartment.

Eighth memory: recollection from the *deceased*

What the *deceased* can do

The *deceased* narrates a memory related to the couple freely. The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *deceased* but should not exceed about 5 minutes.

For example, the memory can be about the death of the *deceased*. It should be something really important to the *deceased*, this is after all their only chance to express themselves freely.

The *deceased* can move freely and you should try to act as if you were playing the scene from the recollection, if possible.

The *deceased* can also hold the *widowed's* hand.

What the *widowed* can do

The *widowed* will be allowed to talk at the end of the *deceased's* recollection. They can contradict or add something to the recollection and express their feelings but cannot exceed about 5 minutes.

The *widowed* can move freely and you should try to act as if you were playing the scene from the recollection, if possible.

The *widowed* can also hold the *deceased's* hand.

What the players cannot do

They cannot go to the *inside* room.

They cannot touch each other unless noted otherwise.

The *deceased* cannot react to the *widowed's* speech.

Transition

The scene ends when the *widowed* finishes their narration.

Epilogue (~15 minutes)

After that last memory, the bond between the couple is strong enough for the *deceased* to manifest themselves. It's time for a last goodbye, for a last physical interaction, be it good or bad. The decision are theirs: do they trust each other enough? Is this a ghost of sorrow and hatred, hoping to strangle the living?

In this last scene, the players are standing face to face, a step away from each other.

They then close their eyes and choose either to:

– **open their arms** to welcome the other.

– **show a fist** (for the *deceased*) to kill or **raise a stopping hand** (for the *widowed*) to reject.

When they have checked together that their decision is made, they can open their eyes.

If both players have opened their arms...

For a short last moment, the *deceased* can manifest themselves physically, as if they would have a body.

Both players step forward and hold themselves into their arms.

They collaboratively narrate this last moment between their characters. The narration is a dialog which duration is chosen freely by both of them but should not exceed about 10 minutes.

The scene ends when they finish their narration. The *deceased* takes a few steps back and leaves the room, disappearing from reality.

If the *widowed* has opened their arms and the *deceased* has showed a fist...

The *widowed* took a risk and the *deceased* may hurt or even kill them.

The *deceased* narrates what they intend to do to the *widowed*. The narration is a monologue which duration is chosen freely by the *deceased* but should not exceed a couple of minutes.

The scene ends when the *deceased* finishes their narration. They take a few steps back and leave the room, disappearing from reality.

If the *widowed* has raised a stopping hand...

The *widowed* has chosen to reject the *deceased* and the *deceased* is trapped into limbo.

The *deceased* takes a few steps back and leave the room, disappearing from reality.

Debriefing (~15 minutes)

Take the time to discuss with your gaming partner what happened during the game.

You can also take the time to answer some of these questions:

What do you think about the characters' relationship?

What do you think will happen to the *widowed*?

Will the *widowed* hold dear these memories? or will they fade away?

Which memory has been the most touching to you?

Did you like the game? Were you comfortable playing it?

Thanks for playing!