

# Just A Rumor

by Gary Lyons & Doug DeVita  
(From an idea by Gary Lyons)

# JUST A RUMOR

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## JUST A RUMOR

### **CHARACTERS**

Ross Buchanan, a star from the golden age, 58/78 F

Frank Bonnar, a film director from the golden age, 60/80, M

Alice Watson, Ross's assistant/companion, 63/83, F

Lesley Harding Harris, Gray Harris' widow, 58/78, F

Jamie, Bunny, A Male Star, 30s, M

### **RECOGNITION**

SEMI-FINALIST, Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference

## JUST A RUMOR

JUST A RUMOR was given a developmental reading at the Abingdon Theatre Company in New York, NY in February 2007. It was directed by Mr. Lyons, and the cast was as follows:

Rosalynne (Ross) Buchanan.....Tovah Feldshuh  
Frank Bonnar.....Steven Hauk  
Lesley Harding Harris.....Joy Franz  
Alice Watson.....Jenny Galloway  
Jamie, Bunny, Male Star.....Darrin Baker

It was subsequently given a developmental reading at The Menier Chocolate Factory in London, produced by Gerald Armin and again directed by Mr. Lyons. The cast was as follows:

Rosalynne (Ross) Buchanan.....Patricia Hodge  
Frank Bonnar.....Christopher Biggins  
Lesley Harding Harris.....Jenny Logan  
Alice Watson.....Stephanie Cole  
Jamie, Bunny, Male Star.....Richard Cunningham

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*The tastefully furnished living room of a guest cottage on the estate of famous film director Frank Bonnar 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 the kitchen, 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.)* 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 up on Ross in the living room and on the phone.)*

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**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 crossfade 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 Gray's 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 that 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?

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**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 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?

**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 as Frank Bonnar, 80, debonair director from Hollywood's golden years, rides in on another palette. It is 1988. He is lounging by his pool, wearing 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

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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 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, now 60, enters in a dressing gown, pajamas, and slippers. Ross motions him into the room and continues talking.)* 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. 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.

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**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.)* So I've heard.

**FRANK.** Not after he took his teeth out. ... So I've heard.

**ALICE.** Frank, my dear: I don't give a damn.

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**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.)* 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 picks 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.)* 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?

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**MARY.** 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 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.*)

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**ROSS.** Oh. Of course. 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 seeing dead bodies, Ross. That crazy doctor 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 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.

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**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.** 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.)* 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 shoving them into his mouth.)* 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!

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**ROSS.** *(Standing in the doorway.)* For God's sake, will you two stop? 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.** *(O.S.)* 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. 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 the movies she'd made with Gray, of course, and some of her other movies, but 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.)*

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*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.)* 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 an old fucking 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!

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**ROSS.** *(She snaps her fingers.)* 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. 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 in Norma Shearer's "Marie Antoinette" drag 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*

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*at Gray with various looks of astonishment.)* 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?

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**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!"

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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 is 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 town 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.

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**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?"

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**BUNNY.** “Not until the last drugstore has sold its last pill.” (*Frank collects himself and goes to pick up the phone. Lights up 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.

**FRANK.** Thank you, Frank.

**FRANK.** My pleasure. Goodbye, Lesley.

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**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, neck brace 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.)* 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.)*

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**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 overnight. 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.** 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*

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*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.)*

Well, we may have to get a new trolley, but other than that, it 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.

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**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 (Pulling and groaning.) to 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. *(Gray's body slides 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

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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 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, 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.

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**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.

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**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.)* 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.)*

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