

JUST A RUMOR
A New Fiction Based on The Sacred Truths of Old Hollywood

By Gary Lyons and Doug DeVita
Based on an idea by Gary Lyons

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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Rosalynne Buchanan	A movie star from the Golden Age	58/78	F
Alice Watson	Ross's British, no-nonsense companion	63/83	F
Lesley Harding Harris	Gray Harris' widow, a former actress	58/78	F
Frank Bonnar	A film director from the Golden Age	60/80	M
Jamie/Bunny/Male Star	Various roles played by the same actor	30s	M

SYNOPSIS

Rosalynne (Ross) Buchanan and Graham (Gray) Harris are two Hollywood legends whose dynamic on-screen chemistry sparked an off-screen affair lasting 25 years. (Think Hepburn and Tracy) In 1968, a few weeks after completing their latest film together, Gray Harris dies in the early hours of the morning in the house they both share. Ross has no choice but to inform Gray's wife Lesley of his death. What happens when Ross and Lesley meet for the first time is the premise of *Just A Rumor*, a play that explores the nature of love, celebrity, gossip, truth, and how to get a dead movie star out of the kitchen.

SETTING

Most of the action takes place in the living room of a cottage on Frank Bonnar's estate in Bel Air, California. Other scenes take place on palettes which can slide on an off in front of the main set. 1968, and 1988.

RECOGNITION

Semi-Finalist

Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference

ACT ONE

The tastefully furnished living room of a guest cottage on the estate of Frank Bonnar, famous film director, in Bel Air, California circa 1968. Prominent among the furniture is a black leather armchair. Downstage right is the entrance to the cottage; further up the same wall are four steps leading to a landing, then another 10 or so steps leading to the upstairs bedrooms, out of sight. Along the back wall is an enormous picture window framed with bookshelves. Along the stage left wall is a swinging door, which is the entrance to the kitchen.

The door to the kitchen is swinging shut. The only illumination comes from a nightlight, and the sliver under the kitchen door. We hear the sound of someone rattling around in the kitchen, and then the sound of a teacup smashing, followed by the thud of a body hitting the floor.

ROSS (O.S.)

Gray? ... Gray?

Rosalynne (Ross) Buchanan, 58, legendary film star, comes down the stairs and goes into the kitchen. She is wearing white silk pajamas.

ROSS (O.S., CONT'D)

Oh, Gray. My darling, beautiful Gray. Not quite the way you imagined it.

A palette slides on. Lights up on Alice Watson, Ross's paid companion. It is 1988. She is in a hospital bed, wearing a neck brace and has an IV attached. She is British, 83. Her pain medication causes her mind to wander.

ALICE

I was the first one she called. Before the others, and of course, before... The secret of a good Yorkshire pudding is in the dripping. It must be very hot... the phone rang at 3:15 in the morning. It was Ross. I knew what it was, what had happened... we were all expecting that call... Kit loved my Yorkshire puddings.

I have always looked after the stars. After Kit died, I got a call from Greta Garbo: “Alice, I want you.” I had quite a reputation for discretion, you see, but she didn’t seem my type – I’m not a lesbian – but she just sat there looking out her window all day. Ross and Gray were much more fun... you must let the batter stand, covered, for at least half an hour...

Lights cross fade to Ross, in the living room and on the phone.

ROSS

It’s Ross... yes... just now... of course I’m sure... I heard him rattling about in the kitchen, and then this goddamn awful thud... I’m fine... no really, I’m fine. I guess I have my father to thank for that, and I can’t fall apart right now, I have so much to do, so many calls to make... yes, yes I know... well she may be the first on your list, but she isn’t first on mine... I know she’s Gray’s wife, but Gray wasn’t her husband... Look, I’ve got to go, I’ve got those calls to make... well, we’re all going to miss him... yes, but it’s a shock just the same...

Lights cross fade to Alice.

ALICE

I was only a couple of minutes away, in a cottage that backed onto Frank Bonnar’s estate... I used to do some acting myself, you know, before I went to work with Kit. Kit loved my Yorkshire puddings... As I drove up to their cottage, I could see the lights were on in Frank’s house but that wasn’t unusual for that time of the morning at Frank’s, especially at the weekend. When I got there, Ross was on the phone, sitting, with a large scotch... I prefer making individual puddings, in a muffin tin. I can’t bear it when someone serves you a slice of Yorkshire pudding. I like a crust all the way round...

Lights cross fade back to Ross.

ROSS

Well, it’s a tricky situation, Bill, I’m at the cottage on Frank’s estate... there’s his wife, and his children... No, I’ve only spoken to Lesley once... About five years ago when Gray collapsed. The conversation was, how should I put it, brief. I called her, and then left him in the hospital... Well I’m sure she’s more than willing to play the grieving widow now after so many years playing the devoted wife... So I need a favor? Would you handle the press? ...You were the first one I thought of because of how you handled the Victor Brent situation... Thank you, I’d rather not have to deal with the coroner right now... Oh, that’s a good idea. I’ll get Frank and Alice to help... I think the three of us can manage. It’ll be just like that scene in “The Turkey’s in the Oven”... Thank you... Yes, but it’s a shock just the same... Well, we’re all going to miss him.... Goodbye Bill, and thanks again.

She picks up a pad and crosses off a name.
Alice, now 63, enters from the kitchen. She is wearing a simple skirt and a cardigan sweater over her blouse.

ALICE

I've covered him with a blanket. What do you want to do now?

ROSS

Thank you, Alice. As soon as Frank gets here, we'll move him upstairs.

ALICE

Do you think the three of us can handle it?

ROSS

Of course we can. Frank can take his feet, and we'll take his top half, we'll get him upstairs with no problems. Gray, Ruth and I did it quite easily with Jimmy when we made "The Turkey's In The Oven."

ALICE

That was a movie.

ROSS

Contrary to popular belief, movies are a lot harder than real life. It took 17 takes.

ALICE

That was 1940. You were 30 then. You're nearly, what? How old are you saying you are now?

ROSS

Five years younger than you're saying you are. Now get me a scotch.

Alice crosses to the wet bar and prepares a drink for Ross, and one for herself.

ALICE

I think you're handling this very well.

ROSS

What choice do I have?

ALICE

(She picks up Ross's pad.)

I could make some of these calls if you need me to.

ROSS

Thank you, Alice, but I need something to take my mind off how painful this is.

ALICE

He was difficult, but I did love him. I'm going to miss the old bugger.

ROSS

I need some ice.

ALICE

I'll get you some. And I'll make some sandwiches.

ROSS

I'm not hungry.

ALICE

But I am and you will be. And so will Frank.

ROSS

Isn't he on one of his diets?

ALICE

Exactly.

(She starts to exit to the kitchen, and turns back.)

Chicken, or ham?

ROSS

I don't care. I'm not hungry.

ALICE

I'll make ham. I'm sure Frank's had plenty of chicken already tonight.

Alice exits as Ross starts to make another call. Lights shift to as Frank Bonnar, 80 (60 in the main body of the play), debonair director from Hollywood's golden years, rides in on another palette. It is 1988. He is lounging under an umbrella by his pool, watching a young hunk, offstage, frolicking in the water.

He is dressed in a pastel colored polo shirt,
loose linen pants, and loafers without socks.

FRANK

I was the first one she called. I was the closest. It was a call I was expecting, but it's always a shock just the same. The coroner's report said he died on Monday, September 16, 1968, but in fact it was the early hours of Sunday morning the 15th. I was relieved that I didn't get that call while we were shooting. The studio wouldn't insure Gray, you know, his health was so precarious, but I wouldn't do the picture without Gray Harris and Ross Buchanan. So Ross and I vouched for him, professionally and financially. We all knew it would be their last film together. If it wasn't for Ross, I don't think he would have made it through the picture. She helped him with his lines, got him to the set on time, and was even there for him off camera when she wasn't scheduled to shoot that day. He knew he was running out of time. He did most of his scenes in one take; I hardly gave him any direction at all. When we finished principal photography, he hugged me and thanked me. It was the last time I saw him on the set. When I got to the cottage, Ross was sitting in Gray's chair, devastated. She looked so small and vulnerable — not "Ross the Boss," as we so "lovingly" called her.

Cross fade to Ross, smoking, on the phone.

ROSS

... I'm doing fine. I've had so many calls to make that I can't think about anything else right now, which is just as well. I'm so sorry for you, you must feel awful... Yes, it is the end of an era, I'm just not sure which one: his, mine or yours... You were more than an agent, Sam, you were a good friend to him as well... Yes, you're right, we were all good friends... No, no Sam, you don't have to come, Alice is here already, and Frank should be here any minute... Well, it is the weekend, and you know what that means at Frank's house... Apparently so, age hasn't affected that part of his career...

Frank enters in a dressing gown, pajamas, and slippers. Ross motions him into the room and continues talking.

ROSS (CONT'D)

...No, not yet... I know I have to call her – call Lesley; it's the next call I'm going to make... I think awkward is an understatement, but it has to be done... I must go, Sam, Frank just got here... Yes, but it's a shock just the same... Well, we're all going to miss him... Yes, life. And death... Goodbye.

She hangs up the phone. She and Frank look at each other for a moment.

FRANK
This sucks, doesn't it?

ROSS
You bet.

FRANK
I'm so sorry, Ross.

ROSS
You must feel awful, you were such good friends.

FRANK
Good friends.

ROSS
Good friends.

FRANK
Is Alice here?

ROSS
She's in the kitchen. She's making sandwiches. I told her not to.

FRANK
Why?

ROSS
Because you're on a diet and I'm not hungry.

FRANK
But you will be.

ROSS
There's also a dead body in the kitchen.

FRANK
That's a terrible way to talk about Alice.

They both laugh. Alice enters with a carving knife.

ALICE
I heard that. Now get in here and start slicing the ham.

FRANK

That's a terrible way to talk about Gray.

ALICE

That's not funny.

There's an awkward silence, and then all three start laughing. They recover, make an attempt at being serious, and then start laughing again.

FRANK

We are awful.

ROSS

No, we're not.

ALICE

Yes, we are.

ROSS

No, we're not. Gray would be the first one to see the funny side of all this. It's good to laugh with good friends. And Gray was my best friend. Now, I don't know about you but I'm starving. Where are those sandwiches?

ALICE

I told you you'd be peckish. You finish your calls; Frank, come and help me in the kitchen.

FRANK

(Saluting her.)

Yes, sir.

Alice and Frank exit into the kitchen. Ross calls after them.

ROSS

And I'll have the potato salad and some cheese. Oh – don't forget the cookies and the bundt!

FRANK

(Re-entering.)

“Scarlett, if you keep eating like this you’ll grow as fat as Mammy, and then I’ll divorce you.”

ROSS

“As god is my witness” I should have played that part!

FRANK

But Clark Gable looked better in pants.

ALICE

(Re-entering.)

And you wanted to get in them.

ROSS

You weren’t missing much. He was a lousy lay.

Frank and Alice both give Ross a look.

ROSS (CONT’D)

So I’ve heard.

FRANK

Not after he took his teeth out. ... So I’ve heard.

ALICE

Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn.

ROSS

I’m famished. Will you two get a move on?

FRANK

After you, Mammy.

ALICE

After you, Prissy.

Alice pushes Frank into the kitchen and follows him as Ross calls after them.

ROSS

Where’s that ice?

She gets up and goes to the phone. The lights fade to a tight spot on her as she picks up the receiver. She ponders a moment, and then quickly puts it back.

ROSS (CONT'D)

I'm not going to make that call. Why should I? I don't have to explain anything. Not to her, anyway. She said it was just some gossip she'd heard. And now the whole town's talking. I'm fed up with this small town mentality. Nobody's seen anything. It's just silly people with nothing better to do than spread silly rumors. All in the name of religion and morality. What's immoral about loving someone? What's immoral about sharing their life, being there for them, and them being there for you? What's immoral about waking up next to the person you love and looking forward to spending another day with them? Having breakfast together, talking about all the little things that don't mean a thing but mean so much. Those little looks you swap as you pass on the stairs, in the hallway, in the bathroom or in the kitchen. What's immoral about the most important person in your life falling asleep in your arms? If that's immoral, then okay, I'm immoral. We're all immoral. We're all irreligious. I believe that when two people are in love, God is with them. God is happy. God blesses that love. Yes, that's what I believe. And you better believe it too, Mrs! Okay, I'm ready to make that call.

She starts to pick up the phone.

FRANK (O.S.)

And cut!

The lights change. We are now on the set of "Love Without Approval." Frank enters, dressed in regular clothes.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Ross, dear, that was lovely. Just lovely.

ROSS

Just lovely? I know what "just lovely" means from you, Frank. I noticed Agnes Moorehead didn't get a "just lovely" from you yesterday.

FRANK

Look, Ross. Mary's talking out loud to convince herself. And she does. She's about to call Mrs. Brewton, the town gossip...

ROSS

Yes, I realize that, Frank, but I'm finding it terribly hard to do it without sounding self-righteous and pompous.

FRANK

Yes, I realize that. But don't you think Mary has a right to be self-righteous and pompous here?

ROSS

Mary has a right to defend her son, but I'm not sure she'd go about it this way in a small town like South Bend, Indiana.

FRANK

When Sumner came to me with this script, he told me he based the character of Mary on you and the stories you've told about those crazy parents of yours shaking up Waterbury, that small town you grew up in.

ROSS

They weren't crazy, Frank. They were free thinkers. And that was 1920, not 1968. They were ahead of their time.

FRANK

So is this movie. We're dealing with a subject matter that a lot of people consider taboo. That's why I said I would only make this movie with you and Gray. If I may stand on my soapbox for one moment, it's the self-righteous and pompous who need to see "Love Without Approval." The free thinkers aren't staying home on Saturday night watching "My Three Sons."

ROSS

At least "My Three Sons" is a good title. It gives you a hint of what to expect.

FRANK

And you don't think "Love Without Approval" does?

ROSS

You know I don't. I've told Sumner it's got to be changed. Especially if you want to get those self-righteous, pompous asses in those seats.

FRANK

Right now I'm more concerned about getting a certain self-righteous, pompous actress back on the set.

ROSS

That's a terrible way to talk about Agnes Moorehead.

FRANK

Miss Moorehead, I'll have you know, is making something very special out of Mrs. Brewton.

ROSS

Dear Agnes. Bewitched, Bothered and Be-type cast!!

FRANK

Typecast or not, she's doing it with grace and charm, very few lines and no complaints. Now let's try this scene again.

ROSS

I don't see the point. I'm still not sure how to play it. And unless you can come up with one of your brilliant directorial insights, it'll be exactly the way I did it before.

FRANK

And that's exactly how I want you to do it, only this time do it as if you were talking about someone close to you in your real life, not your son Steven in the movie. Do it as if you were talking about Gray.

He walks away.

ROSS

Oh. That's brilliant.

The lights shift again as Alice reenters pushing a tea trolley laden with an ice bucket, a plate of sandwiches, plates, cups, a pot of tea, and Ross's scotch.

ALICE

Well thank you, but I've only made some sandwiches. Brilliant's a bit over the top, don't you think? It's not like I made you my Yorkshire pudding. Now my Yorkshire pudding – that is brilliant. I made some coffee. I thought I'd make a pot of tea as well, since there was water on the boil. Would you like a cup? There's the bundt, and some cookies, too.

ROSS

(Holding up her glass of scotch.)

Where's the ice?

Alice picks up the ice bucket and puts ice cubes into Ross's drink. She leaves the bucket on the wet bar as Ross takes a swig from her glass.

ALICE

(Offering Ross the plate of sandwiches.)

I think you should have one of these first. I don't want to be carting two bodies upstairs.

ROSS

Thank you, Alice, for your concern. I'm very touched.

(She takes another swig of scotch, and then takes a sandwich.)

What's happened to Frank?

ALICE

He said he wanted to have a moment alone with Gray, to pay his respects.

Frank enters, wolfing down a sandwich.

FRANK

Good God, that's the most hideous thing I've ever seen.

ROSS

That's what dead bodies look like, Frank.

ALICE

You forget you're used to dead bodies, Ross. That crazy father of yours has a lot to answer for.

FRANK

I'm referring to that blanket you've thrown over him. Promise me that if I drop dead, you won't cover me with anything that's plaid.

ALICE

I'm sorry Frank. I didn't mean to offend your highly developed sense of style. Next time someone drops dead in the kitchen, I'll make sure I have a Liberty print on hand.

ROSS

We thought it would be better to cover Gray until we moved him.

ALICE

Frank says we'll never be able to move him. He's too heavy. And he knows all about picking up heavy men.

FRANK

More than you do, anyway.

ALICE

I am not a lesbian!

ROSS

Stop it, you two. C'mon, I want to get Gray upstairs sooner rather than later. With the three of us it'll be easy.

FRANK

Are you out of your fucking mind? It's going to take a lot more than two alteh-kakas and a movie star to lift him.

ROSS

Language!

FRANK

Sorry, two homosexuals and a movie legend to lift him.

ALICE

I am NOT a lesbian!

ROSS

Of course you're not, dear. Now let's move him. The longer we leave him, the harder it'll be.

FRANK

That's not been my experience.

ROSS

That was a cheap, unnecessary joke.

ALICE

Did you see his last movie?

ROSS

We've got to get Gray upstairs!

FRANK

Are you sure we should move him? Aren't we supposed to leave him until the coroner comes?

ALICE

You did call the coroner?

ROSS

I left that to Bill at MGM. I called him before I called you two. Now let's get him out of the kitchen and into the bedroom.

She goes into the kitchen making a grand,
movie star exit.

ALICE

I thought she called me first.

FRANK

I thought she called me first.

ALICE

Bugger you. Why would she call you first?

ROSS (O.S.)

I called a lot of people first. Now will you get in here!

They give each other a knowing look and exit
into the kitchen.

ROSS (O.S.)

Now Frank, you take his legs and we'll grab under his arms.

(We hear huffs, puffs, and sighs of
frustration.)

Oh come on Frank, put a bit more muscle into it.

(Sound of a body being dropped.)

This isn't working. All right Frank, as you can't seem to manage his lower half, you lift
him under his arms, and we'll take his legs.

Some more sounds of struggling, and then
another thud.

FRANK (O.S.)

I told you that the three of us would not be able to lift him.

ROSS (O.S.)

It's you Frank! You're not pulling your weight.

ALICE (O.S.)

We need someone with a bit more brawn.

There is a third thud, and then Frank flounces in
from the kitchen.

FRANK

That's it! I'm a movie director, not a grip!

(He heads straight for the sandwiches and starts eating another one.)

If you need a shlepper, then call central casting. Why do we have to move him anyway?

ALICE

(Following Frank into the living room.)

I thought it would be quite obvious to you Frank, with your impeccable sense of style – Gray clashes with the floor tiles!

ROSS

(Standing in the doorway.)

For God's sake, will you two stop it? Bill thought it would be better to get him upstairs before the coroner gets here.

FRANK

Fuck Bill. He doesn't have to lift him.

ROSS

Language!

(She goes back into the kitchen and continues talking.)

I don't know why it's so hard to move him. It was so easy when we made "The Turkey's in the Oven."

ALICE

Jimmy was playing dead. Gray is dead.

FRANK

Once a heavyweight, always a heavyweight. Well, I've had it. I give up. You want someone with brawn? Wait till his fucking wife gets here.

ROSS

Shit!

(She bursts through the kitchen door and races towards the phone.)

Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit! I forgot to call his goddamn wife.

FRANK

Language.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO

Lights up on Lesley Harding Harris, Gray's widow. She is 78, attractive but not a beauty, well dressed. She is sitting in Gray's chair, which was given to her sometime after Gray's death. It is 1988.

LESLEY

I was the first one she called. Well, I was his wife, mother of his children. I knew why she was calling, because after all, why else would Rosalynne Buchanan be calling Mrs. Lesley Harris at four in the morning? I was prepared; I knew he was very ill. The conversation was brief; I thanked her and said I would be there within the hour. Although we lived quite near, I had many calls to make: our children, family and friends; and besides, I wanted time to get ready. I needed to make the right impression. I'd never met her, you see. I'd seen her movies, and the movies that she made with Gray. The only time I'd ever seen her in person was when she was first starting out on Broadway years ago in Mother Of The Year. Terrible play, but you could see early signs of the great actress she was going to become.

Cross fade to the living room. The kitchen door opens. Ross holds the door open and with a grand, sweeping gesture indicates for Alice and Frank to pass through.

ROSS

And ACTION!

FRANK (O.S.)

This is the most fucking ridiculous thing I have ever had to do in my whole fucking life!

Alice appears butt first through the open door pulling Gray's still blanketed feet. She has removed her cardigan. They have somehow managed to get Gray's body onto the tea trolley. Frank appears at the other end, holding onto Gray's torso. Throughout the continuation of this speech they "wheel" Gray's body across the room to the stairs, Ross moving furniture out of the way as they do.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Look at this – I'm a fucking Oscar winning director wheeling a fucking Oscar winning actor, who dropped dead on the fucking kitchen floor, on a fucking old tea trolley, wrapped in a fucking awful plaid blanket, being fucking "directed" by a fucking Oscar winning actress, who wouldn't have gotten that fucking Oscar if it hadn't been for my fucking brilliant direction, thank you very much, and all because some fucking publicity head at fucking MGM, who still owes me for saving his fucking ass on that fucking Ida Lupino fiasco, I'll have you know, wants to cover up a fucking twenty-five year affair that everybody fucking knows about anyway, by making his fucking wife, who wouldn't fucking divorce him, believe that he'd fucking died in his fucking bed. Alone.

ALICE

Are you quite finished, Frank?

FRANK

No, I'm fucking not!

(Continuing his rant.)

And that fucking wife of his is about to descend on us in fifteen fucking minutes and we still have to get him up the fucking stairs, down a fucking hallway and into his fucking bedroom! And it's four o' fucking clock in the fucking morning! And I should be at home, fucking!

And they have reached the stairs.

ROSS

There, I told you it would work. I don't see why you need to get so worked up, Frank, it's not like you had to get him across the living room all by yourself.

ALICE

Yes, you did have some assistance. It's not easy holding someone's legs whilst pulling them backwards.

FRANK

"Whilst" I could come up now with "a cheap, unnecessary joke," Little Miss Muffin here appears to have beaten me to it.

ROSS

You were both marvelous. I couldn't have done it without you.

FRANK

Yes. Well, now that you've got him here, how do you plan on getting him up the fucking stairs?

ALICE

Frank, can't you think of another expletive? You of all people should know that less is more.

FRANK

Oh, don't you fucking start!

ROSS

I've got it! I'm going to get some string and tie up this end of the blanket, like a bratwurst. Then with Gray secure inside, you and Alice hold the other end of the blanket while I pull the trolley out from underneath his body.

(She snaps her fingers.)

That way we'll have him on the first landing just like that. It's brilliant.

ALICE

There's some string in the kitchen.

Ross exits into the kitchen to get the string.

FRANK

(Calling after Ross.)

That's fine, but what about the next flight of stairs up to his bedroom?

(To Alice.)

It must be ten steps.

ALICE

Frank, you're being deliberately difficult.

FRANK

I'm not being deliberately difficult, I'm being deliberately practical. It nearly killed the three of us getting him onto that fucking trolley, and we had to use the fucking ironing board to get him there. So how the hell are we going to get him up a fucking flight of stairs? Can't we just put his holiness in his chair over there?

ALICE

Frank, don't be ridiculous.

FRANK

I'm not being ridiculous! If we prop him up, wrapped in the blanket with a slice of the bundt, a cup of coffee and his favorite book, it'll look like he just died in his chair.

ALICE

Frank, you aren't helping the situation.

FRANK

I think it's a brilliant solution to this whole ridiculous farce.

ALICE

You of all people should know that when Ross gets like this it's just better to shut up and follow fucking instructions!

FRANK

(Gasping in mock horror.)

Uhhhhhhhhhhh! Ooooh, I'm telling Miss Buchanan you swore while she was out of the room!

ALICE

You do, and I'll tell her that you slept with her first husband.

FRANK

Everybody knows that!

ALICE

But they don't know you were dressed as Norma Shearer at the time.

Ross enters with some string, some tape and a pair of scissors.

ROSS

Here we are. I found this tape as well – I thought I could use it to put over both your mouths.

FRANK

Just for the record, Ross, I'd like it noted that all three of us have used expletives to make a fucking point.

Gray's corpse emits a weird, whale like noise from one of his orifices – Director's choice. They all look at Gray with various looks of astonishment.

FRANK (CON'TD)

I stand corrected – all four of us.

Cross fade back to Lesley.

LESLEY

Thank God it wasn't me who discovered the body. I've never been good around death. I must say it was all very civil. As soon as I got there, Ross took me upstairs to Gray's bedroom and left me alone with him. The room was lit by some candles. He looked at peace, but his face still had that impish quality that attracted me when we first met in that stock company, when he told me he was in love with me and wanted to marry me. Ross told me he died in his bed. She said she'd heard the sound of breaking glass, that he must have been pouring himself some water. Gray always did keep a pitcher of water by his bed. Mind you, I don't recall seeing any signs of water or broken glass, but I didn't think about that at the time. I just sat there looking at him. I took his hand, and then I found myself talking to him. It was almost surreal. There I was, in a bedroom that wasn't ours, saying things that I couldn't say to him when he was alive. How strange that his death would give me the courage to tell him the truth after all those years. Looking back, I must have sounded like I was spouting dialog from some clichéd tearjerker...

Cross fade to Ross "on set" in an appropriate costume.

ROSS

There's never a good time to say these things but this seems to be as good a time as any. Seeing you here, now, I know I have to face the truth, and the truth has made me realize this: I love you. There is nothing, nothing you could do that will change that. The truth, and this particular truth, isn't easy. It sure isn't easy for me. I guess I should have known all along but a part of me wanted to believe it was just a rumor. But this truth changes everything; or maybe it changes nothing because now I know I will always love you no matter what. I know in my heart that you are a good person, a good soul, and I accept you for everything you are, even if you may have done some things that other people find difficult to accept. Well, that's their problem. They don't know the true meaning of love. Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give – which is everything. Love means never having to say...

(She stops suddenly.)

Oh Frank, this is just goddamn awful.

FRANK (O.S.)

And cut! What is it now, Ross?

ROSS

This is ridiculous! I'm just going on and on with this claptrap, spouting cliché after cliché. This is a mother talking to her son, not Lana Turner talking to John Gavin in "Imitation of Life."

Frank enters.

FRANK

Maybe if you gave us an imitation of an actress, it might work.

ROSS

Frank, I defy any real actress to make this dialog work. I told you before we should rewrite it. Like I told you before we should change the title!

FRANK

When you say “we,” do you mean you, me and Sumner, or do you mean you, you and you – Queen Ross of the back lot?

ROSS

I could work on the scene with Sumner tonight and you could re-shoot tomorrow. I’m coming in anyway to help with Gray and feed him his lines off-camera.

FRANK

That may fit with your schedule, but it doesn’t fit with mine.

ROSS

But Frank, I have an idea...

FRANK

So do I, Ross. And I’m the director. With brilliant directorial insights, remember?

ROSS

And “we” have script approval, your highness. Remember?

FRANK

But you don’t have title approval, your majesty.

Cross-fade to Alice, 1988, in her hospital bed with neck brace and I.V. attached.

ALICE

...The secret to a good Yorkshire pudding is in the dripping, did I tell you that?... It wasn’t easy getting Gray upstairs, but with the four of us we managed it quite quickly. Not without the odd expletive, from Frank of course... you must place the baking tray at the bottom of the oven... Ross loathed foul language of any sort. She knew she couldn’t control it on the set, but in her private world people didn’t swear. When I first came to her that was one of the things she made very clear: no swearing in her home. At first I found it difficult, not that I used the “F” word that much, but I am partial to the “bugger” word when the occasion calls for it. In all the years I’ve known her, I can’t say I ever heard her swear, not even on stage or screen. Unless you consider “shit” and “goddamn it” swear words? Are “shit” and “goddamn it” swear words?

I don't think "shit" and "goddamn it" are considered swear words these days. Now it's the 80's they say "shit" and "goddamn it" in all the movies. Even Olivia De Havilland says "shit" and "goddamn it" now. Gray swore all the time, but that was Gray. Everybody else usually got a look, or that school-marmy "Language!" from her... the oven must be kept at a constant, even temperature. If you open the oven door to peek, then that's it, your Yorkshire pudding's bugged.

Lights cross fade to Frank, in his director's outfit, with Ross on the set of "Love Without Approval." They are both looking over pages of a film script.

ROSS

You see Frank, now with this speech, it's far less preachy and it makes the point far more succinctly. And it's much more actable.

FRANK

Well, after your outburst yesterday, Ross, I realized you were right. No real actress could make the other speech work. That's why I'm giving it to Gray.

ROSS

Gray?

FRANK

It'll work wonderfully as is, and we don't have to get Sumner, or you, to rewrite it.

ROSS

Not even that ghastly line, "love means never having to say... another cliché?"

FRANK

I met with Sumner last night, and we agreed Gray's character needs to be the focus at the end of the movie. If he says that speech to Steven in front of everyone at the meeting instead of in private, the preachiness works because...

ROSS

Because it isn't preaching. Because it's a father now, telling his son in public that he loves him, and that he will support his son no matter who he chooses to love. That's brilliant Frank, you're so clever.

FRANK

And so are you. You've given the final moment of the movie to Gray.

ROSS

No, Frank, I've given Gray his final moment. Besides you're going to give me lots of great reaction shots while he's giving that speech, aren't you, Frank?

FRANK

I think you'll only need one.

ROSS

Now if you'd only listen to me about the title...

FRANK

Let's just get this final scene with Gray in the can, and then we'll worry about the title. I hope it won't be too much for him.

ROSS

Don't worry. I'll work with him on his lines. I'm so busy looking after Gray I've hardly spent any time working on my own performance.

FRANK

Well, it's a performance that's going to win you an Oscar.

ROSS

Oh, like I care about that.

FRANK

Easy enough to say when you've already got three.

ROSS

Winning an award for acting is ridiculous. Now an egg and spoon race – that's something you can win.

FRANK

But with an egg and spoon race you don't get to dress up, make an emotional speech and get script approval.

ROSS

Script approval isn't much good to you when you haven't had the time to learn the script you've approved. I know Gray's lines better than I know my own.

FRANK

Perhaps that's why you're so good in this, why the two of you are so believable as a married couple.

ROSS

Perhaps. But I feel so unprepared. All my attention is focused on Gray. I'm up with him most nights going over the script. He used to be such a fast study.

FRANK

Once he sees he has the final moment in the movie, I'm sure the ham in him will get him through.

ROSS

No Frank, not the ham. The Prime Rib. Very rare.

They are interrupted by Bunny, Frank's male assistant.

BUNNY

Frank, I'm sorry to interrupt, but you have a call.

FRANK

I'm just about to have lunch, Bunny. Can't you take a message?

BUNNY

Normally I would, but it's Christina from wardrobe. She's hysterical. She says she has to have a decision about the hats for the town meeting scene.

FRANK

(To Ross.)

"Next to a tenor, a wardrobe woman is the touchiest thing in show business."

ROSS

You'd better take it Frank.

She exits.

FRANK

(Knowingly.)

So who is it, Bunny?

BUNNY

It's Gray's wife.

FRANK

"Well done. I see your career rising in the east, like the sun."

BUNNY

It's the third time she's called today — I can't keep putting her off. She's very worried about Gray.

FRANK

Okay, I'll take it. Once I'm done with "Christina", I need to discuss Agnes's schedule with you over lunch.

BUNNY

"Like girlfriends, with hats on."

FRANK

Bunny, do you think we'll ever get through a day without quoting "All About Eve?"

BUNNY

"Not until the last drugstore has sold its last pill."

Frank goes SR. He collects himself and picks up the phone. Lights up SL on Lesley, on her phone.

FRANK

Hello, Lesley.

LESLEY

Hello, Frank. How is the movie going?

FRANK

We're on schedule, thank God.

LESLEY

Oh, good. I'm pleased to hear it. And Gray? How is he?

FRANK

He's fine, Lesley. You'd be the first to know otherwise.

LESLEY

That's not what I've heard, not from the reports I'm getting.

FRANK

He's giving one of the best performances of his career. It has Oscar written all over it.

LESLEY

I hope he's alive to receive it.

FRANK

I'm keeping his schedule as light as possible, shooting his scenes in the afternoon so he can have plenty of time to rest. Ross is being marvelous, helping him with his lines, being there off camera for him, and making sure he is generally taken care of.

LESLEY

We are all very concerned, Frank. The last time Amanda and Mike saw their father, Amanda said he was very weak.

FRANK

Well, he has good days and bad days. So far we've been lucky and he hasn't missed a day of shooting.

LESLEY

Lucky you. We only seem to get him on his bad days.

FRANK

He's never been an easy man, Lesley. You should know that.

LESLEY

There are a lot of things I should know, Frank.

FRANK

Is there anything else I can do for you, Lesley? I have to go, I'm re-shooting a scene with Ross after lunch.

LESLEY

Of course. Ross Buchanan always comes first.

FRANK

Actually, Lesley, I come first, and I have to eat.

LESLEY

I'm sorry Frank; I didn't mean to spoil your lunch. It's just that my husband is dying, and as his wife, and mother of his children, I am naturally worried.

FRANK

Of course you are, Lesley. Worrying about Gray is something we all have in common. Now I'm sorry, I really have to go. You can always call me if you get any other reports.

LESLEY

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

My pleasure. Goodbye, Lesley.

LESLEY

Goodbye, Frank.

They both put down their phones. A moment on Frank, then the lights fade on him. A moment on Lesley, then the lights crossfade to Alice, in her hospital bed, neckbrace on. It is 1988

ALICE

Charlie Chaplin loved my Yorkshire pudding. Even then I had a reputation for my Roast Beef and Yorkshire pudding, and as we were both ex-pats we had a lot in common... I have very strict rules about getting involved with actors, especially if they're married, even if they are Hollywood Royalty... I couldn't be like Ross and Gray... I used to do some acting myself, you know, before I went to work with Kit... I fell madly in love with the leading man in the repertory company I was in... Charlie asked me over one day to show his wife, Paulette Goddard, how to make a proper English Sunday lunch. They were great friends of Kit. When I got there, Mr. Chaplin was in his dressing gown, and Mrs. Chaplin was nowhere to be seen. The next thing I knew, Charlie was on his knees, naked, and telling me he was madly in love with me. Contrary to what people say about me, I have seen a lot of men naked, but let me tell you, "The Little Tramp" was a big bugger... The sight of him, on his knees with his thing nearly touching the ground was so funny I started to laugh – this didn't go down well with Mr. Chaplin, which was surprising because he was known for doing anything to get a laugh. I later found out from Kit that he did this all the time...

(She indicates her IV drip.)

I'm not sure if this is working ... If I'd had my reading glasses with me in the car last week, none of this would have happened...

She fiddles with her IV as the lights fade on her. We continue to hear her voice, however, as the lights come up on Jamie Conovan, who is sitting at his desk taking notes while listening to Alice on a portable cassette recorder. There is a T.V. and Videocassete player in the "room," as well as several books about Ross Buchanan and/or Graham Harris strewn on the desk.

ALICE (V.O.)

You must let the batter stand, covered, for half an hour... After the repertory season finished I assumed I'd continue seeing my leading man. We were in love, and I thought this was 'it,' but when I finally managed to get in touch with him he said, "Oh I thought you knew I was married"...at least Ross knew what she was getting herself into with Gray...

The phone rings. Jamie stops the recorder and picks up the phone.

JAMIE

Hello?... This is Jamie Conovan... Oh, yes, Bunny! Thank you for getting back to me so quickly, I really appreciate it. You've been hard to get hold of, what with the time difference. What time is it there?... Oh, do you have time to talk now?... Well, perhaps when the movie wraps and you get back from France we can talk... I've already interviewed Frank, that's how I found out you were working on "Les Liaisons Dangereuses"... Oh. Why have they changed the title?... Oh, yes, I see – not that "Dangerous Liaisons" will make any difference in "les" Peoria, pensez-vous?... No, not yet, but I have interviews with Alice Watson and Mrs. Harris, and I'm waiting to hear from... yes, I know it was 20 years ago, but I figured if I wanted to know, then so would a lot of other people...

Crossfade to Ross "on set" in another costume.
We hear Frank's voice offstage.

FRANK (O.S.)

And action!

ROSS

You tell me the point you're trying to make is not who you love but that you love, and someone loves you. And that's an interesting point, indeed. Up until a few days ago I never really gave it much thought. You think that because I'm from a different generation, and not "groovy," that I've forgotten what it's like to be in love. Well it may not look like it to you, but what your father and I have is called being in love. And if what you and Adam feel for each other is half what your father and I had and still have, then you've convinced me, and I want you to know I'm on your side. Now all you have to do is convince your father, and Mrs. Brewton, and all the other small-minded people in this town. I wish you luck. I love you, you're my son, but what you are asking these people to do is to change the way they think, to fly in the face of everything they believe in. That sort of change doesn't happen over night. But if the point you're trying to make is that important to you, and you want to change the world over night, I say to you, bravo, I'm proud of you, and proud to be your mother. Point made. Point taken.

FRANK (O.S.)

And cut.

Cross-fade to Lesley, dressed in a black dress, putting on a matching black jacket. She appraises herself in a full-length off-stage mirror in front of her.

She then proceeds to choose between two hats, one with a veil and one without. After creating a few “looks” with both of them, she settles on the hat with the veil. The lights then cross fade to the full stage set revealing Alice and Frank on the steps, holding the top end of Gray’s blanketed body. Ross, now back in her white silk pajamas, is at the other end, which has now been securely tied, about to pull the trolley out from underneath. He does, indeed, look like a bratwurst.

ROSS

Okay, are you ready? On the count of three. One, two, three!

Alice and Frank pull towards them as Ross pulls the trolley away. Gray’s legs land with a thud, which causes Alice and Frank to reel back. This causes the body to hit the landing ass first, and it slumps over in a sitting position, the tied end on the first step. Ross steps back and surveys the situation.

ROSS

Well, we may have to get a new trolley, but other than that, that was perfect!

FRANK

Perfect. And it’s only taken us fifteen minutes to get him up four whole steps.

ALICE

Oh my God! His wife will be here any minute.

ROSS

We’ve got to get Gray upstairs.

FRANK

If you say that one more time, I’m going to slap you. I told you the three of us wouldn’t be able to get him up the stairs.

ALICE

And if you say that one more time, I’m going to slap you.

ROSS

All right, enough of this nonsense. I'll take his feet. Frank, you and Alice grab the top of the blanket and pull him up the stairs.

FRANK

But...

ROSS

No buts – just do it.

ALICE

I told you! Just follow instructions when she gets like this.

ROSS

Oh just shut up Alice, and pull.

And they do as they are told, pushing, pulling, groaning and moaning, and slowly as they gain momentum, they manage to get him almost all of the way up the stairs, Ross alternately encouraging and bullying them the whole way.

ROSS

We're almost there; one more big pull ought to do it.

FRANK

That's all right for you to say, you've got the light end of the bratwurst!

ROSS

But there are two of you at the "heavy" end.

ALICE

It's just as difficult for me, Frank, and I'm a woman.

FRANK

Prove it!

ROSS

Frank!

FRANK

I'm like a fucking contortionist up here, trying to get in the right position so I won't fall backwards with him on top of me.

ALICE

I don't see the problem Frank, it can't be that much different from what you were doing an hour ago.

FRANK

An hour ago the man on top of me wasn't dead.

ALICE

Prove it.

ROSS

Thank you, Fred and Ethel. Now Frank, put your back into it!

FRANK

I take back what I said before. THIS

(Pulling and groaning.)

is

(Pulling and groaning.)

the most fucking

(Pulling and groaning.)

ridiculous thing

(Pulling and groaning.)

I've ever had to

(Pulling and groaning.)

do in my whole

(Pulling and groaning.)

FUCKING

(Pulling and groaning.)

life!

He pulls and groans one more time and Gray's body is now at the top of the stairs. Frank and Alice hold onto the body to make sure it doesn't fall back down.

ALICE

Well-done Frank.

ROSS

We did it!

FRANK

WE did it? I did it, with a little support from Vita Sackville-West here.

ALICE

I AM NOT A LESBIAN!

Ross backs down the stairs to the landing.

ROSS

Oh, let's not quibble about billing.

The doorbell rings.

FRANK

Fuck. Who's that?

ALICE

(Letting go of Gray's body, she looks at her watch.)

Bugger it. It must be Lesley.

And with that, the string at the bottom end of the blanket unravels and Gray's body slides all the way down the stairs, leaving Frank holding the blanket. The body lands askew at the bottom where they first started.

ROSS

Shit and goddamn it!

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The lights come up on Bunny. It is 1988 and Bunny is now 55. He is in a hotel room in Los Angeles.

BUNNY

I was the first person she called. Well, after her children. Well, after Amanda, anyway. I don't think she told Michael till later. Mrs. Harris... Lesley and I had gotten very friendly during the shoot. "Bunny," she would say, "you're the only one who really understands". Which was true because I was the one who had to listen to her and handle all her calls to the set. The excuses I came up with why Frank couldn't speak to her became very inventive. My best one being the color of Agnes Moorehead's eye-shadow – which was only a semi-lie – I swear she'd been doing "Bewitched" for so long, she'd forgotten how a mortal woman would do her eyes. If you look very closely in the drug-store scene, you can see traces of "Endora Blue" peeping through. Anyway, Lesley called me about four in the morning. Usually, I'd be at Frank's, but every time I went to one of those weekend parties I ended up doing what I always do: being "Frank's Assistant." Anyway, this time I came up with a 'classic' excuse for not coming that I knew Frank wouldn't challenge. Crabs. I felt sorry for Lesley. Whatever she knew or didn't know about Ross and Gray, she never let on. At least not to me anyway. When she called me at home that morning, she told me Ross had called her and she was going over there to see the body. They'd never met you know. After all those years and all those movies! Anyway, Lesley was very concerned about what to wear and whether or not she should wear a hat. I told her a hat was little too "Joan Crawford" in my opinion. I've no idea what she ended up wearing that morning — she never called to tell me what happened. Nobody really knows what went on between the two of them that morning. But I've heard stories...

The lights cross fade to the living room, 1968. It is about 4:30 a.m. Throughout this scene the light outside gets brighter as dawn approaches. Lesley is alone on stage. She is dressed in the chic black widow's weeds and hat we saw her wearing in Act One; looking around the room as if it is the first time she is seeing it, which of course, it is. Taking her time, she touches a few objects, perhaps picks up a framed photograph or two, before going over to Gray's chair. Instinctively, she knows it is his, and she strokes the back of it. The kitchen door swings open, startling her. Alice enters with the tea trolley, which is now wobbling and squeaking.

For reasons that will become evident, the top tray has: two plates, two cups w/saucers, spoons, knives and forks, (assorted cutlery for serving,) creamer, sugar, teapot, coffee pot. The bottom tray has a bundt cake, a plate of cookies, a plate of sandwiches, and napkins.

ALICE

I'm sorry it took me so long; I'm having a little trouble with this trolley. I made some tea and coffee, unless you'd like something a little stronger?

LESLEY

It's 4:30 in the morning.

ALICE

Well, everyone's a little shaky. Even though Gray was very ill, it's still a shock.

LESLEY

Coffee is fine, thank you. Milk, no sugar.

ALICE

There are some sandwiches.

LESLEY

No, thank you.

ALICE

There's some bundt and cookies too, if you'd like.

LESLEY

Just coffee will do.

(As Alice pours the coffee for Lesley.)

Aren't you having any? Please don't tell me you've gone to all this trouble just for me.

ALICE

Oh no. I prepared all this earlier. I said I'd go to Frank's to help him with Paddy. Paddy was very upset. He's going to miss Gray dreadfully. We are all going to miss him.

LESLEY

So are we. When did Paddy get here?

ALICE

About half an hour before you did.

LESLEY

He must have driven like a maniac. Gray was just the same. No mistaking those two were brothers. They were alike in so many ways. I'm sure he took you up on your offer of "something a little stronger."

ALICE

Well, he needed it, he was very upset.

LESLEY

I would have been here sooner, but I had many calls to make.

Lesley goes to sit in Gray's chair

ALICE

Oh. That's Gray's chair, you can't... I mean, nobody ever sat in that chair except Gray...

LESLEY

Not even Ross?

ALICE

No, not even Ross.

LESLEY

Maybe I will have some cake.

(She sits somewhere else.)

You seem to know a lot about what went on around here, don't you?

ALICE

(Slicing a piece of the cake.)

I've been Ross's companion and personal assistant for many years, Mrs. Harris. Ross and Gray made nine movies together, ten with "Love Without Approval." I've been around them both for a very long time, and got to know their ways. It's my job. It's what I do.

She hands the slice of cake to Lesley, putting the remaining cake on either the coffee table or side table.

LESLEY

And you do it very well. This cake is delicious. Did you bake it? Is that something you do as well?

ALICE

Well, I do have a reputation for my Yorkshire pudding, but no, this particular cake is from Drayton's, in Glendale. It's the only bakery that makes a Boysenberry bundt. It was Gray's favorite.

LESLEY

Gray always loved my coconut loaf.

ALICE

He'd have these mad cravings and I would have to drive all the way to Glendale and back to get one for him.

LESLEY

Doesn't Drayton's deliver?

ALICE

They do now. I don't know what's taking Ross so long. She said she was just going to take a shower and be right down. I really should be at Frank's.

LESLEY

Oh, go right ahead. I'll be fine here.

ALICE

Are you sure? I left my cardigan in the kitchen. I'll just go and get it.

Alice exits. Lesley sits alone, drinking her coffee. Suddenly the trolley collapses, and everything on it falls to the floor. Alice rushes in, and sees the mess.

ALICE

Bugger it!

LESLEY

I was just sitting here, and it fell apart.

ALICE

It's not your fault, Mrs. Harris. It's Gray's... He... it was used for something it was never meant to carry.

LESLEY

It must have been something very heavy for it to collapse like that.

ALICE

Bratwursts.

LESLEY

Bratwursts?

ALICE

Assorted Bratwursts. He used to buy them by the dozen for his poker nights. He'd pick them up at the market, and then use the trolley to bring them into the kitchen through the back door.

LESLEY

Why didn't he send you?

ALICE

Oh, you know Gray. He was very particular about his Bratwursts.

LESLEY

I'll help you clean this up.

ALICE

That's very kind of you.

LESLEY

You go get a towel; I'll start clearing up in here.

The lights cross fade to Frank as Alice goes into the kitchen and Lesley starts to clear up the coffee and teapots. It is 1988, and Frank is again on his chaise by the pool.

FRANK

Looking back on it now I can see the humor in it. At the time, though, I just didn't see the point of the farce we all had to go through because some washed up publicity head at MGM thought it would be better for a member of "Hollywood Royalty" to be found "lying in state," rather than on the kitchen floor. I told Ross that I thought it was ridiculous, but Ross was on one of her "missions" and there was no arguing with her. When she gets like that, I've learned it's always better to just keep quiet and follow instructions. Thank God Gray's brother Paddy arrived when he did. Alice, bless her, just didn't have the brawn. But once Paddy got there, we managed quite easily. It was upsetting for him moving his brother's body; they were very close. And he wasn't in the best of health either. I figured he needed a drink. So I thought it was better for everyone if he came back to my house. Ross was getting edgy because Lesley was due any minute. She didn't want anyone around; it was the first time the two of them had ever met. Alice was supposed to come to my house, but she never showed up. She told me later she had gone back to her place to freshen up.

I saw Lesley's car drive up to Gray's cottage just as Paddy and I got to my house. Strange to think that Gray's death would be the reason for these two women to meet. I would love to have been a fly on that wall.

Cross-fade to Lesley, sitting in Gray's chair. Once again she is alone. The trolley has been removed and the mess has been cleaned up. Ross enters from upstairs. She is dressed in a flowing, silvery grey pants suit, casual but very chic. She has applied a subtle makeup and now looks subtly younger. When she gets to the bottom of the stairs, she is startled to see Lesley sitting in Gray's chair. She recovers quickly, and strides into the room with her usual self-confidence intact.

ROSS

Hello Lesley. I'm Ross Buchanan. I'm so sorry for your loss. Even though Gray was ill it's still a shock. You've known him the longest.

LESLEY

Thank you.

Lesley remains seated.

ROSS

Oh no, don't get up – you look so comfortable in Gray's chair. I heard some god-awful noise. Are you all right?

LESLEY

I'm fine. The trolley collapsed with everything on it.

ROSS

Oh dear. It was a very old trolley. Can I get you anything?

LESLEY

No, thank you. I've had some coffee and cake...the bundt.

She gestures towards the cake on the table.

ROSS

It was Gray's favorite.

LESLEY

So I've been told. I've learned so much about Gray since I've been here: Boysenberry bundt and the Bratwurst.

ROSS

Bratwurst?

LESLEY

Yes. Alice told me all about Gray, the bratwurst, and the trolley before she left.

ROSS

Oh... Well... it... uhm...

LESLEY

He never ate it when he... I never even knew Gray liked bratwurst.

ROSS

Neither did I, until very recently. He was very secretive at times. You know Gray.

LESLEY

Yes, I did know Gray.

ROSS

Of course you did. That's a lovely hat. But I wish you'd take it off, I feel so underdressed.

LESLEY

Well, I was in such a rush I didn't have time to fix my hair, so I thought a hat was the best solution.

ROSS

And black goes with almost anything.

LESLEY

So does grey.

ROSS

Would you like to see him now?

LESLEY

I'm not sure I'm ready.

ROSS

Well, you look ready.

LESLEY

I'm not very good around death. I couldn't see my mother or father when they passed.

ROSS

My mother went to take a nap one day, and that was it. She was fifty when she died, still young and vibrant. She looked so beautiful and peaceful. I sat there with her holding her hand and talked to her telling her all about my day – it's what I would have done if she were alive. I miss her terribly. My father was a biologist; he was very matter of fact about it all. To him it was a natural part of life. So I don't fear death now; I think it must be just like a long sleep. It was very different with my father; he was in a lot of pain and died in a hospital – all very cold and clinical. If I could choose, I'd like to go the way my mother did. Or, at least, in my own bed, like Gray. How are Michael and Amanda?

LESLEY

I haven't told Michael yet; I want to be there in person when I tell him. And even then, I'm not sure just how much he will understand. Like the rest of us, Amanda was expecting it, but it was still a shock.

ROSS

You did tell Amanda that she could come and see her father?

LESLEY

I'd rather she didn't come here.

ROSS

Why?

LESLEY

I would think that was obvious.

ROSS

Look Lesley, this is an awkward situation for both of us. But Amanda was Gray's daughter. She should be allowed to see her father if she wants to.

LESLEY

I'm her mother. I think I know what's best for her in this situation.

ROSS

She's 32 years old, Lesley. I think you mean what's best for you.

LESLEY

Please don't talk to me like that. You don't know me well enough to talk to me like that.

ROSS

But I knew Gray well enough to know that he loved his children and they loved him.

LESLEY

You wouldn't understand. You're not a mother. Or a wife.

ROSS

I would have expected that line to come from Joan Crawford. Not from the "great" Lesley Harding.

LESLEY

I haven't been called that in many years.

ROSS

I saw you on Broadway in *The Truth of the Matter*.

LESLEY

That was before I met Gray.

ROSS

God-awful play, but you were good.

LESLEY

I can't believe you would remember, it was so long ago.

ROSS

I have a very good memory. Especially when I see a good performance.

LESLEY

I was a good actress; I could have been a great actress. But when Michael was born everything changed. Gray went out on the road and became the breadwinner. Then Gray's career took off; I stayed home to take care of Michael. They don't give out Oscars for being a mother. I made a choice.

ROSS

We both made a choice when it came to our careers. And you've received quite a few awards for the work you have done for the mentally handicapped.

LESLEY

I never considered it work. It's what any mother would do for her child. Of course, having Gray at my side helped a lot.

ROSS

Raising money is a lot easier when you've got an Oscar winner lending his support.

LESLEY

I would hardly call it “lending” his support. He was Michael’s father. He did more than raise money.

ROSS

I think I shall have another drink.

(She goes to the wet bar and pours another scotch.)

Would you like one?

LESLEY

It’s much too early for me.

ROSS

Me too.

(She plops some ice into the glass and takes a sip.)

Lesley, I have to ask you something. Why are you sitting in Gray’s chair? Even our dog Lutie knew it was off-limits to anyone but Gray.

LESLEY

Gray had a dog? A bundt, the bratwurst, and a dog.

ROSS

Gray loved Lutie, he cried when we had to put him down.

(Taking another sip of her drink.)

If you’re trying to make some sort of statement by sitting in Gray’s chair, you are. And quite frankly, Lesley, I find it very upsetting and unnecessary given the circumstances.

LESLEY

I lost my husband this morning.

ROSS

You lost the father of your children this morning. You lost your husband years ago. Before I even met him. I think it is time you faced the reality of what happened. For God’s sake, Lesley! Where do you think he was for twenty-five years? Gone to pick up the dry-cleaning?

LESLEY

He wasn’t gone for twenty-five years. He came back many times.

ROSS

But he didn't stay. Look Lesley, let's be adult about this. You knew him then, and I knew him then. We both loved Gray and we both have wonderful memories of a very complex man. A man who is now dead. We both have grief, and we both have to mourn him. We could carry on pretending, or we could be friends.

LESLEY

I can be friendly Ross, but not friends. You see, I thought you were just a rumor.

ROSS

Lesley. I can't imagine what it must be like to be you at this moment in time, or what's going on in the mind under that pathetic black hat. But that has to be one of the most ridiculous things I've ever heard.

LESLEY

At least my outfit is appropriate for a woman of my age.

ROSS

The only thing appropriate about you Lesley is your age. Just a rumor! Gray and I were together for 25 years. Some rumor.

LESLEY

And I was married to him for 40 years.

ROSS

Minus 25. That makes 15. Rumor has it.

LESLEY

No matter how you do the math, I will always be Mrs. Graham Harris.

ROSS

You were wrong, Lesley, when you said you could have been a great actress. You are a great actress, but unfortunately your performance this morning will end up on the cutting room floor.

LESLEY

But my name will always be above the title. Now I'd like to see my husband.

ROSS

I'll take you up to him.

LESLEY

No, thank you. I would rather go up by myself.

ROSS

It's the first door you come to at the end of the hallway.

Lesley starts up the stairs, but stops at the first landing and in "great actress" style she turns to Ross and takes off her hat. Her hair is perfectly coiffed.

LESLEY

You weren't the only one, you know.

ROSS

And I wasn't the first, you know.

Lesley continues up the stairs and exits. Ross stares up after her for moment, and then goes to Gray's chair and strokes the back of it.

ROSS (CONT'D)

You were right Gray – she is a damned good actress.

(She finds her scotch and finishes it.)

And that performance deserves an Oscar.

The kitchen door slowly opens and Alice stands in the doorway, unseen by Ross.

ALICE

We all deserve Oscar's this morning.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

Lights up on Frank, on the chaise by his pool, as he was before. 1988.

FRANK

We were all nominated for Oscars, despite the fact that the movie was slow to take off. It was released in December 1968; a rush job – the studio wanted to capitalize on Gray's death. But despite the publicity, the names Harris, Buchanan and Bonnar weren't quite the box-office draw they used to be. None of us could understand why we weren't a hit. We were all disappointed, especially as it was Gray's last movie – the studio heads put it down to Viet Nam; Gray's agent Sam thought it was due to the Civil Rights movement;

Ross was convinced it was the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy; I put it down to the new kids on the block: Polanski, Kubrick, Zeffirelli, Faye Dunaway, Steve McQueen, Dustin Hoffman, Warren Beatty, Jane Fonda, Julie Christie; Alice put it most succinctly by saying that nobody wanted to see a movie about a bunch of buggers in South Bend. When a movie isn't immediately successful, especially an Oscar winner, everyone is quick to find a reason why. Then in the summer of 1969, Judy Garland died. Another shock, but like Gray, not unexpected. I flew to New York for the funeral; Friday, June 27 – it was a very sad day for a lot of people. Naturally, it made the front pages of all the papers. What didn't make the front page, though, was an item about a police raid on a gay bar in the Village later that night. Over the course of the next few days, the Stonewall riots changed many lives, many things, including our film. The taboo subject matter was no longer taboo, and eight months after its release the box-office went through the roof. Suddenly, we were the movie to see. Everyone was applauding our bravery; we literally got standing ovations – for a movie! I threw a big, old-fashioned, Hollywood party here. The studio heads were falling over backwards congratulating themselves on their foresight, Ross said that after the national grief of the assassinations people needed something to make them forget, Sam made a toast to Gray, and Alice got smashed, made a pass at Tab Hunter and whipped him up one of her famous Yorkshire puddings. In the end, it all came down to just sheer luck. And the death of another Hollywood legend.

Lights cross fade to Lesley, making an acceptance speech, holding an ambiguous award that could be an Oscar. She is smartly dressed in a simple but glamorous gown, a la Jackie Kennedy.

LESLEY

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you, thank you so much. I feel like a fraud, standing up here tonight accepting this award. Of course I am honored and humbled to be here in front of you all, but this award belongs to someone who cannot be here tonight. If my husband Graham were here tonight, I know he would feel the same. And he would tell you that this award should go to a very special person whose courage, strength, perseverance and generosity has affected so many people's lives for the good. That person is, of course, our son Michael. To be here accepting this Mother of the Year award in the company of all the mothers who have received this award in the past is a little daunting for me, as I consider their achievements far greater than anything I have ever done. Like any mother who brings up any child, I was just doing the best I could for my son. I never considered it work. It's what any mother would do for the child she loves.

Of course, having a famous husband at my side opened many doors and many wallets, but it was Michael's bravery and achievements that gave me the courage to challenge people's perceptions of the mentally handicapped and to fight for a better way of life for human beings who are often looked upon as second class citizens, but who are most definitely first class in the eyes of God. On behalf of Michael and myself, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart...

Lights cross fade to the living room. Ross is alone, on the phone. She has a cardboard box into which she is putting various personal items while she speaks.

ROSS

Well, we're all going to miss him...yes, but it's a shock just the same... Oh that's very sweet of you Bunny, we're fine now. But we could have used you an hour ago... Well, if there is anything we need, you'll be the first person I call...

(She looks in the direction of the stairs.)

Oh, she's putting on a brave show, but I can tell it's all an act... Well, it's difficult for both of us. How did you know she was here, did Frank call you?... Oh, she did? I didn't realize you and Lesley were so tight...I suppose that's understandable... Look, I'd better go — I want to keep the line free, I'm expecting a call from Bill and the coroner... Yes, I promise. I'll tell Frank you called...Thank you, Bunny. Goodbye.

Ross puts down the phone and continues packing. Lesley comes down the stairs, holding her hat.

ROSS

Are you all right, Lesley? You were up there for quite a while. I was a little worried.

LESLEY

I had a long talk with Gray.

ROSS

I see.

LESLEY

He looked so peaceful, almost as if he were happy to be done with this life. The candles are beautiful.

She puts her hat down on one of the side tables.

ROSS

It seemed the right thing to do.

LESLEY

I felt as though we were in our own private chapel. Thank you.

ROSS

I'm not religious; I just know how important the right lighting is. Especially in a death scene. Can I get you anything?

LESLEY

Is there any Scotch left?

ROSS

How do you like it?

LESLEY

On the rocks with a splash of soda.

(As Ross puts down the box and goes to make the drink for Lesley.)

I'll do it.

ROSS

Are you sure? Thank you.

LESLEY

(As she's making her drink.)

What are you doing?

ROSS

I'm packing my things. I want to get them in the car before the mob gets here.

LESLEY

Why?

ROSS

Why? I thought that would be quite obvious, Lesley. I'm just a rumor.

LESLEY

Ross, as much as I would have preferred Gray to have died in my arms, in our home, he didn't. He died with you. You said we both made choices, Gray did too. 25 years ago. This was your home with him; this is your home without him.

(She goes to the box and begins unpacking it.)

You were right when you said I lost my husband years ago. I always wanted to believe that Gray left me, but the truth is that I left him when we realized that Michael was severely retarded. The choice I had to make was to put my son first. The choice you made was to put Gray first. No contest.

ROSS

That was some talk you had with Gray. For what it's worth, Lesley, I know Gray felt terribly guilty. That Irish Catholic guilt. He found it very hard to come to terms with Michael's handicap.

LESLEY

It wasn't guilt.

ROSS

It seemed like guilt to me.

LESLEY

It was the fact that Michael, his son, was never going to be a perfect replica of the great Graham Harris.

ROSS

I think one Gray in this world is enough, don't you?

LESLEY

I did love him.

ROSS

And he loved you.

LESLEY

And then he loved you.

ROSS

I suppose. I don't really know. He never told me. Maybe it was that Irish Catholic guilt thing again. I think he liked me.

LESLEY

He wouldn't have stayed if he didn't.

ROSS

I don't know which is better. Being loved, or being liked.

LESLEY

I do. May I use your phone? I'd like to call Amanda. I think she should see her father.

ROSS

She'll have to get here quickly; the undertaker should be here soon.

LESLEY

She lives in Westwood, she can be here in 15 minutes if I call her right now.

ROSS

Well, then go right ahead.

LESLEY

Are you sure you don't need to keep the line free?

ROSS

Oh, no, we have two lines here. I just wanted to get rid of Bunny — he's very sweet, but you know what a gossip he can be. There's an extension in my room upstairs if you'd like some privacy.

LESLEY

Thank you.

Lesley starts up the stairs.

ROSS

I'll ask Alice to prepare some breakfast.

LESLEY

Breakfast?

ROSS

By the time Amanda gets here, it'll be nearly 6. She's bound to be hungry.

LESLEY

I'm sorry; I've lost all track of time.

(She continues up the stairs, stops, and turns.)

Ross, while we're waiting for Amanda, I'd like to talk to you about what outfit we should bury Gray in.

ROSS

Oh... well... yes, of course...

(After Lesley has exited.)

You can come in now Alice.

Frank enters from the kitchen. He is now more suitably dressed.

ROSS (CONT'D)

How long have you been in there?

FRANK

Long enough to have come up with the perfect outfit for Gray.

Alice enters from the kitchen.

ALICE

Frank, I don't think the costume he wore in "The Pirate of Vera Cruz" is appropriate.

(To Ross.)

He got here about five minutes ago.

ROSS

How's Paddy?

FRANK

Asleep. A combination of exhaustion and scotch. What's for breakfast?

ALICE

Well, I had to throw everything away because of the trolley, so I was thinking muffins.

(As Frank does a "take.")

I am not a lesbian.

ROSS

Alice, dear, shut up.

FRANK

Alice, dear, shut up.

ALICE

I'm going back into the kitchen now, where I shall prepare muffins for Lesley and Amanda. And rock cakes for you two.

Alice exits into the kitchen with a regally sinister dignity.

ROSS

I think you've really upset her, Frank. The last time she made rock cakes was for Hedda Hopper's 80th birthday. Hedda died very soon after, you know.

FRANK

I shall make my peace with Alice. And in honor of the dear departed Hedda, I shall wear this hat.

He picks up Lesley's hat.

ROSS

That's Lesley's, Frank. Please don't.

FRANK

I'm never sure on these occasions; does one wear the veil up? Or down?

(Looking in a mirror.)

Dietrich wore it up in "Witness For The Prosecution," Barbara Stanwyck wore it down in "Double Indemnity," Bette Davis had it both ways in "Mr. Skeffington."

ROSS

She did. On and off screen.

FRANK

You wore it down in "The Winter Before Last."

ROSS

No I didn't, I wore it up. I was younger then.

FRANK

I'm talking about the gas chamber scene.

ROSS

I wore it up in that scene too – I wanted to see everything. Now Frank, take it off. Lesley'll be down in a minute.

FRANK

Oh, since you've become a "widow" you're just no fun anymore.

ROSS

Give me that hat and get into the kitchen.

FRANK

Oh, all right. It's a terrible hat anyway. So '50s. I wouldn't be caught dead in it. Oops! Poor Lesley, she could never make the right choice, in hats or in men. "Frank exits into kitchen, cut to reaction shot on Ross."

And he exits into the kitchen. Ross puts the hat back on the side table where Lesley left it. Lesley comes down the stairs.

LESLEY

I heard voices. Is Paddy here?

ROSS

Paddy's asleep at Frank's. Frank and Alice are here. They're in the kitchen making us some breakfast.

LESLEY

Amanda will be here in about 25 minutes.

ROSS

I'm pleased you called her.

LESLEY

Frank must be taking this pretty hard. He and Gray were such good friends.

ROSS

Oh, he's devastated. That's why I suggested he help Alice in the kitchen. It's giving him something to do.

Frank enters from the kitchen, in his straight, professional studio mode.

FRANK

Lesley. I am so sorry for your loss.

(Kissing Lesley on the cheek.)

It's so good to see you; I wish it were under more pleasant circumstances.

LESLEY

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

Ross, I couldn't stay in that kitchen. Everything reminds me of Gray, even the floor tiles.

Almost teary, he flops into Gray's chair.

ROSS & LESLEY

Frank!

FRANK

Oh, I'm so sorry. I forgot.

(Getting up and moving to another chair.)

It's been quite a morning, what with Paddy, Alice and the trolley.

LESLEY

The trolley?

ROSS

(Glaring at Frank.)

Alice told Frank all about the trolley collapsing here in the living room. She was very upset. She was very possessive about that trolley. Gray was the only other person she let use it.

LESLEY

Well, she didn't seem that upset at the time.

ROSS

She's British.

With that, Alice enters with a tray with coffee, cups, saucers, milk and sugar.

ALICE

Could you clear some space for the coffee?

(Getting slightly emotional.)

Normally, I'd have everything on... the trolley... but...

LESLEY

(Very concerned, she picks up her hat.)

Oh here, I'll move my hat.

ALICE

Thank you. Now Frank, could you help me bring in the rest of the things from the kitchen?

FRANK

Alice, you know I can't go into that kitchen at the moment. The memories are too vivid.

LESLEY

I'll help you Alice.

ROSS

No, no, Lesley, don't be silly. I'll help Alice. You stay here and take care of Frank.

Ross and Alice exit into the kitchen. Lesley looks around for a place to put her hat, she places it on the seat of Gray's chair.

LESLEY

You all have such special memories of Gray. A different Gray from the one I knew.

FRANK

We're all going to miss him terribly. Even though he was ill, it's still a shock. You knew him the longest.

Ross and Alice reenter with plates, sandwiches, etc...

ALICE

The muffins are in the oven.

FRANK

Alice loves her muffins fresh and hot, / don't you, Alice

ROSS

/ Would you like some coffee, Lesley?

ALICE

I could make some tea.

LESLEY

I think I'll wait until Amanda gets here.

FRANK

(Cutting himself a huge slice of bundt.)

Well, in honor of Gray I'm going to have some bundt. It was his favorite. I'm not a muffin man, myself.

ALICE

Frank's a bratwurst man.

LESLEY

Bratwurst. For breakfast?

ALICE

Oh, Frank can take a bratwurst anytime of day, can't you, Frank? As a matter of fact it was Frank who introduced Gray to Bratwursts in the first place.

LESLEY

Oh, that would explain why he had so many.

ALICE

Not nearly as many as Frank.

FRANK

Oh, the bratwursts Gray and I shared... I remember a particularly tasty one when we were on location in / Bavaria

ROSS

/ Lesley, have you given any more thought as to what outfit we should bury Gray in?

LESLEY

Oh... well... Amanda and Michael once gave Gray this tie for St. Patrick's Day – I told Amanda to pick it up on her way here. It's a lovely green plaid.

Frank does a “spit” take with the bundt.

FRANK

I’m sorry; a boysenberry went down the wrong way.

ALICE

I think I’ll go check on my muffins.

She exits into the kitchen.

ROSS

(Taken back a bit, but going along with
Lesley’s fait accompli with the tie.)

Well, green would look very nice with that sport shirt he loved, and his old brown cardigan and corduroys.

LESLEY

I was thinking something more formal. One of his Botany 500 suits.

ROSS

A suit.

LESLEY

I asked Amanda to bring that as well.

ROSS

I see.

LESLEY

It is Graham Harris, after all.

ROSS

The Graham Harris I knew was very casual.

LESLEY

The Graham Harris I knew was... is the one I want people to remember.

FRANK

The Graham Harris I knew would find all this very amusing.

LESLEY

I want him to look respectable.

ROSS

Oh for God’s sake, Lesley, what difference does it make?

LESLEY

I am still his wife. For better or for worse.

FRANK

Forsaking all others.

ROSS

Until death do us part.

(Genuinely.)

If it's that important to you Lesley, Gray should be buried in whatever you want.

LESLEY

Thank you, Ross. This isn't easy for either of us.

ROSS

Lesley, in situations like these, a wife always trumps a rumor.

She sits in Gray's chair very purposefully,
unknowingly sitting on Lesley's hat.

FRANK & LESLEY

Ross!

ROSS

Oh, really, you two, Gray's dead. If I can't...

(She realizes she's sitting on something.
She stands, and picks up Lesley's
squashed hat.)

Lesley, I'm so sorry.

LESLEY

Oh, don't worry, Ross. Frank was right. It is a terrible hat.

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

Lights up on Alice, 1988, in her hospital bed,
etc...

ALICE

You've never had a rock cake? They're closer to what Americans call a scone. Quite different from a British "scone" (pronounced scon). Same thing with muffins.

Even those things you call English Muffins aren't English Muffins. And then there are biscuits – which you have with dinner, and we have with tea. It took me years to sort it all out... to this day it irks Frank that I overheard what went on between Lesley and Ross. And what irks him the most is that I've never told him what I heard, or anyone else for that matter. I'm known for my discretion. Greta Garbo wanted me after Kit died, but I thought Ross and Gray were much more fun. Ross always says I'll go to my grave knowing more things about... You see, American muffins are sweet, like a cake. English muffins are more like a bread... I didn't mean to eavesdrop; I did it more out of loyalty to Ross. I started to walk to Frank's to help with Paddy, but then I decided I'd drive home first to freshen up. I'd left my car keys in the kitchen... So I went in through the back door. When I got inside I could hear them talking – you could hear everything through that door... I have to say I nearly gave myself away when I heard Lesley say to Ross that she thought she was “just a rumor.” What a ridiculous thing for her to say... Oh I'm not saying anything the whole world doesn't know. Ross tells the story herself, and of course the story of how “Love Without Approval” became “Just A Rumor.” You'd have had to have been on Mars not to know how much Ross hated the original title. Between you and me, it was my idea. You see, while Lesley was upstairs with Gray, I jokingly said to Ross: “Just a rumor – sounds like a good movie title to me.” Ross, of course, will tell you it was her idea; Frank will tell you that he came up with it after Ross regaled him with what Lesley said; Lesley denies she ever said it... I'm not sure if this is working...

(She indicates her IV drip.)

If I'd had my reading glasses in the car with me last week none of this would have happened... they even wrote a song for the movie called “Just A Rumor,” you know Burt Bacharach... and that girl who's very famous now sang it...

We hear the theme song* from “Just A Rumor,” sung by a female singer who sounds remarkably like a young Linda Ronstadt. The lights crossfade to Jamie, 1988. He is seated, notepad in hand, watching “Just A Rumor” on his VCR.

(*Music & Lyrics by Gary Lyons. Use as much or as little as needed.)

FEMALE SINGER'S VOICE

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
PEOPLE ARE TALKING AND WHISPERING
SILLY PEOPLE
THEY DON'T KNOW
PEOPLE ARE LOOKING
PEOPLE ARE LOOKING AND SHAKING THEIR HEADS
SILLY PEOPLE
THEY DON'T KNOW...
THAT YOU LOVE ME
THAT I'M HAPPY

THAT YOU'RE HAPPY
THAT I LOVE YOU
WE'RE IN LOVE LIKE TWO SILLY PEOPLE
AND WE KNOW...

The phone rings. Jamie finds the remote and mutes the video. He picks up the phone.

JAMIE

Hello?... This is Jamie Conovan ...

(Startled by who is on the phone, he looks toward the TV.)

Oh. Hello. Thank you for getting back to me...Oh, yes, Tuesday will be fine.

(Making a note on his pad.)

... No, no, Tuesday at 3 is great... Yes, I have the address... Very good, I'll see you then. And thank you again. Goodbye.

(He hangs up.)

Yes!

He makes a few more notes and then reaches for the remote. As the lights crossfade we hear the continuation of the song.

FEMALE SINGER'S VOICE

(THAT)
PEOPLE ARE TALKING
PEOPLE ARE TALKING AND WHISPERING
THEY'RE JUST PEOPLE
SILLY AS THEY CAN BE
JUST SOME TALKING
JUST A WHISPER
JUST A RUMOR
A SILLY RUMOR
THAT WAS STARTED BY
YOU AND ME

The lights have crossfaded to Ross and Alice, 1968, on the set of "Love Without Approval." They are "off camera," facing out front towards the audience, looking at the set, waiting as Frank prepares to film Gray's climactic scene.

There are three “director’s” chairs, with Frank’s, Ross’s and Gray’s names on them. Possibly lights, boom mike, etc...

ALICE

How is he?

ROSS

He had a terrible night. I thought we might have to postpone the shoot till tomorrow, but he insisted he was fine. I think he was worried if he didn’t make it today, he never would. Frank’s hoping he can do it in one take.

ALICE

Where is he?

ROSS

He’s still in makeup. His face was very blotchy this morning – he looked god-awful. I asked Craig to go in and have a look at him; he did such a good job on me, hiding that rash when I did “Indian Summer.”

Frank enters.

ROSS

How’s he doing?

FRANK

About as you’d expect. I’ve told everyone to be focused and ready so we can do this as quickly and painlessly as possible as soon as he gets on set. I’ll have three cameras on him. How was he on his lines last night?

ROSS

One minute he was word perfect, the next he was all over the place. But you know Gray, he’ll deliver as soon as he hears “action”.

ALICE

There he is.

ROSS

(Going to help him.)

Oh my god, he can hardly walk.

FRANK

(Stopping her.)

No, Ross. He doesn’t want any fuss and bother today, especially from you. I’ll go and talk to him, and then we’ll go for a take.

Frank exits.

ALICE

You're here for him if he needs you, Ross. That's enough. He's going to be fine.

ROSS

I hate seeing him in so much pain, and I can see in his eyes he knows.

ALICE

What?

ROSS

Oh come on, Alice.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Quiet on the set!

FRANK (O.S.)

And action.

There is a tense pause as they wait for Gray to begin. Throughout the speech, we watch Ross, Alice, and later, Frank react.

GRAY (V.O.)

There's never a good time to say these things but this seems to be as good a time as any. Seeing you here, now, I know I have to face the truth, and the truth has made me realize this: I love you. There is nothing, nothing you could do that will change that. The truth, and this particular truth, isn't easy. It sure isn't easy for me. I guess I should have known all along but a part of me wanted to believe it was just a rumor. But this truth changes everything; or maybe it changes nothing because...

As the speech continues, we see the scene from the movie on a big screen, with Gray in full technicolor glory.

GRAY (V.O.)

Because now I know I will always love you no matter what. I know in my heart that you are a good person, a good soul, and I accept you for everything you are, even if you may have done some things that other people find difficult to accept.

There is a long pause; Ross and Alice look anxious.

GRAY (V.O.)

Well, that's their problem.

Ross and Alice all look relieved; Frank re-enters and sits in his chair.

GRAY (V.O.)

They don't know the true meaning of love. Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give – which is everything.

Ross starts to tear up.

GRAY (V.O.)

Love means never having to say I love you, but always wanting to say I love you.

FRANK

Cut. Print.

The filmed sequence ends.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Gray, that was fucking brilliant.

ROSS

Fucking brilliant.

They all start to applaud. Ross rushes off to be with Gray. Frank starts to follow Ross, but Alice holds him back. They both sit in the chairs and watch. Lights cross-fade to the 1969 Oscar ceremony. We hear a burst of applause as a Famous Male Star, dressed in a tux, is discovered at the podium.

A FAMOUS MALE STAR

Thank you. It's been quite a night of surprises here tonight, hasn't it? As if Tiny Tim wasn't enough.

(Laughter and a smattering of applause.)

So here we go. The nominees for Best Actress in a Leading Role are Rosalynne Buchanan, "Just A Rumor" ...

(He stops for wild applause.)

Faye Dunaway, "Pirouettes In Tulsa" ...

(He stops for applause, which is mild.)

Ruth Gordon, "Cain, Willing and Able" ...

(He stops for more wild applause, similar to Ross's.)

Susan Sarandon, "Fourteen" ...

(He stops for applause.)

And Barbara Streisand, "Jungle Woman."

(He stops for applause, then opens the envelope.)

And the winner is... Faye Dunaway, "Pirouettes In Tulsa."

A moment, and then wild applause as the lights cross fade back to Frank and Alice backstage at the 1969 Oscar ceremony. Alice is wearing appropriate Oscar garb for her; Frank, holding his Oscar, is wearing a tuxedo.

FRANK

Fuck.

ALICE

She gave a wonderful performance, Frank.

FRANK

Yes, she did, thanks to Polanski.

ALICE

Ross has got three already - she's only here tonight because of Gray.

FRANK

But I'm working with Miss Dunaway now. She hasn't been easy, now she'll be impossible.

ALICE

I'm sure you'll manage, Frank. You worked with Miriam Hopkins, remember. Twice.

FRANK

And that was two times too many.

The lights cross fade to the Oscar ceremony. Ross is at the podium, wearing a simple but elegant outfit.

ROSS

I just want to take a moment, if I may, to congratulate Miss Dunaway. That was a marvelous, marvelous performance.

(She acknowledges the applause.)

As you know, ladies and gentlemen, this is a very special night for me. I'm actually here this time.

(She acknowledges the laughter.)

And delighted to be so.

(She acknowledges the applause.)

Okay, that's enough of that; let's get on with it. The nominees for Best Actor in a Leading Role are: Alan Alda, "Pirouettes In Tulsa"...

(She stops for applause.)

Peter Finch, "Fourteen"...

(She stops for applause.)

Graham Harris, "Just A Rumor"...

(She stops for applause.)

Dustin Hoffman, "Incomplete" ...

(She stops for applause.)

Walter Matthau, "The Absurdities Of An Aging Renter."

(She opens the envelope during the applause.)

And the winner is..

(She sees the name, and collects herself.)

Graham Harris, "Just A Rumor."

(She basks for a moment in the wild, loud cheering and applause, and then becomes all business again.)

Accepting the award for my darling Gray is his wife, and my friend, Lesley Harding Harris.

The applause continues as the theme song from "Just A Rumor" plays. A youngish man in a tuxedo enters carrying an Academy Award statue and hands it to Ross as Lesley enters, looking radiant. She accepts the award from Ross and kisses her on the cheek. They exchange a few unheard words, and Ross takes her place in the background.

LESLEY

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you, thank you so much. I feel like a fraud, standing up here tonight accepting this award for Gray. Of course I am honored and humbled to be here in front of you all, but this award belongs to someone who meant so much to him. If my husband Graham were here to accept this award, I know he would feel the same. In this, Gray's final film Gray has a wonderful speech that he delivers to his son in the film.

I know in my heart that when he filmed that scene, he was speaking directly to our own son. So I accept this award for both my husband and our son Michael, and I would like to thank the Academy for honoring Gray tonight.

(She basks in the applause, perhaps milking it a bit.)

I would also like to thank another person for their unwavering support and belief in Gray on this film. Without Frank Bonnar, Gray would not have been able to make “Just A Rumor,” a glorious finale to a long, illustrious career. Thank you, Frank.

(Again, she basks in the wild, over-the-top applause, again perhaps milking it.)

Thank you, Frank. I feel so much love here tonight for my husband; I know you are up there, Gray, listening with that impish grin I loved so much, and I just want to say this: “Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give – which is everything. Love means never having to say I love you, but always wanting to say I love you.” On behalf of Gray, Michael, and myself, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

We hear the kind of applause that can start an avalanche as Ross and Lesley walk offstage together. Again, they exchange unheard words. The lights cross fade to Frank on his chaise by the pool, 1988.

FRANK

Thank God that performance wasn't nominated that year. Faye would have gone home empty handed. It was quite a night for “Just A Rumor.” We didn't win Best Picture, “Pirouettes in Tulsa” did, but we still came away with 5 Oscars: Gray's for Best Actor, mine for Best Director, Agnes Moorehead for Best Supporting Actress, Sumner's for Best Original Screenplay, and the biggest surprise of the night, Burt Bacharach and Hal David for Best Song. I felt bad that Ross didn't win for Best Actress, but she made up for it the following year with “Mrs. Pemberton.” She made light of it that night, and even joked she should have shared the awards for best screenplay and song, because without her meddling Sumner's script wouldn't have taken the shape it did, and the title song never would have been written. She also takes credit for launching Linda Ronstadt's career; it was Ronstadt's recording of “Just A Rumor,” according to Ross, that put her on the map. I take credit for the title of the movie – it came to me after Ross told me what Lesley said to her that morning Gray died. It wasn't such a good night for Lesley, though. Alice was very upset that she didn't mention Ross in her acceptance speech and told her so; Ross told us later that she'd asked Lesley not to mention her; she wanted it to be Gray's night. If you ever see a clip from the telecast of that year's Oscars, you'll notice Ross saying something to Lesley when she came up on stage. Ross was appalled that Lesley used that quote from the film, and then didn't mention Amanda, their daughter. She made that quite clear to Lesley before she went home.

I think that's why Ross made every effort to keep in contact with Amanda after Gray's death, and they became good friends. Good friends. That's what you need in this business...

The lights cross fade to the living room, 1988. Gray's chair is gone; Jamie is seated on the sofa. A moment, and then Ross comes out of the kitchen, carrying a boysenberry bundt. There are tea and coffee things set up already on the coffee table. Ross is now 78, with her arm in a sling. Jamie gets up to help her.

ROSS

Oh sit down, I'm fine.

(She puts down the bundt and begins to slice it.)

I feel such a fool — first for getting lost, and then trying to read the map and drive at the same time. It never would have happened if Alice had brought her reading glasses. Poor Alice. She's in the hospital with a concussion and whiplash. I got away lightly with a dislocated shoulder. I saw Alice this morning; the medication is making her ramble a bit — I'm not sure she knew it was me she was talking to. But all things considered she was quite chirpy. Would you like some of this? It's a boysenberry bundt. We used to get it from Drayton's in Glendale, but they've gone out of business. I found a lovely little bakery on Wilshire that makes it now. Just as good, and much closer.

JAMIE

It looks delicious, I'd love some, thank you. (She hands him a slice on a plate.)

ROSS

(Handing Jamie a slice on a plate.)

It was Gray's favorite. Alice and I would have to keep an eye on him — he'd sit in his chair over there with a cup of coffee, reading a book, and before you know it, the bundt would be gone.

JAMIE

I can understand why, it is delicious. What happened to Gray's chair?

ROSS

I gave it to his daughter Amanda. We're very good friends, you know.

JAMIE

How does Mrs. Harris feel about that?

ROSS

I wouldn't know. I haven't seen or spoken to the woman since the Oscar ceremony in 1969, when she made that awful acceptance speech on Gray's behalf. I know that Amanda gave Gray's chair to her mother a few years later. She asked me if I minded. I told her it was hers now, she could do what she liked with it. Lesley always wanted things to remember Gray by. She had this awful suit and green plaid tie of his. I'd rather have the memories.

JAMIE

How do you feel when you see "Just A Rumor" now?

ROSS

I haven't seen the movie since it was first released in 1968.

JAMIE

It must hold some very special memories for you. It certainly has for me. I saw it when it was first released, and I have it on video.

ROSS

You must have been 10.

JAMIE

I was 18, a freshman in college. It had a profound affect on me.

ROSS

Profound? My, my. That's quite an affect for a movie to have on someone.

JAMIE

It was an important movie for many people.

ROSS

Yes it was. It put Linda Ronstadt on the map.

JAMIE

I think movies can change how people think.

ROSS

Do you? Do you really?

JAMIE

You don't?

ROSS

I think movies can change your mood, change what you wear, but not the way you think. Whatever way you think – I think, you were thinking that way before you saw the movie.

JAMIE

You're very cynical.

ROSS

I'm very old. I've made many movies and can count on the fingers of one hand the ones that had a profound affect on me. The first movie I made with Gray was one of them, and of course "Just A Rumor." But not for the reasons you'd think.

JAMIE

Is it true that "Just A Rumor" was not the original title?

ROSS

No, it wasn't! I had to fight like the devil to get it changed. It came to me as I was going over Gray's lines with him the night before he shot his last scene. It's in his final speech...

JAMIE

"The truth, and this particular truth isn't easy. It sure isn't easy for me. I guess I should have known all along, but a part of me wanted to believe it was just a rumor." It seems obvious. I mean that's what the movie's about.

ROSS

It seems obvious now but making a movie is anything but obvious. What's the title of this book you're writing?

JAMIE

The working title is "Hollywood Remembers."

ROSS

And it also forgets, but very selectively.

JAMIE

I'm devoting a section of the book to you and Gray.

ROSS

That's very sweet of you. I've never thought we warranted an entire book. And there are so many books out there professing to be "the truth" about Gray and me. That's why I agreed to meet with you. I've done a lot of research on you, young man, and I've heard wonderful things about your book on Ladybird Johnson.

JAMIE

Thank you. You're very kind.

ROSS

You're very good. I assume you're going to interview Frank and Mrs. Harris?

JAMIE

They're on my list, but you're at the top.

ROSS

Very smart.

JAMIE

And then there's Alice.

ROSS

You won't get a thing out of her, except how to make a Yorkshire pudding. In all the years I've known her, she's never spilled the beans on anyone.

JAMIE

I'm particularly interested in the night...morning Gray died. From what I've read and heard, I believe he died in his bed.

ROSS

Well, what you've read and heard was wrong. That's what I mean about those other books. The stories I've heard about the morning Gray died. He died in the bathroom, in his bedroom, on the stairs, in his chair. It was a heart attack, a stroke, he fell and hit his head. All these people claiming they were the first to hear about it because they were so close to me – that they were the first person I called.

JAMIE

From what I've... I believe you called Frank Bonnar first. He was the nearest.

ROSS

He was. So was Alice. So was Zsa Zsa Gabor for that matter. I don't see why who I called first is so important.

JAMIE

Well, I want to know, and I figure if I want to know, then so do a lot of other people.

ROSS

There were a lot of practical things that had to be handled that morning.

JAMIE

Do you mind talking about that morning?

ROSS

Not now.

JAMIE

So... who did you call first?

ROSS

His brother Paddy. Paddy was in charge of all of Gray's affairs. Well, most of them. And he was his brother. They were very close. Paddy needed Gray almost as much as I need Alice. It was the toughest call I had to make that morning.

JAMIE

I would have thought you would have called Mrs. Harris first.

ROSS

You would?

JAMIE

Well, it makes sense.

ROSS

Does it?

JAMIE

She was his wife and mother of his children.

ROSS

Yes, she was. But it was me who found him at three o'clock in the morning on our kitchen floor. That's where he died, on the kitchen floor.

JAMIE

Oh.

ROSS

I was sleeping in the guest room, well not sleeping; I hadn't slept properly since we finished shooting. I wanted to be on call if Gray needed something in the middle of the night. I always left a large kettle simmering on the stove in the kitchen so Gray could make himself a cup of tea if he couldn't sleep. Most nights I'd hear him get up and go to the kitchen and then slowly make his way back to his bedroom. I'd gotten used to listening to his routine. But his timing was off that night. He was slower going down the stairs, his breathing was heavier. I heard the kitchen door swing, but not with its usual whoooooosh. The cupboard door opened just a bit later than usual, and closed a bit later than usual. And then I heard it – the teacup smashing on the floor, and then that awful thud as his body finally gave up. He'd fallen before, but this time... I made my way downstairs hoping, praying that it wasn't what I thought it was. I called his name twice... Gray... Gray? There was no response. When I saw him lying there, I knew it was over. I was thankful it was quick. For weeks I'd been playing the scene over and over in my head, wondering how I'd feel when it finally happened.

And then, at the final “take,” I was remarkably calm, almost relieved. Not quite what I expected, and yet somehow familiar. I stood there, just looking at him, mesmerized by the sight of a lifeless Gray. I checked his pulse, held him in my arms and told him I loved him. Then, stroking his hair I said “Goodbye, my darling Gray.”

(She wipes her eyes.)

If it was a movie, the music would swell and there’d be a big fat close up of me with tears rolling down my cheeks. But there was just silence. Cut. Print. No tears. Not yet. I had many people to “call first.” Would you like some more coffee?

JAMIE

Yes, thank you.

The lights begin to fade.

ROSS

(As she pours the coffee.)

So tell me, Jamie. Who was the first person Ladybird Johnson called the day Lyndon B. died?

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PLAY