

GWEN MONOLOGUE

(In the casket lies Allie, draped in linen, motionless.)

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.

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

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 –

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.

I have them. I took them.

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...

ALLIE MONOLOGUE

ALLIE: Ok. Here goes. First, I want to thank you for what you said to me when I was in there. Audacious. Bold. I love that. Most people just call me loud. But you see more.

I don't have your words so I can't return the favour. But that doesn't mean I don't care. I wanted this to work. It's true I didn't need it like you did. But the bit that means the most – the being in it together – that's what I won't give up on.

So here's the thing. I read this article a while ago – about two friends. Two women. They look after each other. Because – because they mean as much to each other as anyone ever did. They're not looking for a romance, they've been burnt too often before. I get that. You get that too. But they'd love to share life with someone. I couldn't stop thinking about it. It could be us. We could make a commitment to be there. Like we always have been anyway. But for real. Pool our resources. Move in together. Maybe we could even afford to buy something if we're careful. You could take some time to figure out what you want to do next.

You're a bit too good at playing dead. (Pause) Ok, my turn's over. Gwen? Don't leave me hanging. If you hate the idea you can just tell me.

ROWENA MONOLOGUE

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.

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.

CLIENT: JACQUI

JACQUI: *(With her dog, taking a selfie video.)* 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?

JACQUI: Oh sorry honey, I didn't know you could hear me...*(Buster bites the phone.)*
Buster! Shhh! Give me that – Buster!

MAN'S VOICE: What the hell..!

CLIENTS: JULIE & JOHN

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

JOHN: Shhhh.

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.

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! And close your eyes. 28 minutes to go.

JULIE: I hate this song.

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

CLIENTS: ED & ELLIE

ED: Now come on – we’ve only got an hour. Don’t want to waste a second.

ELLIE: It just doesn’t feel like I thought it would. I thought it would be really hot – but it’s actually, like...

ED: What?

ELLIE: Creepy.

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

ELLIE: Promise?

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

ELLIE: Yeah... ok.

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

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

ED: Ellie – come on. It won’t shut.

ELLIE: Well – you can be pretty...you know.

ED: Pretty what?

ELLIE: Full on. Like, physical and stuff.

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

ELLIE: Oh – it is. But I don’t want to get locked in that thing.

ED: Could be extra hot.

ELLIE: I don’t rate suffocating in a coffin!

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

ELLIE: Ed! No. I’m up for wild, but not completely stupid.

ED: Babe – you worry too much.

ELLIE: I just want to check.

ED: Ok – first get your top off, then I’ll check. Mmmm...

ELLIE: That’s it. Till you check.

ED: Fine.

TESS & ROWENA

ROWENA: You heard every last word I said, didn't you?

TESS: Yes.

ROWENA: That was private. Why didn't you reveal yourself?

TESS: You picked the lock. I thought you were a burglar.

ROWENA: Do you often see elderly ladies conducting break and enters? You must have seen me.

TESS: I did.

ROWENA: You could have said something.

TESS: I guess I should have. But then I thought you were a – a...

ROWENA: A what?

TESS: I dunno. A sort of a – a witch I guess.

ROWENA: A witch.

TESS: It's what you're wearing. Seriously, who wears a cape? And in the dark you were...well...

ROWENA: Well what? Old?

TESS: Ummm –

ROWENA: Ugly?

TESS: No!

ROWENA: Terrifying?

TESS: Yes! For a moment. And – well, now, too.

ROWENA: I see. Would you like me to pull back a bit?

TESS: I would. Thank you.

ROWENA: You know exactly why I'm here. But I still have no idea why you are.

TESS: I was trying to – uh –

ROWENA: For heaven's sake, spit it out.

TESS: Fine! Wow. Is that the pulled back version? I came here as a personal challenge.

ROWENA: Of what sort?

TESS: I – I get scared. This coffin thing freaked me out. I made a total fool of myself the other day in front of Mum and Gwen. I wanted to try and conquer my fear of it.

ROWENA: How?

TESS: Just by being here. On my own. In the dark. For an hour.

ROWENA: How did it go?

TESS: Well the first two minutes were ok. Then you rocked up.

ROWENA: I see.

TESS: Can we please turn the lights on?

ROWENA: Certainly. Do you know where the switch is?

TESS: I actually do.

(Tess turns on the lights and sighs with relief.)

ROWENA: You're scared of the dark?

TESS: Yes.

ROWENA: Dear me.

TESS: Yeah, I know. Listen - I'm sorry. I think I'll just – I'm going to go. I never want to see this place again.

ROWENA: I – uh...

TESS: Yes?

ROWENA: I have some regrets. About what's happened here tonight.

TESS: I said I'm sorry, ok?

ROWENA: No, I mean...

TESS: Just spit it out why don't you?

ROWENA: I suppose I deserved that. Very well. I'm sorry too.

TESS: Thank you. You know – you could just say that to Gwen. She's a great person. She'll give you another chance. I know it's none of my business, but...

ROWENA: You're right.

TESS: Really?

ROWENA: It's none of your business.

TESS: Huh. You know, my Mum told me what you did here the other day. She always calls you a 'piece of work'. I thought she must be exaggerating. She does that. Now I can see what she means. But tonight I saw something she never did.

ROWENA: Do share your unique insight.

TESS: Maybe if you just pull back the claws and speak to Gwen like you were speaking to your sister, you could get things back on track. You'd both be so much happier. She was beautiful. Just like Gwen.

ROWENA: Yes. Just like Gwen.

TESS: I don't want to leave you here on your own. I'll – I'll wait outside. Take your time and I'll see you to your car.

ROWENA: There's no need.

TESS: Wow. You're really hard work. You know you could just say thanks, right?

ROWENA: Thank you.

ALLIE & GWEN

ALLIE: Please tell me it's true! Do you really have them? Pass me the damn box! 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. 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.