

SCENE 1

The set is bare, besides a sofa, a dining table, and four chairs.

Ray at the dining table, writing. In a bathrobe. A cup of coffee.

RAY

Woke up feeling anxious and bone-lonely. Unable to give my attention to anything beyond coffee and cigarettes. Of course, The best antidote for this is work. "What is your duty? What each day requires," Said Goethe, or someone like him. But I didn't have any sense of duty. I didn't feel like doing anything. I felt as if I'd lost my will, and my memory. And I had. If someone had come along at that minute, as I was slurping coffee, and said, "Where were you when I needed you? How have you spent your life? What'd you do even two days ago?" What could I have said?"

Enter Tess

TESS

Good morning dear.

RAY

Where've you been?

TESS

I just went for a walk. Needed some fresh air. You know

RAY

Sure.

TESS

How are you doing? Today?

RAY

Same as usual. Pretty much.

TESS

Good to hear. Let me know if you need anything.

RAY

I want a goddamn cigarette.

Beat

TESS

Anything but that.

RAY

Right. What would I do without you?

TESS

Don't be snippy.

RAY

I'm not. I seriously don't know what I'd do without you.

TESS

Alright. I'm gonna make some eggs, if you want any.

RAY

I'm not feeling very hungry this particular morning, Tess.

TESS

Suit yourself. Kisses. Besitos.

RAY

Bisous.

TESS

Be ready to go in 45. Alright?

RAY

Alright.

Exit Tess. Ray goes back to his work.

Blackout

SCENE 2: AT THE DOCTOR

Lights up. Ray in the same spot. He's still in his bathrobe. Tess sits on the sofa, opposite a doctor. The doctor is frozen in speech, Tess frozen too. A slight moment of confusion from Ray as to how he got here. Then, he gets up, examines the space, which breathes with him. He faces the audience. Recites:

RAY

“WHAT THE DOCTOR SAID:”

He said

DOCTOR

It doesn't look good

RAY

He said

DOCTOR

It looks bad in fact real bad

RAY

He said

DOCTOR

I counted thirty-two of them on one lung before I quit counting them

RAY

I said “I'm glad I wouldn't want to know about any more being there than that.” He said

DOCTOR

Are you a religious man? Do you kneel down in forest groves and let yourself ask for help when you come to a waterfall, mist blowing against your face and arms? Do you stop and ask for understanding at those moments?

RAY

I said “not yet, but I intend to start today.” He said

DOCTOR

I'm real sorry. I wish I had some other kind of news to give you

RAY

I said “Amen,” and he said something else I didn't catch, and not knowing what else to do, and not wanting him to have to repeat it, and me to have to fully digest it, I just looked at him

Beat. Ray looks at Doctor. The Doctor sees him. They're seeing each other, for the first time in the scene, which slows down. Their heart beats, the scene almost freezes. Then it keeps going.

RAY

For a minute.

DOCTOR

And I looked back

TESS

It was then Ray jumped up and shook hands with this man who'd just given him something no one else on earth had ever given him.

Ray gets up, and shakes hand with the Doctor. It's a tender moment of connection, of thanks. Time slows again, just slightly. Then, Ray and Tess walk out the imaginary door. The doctor exits. As they walk:

RAY

I may have even thanked him, habit being so strong.

Lights out.

SCENE 3: BACK AT HOME

Ray and Tess at the dining table. Tea and biscuits in front of them.

TESS

Honey, you haven't touched your tea.

RAY

I know.

TESS

God, Ray. What are we gonna do?

RAY

What do you mean?

TESS

You know what I mean. Where are you? Do you realize what's happening right now?

RAY

I feel like dancing.

TESS

Ray. Can we--

RAY

Cmon, Tess. Let's dance!

TESS

Can we just talk about this for one min--

RAY

Tess. Tessy. My hummingbird. My sweet koala. My baby goldfish. I know what's happening. Of course I do. I've never felt so alive in my life. We don't dance anymore. And that's a goddamn crime. I would love it if you got up and danced with me, Tess. Please. Why waste time? Why waste time. Do you-- do you understand me?

Beat. Tess gets up, grabs Ray, and wraps herself in his arms. The two slow dance. A sweet jazz song plays. They break apart. Light changes.

RAY

I ask her and she asks me.

Ray kneels, in proposal. Tess joins him there.

TESS

We each accept. There's no back and forth about it.

RAY

After nearly eleven years together, we know our minds and more. And this postponement, it's ripened too.

TESS

Makes sense now. A few days back some things got clear about there not being all those years ahead we'd kept assuming.

Time rewinds. The doctor returns. Back in the office.

RAY

The doctor going on finally about "the shell" I'd be leaving behind, doing his best to steer us away from the veil of tears and foreboding.

TESS

But he loves his life,

RAY

I heard a voice say. Hers. And the young doctor, hardly skipping a beat

DOCTOR

I know. I guess you have to go through those seven stages. But you end up in acceptance.

Time speeds up. The doctor exits, the space
turns into a restaurant. They eat in silence at
a table.

RAY

Time pressing down on us like a vise, squeezing out hope to make room for the
everlasting.

Time passes. They're in bed.

RAY

Back home we held on to each other and, without embarrassment or caginess, let it all
reach full meaning. This was it.

Long beat

RAY

"Reno." I said. "Let's go to Reno and get married. In Reno," I told her, "it's marriages
and remarriages twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. No waiting period. Just 'I
do.' And 'I do.'" She agreed. Reno was just the place.

Ray and Tess get out of bed, as if to get
ready to get married. Ray continues to speak

RAY

She had a green cotton dress I'd bought her in Bath. She'd send it to the cleaners. We
were getting ready, as if we'd found the answer to that question of what's left when
there's no more hope

Ray somehow makes his way back to a
desk, in his robe, a cup of coffee, writing on
a page. Tess exits.

RAY

The muffled sound of dice coming down the felt-covered table, the click of the wheel, the slots ringing on into the night, and one more, one more chance.

Lights out.

SCENE 4

Immediate lights up. Ray at the desk. Tess enters

TESS

What are you writing, honey?

RAY

A poem. About our wedding.

Tess smiles. Ray hands her the poem, which she looks at, and reads. She smiles, tears up.

TESS

That's beautiful, sweetie.

A long beat of silence. What is there to say?
After, a lighting change. Ray speaks out.

RAY

What is there to say? We've been living in a world where time is lifted off us like a billowing cloth, exposing us to the vast sky of wisdom. The clouds made of honey, dripping down on us from above. A sweet world we've been living on. Wisdom abounds. Sometimes, I find myself thinking of Pandora's box. Containing all the evils in the world, and yet hope, that tiny, pesky hero, strong enough to melt it all into dust. What is there to say?

The lighting returns to normal. Tess is looking at pages of poetry.

TESS

"Dust. Dust where I stand." I like that bit.

RAY

I don't know if I like "dust." Try "silk."

TESS

"My grin turns to silk. Silk where I stand." Try "salt?"

RAY

“I look into the camera. My grin turns to salt. Salt where I stand.” Beautiful, Tess.

TESS

Thank you. “Faithless, we have come here this morning on empty stomachs and hearts. I open my hands to quiet their stupid pleading--

RAY

“But they begin to drip onto the stones--

TESS

“Behind me, my love with the camera records it all on color film down to the finest detail.”

SCENE 4.5

Tess exits. Maryann enters. Sits across Ray

MARYANN

I was 15 when we first met.

RAY

Year in and year out, we were crazy in love with each other.

MARYANN

I still send you letters every now and then. We separated and became friends. You always said that, didn't you.

RAY

Yes. We were funny together.

MARYANN

We are funny together.

RAY

It's real wacky to be able to look back like this. You may have been the singular most important relationship to me in my life. This mark I've made. This dent I'm leaving. In some ways, at least. I don't know, Maryann. We were married 25 years. I wonder if I'll see you before... well, before...

I was 17 when we first met.

MARYANN

You're 17 now, and we're at the diner together. I'm 16. We're laughing. We're funny together.

RAY

I get the idea for “Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes” from something you say. You mean the world to me, Maryann.

MARYANN

I’m 29. You’re 30. We’re at the beach in Israel.

RAY

When you studied abroad. Vance and Christine stayed at the apartment. Crazy kids we brought up. Crazy dent we’ve left. Crazy mark we’re leaving on the shore of time, here.

MARYANN

“My hands grieve in this bright sunlight. They walk back and forth along the Dead Sea shore with a thirty-year-old man,” you wrote. I wondered who you were in that moment.

RAY

The cloudy beach. Felt like a dream. You had your camera with you. You saw it all, didn’t you?

MARYANN

I’m there right now. We’re there. I can feel it.

RAY

It’s wonderful, isn’t it?

A long beat, as the two close their eyes and go back to that moment. Maryann speaks, slowly at first:

MARYANN

“Lord, I tell you
I am without purpose here
in the Holy Land. My hands grieve in this
bright sunlight.

Tess enters, joins Maryann.

TESS AND MARYANN

They walk back and forth along
the Dead Sea shore
with a thirty-year-old man.
Come, Lord. Shrive me.

Too late I hear the film running,
taking it all down.

Maryann exits. Tess keeps speaking.

TESS

I look into the camera.
My grin turns to salt. Salt
where I stand.”

A long beat. We’re back in the present. Time
falls down again.

RAY

It’s interesting to think about. The idea of this collection. The final one.

TESS

I know.

RAY

I write these as they come to me, but I know they won’t be read by anyone besides you
until after I’ve gone. Like I’m speaking to these people from beyond the grave.

TESS

So they contain the knowledge of the dead. In some ways. Tell them what they need to
know, my dear. You have so much to give.

RAY

I hope so, Tess. I really do.

A beat.

TESS

Do you need anything? Are you hungry?

RAY

I could eat, yes. Thank you, dear.

TESS

I’ll make us some lunch.

She goes to exit. But first, says

TESS

My personal favorite? Hummingbird.

SCENE 5: A PARK, AND SOMEWHERE ELSE

Ray and Tess on a picnic in the park. Sharing a beautiful day in beautiful early summer weather. Ray walks away from the scene, watches it, and then speaks as lights change

RAY

I wrote this for her just a few days after we had found out. We had spent hours in tears, and in thanks, and in pleading, and in breathing, and in savoring. Savoring each moment that crossed upon our lips.

TESS

It looks beautiful out, Ray.

RAY

I've never seen the trees so happy

TESS

I've never seen the sky more peaceful.

RAY

I'll go out and get a fresh loaf. I'll pick up some cheese. Some raspberries. Ice cream?

TESS

Mint chocolate, please. Honeybun. I'll meet you in the park in 15. Under the willow?

RAY

Where else?

Suddenly at the park. Lights change. Breath,
for a moment.

TESS

Ray. Raymond. Raymond Raymond Raymond. Mister carver himself. My future husband. My Raymond.

RAY

Tessy. My goldfish.

TESS

What do you think there is? After?

RAY

My hope? A nice lake to swim in. Boats. Fishing. Good people. Some pot, maybe.

Tess laughs

TESS

I can see you there now. Just, just...

She trails off. Time takes hold.

RAY

Exactly.

Lights change. Ray stands

RAY

Time pressing down on us like a vise, squeezing out hope to make room for the everlasting...

Beat. Ray at the dining table, writing.

RAY

Supposed I say *summer*,
write the word "hummingbird,"
put it in an envelope,
take it down the hill
to the box. When you open
my letter you will recall
those days and how much,
Just how much, I love you.

Ray looks back to the scene of the picnic.
Tess is older now, more silent,
contemplative. Ray returns to the picnic,
taking his place back. It's nighttime, now

RAY

I've been thinking more about the idea of talking to someone from beyond the grave.
Like you were saying. With the poems.

TESS

Yes?

RAY

All I want to tell you is that you're loved. I keep trying ways to do it.

TESS

You're doing wonderfully.

RAY

I know. But I'm scared you'll forget it, one day. Even for just a second.

TESS

I am so blessed to have had so much of you. To have so much of you. You're leaving so many pieces of your wonderful soul behind.

RAY

I hope so.

TESS

I hope everyone who reads them can also hear you tell them that they're loved. That there is hope.

RAY

It's always that word, -- hope -- isn't it?

Beat. The two stare at the stars.

RAY

My little goldfish.

Tess cuddles closer to Ray

RAY

"Words lead to deeds. They prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness." I want to write a play. I think. About us.

TESS

A play? You've never written a play before.

RAY

Trying something new. There's no time like now. Who knows what time there'll be? Maybe it won't work. I'm just --- trying to leave more for you. Give you more while I still can. In the hopes it can last forever.

TESS

Don't do it for me. Do it for you.

RAY

I've learned there's no difference, at this point. Not really. If I can write something today, in a moment of bliss knowing we are here, now, that we were here --- then, well --- then maybe this can live forever. This. Us being here.

TESS

We're here now. And now for forever.

RAY

Close your eyes, Tess. We're together here, right now, and always will be.

The two close their eyes and hold each other. Feeling the infinity of it all.

SCENE 6: DINING TABLE, PAST PRESENT FUTURE

Ray at the Dining table, writing. Tess enters.

TESS

I ran into Joey at the store.

RAY

I should give him a call. I'm just ever-so-slightly scared of him. You know?

TESS

I do. He's good people. He asked about you.

RAY

What'd you tell him?

TESS

Same old. You know.

RAY

I know.

Beat

RAY

I love you, Tess.

TESS

I love you too, butterfly.

Maryann enters, passing Tess on her exit.
Maryann sits across Ray.

MARYANN

What's the trouble now?

RAY

I'm dying, goddamn it.

MARYANN

I know you are. Take a breath.

RAY

Here you are again, Maryann. And I thought I'd be the ghost.

MARYANN

We've always been here. You'll always be there, too. You know how time works.

RAY

Like a parachute made of silk.

MARYANN

You always did have a way with words. Did anyone ever tell you you should write?

Ray smiles, betraying more of himself than he expected. He decides to pursue this.

RAY

I want to leave Tess something. For just her. A story of us being here. Being there. Being everywhere. Does this make sense?

MARYANN

You never did have a way with sense.

RAY

I want to make a world in which we are together forever. In whatever way I can. But I hate the idea of forever. Always did. We were never meant to be forever. In any capacity. Like a parachute of silk. The billows end eventually.

MARYANN

So what are you talking to me for?

RAY

Because I'll never see you again.

MARYANN

You'll see me again. April 22, 1988. I dress up for the occasion. My friend tells me I look like I just stepped out of a Ferrari. I come to cheer you up after your radiation treatment.

You're there, in your big coat. It's... I didn't know what to say. It's the most tragic sight I've ever seen. It's going to be rough, Ray. Nobody says it's not. But walk between two worlds. Walk between all worlds. You're doing beautifully... But then, you'll just look at me, and laugh through our tears, saying "if you're not a sight for sore eyes" as we embrace.

A long beat.

MARYANN

You've done hard things before. You got sober. When you were close to death's door. We always knew you'd die young. Me and you both. You're prepared, Ray. You're prepared.

Beat

MARYANN

As for the gift for Tess. You love her well. Trust that's enough. Put pen to paper. You've done it before. You're Raymond Carver. We'll talk about you.

Maryann disappears. Ray begins to write:

RAY

A goldfish. And a butterfly

Goldfish enters. Butterfly enters. Lights change. The butterfly flies and the goldfish swims. For a while. When each character is speaking, they interrupt their constant movement with sudden stillness, in which the text seems to pour out of them. Then, they move again, and the other takes over seamlessly.

FISH

It's been a while since I've swam this fast.
My gills leak from the past.

BUTTERFLY

Still, I say all things must pass.
Flying above, I see a lot. It feels like a silent film. A symphony. The scene of a crime.
Utopia at work.

FISH

Deep, Blue, Empty, Open, Flowing, Free, Fresh, Cycles. Lifetimes. Gone. I guess all things must pass.

BUTTERFLY

I hear a lovely tenor sing “just like the ocean, always in love with the moon.”
 Soaring above the ocean, this thought is found all over.
 The energy in the clouds. The ocean reaching at the moon’s silent dance.
 We danced along. We’re dancing along, forever.

FISH

Day 12. Today, I woke up. Nobody was around, and some coral had appeared next to my bedroom. I thought for a second that it looked like you. Then, the light had changed, and it didn’t anymore. But it looked real beautiful. And the rainfall had done something real nice to the water. I don’t know what else I did today. The days go by like the water, like they’re all made of water, like all of the

BUTTERFLY

Water dripping off my back. Tick tack tick tick tack. It’s all I hear around me. The rain falls, despite me leaving. Despite me being here.

FISH

Today, my friend’s little baby was born. And I thought about crying. Crying entering this world. Crying in general. But I didn’t cry. I haven’t in a while. How would a fish even cry? In every life we enter, do we still carry wounds from the last? Wounds like water, flowing through every moment, out of our eyes, liquid dreams, silver and thick, like

BUTTERFLY

The lake shimmers, silver, glistening. I’ve been dreaming of you lately, as I sleep, as I fly. I wonder if the dreams are a door to you, somehow. I saw you dancing.

FISH

Dance party for my birthday. It was a fine birthday. It was a nice day. I’m doing alright now. It’s almost been a year.

BUTTERFLY

Today I was taking a rest on a sidewalk. A boy stopped, squatted beside me. I felt his smile and smiled back. He told me my wings were beautifully blue. I felt beautiful.

Lights up on Ray. Butterfly and fish go
 away.

RAY

I felt beautiful.

Tess enters.

TESS

You feel beautiful, honey. You are beautiful. Your soul has found ways to peer out your body more and more lately. As your body cracks and breaks, the soul shines bright through the wounds.

Time passes rapidly. It's after Ray has gone.
He watches from the dining table.

TESS

Sam Halpert called me today. He's writing a book about you. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Raymond Carver." A clever title, don't you think?

A beat. Tess sighs.

TESS

I don't know why I'm still talking to you. I miss you.

Enter Sam Halpert. They sit at the dining table, across from each other. Ray is in the seat in between them, facing out.

SAM

Thank you so much for meeting with me.

TESS

Of course. I just wanted to say, I love the title.

SAM

Thanks! "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" was always one of my favorite titles of his. It's recognizable.

An awkward pause

SAM

So, tell me, Tess. When did you and Ray first meet?

TESS

Well... we met at a writer's conference in Dallas. November '77. God, he was goofy, he was gorgeous, in his own, Carver-esque way. You know.

SAM

I sure do, Tess.

TESS

I know this sounds crazy, but I felt as if my life until then had simply been a rehearsal for meeting him.

SAM

What stands out to me is that everybody I've spoken to, in some way, expressed a similar sentiment. Even those I spoke to who were close to Ray in the early Bad Raymond days. The narratives often contradict each other in parts as the witnesses relate the same events from different points of view. Carver is the hero, the victim, and sometimes the villain in these tales spoken with affection as if at a wake--

TESS

I'm sorry Sam, I'd love to talk to you about Ray, but I feel our relationship may be entirely different than these other people. I met him five months after he decided to get sober. I sat with him in his final days. Day by day we found each other, wrote and lived together, challenged, inspired, and supported one another in the new life we created together. He once told me on a subway platform...

SCENE 7: OCEAN AND SKY

Butterfly and Fish take over.

BUTTERFLY

I am remembering that time, on the subway platform, the man had painted his entire body silver. He became a statue. I wonder where he went in that moment. Where the tremors had gone, those little things, isn't it always those little things, locked up in a prison somewhere, the little silver bars of the cell. Freaky to think about, really. I gotta get out of here. Heaven contains multitudes. So many gates here in Eden. Feet lift off the ground. Onto something new. Something old. Something

FISH

Borrowed a shirt from my friend today and then I ripped it.

This is awkward.

I got another plant today. It's nice having these little things to keep me company.

The company is doing well. I've been delivering more frequently. Getting more hours in.

Today, my boss yelled at me. But he apologized. It was a nice moment. A learning experience for him, I think.

The coral is looking nice, as well.

The water is a little grim. But then it got nicer.

Sometimes I'll be swimming, and I spend hours and it goes by in seconds.

Sometimes, I'll be swimming, and I'll wake up. I swim for ages, and then I wake up and I have to do it again.

I don't know what I'm saying.

I spend these hours swimming, I don't know where the version of me that isn't swimming, where that part goes.

BUTTERFLY

Something blue: the sky today
 A poem about flying on a day like this:
 I see you, and you see me.
 Trusting in the air, feel my tail flail.
 My soul flies, drinks a cocktail, meets a monster, lives to tell the tale.
 Faster. Slower. I'm not moving anymore. I'm being moved, something overtakes me,
 awakes me,

FISH

Day 40:
 I wrote a poem about nothing:
 I woke up today
 I got a new job today.
 I remember you once told me something mundane,
 something you probably never thought much about.
 I find beauty a lot more, now. Tragic things are beautiful, still.
 Why are greek statues so dramatic? I like seeing the ones down here. They're always a
 nice moment of reflection.
 I've been laughing a lot, lately.

BUTTERFLY

I'm laughing, thinking about all the mistakes I've made. I hope I was in service to the world. I hope I'm still in service to the world. Feel myself beloved...

Lights down

SCENE 8

Lights up. Ray in shambles, writing at the table. He's been crying. Tess enters. Walks to Ray, rubs his back.

TESS

Raymond. What's wrong.

RAY

It's all wrong.

TESS

It's alright. I know.

RAY

I'm trying to write this play for you. My goldfish.

TESS

My butterfly.

RAY

I don't know what I'm doing here.

TESS

Your actions say otherwise. Your thousands of fans. The final collection does wonderfully. We call it "A New Path to the Waterfall."

Ray and Tess suddenly in bed.

RAY

I've always wanted brook trout for breakfast.
Suddenly, I find a new path to the waterfall.
I begin to hurry.

TESS

"Wake up,"

RAY

My wife says,

TESS

"you're dreaming."

RAY

But when I try to rise, the house tilts. Who's dreaming?

TESS

"It's noon"

RAY

She says.
My new shoes wait by the door.
They are gleaming.

A beat. Tess exits.

RAY

"Walk between two worlds," she said...

He runs to the table to write. He writes. The Butterfly and Fish return. They watch him write, for a bit.

RAY

One time, Tess, we walked through the park. We dropped two coins in a pond. I wonder where our wishes went...

The butterfly and fish take over.

FISH

I almost got hit by a coin today. I hope it was worth the wish. I don't know why, but I have a feeling it was. One came down, and then the other. I know what that says to me, but I don't know how to put it into words.

BUTTERFLY

Music to my ears. That's what the birds sound like today. Other days, they sound like garbage. And I just want to scream "shut up." The two both exist. Two sides of the same pole. No judgment either way. You can't have one without the other. You can't have me without you, you can't have happy without sad, you can't have flying without drowning. Or swimming without falling. This ascension, it's like a math problem. I'm experimenting with physics. With the physics of thought, too. That's all I ever have time to do in this goddamn afterlife. Think. Recall. Work. Think. Recall. Work. How much more cleansing can my soul take? Think. Recall. Work. Think. We all know where that leads me. Back to

FISH

You.

That's what I thought about today. Day 393.

Went on a blind date. He smelled like salmon. He had a funny smile. I guess he was nice. Maybe I'm the problem. Give me some grace.

BUTTERFLY

I think about all the times I was the problem. The "Bad Raymond Days..."

Lights up on Ray. He crosses something out.

RAY

The bad butterfly days.

A groan of Anguish from Ray. Maryann appears across from him.

MARYANN

What's the problem now?

RAY

I don't know how to do this.

MARYANN

Yes you do. You've done it thousands of times. Your ancestors, your children, your wife. You know.

RAY

I feel like I'm pretending.

MARYANN

We all do.

RAY

The story is about us. But we're animals. Why are they pretending to not be us?

MARYANN

Everyone's always pretending to be anyone but themselves. That's the trick.

RAY

No tricks. No lies. Just truth. That's what I want. I don't have much time left.

MARYANN

I'm sure you've learned by now that time isn't real. What time is it now? Where are we?

RAY

It's Sunday night, and we're in the parlor. We have some people over. Sunday Night...

He writes.

RAY

Make use of the things around you.
 The light rain
 Outside the window, for one.
 The cigarette between my fingers,
 These feet on the couch.
 The faint sound of rock-and-roll,
 The red Ferrari in my head.
 The women bumping
 Drunkenly around in the kitchen...
 Put it all in,
 Make use.

MARYANN

Make use, make use. Walk between all worlds.

RAY

Make use, make use.

Maryann disappears. Tess appears, across
from Ray, reading the poem he just wrote.

TESS

“Put it all in,
Make use.” I love it, Raymond. Sunday Night. Where did you go?

RAY

I went back to that Sunday Night. I remember it all from here. This vantage point.

He writes that down, suddenly stricken with
inspiration.

TESS

What are you writing?

RAY

That. The butterfly says that. To the fish. Or not. I don't know. I'm forging ahead.
Walking my path to the waterfall.

Ray keeps writing, furiously, walks offstage.
Sam appears.

TESS

A New Path to the Waterfall. It was well received, I think. It was almost like he was
speaking to the readers from beyond the grave,

SAM

Truly, Tess. And I hope right now, we can speak to him from where he is. Beyond the
grave. I hope to paint an accurate picture of a person. A real person

TESS

And real he was. Real he was. I'm sure he'd appreciate that

SAM

So tell me about those final few days.

TESS

Well, I wrote about this in my preface to the book. Each morning, we would take our coffee in front of the painting that our good friend, Alfredo Arreguin, painted, that later became the cover of the book. We'd stare at it, in silence.

Ray enters, carrying a painting of a waterfall. He stares at it.

TESS

He'd sit there, staring at it for hours, sometimes. Meditating. Breathing. Feeling time move. Backwards, forwards. He existed between worlds, in those final days. And we'd go over his poems, pondering small words, titles. It all felt so big at the time. And now...

Tess gets choked up. She picks up a book, which is "A New Path to the Waterfall."
Opens, reads

TESS

"It seems important finally to say that Ray did not regard his poetry as a simple hobby or a pastime. Poetry was a spiritual necessity. The truths he came to through his poetry involved a dismantling of artifice to a degree. Milosz wrote: 'In the very essence of poetry there is something indecent: a thing is brought forth which we didn't know we had in us, so we blink our eyes, as if a tiger had sprung out and stood in the light, lashing his tail.' Ray used his poetry to flush the tiger from his hiding.

A lighting change

TESS

Stop hiding, Ray, I see you there. Come out.

Ray comes into the light with Tess and Sam, who is frozen.

RAY

What did the rest say about me?

TESS

Good things. All things. Human things, Ray. Would you like to see?

Beat.

RAY

Yes.

Sam Halpert gets up, picks up a book:
 "...When We Talk About Raymond Carver."
 Reads:

SAM

Tobias Wolff wrote: "We are all dying. We should all know that, but Ray knew it better than most." He called you "a very brave man. It takes art to do what he did... Ray will be one of those writers who will be read with care and love as long as people read our language. He has penetrated a secret about us and brought it to the light." Robert Stone said you had "a manner that was very much his own, a kind of shambling and colorful manner of viewing things." Jay Mcinerney said you were much too modest to realize how widespread your influence was. Douglas Unger, Geoffrey Wolff, Chuck Kinder, many more, all speaking about your beautiful prose, poetry, your short stories. The wacky manner in which you went through the world, turning it all into art. They speak about seeing you drink too much, work too hard, live too fast, and amidst it all, finding ways to raise your family, make your friends laugh, and create. Create, create, create. From all the ugly and beautiful things in your life.

Ray steps to Sam. A breath

RAY

What about Maryann?

Maryann enters. She takes the book from Sam, then speaks:

MARYANN

I think Ray did his job in life. He honored his life goal. I am so proud of him and so pleased with his success. I appreciate the care that Tess gave him that last year, and the other help she gave him in his career and his life. Against many odds, but with many boons and lots of love and support, he realized his talent and accomplished his dream. Ray always had a short attention span. He could never stand to be bored. He liked to move on, even from ostensibly good situations. I think, on some higher plane, he wanted to move on and do something else. He always said, "I'm going to die young, but you're going to live to be a mean old lady." Ray had a great spirit. He was overall a wonderful husband and father, and there were always more smiles than tears. And I have no doubt in my mind or heart---that bottom line---neither one of us would have missed it for the world.

A long pause as Ray walks to Maryann, and holds her from behind.

MARYANN

And, of course, looked at another way, we ended up having it, too...

Maryann exits. Sam exits, leaving Tess and Ray, but time still floats above, having no bearing on the situation. Ray writes, and the butterfly and goldfish re-enter.

RAY

I was always your butterfly. And you were my goldfish. I never thought about the idea that the two are diametrically opposed. They never could be together, really. The ocean and the sky. Just like the ocean, always in love with the moon. But here in the afterlife, I'm walking between worlds. Flying through them all at once. Time like a silk parachute, breathing, bending, malleable as the ocean you swim in. My hopes and dreams for heaven obliterated. There is a lake, in which you swim. In which we drop coins together with all our wishes. In which a waterfall flows, and I walk a path to it. There is a lake I can swim in, when I feel like. Sometimes Vance joins me. And his kids, too. My grandkids. And sometimes a little pot.

BUTTERFLY

I can swim, now. I've learned to surpass expectations. I was once a caterpillar. All things are possible, here.

FISH

All things are possible. Your words inspire future generations. I can swim in the grandness of it all, and sometimes, just sometimes, I can leap out of the water, and see you there, flying above it all. You wrap your big, warm wings around me, for just a second.

Tess and Ray slow dance as jazz plays again.

FISH

You always knew you'd go sooner rather than later. So I'm underwater. And you're in the sky. So what? Neither place exists.

TESS

Neither place exists. It's just you and your words, Ray. "Words lead to deeds. They prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness."

RAY

I'm ready. I've left the play for you. It's my gift to you before I leave.

TESS

Please, don't go yet, Ray. I can't bear it. Let's stay here. Forever.

RAY

We have a few moments left. Let's spend it well.

SCENE 9: HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

Ray and Tess together, running through time.

Naches River
TESS

Just below the falls
RAY

A day of dense sunlight
TESS

Heavy with odors of love.
RAY

How long have we?
TESS

Beat

RAY
Already your body, sharpness of Picasso, is drying in this highland air. I towel down your back, your hips, with my undershirt.

TESS
Time is a mountain lion.

RAY
We laugh at nothing, and as I touch your breasts, even the ground-squirrels are dazzled.

The two run to the other side of the stage.

RAY
I see an empty place at the table. Whose?

TESS
Who else's?

RAY
Who am I kidding?

TESS
The boat's waiting.

RAY

No need for oars or a wind.

TESS

I've left the key in the same place. You know where.

RAY AND TESS

Remember me and all we did together.

TESS

Now hold me tight. That's it. Kiss me hard on the lips.

They kiss, capturing it all for a moment.

TESS

There. Now let me go, my dearest. We shall not meet again in this life, so kiss me goodbye now. Here, kiss me again

They kiss again.

RAY

Once more.

The final kiss of life.

TESS

There. That's enough.

RAY

Now, my dearest, let me go. It's time to be on the way.

Ray begins to exit, as if to the afterlife, as if to die, finally.

TESS

Wait

RAY

What is it, my hummingbird?

Tess picks up "A New Path to the Waterfall." Throws it to Ray. He catches.

TESS

The final page. It's the last one you wrote. It's inscribed on your gravestone.

Tess starts to cry, mourning, then exits. Ray
steps center stage, in a spotlight. Long beat.
Reads:

RAY

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

Blackout. End of play.