# Clinical Case – 80-year-old Widow with Anxiety Linked to Fear of Dying Alone

## Age and Gender

Female – 80 years old – Widow – Retired antique dealer

## Summary of Identified Issues

1. Acute anxiety linked to the fear of dying alone

* • Trigger: sudden weight loss → fear of following her husband's path (cancer).
* • Associated behavior: getting dressed quickly to avoid being found naked → ritualization tied to death phobia.
* • Recurring fear: being found dead, alone, without dignity.

2. Hyper-mentalization & difficulty accessing bodily sensations

* • Highly verbal but remains 'in her head', struggling to identify or locate emotional sensations.
* • Strong disconnection between body and mind, typical of very autonomous profiles who’ve held strong for others.

3. Unresolved emotional imprint of grief

* • Loss of husband during Covid, without traditional mourning support (isolation, no in-person announcement, final moments in palliative care).
* • Heightened sense of loneliness since that time.

4. Projective identification with children

* • Current emotional pain mirrors her children’s suffering (daughter abandoned, son with addiction issues).
* • Feeling powerless facing her loved ones’ pain → reactivation of her own emotional lack of support.

## Dominant Emotions

• Existential anxiety  
• Emotional loneliness  
• Masked diffuse sadness  
• Latent guilt (towards her children, her health, her past choices)

## Limiting Beliefs and Cognitive Schemas

• 'If I lose weight, it's the beginning of the end.'  
• 'I must be ready to die, but properly.'  
• 'I am alone with my anxieties.'  
• 'Analysis is not enough, but I don’t know how to feel.'

## Identified Emotional Triggers

1. Scale/weight → memory of husband’s illness.  
2. Isolation → waking without support → morning anxiety peak.  
3. Children’s suffering → painful echo of her own wounds.  
4. Inability to travel → experience of lost vitality, frustration.

## Emotional Immersion (Scenario)

It’s a grey morning. Silence fills the house. Stepping on the scale, she sees those three kilos gone. A sense of collapse. Like a spiral in her chest. Her husband’s memory creeps in. That look in his eyes, his emaciated face. The shock of the text message. 'A few months to live.' That morning, she hurriedly gets dressed. 'Let me be found dignified, clean, presentable.' Her body is on alert. The anxiety now strikes without warning. She rushes to Claude-Marie, her only refuge.

## Proposed Solutions

* Immediate Solutions
* • Emergency grounding: sternum self-massage + “4-4-8” breathing as soon as anxiety arises.
* • Verbal self-grounding: repeat aloud “I am here, I am alive, it’s not now.”
* • Symbolic preparation for end-of-life staging: conscious ritualization to deactivate the fear of dying alone.
* Intermediate Solutions
* • Continue EMDR sessions (3 to 6) to address:
* – the trauma of the SMS announcement
* – the inability to accompany her husband early on
* – current solitude in facing anxiety
* – the triggering episode of weight loss
* • Daily feeling journal (even if vague at first) to reconcile thought and sensation.
* Long-Term Solutions
* • Guided hypnosis on reconciliation with solitude: transform solitude seen as void into a space of inner connection (script to be created).
* • Immersive meditation on transmission: highlight her emotional role in the family as a keeper of memories and stories (echoing her passion for antiques).
* • Symbolic grief integration therapy: letter to husband + voice expression + symbolic burial.

## Tailored Hypnosis/Meditation Session (to be created)

Title: Taming the Shadow and Walking with the Light

Themes:  
• Deactivation of morning anxiety  
• Bodily reprogramming in response to fear of death  
• Reconciliation with the past, connection with husband, release of frozen solitude  
• Visualization of a golden thread linking the living and the dead, offering comfort.

## Follow-Up and Indicators

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| Phase | Objective | Indicator |
| Phase 1 (weeks 1–2) | Stabilize anxiety | Reduced morning urgency |
| Phase 2 (weeks 3–6) | Process traumatic memories | SMS memory = neutral emotion |
| Phase 3 (months 2–4) | Positive anchoring and reopening to projects | Plan a trip or antique project |
| Phase 4 (month 4+) | Relapse prevention | Create a personal grounding ritual |

## Crisis Prevention Mode

• Quick body-based grounding technique for nocturnal or morning anxiety.  
• Fast emotional check-in using a printed visual scale (green/orange/red) near the bed.

## Final Motivational Phrase

You have faced the grief journey with immense dignity. Today, it’s not the end you need to prepare for, but the rest of your journey. You are not alone. Your heart still beats for precious things, and your memories are not chains: they are bridges to peace.