

THE INHERITANCE

A TEN-MINUTE
MONOLOGUE

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SYNOPSIS

The Inheritance is a powerful 10-minute monologue in which a prison guard confronts the emotional legacy left to him by a deceased prisoner who reminded him too closely of himself. Through a box of unsent letters – an unexpected inheritance – the guard is forced to face his own history of depression, shame, and quiet survival. What begins as judgment turns into recognition, as the guard realises the “worthlessness” he once projected onto others was his own unspoken pain. The gift of the letters becomes a burden and a blessing, compelling him to reject a promotion, abandon emotional armour, and finally accept that survival itself is an act of courage. The monologue explores mental illness, dignity, and the unanticipated consequences of truth, leaving the audience with a quiet but devastating affirmation of human worth.

CHARACTERS

David (Dave) Rourke

Prison Guard

*LIGHTS UP. A PRISON CORRIDOR. NIGHT
SHIFT. A GUARD STANDS OUTSIDE A CELL,
HOLDING A SMALL CARDBOARD BOX.*

DAVE: They said it was yours.
What's the word they used?
Inheritance.
As if you were royalty.
As if you owned something other than time and regret.
They handed me this box and said, "He left it for you."
Not for his family.
Not for the system.
Not for God.
For me.
And I almost laughed.
Because what kind of idiot leaves his inheritance to a
prison guard?

HE LOOKS AT THE BOX.

You didn't leave money.
You didn't leave jewellery.
You didn't leave anything you could sell.
You left... paper.
Letters.
Pages.
Words.

The one thing I've spent my life pretending not to need.

BEAT.

Before you arrived here, I already knew you.

Not your name.

Not your crime.

I knew your posture.

That way of sitting like you're apologising for taking up space.

That way of standing like gravity is personal.

That way of looking at people like you're bracing for disappointment.

You walked in carrying what I carried.

Only difference is, you stopped hiding it.

And I hated you for that.

Because I worked very hard to look like I was coping.

HE EXHALES.

You used to look at me like I was the strong one.

You were wrong.

I was just louder in my silence.

I built a life around being useful instead of being honest.

Around routine instead of relief.

Around survival instead of living.

And when you arrived... you reminded me of every version of myself I tried to bury.

HE LIFTS ONE LETTER.

You wrote about hospital rooms.

Not the dramatic kind.

The quiet ones.

The kind where the ceiling is too clean, and the thoughts are too loud.

You wrote about medication.

How it kept you alive but changed your body.

How you didn't recognise yourself in mirrors anymore.

How you were grateful and angry at the same time.

You wrote about feeling like a burden.

Like you were expensive to love.

Like people had to work to keep you breathing.

You wrote about mornings where getting out of bed felt like climbing out of a grave you hadn't earned yet.

You wrote about the shame of surviving when you didn't feel heroic.

BEAT.

I read every word.

I told myself I was doing it as a duty.

As a professional courtesy.

That's the lie I used.

The truth is – I was reading myself.

You didn't write anything I hadn't thought.

You just had the courage to admit it.

HE CLOSES HIS EYES, BRIEFLY.

You know what I hated most?

You still wanted things.

You still wanted to write.

To perform.

To matter.

You still believed your voice deserved air.

Even when you didn't believe you deserved rest.

And that made me angry.

Because I had stopped wanting.

I had replaced wanting with functioning.

*HE SHIFTS, SITS ON A CHAIR OR LEANS
AGAINST THE WALL.*

You called it depression.

I called it discipline.

You called it illness.

I called it weakness.

You called it fear.

I called it realism.

And then you handed me this box.

And ruined all my excuses.

BEAT.

The inheritance came with a condition.

You wrote it on the inside of the lid.

"Read this when you're ready to stop pretending you're better than me."

You absolute bastard.

A SAD SMILE.

I thought I was inheriting your story.

I inherited my own.

You made me look at all the ways I learned to survive instead of heal.

All the ways I learned to stand instead of feel.

All the ways I learned to punish myself quietly so no one would call it pain.

HE STANDS.

You wrote about wanting to disappear – not dramatically – just gently.

You didn't want to die.

You wanted the noise to stop.

You wanted rest without guilt.

You wanted relief without explanation.

You wanted to stop negotiating with your own head.

And I finally understood something:

The mind doesn't want death.

It wants peace.

It just doesn't know the difference anymore.

BEAT.

They offered me a promotion last week.

Training officer.

Power.

Authority.

Respect.

A better title.

Another uniform with more stitching.

That was my inheritance.

My reward for staying upright.

And when they offered it, I thought of you.

Of this box.

Of what it would cost me.

Because taking that job meant staying exactly who I've been.

And reading your letters meant changing.

And change... comes with consequences.

Unanticipated ones.

Like grief.

Like honesty.

Like finally admitting you're not as strong as your posture.

HE PICKS UP ANOTHER LETTER.

You wrote about shame.

How it sticks longer than pain.

How it whispers when the room is quiet.

How it tells you your survival was a mistake.

How it tells you you're only tolerated, never wanted.

How it tells you you're lucky anyone stayed.

And then, in the same paragraph, you wrote about hope.

Not optimism.

Not joy.

Hope.

The stubborn kind.

The kind that says, "I don't feel better, but I'm still here."

That line broke me.

Because that's not weakness.

That's courage.

BEAT.

You gave me knowledge.

That was the inheritance.

Not facts.

Truth.

The truth that survival doesn't look like victory.

It looks like staying.

It looks like eating when you don't care.

It looks like breathing when you're tired of trying.

It looks like letting someone see you unfinished.

HE PUTS THE LETTER BACK IN THE BOX.

I used to think worth was earned.

I thought you had to justify your existence.

You taught me worth is not a performance.

It's a permission.

And I realised something awful.

I had spent my whole life denying myself the permission
I would give you without hesitation.

BEAT.

You didn't just leave me a box.

You left me responsibility.

To do something with what you gave me.

To live differently.

To stop using strength as camouflage.

To stop treating survival like a crime.

HE BREATHES.

I don't know if you ever believed you mattered.

But you changed the man with the keys.

You altered the future of someone who thought he was
finished evolving.

You made me choose between comfort and truth.

And I chose truth.

It hurts more.

But it feels real.

HE LOOKS AT THE CELL.

You were never worthless.

You were exhausted.

You were ill.

You were human.

You were brave enough to stay when staying felt
pointless.

And now your inheritance sits in my hands like a
promise.

Not to be strong.

But to be honest.

BEAT.

I don't wear the promotion badge.

I turned it down.

That's the part no one expected.

That's the consequence they didn't plan for.

I told them I needed to learn how to be a person before
I taught anyone how to be a guard.

HE SMILES.

You gave me that.

You didn't leave me money.

You left me permission.

HE CLOSES THE BOX SLOWLY.

And I swear to you...

I will carry it properly.

I will speak softer.

I will judge slower.

I will remember that every person I lock away is
fighting something I can't see.

I will remember that survival is not weakness.

It is resistance.

HE TURNS TO GO, THEN STOPS.

You once wrote:

"I don't know if I matter, but I know I'm still here."

That was enough.

That will always be enough.

HE EXITS CARRYING THE BOX.