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The Unvarnished Truth

by Royce Ryton

Samuel French — London
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THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH

First presented by the Cambridge Theatre Company at the Civic Theatre, Darlington, on the 31st January 1978: transferred to the Phoenix Theatre, London, on the 13th April 1978, with the following cast of characters:

CHARACTERS

Tom Bryce	Tim Brooke-Taylor
Annabel Bryce	Jo Kendall
Bert Hopkins	Graeme Garden
Mrs Cartwright	Gabrielle Hamilton
Bill Carlisle	Royce Ryton
Mrs Stewart-Dubonnet	Gwyneth Owen
Inspector	Ivor Roberts
Isabel	Morar Kennedy
Dr Sarah Hedley	Joyce Donaldson

The play directed by Jonathan Lynn
Setting by Robin Archer

The action takes place in the living-room of a cottage
in Thames Ditton

ACT I Early evening
ACT II Later the same evening

Time—the present

ACT I

SCENE 1

The living-room of a modern cottage in Thames Ditton. Early evening

Leading into the room are the front door, a door to the kitchen, a door to the lavatory, and a flight of stairs with a door and an archway off. Furniture includes a sofa, a day bed, chairs, a desk, two bookcases, a pouffe and a trolley

As the CURTAIN rises Tom and Annabel Bryce are discovered, a middle-aged couple, kissing each other with great enthusiasm on the sofa

Tom I love you.

Annabel I love you too.

Tom I love you more than you love me.

They kiss again

Annabel That isn't true, but never mind.

Tom What isn't true?

Annabel What you just said.

Tom About my loving you more than you love me?

Annabel That's right.

Tom You're heaven. *(He kisses her again)*

Annabel You're divine.

Tom Drink?

Annabel Yes please.

Tom gets up, goes to the drinks trolley and pours two drinks

Tom How long have we been married?

Annabel Thirteen years.

Tom Quite a good innings really. Especially as I'm your second.

Annabel You know, I can't remember Paul at all. I can't believe I ever even knew him, let alone married him.

Tom It broke my heart when you did. I remember I went into a decline.

Annabel Well, you soon recovered. You got engaged to Cynthia.

Tom She became a lesbian.

Annabel Didn't your other fiancée become a nun?

Tom Nancy? I believe she did.

Annabel Very sinister.

Tom I shouldn't let it worry you. You actually married me and became neither. Still, it proves my point.

Annabel What point?

Tom You married someone else, whilst I only became engaged to other women. I must love you more than you love me.

Annabel I don't see that it proves anything at all.

Tom You knew I adored you.

Annabel I knew nothing of the sort.

Tom I was in hospital, very ill indeed, and you came and told me you were marrying Paul. The shock was terrible. I had a serious relapse and very nearly died. I had to have four doctors in constant attendance for a week.

Annabel You are funny, darling. None of this is true. I wrote to you about Paul.

Tom I believe you did. All I can remember is the blinding shock. I'd forgotten you didn't have the courage to tell me to my face.

Annabel I wrote to all my friends.

Tom It's a wonder it didn't kill me.

Annabel Darling. You really must be careful. You'll end up believing all this nonsense. We didn't fall in love until after I'd left Paul. We'd lost touch. We met by accident. We went out together and it was then it all started and you know that.

Tom I've decided to forgive you.

Tom sits beside Annabel on the sofa and gives her her drink. She nobly controls her irritation at his words

Shall we go to bed?

Annabel What, now?

Tom It's legal.

Annabel It's legal to drive a car, but I don't see any reason for doing so at the moment.

Tom Oh. Well, that puts me in my place. Thank you very much.

Annabel Darling, I am sorry. I just don't feel like it.

Tom You did a moment ago.

Annabel Yes, I know, but . . .

Tom Come on.

Annabel It would be fun.

Tom Well, then . . .

Annabel Ma's coming.

Tom She won't be here for ages.

Annabel Don't you believe it.

Tom (*rising*) Take that drink, go upstairs and . . .

Annabel There's the supper to cook.

Tom Never mind the supper.

Annabel I must do one or two things first.

Tom God, you are tiresome! We can open a tin. Here I am, full of love for you, full of desire—proper legal desire for my lawful wife—and all you can talk about is cooking supper.

Annabel Well, it's very inconvenient.

Tom Inconvenient! You have no romance in you. The divorce courts are full of women like you, who think more about cooking than they do about the pleasures of the marriage bed. If I had a secretary, I'd ring

her up at once and go out with her. It's quite obvious I love you far more than you love me. If you'd suggested going to bed, I'd be there undressed by now, not talking about supper.

Annabel (*rising*) You don't have to cook it, I do.

Tom No, you don't. We could go out.

Annabel Where?

Tom There are hundreds of places in Kingston.

Annabel Mother is very nearly eighty. We haven't booked a table.

Tom I could ring up . . .

Annabel You just have no consideration for anyone except yourself and never have had. Whenever you can't get your own way all the time, you fly into a rage.

Tom Women are all the same. Practical bitches.

Annabel We have common sense if that's what you mean.

Tom Common sense may be a virtue. I'm sure it is. It's also bloody dull.

There is a pause

Annabel I'm going into the kitchen. (*She turns away*)

Tom Good. When you next appear, make sure you have an overall on, then we'll all know you're a *hausfrau*. I should also disarrange your hair and look harassed and overworked and as unattractive as possible.

Annabel You have a very childish streak, darling, but I intend to ignore it.

Will you come and lay the table?

Tom What are we having?

Annabel Soup first, and then—

Tom Oh God!

Annabel What's the matter?

Tom Do we have to have soup?

Annabel No, we don't have to have soup.

Tom Your mother sucks in her soup.

Annabel All old people do. Besides I've made it.

Tom If you've made it already, why can't we go to bed?

Annabel There are other things to do.

Tom There can be no two opinions about it. I love you more than you love me.

Annabel Oh God!

Tom I don't lie to get out of going to bed with you.

Annabel I haven't lied. I have other things to do. There are the potatoes.

Tom Fattening.

Annabel For her, not us.

Tom You think more about your mother than you do me. What further proof do you want? Obviously I love you more . . .

Annabel (*putting her glass on the trolley*) I'm going to scream. That's what I shall do. Scream. I shall scream without ceasing all evening.

Tom Well, it's true.

Annabel It isn't. We love each other equally.

Tom You married someone else. (*He sits at the desk*)

Annabel I divorced him, didn't I? In any case, you intended to marry

other people. Twice too. I have been loyal and devoted to you for thirteen years. I had faith in your play writing when no-one else had. I've adored you and still do. What more do you want?

Tom I don't doubt any of that. It's just that it's so silly of you not to admit I love you more.

Annabel It's always the same when we get into an argument. You nag round one idiotic point. An idea suggests itself to you and within seconds you believe it.

Tom It's so silly to go on like this when you're in the wrong.

Annabel You can't tell fact from fiction, you never can.

Tom I can.

Annabel You can't.

Tom I can.

Annabel You can't.

Tom I can.

Annabel Darling, do let's stop. It's too silly.

Tom I'm extremely angry.

Annabel Oh dear. I was trying to make it up.

Tom Very successfully too. You should become a novelist. (*Rising*) Your flights of fancy should have a wider public than just me. You may wish to distort the past out of shame at your monstrous treatment of me, but—Annabel Shame?

Tom (*moving towards her*) Monstrous treatment of me as I lay dying, but I am not going to perjure my immortal soul simply to suit your guilty conscience. (*He moves away*)

Annabel This is too much.

Tom The facts are indisputable. We met as students. We fell-in love.

Annabel No.

Tom Then I became ill and you married someone else.

Annabel No, no.

Tom Your first marriage broke up—understandably if you behaved like this—we met again and married.

Annabel Only the last five words are accurate.

Tom Having loved you longer, I loved you more. That alone proves my point. If we consider the question of ardour, only a moment ago I wanted to make love to you and all you could talk about was cooking supper. Obviously, therefore, from every point of view, I am quite right, with a flawless memory of the past, and you are quite wrong. *Voilà!*

Annabel loses her temper, rushes at him screaming and slaps his face

Annabel I love you as much as you love me. (*Slap*)

Tom Annabel darling!

Annabel I love you, I love you, I love you. (*Slap*)

Tom Don't keep on slapping me. It's indicative of hate, not love.

Annabel You're driving me mad. (*Slap*)

Tom Stop slapping me.

Annabel (*kicking him*) I love you, I love you.

Tom Shut up. You've gone mad. I was being sweetly reasonable.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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