



## CIRCLE OF LIONS

### NICHOLAS RAY, GLORIA GRAHAME AND ME: A LOVE STORY

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The biggest scandal in Nicholas Ray's life, worse than his addictions to drink, drugs and gambling, was the sexual relationship between Anthony, his son from his marriage to writer Jean Evans, and Gloria Grahame, his current wife (and lead actress in *In a Lonely Place*, 1950), when she was in her mid-twenties and Anthony was 12 going on 13. It began in June 1950 after Tony flew from New York to Los Angeles and was met by his stepmother but not his dad. Six months later, Nicholas split up with his wife after discovering what had developed during his frequent absences, and they were divorced soon afterwards.

Several years later, not long before Tony appeared on screen in John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959), he wrote this nonfiction novel about his half-year in Malibu and environs, containing more dialogue, shrink sessions and scene setting than anyone could possibly have remembered. He promised his mother it would not be published until all the participants were dead.

In 1960, after a separation lasting almost a decade, Tony and Grahame were married. They stayed together for 14 years and had two sons. Meanwhile, he'd left acting to work in other film industry positions, often in collaboration with the actor and director Paul Mazursky.

Perhaps only a work of art could explain how such a traumatic romance could have developed, and this is what Tony Ray

delivers. His only daughter, Kelsey, says in her foreword that this book posthumously reconciled her with her dad, and Nicholas Ray biographer Patrick McGilligan's introduction is equally appreciative.

Tony claims to have written this book when he was 21, but we also learn he wound up with all his father's addictions and the protective lies they generated. Indeed, Tony's intense, therapeutic narrative and its three-dimensional characters is a text he must have revised, expanded and embellished over the course of his life, fictionalised to make some aspects more legible and revelatory. More psychological than sexual, it projects understandings of its characters that sometimes seem privy to adult afterthoughts.

One hears little about Nicholas Ray's films in the book, but their romantic anguish is vividly evoked, with the director, neglectful as both husband and father, generally behaving as the least sympathetic character. (The most sympathetic is Anthony's mother Jean, and McGilligan reminds us that Nicholas once named her as a communist to keep himself off the blacklist.) Indeed, despite occasional ambiguity about whether father or son is speaking in their conversations, this uncertainty becomes an artistic virtue – because the “circle of lions” is both generational and perpetual, an ancestral curse becoming a mantra.