

An Excerpt From:

TRUTH BE SOLD

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SUE

There's flowers for us.

MACK

We've got flowers at home.

SUE

I can't believe how we're treated--like this is our town.

MACK

Today.

SUE

That's all I need. Cairo is fine but other than our Wal-Mart and Sam's, I can't think of any bigger buildings than the ones up here. Except for the barns. But those just look big but go inside you feel the wind through the wood cause it's so thin and the rafters up high just rotted by birds and the barns don't seem that big anymore. Just tall.

MACK

My dad's barn's not like that.

SUE

No--it's metal and it holds an old trolley. If that's big, it's a big mistake.

MACK

Yeah, I know your opinion on things.

SUE

There's new things going in downtown now, not on the farms to look at some old slave car. There's development.

MACK

Uh-huh.

SUE

Some slave car's past now and people aren't interested.

MACK

They're not interested, they're in town. They're out-of-town, way out of town like up here? They're looking to see.

SUE

And what? Slavery?

MACK

History.

SUE

Uh-huh.

MACK

Ask the blacks, babe -- Aw, why do I have to tell you?

SUE

I'm not black!

MACK

They all know about it. That's a train ride they know and we're a part of it like it or not. When they all come in from the Delta or where they're all from, you know what that train car's called when it touches our state? When it's ridin' that bridge high over both rivers come together at once? A freedom car. It's famous.

SUE

To you. Your old dad.

MACK

Thank you.

SUE

You know what it got him? One hundred percent dead.

MACK

Good.

SUE

And dead. And dead and dead and dead.

MACK

I know that Sue.

SUE

You want to be that? Your stomach's all knots all the time to raise hoopla about rust in a barn? The blacks don't care--they're up here now. Done. You think they want to come back and take photos of that? The whites don't care--it's just a train car to them. A train car, you stupid. Doesn't even run--

A restaurant. MACK

So said your daddy. SUE

Diner-museum. MACK

A good place to eat. SUE

Thank you again. MACK

(Mack crosses to counter to get food.)

Mack... SUE

I'm not in the mood. MACK

Fine. I was going to apologize. SUE

Yeah? Well thank you in triple. MACK

(A pause.)

I knew your daddy too. SUE

And what are you scared of. Like papa, like son? MACK

No. SUE

No. Bullshit. MACK

(Mack tosses her a cookie. Imitating Jeremy.)

Cookie. MACK

I can't eat. SUE

MACK

Okay.

(He grabs the cookie from her and eats it.)

MACK

But I had to eat everything on my plate growin' up. Did you know that.

SUE

I guess.

MACK

Okay. But I did. My dad was a slave to get us that slop-- You think the blacks the only ones made into slaves? No way. My dad was a slave--An old cranky white guy. Slave to his family, slave to the sun, slave to a lousy 40 acres so it won't stop feeding us all.

(Mack tosses Sue another cookie.)

MACK

Eat up.

SUE

I can't eat. I'll throw it up.

MACK

Well that won't do. I like these.

SUE

Mack...

MACK

Huh...

SUE

Mack. I love you and we'll be married today. Aren't you happy?

MACK

I'll be happy when it's all over.

SUE

I don't think you're your father anyway.

MACK

Oh, maybe I am. I don't know. I'm a better businessman though. Have to be. I got answers.

SUE

You do.

MACK

That's right--You want history? We got it baby--And burgers and fries too. Diner-museum, this time. Let's serve it up.

SUE

Don't you...I do...Don't you get sick of sharing streets with old ghosts that make moving so slow. Empty ancient buildings just shelters for history's mistakes and bad luck.

MACK

That bad luck's good luck for us now.

SUE

That bad luck keeps the interstate going by nonstop. It goes somewhere.

MACK

You know where it goes.

SUE

City--Bigger on a map.

MACK

Enough so it's choked by that interstate as it wraps it around it 50 times. Bigger's just more money--don't you know that? That's the whole difference between us and them. We got all the same ways of life but add in their money and it's just taller and faster. One thing you can't make new is old times. Concrete's covered up all the old times here. These people gotta run to us to touch an old chair that's not from a box. And they do--antique malls off 55's packed with those kind every weekend! Now I got that trolley now and I don't care if it carried mules or liquor or fucking slaves comin' north--it's all history baby. That's the last frontier for us. Down there.

SUE

You've got sunstroke. That's a dead frontier.

MACK

Not dead like the machine up here? Keeps stoppin' and startin' and clogs everyday cause newer gets newer and the parts can't keep up? So new up here and progressiveóI hear all these people just moan with delight! Scares 'em when they turn around slow and can't find their street cause looks different yet again. And where can they go to remember its look? To us.

SUE

We might change too. Hopefully. Some say it's our duty to uphold, to keep our town up. Bring real money down south, industry, not just tourists who stop by to laughó

MACK

Oh Sue, no one wants a condo around trailers and trash. Don't even know what to do with a condo or a triple-deck mall. No need.

(Mack walks over to Sue and puts her arm around her shoulder.)

MACK

Hey. We've got to survive. Our old town's still standing just cause we never had money to bulldoze it down. And now look what they want. They need. Like babies. Like unfed babies. And that's our cards.

SUE

In the limo it was so loud outside. I wanted the driver to stop but we were late. I thought "damn glass." Everything I see's through damn glass: TV window, limo window, lens of a camera. It's like no one wants me here. But I can still see through...

MACK

That's a sign, I think. Only reason to come up here's to work the machine cause that's what it serves up: money. Use it, make it, don't put it back.

SUE

Is that why we're here?

(A pause.)

MACK

We're here to get married. On your favorite show.

SUE

Sounds like it, don't it?

(A pause.)

MACK

You better get your dress on.

SUE

What's the point?

MACK

So we're married.

SUE

You answered that ad Mack, not me.

MACK

I know.

SUE

So you know. Everyone out there's gonna see us, we might as well act enthused.

MACK

I am. Maybe I'm nervous.

SUE

(smiles) You are?

MACK

Guess so.

SUE

Would it be any different if we were at an altar back home?

MACK

Guess not.

(A pause.)

SUE

You know.

(A pause.)

SUE

You know people are going to laugh at us if we appear to be...unhappy.

(A pause.)

SUE

Are you that?

MACK

Not in the big scope of things, I'm not.

SUE

What does that mean?

MACK

Just...I hate traveling.

(The Conductor steps out into his space. From behind, the back wall transforms into a traincar window. We watch a rural landscape speed by.)

MACK

On the train up here, every mile goes by I just wanted to haul ourselves out.

CONDUCTOR

Folks, okay, you all best get some rest!

MACK

Like I didn't trust all its parts.

CONDUCTOR

New life's not gonna be here sooner if you all chat so much!

MACK

The engine, the tracks, the windows, the seats--All like it's one big motorman makin' it so. Speeds so fast we just grabbed on board without knowing why...

SUE

To get married...

CONDUCTOR

C'mon, Freedom!

MACK

I know that. Shit. But that quick ride. So quick, felt something else could make decisions for me if I let it. The faster it went, scenery'd blur, track's howlin' higher, and you know--You know in that rush...Maybe I let 'em.

(Lights out in the Conductor's space. The window transforms back into a wall. A pause. Mack can't look at Sue.)

SUE

(frightened) What. What did you let them do?

MACK

(turns to her, scared) I don't know.

(A pause.)

MACK

You better get that dress on. That kid's gonna be here soon.

SUE

How can I get dressed if I don't know what you mean?

MACK

Nothin's always got to have meaning. What does it mean that you're not dressed for our wedding?

SUE

You're not.

MACK

I will.

SUE

You will?

MACK

I'll wear something.

SUE

Okay. So vague. That's all the answer I get from you. But I've known that.

MACK

You have.

SUE

Haven't I? And it's led me even here. To get on a dress, to get married. There must be something else from what comes out of your mouth. Something not words. What is it?

MACK

You tell me.

SUE

Not just words. Like animals, you know. Something pulled us together Mack, by a mystery. Why don't we know?

MACK

Who cares? (A beat.) Why do people have to know every little thing that's only gonna make 'em crazier and crazier once they find out anyway?

(Mack moves close to Sue.)

MACK

Sue. You don't know what's up in space, do ya? You don't know what's on the moon or Mars or how hot the sun is. But you trust they're there, right? You know space goes on forever and you never think why.

(Mack holds Sue.)

MACK

I love you. I feel love for you. Try to probe past that and you'll fail miserable.

SUE

Is that what I trust?

MACK

You want to?

SUE

Yes.

MACK

I need you to. Today.

(A knock at the door.)

MACK

All I ask is one single day. For us to start new.

(A knock at the door.)

MACK

That's the kid.

SUE

I've got to dress.

(Sue disappears behind the screen.)

MACK

(shouts to door) You're rude!

(Another knock at the door. Mack opens it slightly, revealing Jeremy.)

MACK

I'm dressed, she's nude, you're rude.

JEREMY

It's okay. (handing Mack an envelope) This is your check.

MACK

Before?

JEREMY

We always do it before taping. There's been some who once they're all through, they think they're owed more.

MACK

(taking it) I'm not supposed to know that.

JEREMY

Well you do. Now at least. Anyway, if there's more where you came from, don't tell 'em. Where's that again?

MACK

Cairo.

JEREMY

Nice.

MACK

You've been--

JEREMY

Oh no.

MACK

Might have to someday to work down there first. TV station's got kids on the air like you.

JEREMY

Turnover's quick. Don't like to move.

MACK

No?

JEREMY

No. When you're used to up here, that's it. I gotta year left anyway so who knows. Contacts are the key but they're all up here. What do you do down there?

(A long pause.)

MACK

Think.

JEREMY

(smiling) You sure? Most we book get on because that's what they forgot to do. But it's honest. And that's what the show's about. Their truth.

MACK

(smiling) They're funny.

JEREMY

Who?

(A pause.)

MACK

Us. (A pause.) Yeah?

JEREMY

Jackie's #1. Must be a reason.

MACK

Well we all watch him. (re the envelope) This don't bounce?

JEREMY

Never. No one asks that.

MACK

Why not? Too dumb? Maybe they don't even need the money.

JEREMY

Truth be told--Everyone needs the money, most don't get it. Being on camera's enough. And the limo. That's just for low shows.

MACK

Yeah?

JEREMY

Your check's just bigger because of the topic. You've got a good story.

MACK

I do? And why don't you tell me?

JEREMY

You'll be briefed.

MACK

Briefed? Like when?

JEREMY

Right before. Mack. Did you like the food?

MACK

(wipes his hands) Crummy.

JEREMY

I love that pastry shop, it's really excellent. I'm really surprised--

MACK

I want to know what I get to say.

JEREMY

I can't. C'mon--Entertainment's fresh if we're all on our feet. (stretching) You should stretch--

MACK

What if I don't like it?

JEREMY

You don't like to be loose?

MACK

I don't like a surprise.

JEREMY

Okay. I don't make up the contracts. I carry them, I file them, I get them signed. All I know is that for a show to be fun--And everyone loves fun, excellent shows--The papers just need to be followed. It's how it goes.