

# The Break: 10 The Hard Way

By Cliff Burns

This monologue has been selected from a one-person show on the theme of relationships breaking up. There are ten monologues written for ten separate characters, with a wide range of emotions depicted. Though written from a male perspective, either gender can play the role for the purpose of the classroom exercise. Strong language has been used in some cases, feel free to adapt it as needed.

Questions to consider as you prepare this monologue piece:

- 1) Who is the person speaking? List qualities of the person's character.  
What do you think they look like?
- 2) To whom is the monologue addressed? What is the relationship to this person?

*Note: A simple, minimalist set--a generic sofa placed slightly off-centre; a small coffee table in front of it containing a push button telephone, a scatter of magazines, beer bottles, etc., whatever each scene requires.)*

X.

*(Even before the lights come up, he can be heard. Talking on the phone, his tone unctuous, ingratiating, repentant. But as soon as he is visible, the ruse is transparent, the apologies self-serving, insincere:)*

I know....I *know*. What can I say? You're right, everything you're saying...you're one hundred per cent right.

But if I could just--no, don't worry, I'm not going to make any excuses for myself. What would be the point? You know what I am now --you've figured out the score. I won't even try to pretend that I'm a good person, that there's a single ounce of decency in me. There's no possible explanation or reason for what I did. It was unforgiveable, a total betrayal of you and--and everything you represent: love, trust, loyalty. How can I ever excuse something like that?

*(But his demeanor and mien give him away. He carelessly plucks lint off his shirt, pages distractedly through a magazine on the table, barely listening as she prattles into his ear.)*

And I'm not asking for another chance. That would--I know I don't have the right, I haven't got a right to *anything* right now. Why you're even bothering to talk to me is a complete mystery to me. If I was in your shoes I--I'd do something like take out a contract on me or...nail a dead cat to my door. I'm *serious*. I'd deserve it.

*(Getting down to business:)*

Why I called...like I said, I know I can't expect your forgiveness, not in a billion years. That's completely out of the question. And, believe me, that thought has never crossed my mind. What I wanted to say, what I *have* to say, for my own peace of mind if nothing else, is that I'm sorry. I know that sounds lame--the two most over-used words in the English language, right? But regardless of whatever else you might think and even if you hate my guts and, like I said, never want to see my face again, I want you to know that, sincerely, from the bottom of my heart: *I'm sorry*. For everything. For being alive and--and breathing the same air as you...

What can I say? I'm a horrible person, the absolute worst person in the universe. Call me any name you want and I'll agree with you--I'll even throw in a few of my own.

I could be on the phone with you all night long and I still wouldn't be able to explain what happened or *why* it happened...to tell you the honest to God truth, I don't know myself. Maybe I suffered a temporary form of insanity...but, like I said, it doesn't matter and there's no point going into it. Even if I had all the time in the world it wouldn't change anything, nothing that happened can be undone and I just have to accept that. I had my chance and I blew it. Blew it forever.

*(Not moving from his comfortable position on the sofa.)*

You know what I'm doing right now? I'm getting down on my knees and you know why? I'm not going to ask you to forgive me but I do want to say, with as much humbleness as I can, that you are the last person in the world I would ever want to hurt. I am. I'm on my knees here. If anyone walked in right now they'd think I was praying or something. Don't forgive me, don't say anything if you don't want to. Just know that I'm sorry and--and then hang up and forget all about me, put me out of your mind and get on with your life.

Is this getting too heavy for you? Am I freaking you out? Okay, well, thanks. Thanks for giving me the opportunity. Not that I'll find it any easier to live with myself.

*(Reaching over and opening a can of pop, resting it on his chest.)*

I honestly and truthfully don't want you to forgive me and...I don't want *me* to forgive me. I want to wallow in my misery and guilt. I want it to keep me awake at night and I want it to be the first thing I think of every morning. I hope it ruins my life, I really do. That's

not nearly enough but that's, you know, at least part of the price I'm willing to pay for what I did to you.

*(Listens to her; starting to smile, a small, thin rictus of a grin.)*

You don't have to say that. You *shouldn't* say that. That's almost letting me off too easy. Instead you should--God, I don't know...

*(Hitching in his breath; an ersatz sob.)*

I'm sorry, I can feel myself getting all emotional on you here and--and I don't want you to have to deal with that. Listen, I'd better go...before I start bawling or something. You really don't need that right now. Unless that would make you feel better. I'll blubber my head off if that would give you any satisfaction. It's not like I haven't made *you* cry. I'll bet you've cried an ocean, haven't you? I wish I could catch each and every one of those tears and collect them and--and drown myself in them.

*(Grimacing at the tacky imagery.)*

But you *should* want that. You should wish the worst things in the world on me: death, tax audits, Jehovah's Witnesses--hey, did you just laugh? Was that my imagination or--wow, well, at least I've accomplished something tonight. Boy, it's good to hear you laugh again. Almost like...never mind. I just started to say, you know, it was like old times. Stupid. Shouldn't have said it.

*(Suddenly becoming more alert, radiating a potent charm.)*

It's *so* good talking to you again. As soon as you picked up the phone--I mean, I was scared to death but at the same time it was *you*, your voice, and I almost couldn't bring myself to say anything.

Okay, you want to hear something? And this is the honest to God truth. I ended up changing my mind, couldn't bring myself to do it but I had this speech all worked up in my mind. I practically memorized it...but as soon as I heard you, I knew I couldn't say it. That it would sound completely lame and--and inadequate or inappropriate or...I don't know.

Because...right off the bat I was making the assumption that some day, maybe even years from now, you'd be able to forgive me. That I was *worth* forgiving. See, that was the flaw, that's what kept me from--from insulting your intelligence and not recognizing that it's gone too far and nothing can ever make it right again.

*(A huge grin, pumping his fist in the air in triumph.)*

No, believe me, it was a stupid idea. You'd laugh in my face. Not that you don't have a right to. No, really, it's--it would be a complete waste of your time. Forget I even mentioned it--

You're right. You're absolutely right. There's nothing I should deny you right now, is there? Anything you ask I should leap at the chance. And if you laugh, all the better. Really, laugh your head off. Have a good chuckle at my expense. Because I'm nothing but a joke. A huge joke on the human race.

Okay, are you comfortable? Because this might take awhile. I'm not keeping you from anything am I?

Right off the bat I should say that, you know, if I'm going to do this right, you have picture me getting down on one knee in front of you and just...cutting loose. Just picture that in your mind as you're listening. That's really important, okay?

*(Covering the phone, snorting in derision.)*

Oh, yeah, I'll bet you'd like that. I mean, it's bad enough that I'm going to lay myself bare to you on the phone. In person it would be like a thousand times worse. I'm serious. This is gonna be one of the all-time great sob stories. A real tear jerker. If you wanna see someone totally humbled and losing it in front of you--

Jeez, I don't know. It's kind of late and I wouldn't want to wreck your evening. Probably just seeing me would do that. *Really?* But don't you think it would be, you know...too much for you? Wouldn't it just be a reminder--you're right. Sure. It's totally up to you. But...I guess what it comes down to is I don't want to end up hurting you again. I had my chance and I messed up and seeing me again, even for a few minutes might--

Well...

*(Pause, drawing out the moment.)*

I gotta tell you, it *is* a pretty good speech. And I swear to God it's totally, one hundred per cent sincere. One right from the heart.

Okay. Well, if you're *sure* about this. You're sure, right? Okay, *okay*, I believe you. I'll be there. I'm hanging up right now and I'll come right over. You bet. See you soon.

*(He breaks the connection, claps his hands together in satisfaction, an almost sensual surge of pleasure.)*

Whew.

*(Stretching languorously, scratching himself, etc.)*

Man, you are sooo slick...

*(Gets up, grabs his jacket and exits the stage.*

*Lights gradually diminish, darkness, and then:)*