Acting Edition

Truth Be Told

by William Cameron

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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TRUTH BE TOLD was first produced by the Curious Theatre Company in Denver, Colorado, in January 2024. The performance was directed by Christy Montour-Larson, with sets by Caitlin Ayer, costumes by Janice Benning Lacek, wig design by Richard Krammes, lighting design by Colin D. Young, sound design by Jason Ducat, and props design by Krista Montoya. The Production Stage Manager was Rachel Ducat. The Assistant Stage Manager was Harper Hadley. The Board Operator was Chyanne Huynh. The cast was as follows:

KATHLEEN ABEDON . . . . . Karen Slack
JO HUNTER . . . . . Jada Suzanne Dixon

CHARACTERS

KATHLEEN ABEDON – 40s. A grieving working-class mother of an alleged mass shooter. Kathleen is angry, contentious, and fighting boldly for her late son's legacy.

JOSEPHA (JO) HUNTER – Mid-30s. A journalist of some distinction, with one successful book to her name. Resourceful, driven, and manipulative, Jo's professional demeanor almost conceals her vulnerabilities.

SETTING

A modest apartment in Mecklenburg,
a small town in the eastern United States.

TIME

Late summer, present day.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Truth Be Told is to be performed without an intermission. Approximate running time is ninety-five minutes.

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Wagner College Theatre Department

To my mother Edwina,
my son Max,
and my wife Susan,
who did such a splendid job of raising our son.

Scene One

(Present day. Late summer. Monday morning. A modest apartment, combination living/dining room with a sectioned-off kitchen.)

(It feels as if the tenant hasn't quite finished moving in. There are unpacked boxes stacked against the walls, each one of them written on with a Sharpie – "kitchen," "bedroom," "bath," etc. While the apartment is neat and clean, it's also cramped and claustrophobic.)

*(***JO***, thirties, casual chic, is setting up her work area on a small coffee table, where a laptop computer already sits.)*

*(***KATHLEEN***, forties, her attire a less-than-successful attempt at sophistication, stands waiting nervously.)*

KATHLEEN. Would you like some coffee?

JO. Not just yet, Kathleen, thank you. Had two cups at breakfast. So...

KATHLEEN. You already told me that, didn't you?

*(***JO** *smiles, goes back to work; she looks for space.)*

Do you need more room? I could move some of these boxes.

JO. No, I'm fine.

KATHLEEN. *(As she starts to pick up a box.)* I meant to make more space before you came but I –

JO. Kathleen, I have plenty of room.

*(***KATHLEEN** *sets the box down.)*

KATHLEEN. I wish we coulda done this at the house.

JO. I thought you sold the house.

KATHLEEN. Yeah, needed the money. Wanted to get out of this crummy town.

JO. Yet you're still here. Mecklenburg. Why haven't you left?

KATHLEEN. Where am I gonna go? No family, no money –

JO. What about the money from the house?

KATHLEEN. I got maybe half of what the house was worth, and that's going fast. At least I got a job here in Mecklenburg. Sure, people look at me funny, but I still get a paycheck.

JO. I see.

*(***JO** *nods, goes back to work, taking a small electronic device from her bag.)*

KATHLEEN. What's that?

JO. *(Handing it to* **KATHLEEN***.)* Oh, that's the voice recorder. Remember we talked about it.

KATHLEEN. Right, I remember... It's sticky.

JO. Sticky? Oh, maple syrup.

KATHLEEN. What?

JO. My five-year-old, Jake. He likes to play with the recorder.

(She takes it from **KATHLEEN***, touches it, laughs.)*

Yesterday morning he insisted on recording himself eating breakfast. Waffles. We listened to it several times.

*(**JO** laughs, **KATHLEEN** smiles.)*

KATHLEEN. That's cute. Is Jake here in Mecklenburg with you?

JO. Oh, no. He's home with his daddy.

KATHLEEN. Is that hard? I mean, writing these books, don't you have to go away a lot?

JO. Quite a bit in the last year, that's for sure.

KATHLEEN. And Jake, he doesn't mind?

JO. I took him with me on my book tour last year. That was an adventure.

KATHLEEN. How so?

JO. Oh, it was my first book tour and I had no idea how hectic it would be. My agent tried to warn me but... I thought I was Supermom. So I sent him home. Jake missed his daddy. You should see the two of 'em. They're good buddies. It's sweet.

*(**JO** smiles, goes back to setting up her work area. Beat.)*

KATHLEEN. I liked your book. *Evil Men*...something. I liked it a lot.

JO. Oh, you read it. Thank you so much, Kathleen. Means a lot to me.

KATHLEEN. What's the book called again?

JO. *The Evil That Men Do.*

KATHLEEN. Right. Did you make that up?

JO. It's from Shakespeare. *Julius Caesar.* "The evil that men do lives after them / The good is oft interréd with their bones."

KATHLEEN. What's that mean?

JO. Well, in the play, after Julius Caesar is assassinated, Marc Antony does a speech, very famous, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." You've heard that, I'm sure.

(Short beat.)

Anyway, he argues that when someone dies, we tend to remember only the bad, the evil that a person does. The good is buried with him. Forgotten.

KATHLEEN. Forgotten. Right. That's what happens. And that's why I liked your book, 'cause I... I mean, Aynesworth, that man you wrote about, I forget his first name.

JO. Robert.

KATHLEEN. Robert Aynesworth. I know he did those terrible things – murdered his wife and his little girl and he took his little boy on that boat, that voyage and then...terrible but...when you read about him, Aynesworth, you feel sorry for him, kind of. Not sorry but...like, sympathize, 'cause you know he had some good in him...somewhere. That's what I want, when they read our book. I want people to feel something for my Julian. Not just hate and anger. I don't want the good to be forgotten. Because Julian deserves that, just like any other human being...

(Brimming with emotion, her voice cracks.)

...he deserves that.

*(***KATHLEEN** *nods, a bit shaky.* **JO** *crosses to her.)*

JO. I know this can't be easy, my being here, stirring all this up again.

KATHLEEN. I just don't know if I can... I don't know.

JO. I understand.

*(**KATHLEEN** sighs deeply, trying to regain composure.)*

Look, I'm a mother, too. That is no small bond between us, believe me. And had I been in your place, I –

KATHLEEN. You're not in my place.

JO. No. But I have a son. I cherish his future. I fear for his safety and comfort in a wicked world. You felt the same about Julian, I'm sure. A minute ago you said you wanted people to feel something for him, something besides hate and anger. I want that, too. That's the story I'd like to write. The mother's story.

*(**JO** takes her hand.)*

So, tell me all about Julian, all about that boy you loved so much. Please.

*(**KATHLEEN** sighs, then nods her assent.)*

Thank you. Now...where will you be sitting?

KATHLEEN. Wherever you want me.

JO. I want you where you'll be most comfortable.

*(**KATHLEEN** crosses to a stuffed chair and taps it.)*

KATHLEEN. Here.

JO. Perfect.

*(**KATHLEEN** sits, **JO** sitting opposite her. **JO** puts the recording device on the table in front of **KATHLEEN**.)*

KATHLEEN. Oh, um, how do I say your name?

JO. You mean...Jo?

KATHLEEN. I thought it was *Jo*sepha.

JO. I prefer Jo*seph*a. But just call me Jo. Everyone does. Ready?

*(**KATHLEEN** nods.)*

Great. Now –

KATHLEEN. Oh, wait.

*(**KATHLEEN** rises, crosses to a small desk, and pulls out a stack of five-by-seven index cards secured in a rubber band. She sits back in her chair.)*

Ready.

*(**KATHLEEN** takes the rubber band off the cards and starts to lay them out on a coffee table in front of her. She holds onto two cards stapled together. **JO** watches this suspiciously for a moment, turns on the voice recorder, and speaks into it.)*

JO. My name is Josepha Hunter and I am here for my initial interview with Kathleen Abedon, mother of Julian Abedon. The date is September sixteenth. The time is 9:27 a.m. Now, I'd like to start with –

KATHLEEN. I want to start with this.

*(**KATHLEEN** holds up the two index cards stapled together.)*

JO. With what?

*(**KATHLEEN** pulls on a pair of glasses and reads from the cards.)*

KATHLEEN. On the morning of Friday, August tenth, last year, my seventeen-year-old son, Julian –

JO. Wait. I'm sorry, what are you reading, exactly?

KATHLEEN. I wrote this. I want to start with it, OK? Then you can ask me questions, but this really needs to be in the book.

JO. It needs to be in the book?

*(***KATHLEEN** *removes her glasses, looks at* **JO**.*)*

You can read it, of course. I'm sorry if I –

KATHLEEN. *(Reads.)* On the morning of Friday, August –

JO. But I need to stress that what goes in the book is ultimately my decision. Mine alone. You understand that, right?

KATHLEEN. You'll want this in the book, I promise.

(She puts her glasses back on, reads.)

On the morning of Friday, August tenth, last year, my seventeen-year-old son, Julian Abedon, reported for his summer job at the Eden's Bounty food warehouse here in Mecklenburg. There was gunfire. Fourteen employees of the warehouse, including Julian, died and another was seriously injured. This was a terrible tragedy and I, like so many other parents before me, have now lost a child to an act of violence. My son Julian had a difficult upbringing. His father died less than a month after Julian was born and he was raised by me, his mother, and his stepfather, Harlan Kenney.

(Short beat.)

Harlan Kenney is also deceased. Even though I married Harlan, I kept the name of Abedon since it was also the name of my only child. Julian was pronounced guilty for the killings at the warehouse. There was no trial, although an investigation revealed many facts – such as from survivors who claim they saw Julian firing a weapon. But these are only claims and it seems unlike Julian to do that and I knew him like no one else.

KATHLEEN. The whole truth has yet to come out and I hope this book will correct that.

*(**KATHLEEN** removes her glasses, puts the cards down. **JO** regards her, makes a few notes. **JO** reaches for Kathleen's notecard.)*

JO. May I see that?

*(**KATHLEEN** hands her the card, **JO** scans it. After a beat, she reads aloud.)*

"Harlan Kenney is also deceased."

*(**JO** looks to **KATHLEEN**, who nods.)*

You don't mention how Harlan died.

KATHLEEN. The official story is that Julian, um, shot Harlan at home before leaving for the warehouse.

JO. The official story?

*(**KATHLEEN** nods tersely.)*

I see.

*(**JO** goes back to the card.)*

Nor do you mention that Harlan worked at the warehouse with Julian. He was his supervisor, correct?

KATHLEEN. Yeah, but Harlan wasn't there when the shootings happened.

JO. No, he was at home, dead. Julian had already shot him by –

KATHLEEN. We don't know that.

JO. We don't know what?

KATHLEEN. That Julian shot Harlan.

JO. I'm confused, um… Are you saying that –

KATHLEEN. I'm saying that there are no witnesses to Harlan's murder. I was still at work. Night shift. Nobody saw it except for two people who are now dead. What I do know is that what everyone said Julian did –

JO. You mean murdering his stepfather or –

KATHLEEN. I mean everything. All of it.

JO. All of it?

KATHLEEN. All of it! You didn't know Julian. I did and all those things that he… I mean, that they said he… It was very much unlike him –

JO. Just to be clear –

KATHLEEN. – very much unlike him and who knew Julian better than me? Nobody. That's what I'm saying.

JO. I see.

(Beat.)

This is a departure.

KATHLEEN. What do you mean?

JO. From the time I originally approached you, through all of our correspondence…and perhaps I missed something, but it always seemed to me that you knew Julian was the shooter.

KATHLEEN. I never said that. I never even thought that, not completely.

JO. Oh.

*(**JO** makes a note.)*

KATHLEEN. You seem disappointed.

JO. Disappointed? No, I just want to be clear. Are you saying that Julian didn't –

KATHLEEN. I'm saying that nobody knows everything about… I mean, who could, but… There are questions.

JO. I agree. There are plenty of unanswered questions.

KATHLEEN. You seem so disappointed.

JO. Don't be silly. I'm intrigued, really. Now –

KATHLEEN. You never see his face.

JO. His face?

KATHLEEN. In the movie, the video, you never see his face. The shooter. Security cameras were broken.

JO. One of two cameras in the workers' lounge was not working, true, but –

KATHLEEN. It says so in the report. You only see the shooter from the back.

JO. That's correct.

(Short beat.)

Have you seen the video?

KATHLEEN. No. Have you?

JO. Yes. And you're right, you never see the shooter's face. But we do see him from behind –

KATHLEEN. Just for a few seconds.

JO. Just for a few seconds, yes. But we clearly see him carrying the automatic rifle, the Remington Adaptive Combat rifle. On his waist, we see the Glock 19 –

KATHLEEN. *(A bit testy.)* I know.

JO. Sorry, Kathleen, I'm just trying to understand. When you say these are only claims, what exactly –

KATHLEEN. Since one of the cameras was broken, you never see the shooter's face. So, the movie doesn't prove that it was Julian. It doesn't.

JO. I see.

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