

Tru

by Jay Presson Allen

From the Words and Works of
Truman Capote

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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There will also be a program credit substantially as follows:

**TRU is being presented by special arrangement with the Estate of
Truman Capote, Alan U. Schwartz, Executor**

TRU was first presented on Broadway, on December 14, 1989, at the Booth Theatre in New York City, by Lewis Allen, David Brown, Suntory International Corporation, and The Shubert Organization, in association with The Landmark Entertainment Group, by arrangement with The Truman Capote Estate. The sets were designed by David Mitchell, with costume design by Sarah Edwards, lighting by Ken Billington and Jason Kantrowitz, sound design by Otts Munderloh, make-up design by Kevin Haney, wig design by Paul Huntley, general management by Stuart Thompson, production stage management by Ruth Kreshka, and stage management by Jane Grey. The director was Jay Presson Allen. The cast was as follows:

TRUMAN CAPOTE	Robert Morse
VOICE OF JAN	Jayne Atkinson
VOICE OF TELEPHONE OPERATOR	Jill Choder
VOICE OF MRS. FERGUSON	Sarah Schiff
VOICE OF SECRETARY	Jeanne Tripplehorn

CHARACTERS

TRUMAN CAPOTE

VOICE OF JAN

VOICE OF TELEPHONE OPERATOR

VOICE OF MRS. FERGUSON

VOICE OF SECRETARY

ACT 1

(On the curtain is an enormous blowup of the November 1975 issue of Esquire magazine. It is a photograph of Truman Capote who teasingly regards the viewer from under a big black hat... in his hand a dagger, the sharp and shiny blade of which is tipping the hat's brim in a sly salute. The hat, the trenchcoat, the unsheathed knife imply that here is a spy, a man of dangerous secrets. His expression implies that he might ...out of sheer mischief ...reveal those secrets.)

(The curtain remains down as the sound of Louis Armstrong's A Kiss to Build a Dream On comes up. Armstrong sings several bars before we hear a phone ringing. It rings three times, then the volume is turned down on the music. Phone rings once more before it is answered.)*

TRUMAN'S VOICE. *(recorded)* Yee-esss?...Sugar? Where have you been? These days when someone doesn't call me right back I tend to get a trifle...agitated?...Oh day before yesterday. On the redeye ...A last minute booking on *The Today Show*. Oh, just to fire a warning shot, let them know I'm back in town. Armed and dangerous. *(laughs)* So what's up? Anything happening to anybody besides me? Have you seen the Spook?...He has?...He did?...And she was with him? Whenever I see those two together I ask myself one question. What do they do? I believe they have invented a new vice. In what it consists I dare not guess.

(The curtain rises.)

(live) ...but I believe...

*See Music Use Note on page 3.

(We see TRUMAN on a sofa in his U.N. Plaza apartment. He is sitting on the arm of a sofa, unraveling a string of christmas tree lights. A large tree is stage left. TRUMAN wears slacks, a turtle-necked sweater and a windbreaker. His feet are in fleece-lined slippers, and on his head is an Irish tweed hat set at a rakish tilt.)

TRUMAN. *(into the phone)* I do believe...it has something to do with frogs...yes.

(Sound of service doorbell. TRUMAN rises.)

Bells are ringing. Backdoor. Could it be the Three Magi? Don't go away...I'm coming, don't slam the door.

(He walks out to answer service door. We have a moment to take in the room which is the dining end of a large living space. The dining table is covered with packages and wrapping paper and Christmas decorations. This area also contains bookshelves and a sofa and chairs. The place is cozy and personal; the owner's ad hoc possessions, his very personality overcoming the decorator's hand. There is a great abundance of furniture, pictures, objects.)

Oh Lordy! I see it but I don't believe it!

(TRUMAN returns, his hands filled with a pot of red poinsettias which he deposits on the floor and regards with dismay. He returns to the phone.)

You can't conceive what just arrived. A veritable horse trough of unspeakable poinsettias... No, I do not know who from. I am going to dispose of the card sight unseen. It would shock and appall me to learn that somebody I like or even know would send me such a tacky thing. Poinsettias are the Bob Goulet of Botany. Now. I need a little dirt fix. What is everybody up to?... Me? Oh precious, my life is being conducted on the highest possible plane. Don't let me even commence. Two glasses of wine, maximum. I swear...Why?... Because I am in New York to hold my head high and

show the flag, not to roll in the gutter and gratify my enemies. So every evening I go out on my rounds and, my dear, I've been to seven parties in two days. Not bad for a social pariah...I carry a half-full glass of wine for hours to confound their spies! Hehehe...of course last night I came home desperately sober at three a.m. and gobbled up an entire box of chocolate truffles...then, of course, I had to go and take two tetracyclines so my face wouldn't break out!

(Laughs - the phone rings.)

Other line. Hang on... *(punches button)* Yee...essss? Oh, hi! I want to talk to you. Let me say goodbye to the divine Miss G. Hang on. *(punches button)* Sweetie, it's the gossip Avvocato. I'll have to call you back. These are desperate times, dear, and lawyers take precedence. But I adore you, you gorgeous thing. Don't you ever die! Hugs, kiss, kiss. *(Quickly switches lines, manner changes. He sits up. All business.)* Thanks for getting back so fast with the contract memos...Yes, I did. Down to the last wherefore and whereas. It looks pretty good to me... Well, a nonrefundable advance of one hundred and eighty seven thousand five for reprint rights? Not too shabby. I say let's grab it and run...Uh-huh.... Uh-huh ...yeesss, I am sitting down. Why?... *(As he listens, his eyes narrow.)* Oh yeah? I don't suppose Mr. Billy Redanty was careless enough to let you find out where he was calling you from?... Uh-huh...Well, if that pig-turd calls again, you tell him I've got my bone-cruncher out looking for him with a baseball bat, and it is my Christmas prayer that when he finds him, he will kill him. Okay? Will you just convey that message to Mr. Redanty?...And Avvocato dear, you know I'm serious. Rick's really lookin for Billy. And if he finds him, I'm gonna need a criminal lawyer. Now if you don't mind, I would like to elevate the tone of this conversation. What I wanted to tell you is I've decided to let Gerald Clarke have whatever he thinks he needs, so if he calls and asks for stuff from the files...Why not? All

my life I've told things about myself that would make a baboon blush blue. I've been spilling the beans ever since I could talk. So my Boswell isn't exactly plowing virgin soil...Well... I'll, maybe a little discretion with the files. Hehehe. But I'm here to tell you, hon, letting down your hair with your biographer is very soothing. You can't imagine his tendresse and how he absolutely hangs on every word... *(listens a moment, then shrugs)* Oh, well...

(sings)

TRUMAN. *(cont.)* Don't worry, sugar. Like the man said, it's a long life, and "mostly untrue."

(roars with laughter) Listen. I'm going for drinks at Jan's, then we're meeting Ava Gardner and her crowd at Quo Vadis. Want to join us? Good for business, Avvocato. That outfit around Ava is very vivacious, if you know what I mean. They frequently find themselves in need of skilled courtroom advocates...Well, too bad then. And Listen. And I'm expecting that forty-five thousand from Columbia on time. Because Christmas is going to be very expensive this year. I'm giving stuff from Tiffany's and I'm getting poinsettias!

(With a big explosive laugh, he hangs up. Sits still for a moment, staring blankly. Then he rises purposefully and goes to stereo set, turns up volume. Armstrong is now in the middle of La Vie En Rose. TRUMAN turns to Christmas tree and begins to string lights. Armstrong finishes La Vie and begins Basin St. Blues. TRUMAN listens, smiles faintly and moves easily into a quick little soft shoe step. He holds the pose a minute, goes to stereo and takes out the Armstrong tape.)*

I love ya, Louie, but we need something merry.

(He puts in another tape. It is the Supremes' Boy from Ipanema. He nods, turns it fairly low, then he moves to pick up a small dictating machine, clicks it on, speaks into it.)*

*See Music Use Note on page 3.

For the ears of Gerald Clarke. Gary, know when I told you about my early encounter with Louis Armstrong?... Gary, I could just see you figuring, okay, you could write, "Truman claimed when he was four he danced on a riverboat where Louis Armstrong played. He claimed Armstrong called him a fine little dancer and took up a collection for him." (*drinks from his glass*) I could just see the clanking around in your head, Gary. But I did dance with Louis Armstrong, and I know where to find a corroborating witness. You're just gonna have to learn to trust me. I have lived an astonishing life. I've known everybody. (*sits cross-legged on hassock, settling in to tell the machine a story*) I bet I'm the only person in the world who knew Sirhan Sirhan and Robert Kennedy who also knew Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Kennedy. The odds against that...one person knowing all four of those men...odds beyond reckoning, my dear. I met Oswald in Moscow just after he defected.

Out of five people killed in the Tate house the night Mr. Manson came to call, I knew four of the victims independently of each other. (Quite a coincidence.) I knew Garbo and Chaplin since my very first visit to Hollywood. I knew Marilyn Monroe well. I knew Martin Luther King and I knew Adlai Stevenson. As a matter of fact, we were staying in the same house when he died. When I heard I quickly ran in and chose one of his neckties. A very nice man. (*a beat*) Andy Warhol once confided me and me alone that he'd always wanted someone to call him "Daddy". So Gary, when I tell you I once tap danced on a riverboat with Louis Armstrong...know what I mean, Gary?

(*Grins, flips off recorder. Looks out at audience. Stands, walks downstage, speaks directly to the audience.*)

I've known everybody, And I've lived all over the world ...in this country I've lived in Louisiana, Alabama, Connecticut, Brooklyn, Mississippi, Manhattan, Long Island, Kansas, Palm Springs. And at a further remove, Moscow, Italy, France, Switzerland...I went to Staten

Island once. It was like Australia. (*gestures the room*) This is my apartment in the United Nations Plaza on New York's East River. I've had Johnny and Joanne Carson and Robert Kennedy for neighbors and we all have these fantastic views. (*gestures the expanse of windows*) We all look out on the United Nations. It's lovely to sit here with drinks and this phonograph on just at twilight, when all the lights in the city begin to go on. So stick around. (*begins to move around the space, pointing out a variety of objects*) What else can I tell you? I collect stuff...paperweights...(*picks one up, holds it for the audience to see*)

TRUMAN. (*cont.*) This one was given to me many years ago by Colette. Baccarat. It's now worth fifteen grand. (*puts paperweight down, gestures book cases*) Books, books, ever more books. A number of plaster cast...inappropriate Victoriana... (*happily*) I am the Decorator's Despair. Poor lady. Such good taste. However. Good taste is the death of art, you know. (*gestures entire room*)

Anyway, I collect things like a magpie. However, I don't love them much once I've got them. I have very little sense of possession. If I have learned anything, it is that you can't ever really own anything- (*laughs*) You're just sitting there waiting for me to say, "especially," Right? Wellllll, I guess we've all noticed how you can never, never own another person. But another person can own you. It's a very strange equation.

Like my hat? I wear hats a lot now... (*takes it off, shakes his head and runs fingers through his badly thinning hair*)

The receding locks of the aging poet. The Poet Laureate of the Lavatory Wall. (*beat*) That's what they're saying, anyway. At this particular moment in my life I stand accused of obscene treachery and betrayal because three months ago to sort of jolt myself out of a depression, I let *Esquire* publish a chapter from a novel I've been working on for twenty years. The novel's called

Answered Prayers. The title's from St. Teresa of Avila. She wrote, "More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones." St. Teresa was one sharp little cookie cutter.

Anyway, *Answered Prayers* is the book I've been in training for my whole life. It's going to be my *Vanity Fair*, my *Remembrance Of Things Past*. You know how they say everybody has one book in them? Well, I've written a lot of books, but basically I've always had this one book to justify...everything.

What's it about? *Answered Prayers* is about them. The Super Rich. As seen through the eyes of an outsider who for various reasons has privileged access. Hehehe, It's about sexual license and ethical squalor. Sexual license and ethical squalor.

(cheerfully) Camus once said, "My God, I've only written a tenth of what I know and they're already screaming." I know what he meant!

All this brouhaha over that one little chapter? Which was nothing really but a very truthful and may I say witty account of a bunch of silly people sitting in a restaurant dishing the dirt on each other. I used a couple of real names and certain attributes of some others... but my God, you'd think I killed the Lindbergh baby! What's the big deal! (*He takes out a clipping.*) Want to hear what Liz Smith wrote in *New York Magazine*? "Truman Capote in Hot Water: Society's sacred monsters are in a state of shock. Never have you heard such gnashing of teeth, such shouts of betrayal." As if I were Franklin Roosevelt...a traitor to my class. Which is hog-dash. I am not one of them. I am an artist. Artists belong to no class. And people like that who cozy up to artists do sat their own risk.

(*A grim little smile. Laughs, suddenly eyeing the poinsettias, he puts his drink down. Goes to phone and dials, his call is answered immediately.*)

TRUMAN. (*cont.*) Jimmy H., this is Mr. Capote. I 'm going to put a recently orphaned poinsettia plant out the back door for anyone who wants to give it a good home. Okay?

(He hangs up, picks up the plant, starts out of the room. He sings If Ever I Would Leave You. The phone rings. He hesitates, then continues out. On the third ring we hear TRUMAN's voice on the tape:)*

TRUMAN'S VOICE. Hellloo. I'm not in right now. When you hear the beep, just do yo' stuff.

(We then hear Truman's back door close, then the tape's beep. TRUMAN re-enters the room as a young woman's voice comes over the phone.)

VOICE. Mr. Capote, this is Betty, Mrs. White's secretary. Mrs. White had to go to the dentist and asked me to call you about a couple of inquiries. One from this ladies' literary society in Louisville, offering to almost double your fee. It's for the week of February seventh. That would set a precedent and Mrs. White said if you took this gig for that fee, she could maybe up your price on the whole circuit...

(TRUMAN clicks on the phone.)

TRUMAN. Oh, that's wonderful. Listen, hon, when Irene gets back in, ask her when Norman Mailer stabbed his wife, how much his fee went up? (*He hangs up. To audience:*) It's television. I used to be famous because I wrote books. Now I'm famous for being famous. Fame is only good for one thing...they'll cash your check in a small town.

So where was I? Oh yes. The Rich...and I don't count anyone as really rich who cannot quickly summon up fifty million in hard currency and I spent twenty years in the company of the big rich. I've flown everywhere in their planes—jets with queen-sized beds and marble loos and extensive video libraries of pornography. I've

*See Music Use Note on page 3.

eaten their wonderful fetal food, their little fresh-born vegetables...the baby lamb that has been ripped from its mother's womb...they eat well and take great care of their bodies. And they never hit you up for a loan. *(laughs)* Speaking of taking care of your body...

(He starts to jog easily in place.)

My idea of exercise is massage, with me being the massegee, not the masseur. Isn't it boring? But the Rich... most of them are pretty sad. Most of them would be totally lost without their money. That's why it means so much to them. Why they're so fixated on the subject.

(stops jogging, comes forward)

One time I was on the Agnelli yacht with Gianni and Marella and Princess Pignatelli, and about six other guests. Well, we were cruising on the Yugoslav coast. The Princess was just about to go to America. Every day, up and on the top deck, the princess was doing endless exercises. Stretching, bending, sunning, keeping herself slim and gilt. When she wasn't primping she was reading a book. It was a book in English. She read every word with her lips. It was slow going and I became fascinated as to the contents of this book that the gorgeous Luciana was reading with such forbidding intensity. So one day I sneaked over and I peeked at the cover. The title of it was, *The One Hundred Richest Americans*. A couple of days later we were steaming out of some little Jugland harbor where we'd taken on a lot of fresh vegetables and fruit. We all sat down to lunch and the steward served the first course which consisted of these rather exceptional melons. Marella tasted her melon and she said, "Oh, how absolutely divine. I could get drunk and disorderly on melons. Where did they come from?" Whereupon, the Princess perks up her ears and says, "The Mellons? The Mellons?—They come from Pittsburgh."

(Big laugh. He goes for another drink.)

TRUMAN. (*cont.*) Money, money, money! They're very nervous with you if they think you don't have any. That's why they hang together so desperately. It's not that they like each other...they don't. A yacht and five houses are what they have in common. And they get very bored with each other. So when they can, they try to take in amusing artists...If they were smart, they'd confine their patronage to the merely artistic. No billionaire ever got bit by Mario Buatta. (*takes a sip of his drink, walks back downstage, speaks familiarly*)

Any normal person with a normal sense of self-preservation would understand that all any artist has is his life and what he observes as he passes through his life. Any serious writer hanging out for years with the rich...You would have to be deluded to the point of derangement not to know that that writer was taking notes. My God, I even told them. Everybody knew I was writing this book. What did they think I was there for? The intellectual stimulation? The wit? The spiritual uplift? I'm the one who brought intellect and wit to the party. Yes, and the spiritual uplift, too, if anybody was buying. So. So. A few doors have been temporarily closed. Gloria Vanderbilt, the Paley's, the Whitneys, the Cowles, Lady Keith...I am being punished for having the bad taste to write humorously about a few of their crowd's less appetizing, what shall I say? Attitudes? And in a rage of sycophancy their hangers-on, their pilot-fish are violently vindictive. For instance, my own agent, Mr. Swifty Lazar...first time in fifteen years he didn't invite me to one of his big parties. Well, that ought to bring me to my senses! What they want is for me to grovel at their feet...maybe take a judicious little overdose and check in to Payne Whitney. Have my shrink call and say it's from a broken heart...Well, as my good friend Norman Mailer used to write, "fug' em." I am an artist and I am writing a masterpiece and they are wrong. In any event, I don't give a shit about any of them except the

Paleys and Slim Keith. Only those three. And I'm confident that in time Babe and Slim will come around. Very confident. (*talks to self*)

Maybe you're the kind of people that never talk to yourselves. Aloud, I mean. Personally, I've done it all my life. And I consider it healthy. You get a lot of stuff out of your system. I like to talk to myself and about myself. So there. I was born in New Orleans and named Truman Streckfuss Persons. Some years later I took my stepfather's name, Capote. When I was a child, I was called Buddy or Little T. Since I came to New York to work when I was seventeen, some good friends started to call me Tru. Which has a resonance I like. Tru. I've been a writer since I was eight years old. When I was eight I just started writing. Out of the blue, uninspired by any example. I'd never known anyone who wrote. I'd known very few who even read. Even my ambition to be a tap dancer was more acceptable to the people that I lived with than the idea of a writer in their midst. So write I did and write I do. (*a big smile*) Actually, I think I would have been good at anything I'd wanted to do. I'm very ept. I can ice-skate and ski. I can read upside down.

I can hit a tossed can with a .38 revolver. I have driven a Maserati at dawn on a flat, lonely Texas road at one hundred and seventy miles an hour. I can cook, oh can I cook and I can dance. I mean tap dance. (*does a time step*)

Bet you didn't expect that. I can type sixty words a minute and I'm an alcoholic. It's a chemical addiction not a psychological one...I can scarcely think of a writer who's not a heavy drinker. One or two. Arthur Miller, of course. Well, but there aren't many who don't have the problem. Writing is hard and you get depressed and every few years I slide into one of those things and it's not at all pleasant and I try to take it in stride.

TRUMAN. (*cont.*) And whenever I feel things are getting out of control I check myself into a hospital to get the poisons wiped out. I don't believe these should be any opprobrium whatsoever attached to this. It's just common sense. I've been in Silver Hill and Riggs, and a lovely place out in Minnesota. Even a couple of emergency rooms. (*grins*) I wish I had a bit more confidence in psychiatry. I feel a bit like Tennessee Williams who once confided in me that he was going to quit his analysis. "Truman," he said, "That man is tryin' to interfere in my private life!"

(*Laughs. Very cheerfully now.*)

Also. They're always so excessively concerned with homosexuality. Well, I've never had any problem with being a homosexual. I was always right out there.

I have always been an object of desire. Yes I was. When I was in school, I was amusing and I was pretty. Very popular. Everybody wanted to go to bed with me. From the headmaster on down. God, I'm practically the number one person around who has had everybody who everybody else said was straight about women. I think most people don't have any idea what their sexual identity is. I've always said that if you decide you want somebody...I don't care who they are...if you really want them and you concentrate exclusively, you will probably get that person. That has been my experience. Very few people can resist when somebody really, really wants them. When somebody focuses totally on them. One, it's so flattering and two, if it goes on long enough it just wears them down. (*laughs*) Energy helps too.

I am very energetic when the occasion arises. Hehehe. The main thing about me is that I am not like anybody else. Most homosexuals are very ordinary people, but not me. There is nothing ordinary about me. I was always a sort of two-headed calf. As a child I was aware of this at a very early age. For openers, I am distinctly curious-looking, wouldn't you agree? And everybody's