

# **The Phoenix Coffin Club**

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By

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## CHARACTERS

Steve 40+

June 30+

Police Officer Bill Novietzki 30+

*There is what looks like a coffin underneath a sheet on a mobile trestle centre stage left. There is a sign which says THE DIY PHOENIX COFFIN CLUB-OPEN, leaning against it. There's a table with circular handsaw, hammers and any other relevant tools, tubes of glue, drills, boxes of screws etc. Propped up is a notice board with price lists, instructions, and plans for making coffins and odd reminders, a coffee maker and cups. Man, dressed casually enters, puts his cell phone on the top of the covered coffin then positions the sign out front downstage.*

### STEVE

*Looks up at the sun and enjoys its warmth*

Wow, what a day. When the weather's good in Phoenix it's worth all those stinking hot days. What a sky.

*A police siren goes off*

*His phone goes off interrupting his basking.*

That didn't take long.

*Picks up phone.*

Good morning. The Phoenix Coffin Club. Steve speaking. How can I help you? No we don't sell coffins we make them ourselves... no, not necessarily just for ourselves but for others as well... grandparents, close relatives. But mostly for ourselves (*pause*). We have a fully equipped workshop. No, we don't think that's sick. If you're interested it's thirty dollars a month to join and you get full use of the workshop and it's a sort of club. It actually saves a lot of money and you can personalize the coffin for whoever....I'm sorry you feel that way. Thank you and good morning to you too.

*Ironically*

Have a nice day? What's the matter with these people? Some just don't get it. Everyone gets one life and one coffin. We do it as a mark of respect. Maybe he thinks he's going to live forever. Okay. I better check the messages. Oh shit! Pete's lost again. He has as much sense of direction as a tortoise in a gold mine.

*He phones*

Pete.... Where are you now? You don't know. What does the GPS say? You're on the 150. You're on the wrong road.

*He consults map on the top of the coffin*

Go back to the 10. Of course it's in Spanish you're in Mexico. You have to be on the 280 to Culiacan... that's Cool-e-a can. You go east . Give me a ring when you get there.

*Closes phone*

All he has to do is pick up the wood. Coffee. I need coffee.

*Phone rings*

Good morning. The Phoenix Coffin Club. Steve speaking. How can I help you? Certainly Madam. Yes... you can build one for yourself or for someone close to you. I made a beautiful coffin for my grandfather. It was a very moving experience. The family sent him out in style. It doesn't matter. We'll show you how to design it, cut it out and put it together. We're a Club... we enjoy getting together, helping each other out. No, we don't have any women members but you would be very welcome. Pay us a visit. We're at 2516 South 67th Ave and West Pioneer Street. Yes it's safe. Thank you. We look forward to seeing you. Have a good day.

*Enter Policeman in uniform.*

Hi... welcome to the Phoenix Coffin club. How may I help you officer?

POLICE OFFICER

Good morning. I was just driving past when I saw your sign.

STEVE

Well, welcome. We've been here for over a year. Kind of a new venture.

POLICE OFFICER

Coffin Club? Isn't it a strange neighborhood for a club?

STEVE

Not really. We chose the building because it's cheap and we've got plenty of room to make our coffins.

POLICE OFFICER

You make ...coffins?

STEVE

We sure do. It's big in New Zealand and Australia. You join and get the use of all the tools and make your own coffin or one for a loved one. To be honest, sometimes we just sit around and have a few beers... no good hurrying the process along ya know. And it saves a bunch of money.

POLICE OFFICER

Never heard of it before.

STEVE

Some people think it's kinda weird but I think it's going to catch on.

POLICE OFFICER

Mind if I have a look around?

STEVE

No. Go ahead.

POLICE OFFICER

Crime's been up in this area.. A lot of abandoned places. Old factories. Drug dealers. You know, gangs and kids but... drugs are the big problem.

STEVE

That's what I heard. We just moved in here when that officer was shot last year over on East Durango and 4th.

POLICE OFFICER

Yea. Tim Marshall, nice guy. He was a friend. Shot in the back. Never found the killer.

STEVE

That's terrible.

POLICE OFFICER

My beat now. We're spread pretty thin. I do my best to keep an eye on everything.

STEVE

Let me know if I can do anything to help. Here's my card. Please take a look around. I could ask the committee, if you could join for free.

POLICEMAN

Thanks. I'm hoping I'm not going to need a coffin... just yet.

STEVE

Gotcha.

*Phone rings*

Excuse me....

*Police officer makes his way round the shop and into the back and can clearly hear the phone conversation.*

You got there. Good. It's not a load of junk. Forget the thunder. It's just a storm.

Is the guy there? There's a Mexican guy there? Mexicans are brown. You are white. Don't be racist. Yes, that's him, that's him. Miguel. Give him the money. When you get to the border just show them the papers. And try not to look suspicious. Remember last time. They didn't find anything. So you're perfectly safe. When you get to Nogales just show them the papers. Don't look suspicious or nervous. Yes. You've got nothing to worry about.

*Police Officer re-enters. He is much more suspicious.*

POLICE OFFICER

Okay. Nice little set up you've got here. A lot of tools. Some nice looking coffins. ... in the making so to speak. All kinds. Do you have a lot of members?

STEVE

We have about sixty. Sometimes someone phones and wants one to be built so some of the guys can earn a bit of cash. We personalize the coffin and the wood's an extra expense. It's difficult to get good wood for coffins. We buy up old wooden buildings that they're tearing down. Doesn't take much to make it look decent. Had a guy the other week who wanted his wife's coffin lined in velvet... would you believe it.... velvet? It looked real nice when it was done.

POLICE OFFICER

Velvet? Wow. Well if I need a coffin, I know where to come. Here's my card. That's my direct line. Let me know if you see anything or anyone suspicious. Okay? I'm just a phone call away.

STEVE

No problem. The name's Steve.

POLICE OFFICER

Officer Bill Novotski. Nice to meet you.

STEVE

Drop in any time.

POLICE OFFICER

Have a good day.

*Exits*

STEVE

Now for that cup of coffee.

*Phone rings*

Damn. Hello. Good morning. The Phoenix Coffin Club. Steve speaking. How can I help you? Hello? Hellooooo... Nobody there. Well, while I'm at it, I better phone Pete. We have to get that wood today.

*He phones*

Pete? Did you get it? Great. Was he okay about it? That's good. He seemed a nice guy. How big's the stack? You filled the truck? Packed tight! Great work. You should make it back by five. I'll be here in the workshop. I'll have the beer cooled down for you.

*Closes phone*

Well... that's a relief... some decent wood. Now, coffee...

*Enter JUNE heavily disguised as a man. She is obviously . carrying a concealed weapon beneath her jacket. Her gait is awkwardly male and she has her hair underneath a cap.*

Welcome to Phoenix Coffin Club. How can I help you Sir?

JUNE

Yes.... Mmm.... is this where you make your own coffin?

STEVE

Sure is. We supply the tools and the wood, you supply the labor.

JUNE

How much does it cost to join?

STEVE

\$30 a month for everything you need. Pine is included but there's an extra cost for good wood.

JUNE

Sounds great . *(lower voice)* Sounds great. I'd like to join.

STEVE

Just fill in this form and we'll get you registered. *(Pause)* How did you hear about us?

JUNE

I was online looking up cof...Can I give you a check?

STEVE

No problem.

JUNE

That's when I saw your website. I've... 'er... never done much woodwork myself.

STEVE

Don't worry about it. Most of us are amateurs. We have few fellas who know what they're doing. Lets' face it ...a coffin is basically just a big box. Some wood, a few screws, some glue and you're ready to go.

JUNE

A coffin is kind of important though.

STEVE

True. Some people pay thousands of dollars for fancy coffins because they think it's showing respect but we reckon that's not personal, it's just something you buy. If you love someone, making them a nice coffin and decorating it yourself - especially if it's family - shows a lot more love and respect. I made my own.

JUNE

Your own?

STEVE

Got all my favorite quotations burned into the outside, "Hell is other people", that's Jean Paul Satre, pictures of my family on the inside, a list of places I visited and the people I loved and who cared for me, dead and still living. Hell I'm going to spend the rest of eternity in it so I like to feel it was personal...a sort of man cave for the dead.

JUNE

Wow.

STEVE

They used to do that in the old days. Put your belongings in the grave or stack 'em up on a boat and burn it. I reckon everyone should have a personal farewell and what better way to do it nowadays than build your own coffin or build one for someone you love. Anyway... that's the philosophy of the club. I got my coffin at home. Bought some nice cushions and converted it into a real nice sofa in the den. We have parties there and no one knows they're sitting on my coffin.

JUNE

That's so moving. It makes me want to cry.

STEVE

No... no we leave crying to the women. I was in Iraq and I heard too much crying. I got back and it taught me to appreciate people, life, all the little things and most of all... love.

JUNE

Yes. Well. Let me give you a check. When can I start?

STEVE

It all depends who your coffin is for and how long you got.

JUNE

I hope I've got a long time but I don't know. Could be tomorrow.



STEVE

That's tricky. You can put together the basic coffin in two weeks... so it's kinda ready then and you got time to select the handles, do the interior you want, paint it and add all the personal touches. Is the person close to you?

JUNE

Very close... *(lower voice)* Very close.

STEVE

Well Saturday's our big day. We'll get you started and you can meet everyone. They're a nice bunch of people. We start about nine. You get your own key to the shop, here it is. So you can come any time you want. Just make sure you lock up.

JUNE

Thank you.....

*As she puts back her check book back in her jacket, the fact that she's a woman is fairly obvious to the audience and undoing her jacket reveals the concealed weapon. Steve is startled.*

STEVE

You're packing a gun.

JUNE

Yes... just for safety.

STEVE

We've been here over a year and have never had a problem.

JUNE

Better safe than sorry.

STEVE

Up to you. I never stand between a man and his gun.

JUNE

Do you have a restroom?

STEVE

Sure. They're just round the corner. I'll show you. ... on the left.

JUNE

Thank you...

*Switches her to her lower voice*

Thank you.

*Steve watches her exit and is startled because she goes into the Ladies bathroom.*

STEVE

Huh? Oh Jesus... he's some kinda pervert or... a nutcase .

*Phones*

Officer Novotski.... It's Steve here from the Phoenix Coffin Club. We met this morning. You told me to phone if I noticed anything unusual. Well, this guy just walked in here and he's weird and... he's carrying a Berretta M9. Concealed. And... he just walked into the ladies bathroom. I don't know what's going on...it looks suspicious. Okay. Thanks. Try to keep him here? Just act normal? I'll do my best.

*June emerges*

JUNE

Thank you.... So, Saturday 9 am.

STEVE

No, wait .... I forgot you gotta sign some papers... nothing major .... just insurance so that if you hurt yourself with a saw or something like that... it's a business thing. Where are those forms....? I had them somewhere. Why don't you have a seat? Sorry, I forgot . There aren't any. Would you believe it? No chairs. You like some coffee? I got decaf.

JUNE

No, I'm fine, thanks. I have to get back. Can I ask you something?

STEVE

*Nervously*

Sure. No problem.

JUNE

Are you okay with women joining the club?

STEVE

Yea....my wife comes down here the odd weekend. Would your wife...girlfriend....like to join?

JUNE

I think he... she would .

STEVE

You just need to bring her along. If there's two of you, you get a \$10 discount on your membership.

JUNE

Give me your card...

STEVE

Here. I got the forms. Just here...

JUNE

Look ,can I sign these when I come on Saturday.

STEVE

Right. Oh... I'll just give you your membership certificate. Now, where are they?  
I hate all the paperwork...

*In burst's Police Officer with drawn weapon.*

POLICE OFFICER

Nobody move. Face to the wall! This is an arrest.

STEVE

Okay.

POLICE OFFICER

*To June*

You too. Hands on your head.

JUNE

But....

POLICE OFFICER

Do as you're told and no-one will get hurt. Now, stay where you are. Keep facing the wall.  
Put your legs apart.

*He pats down Steve for a weapon. Pulls down one arm and handcuffs it, then the other.*

On your knees. *(To June)*You, don't move. Keep your hands where I can see them .

*Steve pats her down. Finds and removes the concealed weapon. Is surprised when he sees the weapon. It's his and then is surprised that he feels a woman not a man.*

Huuuuuh?????????

*June is reluctant to look at him.*

June?

*Rips off cap, her hair falls down.*

June! What the hell?

JUNE

Bill.

POLICE OFFICER

What are you doing here? And what are you doing with my gun? And you're wearing my jacket.

STEVE

Would you get me out of these handcuffs please?

POLICE OFFICER

Stay where you are buddy. You think I don't know what Mexican Brown is and Junk ? You're phoning your guy in Mexico... coded language. I heard you talking about how you were going to get it across the border. I've got the DEA on the way with the dogs. There's also a strange smell back there. What a way to get rid of the bodies. (*to June*)...but what the hell? You're not in with him are you? And you, are you messing with my wife?

JUNE

Bill....

*She starts crying loudly*

I only met him this morning. I just wanted to make you a coffin.

STEVE

We're just some guys who make our own coffins. Pete's picking up wood from an old disused factory they're pulling down in Mexico. It's good wood by the way.

JUNE

Bill.... I'm sorry ..... Every day when you go on duty I never know if you're going to be shot, so I thought I would like, I wanted to be prepared....and you always say when you leave the house "if I don't come back get me a nice coffin". I know you're joking but I thought... as a surprise... and he seemed such a nice guy. And we get a \$10 discount...

*The tears mount during this speech.*

POLICE OFFICER

Oh sweetheart! But why the gun and the disguise?

JUNE

I wanted to be safe. You always tell me to stay safe.

STEVE

Look Officer, I'm a vet. I spent seven years in Iraq. My driving licence is in my back pocket and my military papers are over there in the coffin. Check me out. The invoice for the wood is on the table...I paid it.

*Sound of sirens getting louder.*

POLICE OFFICER

How the hell am I going to explain this?

JUNE

Perhaps you could tell them, we both wanted to make coffins for each other.

STEVE

Get me out of these handcuffs will you? I'll give you a free lifetime membership of the club and you can make as many coffins as you like. I'll just say it was a mistake O.K.?

*Lights*