

# **Truth Be Told**

A play by William Cameron

# Truth Be Told

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## Cast of 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.

## Time

The late summer of a recent year

## Place

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

## Notes

- *Truth be Told* is to be performed without an intermission. Approximate running time is 95 minutes.
- // signals the starting point of overlapping text.

**SCENE ONE**

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Late summer. Monday morning. A modest apartment, combination living/dining room with a sectioned off kitchen.

JO, 30's, casual chic, is setting up her work area on a small coffee table, where a laptop computer and a small black electronic device already sit. KATHLEEN, 40's, 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, continues her work. KATHLEEN points at the electronic device)

What's that?

JO

(picking it up and handing it to KATHLEEN)

Oh, that's the voice recorder. Remember we talked about—

KATHLEEN

Right...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.

JO laughs, goes back to setting up her work area.

KATHLEEN

So...what happened?

JO

Um, he lasted a few days and then...sent him home. Missed his daddy. They're good buddies. You should see 'em. It's sweet.

JO smiles, goes back to work. Beat

KATHLEEN

I liked your book. The *Evil Men* book.

JO

Thank you so much. Means a lot to me.

KATHLEEN

What's it called again?

JO

*The Evil That Men /Do.*

KATHLEEN

*/Evil That Men Do*, 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 it...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 to come out of this interview. I want people...when they read our book, I want them 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

Are you OK?

(KATHLEEN takes a ragged breath, fighting tears.)

My being here, stirring all this up again, it can't be easy.

KATHLEEN

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

JO

I understand. For me to ask you to share such painful memories, it must be...

(KATHLEEN sighs deeply, trying to regain composure.)

Know what I hope? I hope that telling your story will allow you to find some peace. This is heavy lifting, I know, but it might feel good to talk about it. To share.

(Short beat. JO takes her hand.)

Look, I'm a mother, too. That is no small bond between us, believe me. And I really want to get to know Julian. I want to learn all I can about that boy you loved so much.

(KATHLEEN takes another deep breath. She is calmer. She smiles at JO.)

You ready to do this?

(KATHLEEN smiles and nods.)

Great. 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 again?

JO

You mean...Jo?

KATHLEEN

I thought it was...*Josepha*.

JO

*Josepha*. But just call me Jo. Everyone does. My parents were expecting a boy. Ready?

(KATHLEEN nods.)

Great. Now—

KATHLEEN

Oh, wait.

(KATHLEEN rises and crosses to a small desk, pulls out a stack of 5x7 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 fifteenth. 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

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

On the morning of Friday August eleventh, last year, my seventeen-year-old son, Julian—

JO

Wait.

(KATHLEEN stops.)

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, so—

JO

It needs to be in the book? What—

(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 eleventh, 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. 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

You don't mention how Harlan Kenney died.

(Beat.)

How did he die, Kathleen?

KATHLEEN

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

JO

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

KATHLEEN

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

JO

No, he was already dead by that time. Julian had—



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! It was...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, as she makes a few notes.)

This is a departure.

KATHLEEN

What do you mean?

JO

It's different from what...you and I, in our earlier conversations...well, it always seemed to me that you understood that Julian was guilty.

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 but—

KATHLEEN

You seem so disappointed.

JO

Don't be silly. I'm intrigued, really. Um...may I see your statement?

(KATHLEEN gives her the index card; she scans it, then reads aloud.)

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... Only claims. So—

KATHLEEN

You never see his face.

JO

His face?

KATHLEEN

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

JO

One of two cameras in the worker's lounge was not working, yes, 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.

(She makes a note, puts her pen down, and looks hard at KATHLEEN.)

Julian walks into the—

(KATHLEEN starts to protest)

The *shooter*...walks into the worker's lounge at 6:57 a.m. Shift change at seven, so it's crowded. Twenty-one people are present. The shooter opens fire. Thirteen die. One is seriously injured. Seven get away unharmed. Can we agree on that?

(KATHLEEN nods curtly)

All eight survivors identify Julian as the shooter. This is eyewitness testimony. Now, eyewitness testimony can be notoriously unreliable, but in /this case—

KATHLEEN

/Right. And a lot of times, eyewitnesses, they like...especially in a thing where there's lots of panic, they don't...I mean, you're scared. Who knows what you really saw? Right? Also, Julian, he was wearing those...

JO

Fatigues?

KATHLEEN

Fatigues, right. And he had on that hat. What do they call it?

JO

Field cap.

KATHLEEN

Right. So, Julian looked different—it's not like he went to work every day wearing fatigues and a field cap...right? Plus, I saw him in that, um, field cap a couple of times before that day...once he had it down so far over his face, I almost didn't recognize him, so...see what I mean?

JO

So, you acknowledge that Julian was wearing the fatigues?

KATHLEEN

Yeah. I mean...the shooter was.

JO

And when the police found Julian's body, a short time later, he was dressed in those same fatigues. Is that correct?

(Beat. KATHLEEN turns from JO.)

Kathleen, may I tell you something? About myself?

(KATHLEEN nods tentatively but does not look at JO.)

Some time ago, Jake, my little boy, he...um, he hit...someone. Another, you know...little boy. I saw it happen, and it shocked me. How angry he got. How hard he swung his little fist. If someone had come to me and told me about it, I would've said, no, not my sweet little boy. No! But seeing it...that was different. And the guilt that I felt in that /moment—

KATHLEEN

/That's not what this /is about—

JO

/The guilt was so strong that, even though I'd seen it happen, my immediate impulse was to deny it. So, I understand how you could feel—

KATHLEEN

This is not about what I feel, it's about what I know! It's about the facts. There are facts in dispute.