

## **Mr. Ferguson's Christmas Eve**

By John Glennville

Horace Ferguson: Sixty-something man. Caretaker of the St. Jerome Cemetery.

Beverly: Ferguson's daughter. Thirty-something, well educated mother of Richie, Ferguson's grandson.

Richie: 16 year old son of Beverly, grandson of Ferguson:

John Dungy: Tall, thin fifty-something man. He is well educated, speaks in a slow measured voice. Supervisor and Sales Manager of St. Jerome Cemetery

Dan Olson: Twenty-something demolition crew worker. RFD Construction/Demolition

Will Goodman: Forty-something construction engineer. RFD Construction/Demolition

Scotty: Late-seventy-something former merchant mariner.

Betty Lou: A thirty-something professional woman and mother of Sissy.

Sissy Sorenson: a precocious six year old.

### **Prologue**

*The Prologue takes place in front of closed, transparent curtain behind which can be seen the setting of the play, a maintenance hut, a rounded bunker at a cemetery. It should suggest the appearance of a large hut made of concrete. The set should contain no windows. An entrance to an outer door will be seen on stage left, and another door, which leads to a inner room on stage right. The exterior door has a light switch clearly visible to the right of the door. Hanging on the back wall are a series of twenty Christmas wreaths hanging from wires in rows of five. The wreaths must show exceptional craftsmanship and have a remarkable degree of beauty. A series of storage cabinets are against a side wall. A workbench extends across the stage a few feet separate from the back wall. On the workbench should be a series of tools and boxes*

*that have some reference to wreath making and small tools associated with maintenance, like hammers, screw drivers, a saw, drill, all to suggest an active work area. Around the sides of the room should be tools suggesting work in a cemetery – shovels, picks, and rakes.*

*In front of the curtain, two characters enter. One is an older male, late sixties or older, dressed in classic yachting clothes – white pants, blue blazer, ascot, a cap on his head. A very distinguished looking man, he speaks with the ease of a well-traveled man. With him is a young woman in his her mid thirties. She is dressed in a basic black dress with a black shawl, and black shoes. Her hair has a classic style, modern yet always in fashion. Her name is Betty Lou. His name is Scotty.*

BETTY LOU: You think we can do this, Scotty?

SCOTTY: Sure we can. He won't suspect a thing.

BETTY LOU: Isn't it wonderful? You know that everyone has decided to make a showing.

SCOTTY: Everyone?

BETTY LOU: Yes, everyone. Nobody wants to be left out. Everyone seems to know this is a special moment.

SCOTTY: I think the little celebration will do him good. He needs something special to happen today, something that will allow him to leave this place with a feeling of closure. But it has to be done so it looks very natural.

BETTY LOU: Scotty, do you really think it's possible to do this?

SCOTTY: Betty Lou, I thought getting all of us together would be impossible. You've done that. Making it look natural will be the easy part. First we'll need to plan a schedule, something that will not overburden him. We know he's going to want to put out his wreaths, so we have to plan around that. I don't think we should send in too many and we're going to have to limit the time. (Pause) And Betty Lou, one other thing: you have to be one of the representatives.

BETTY LOU: I'll go if you will go, but Scotty, you have got to go in first. You must.

SCOTTY: I'm not so sure about that. We still have time to plan that.

BETTY LOU: I heard Mr. Dungy say that Horace's grandson will be stopping by to take some pictures. Could we somehow use that?

SCOTTY: Pictures?

BETTY LOU: His grandson wants to document the whole day, at least that's what I heard.

SCOTTY: Pictures! What a wonderful idea.

BETTY LOU: You think we can do it?

SCOTTY: We can try. Let's keep it open as an option. But again we can't let him know. It must come as a complete surprise.

BETTY LOU: I think this is going to be a great day. And it's going to give Horace the best send off any man has ever had.

SCOTTY: You go back and try to arrange the visiting schedule. And Betty Lou – remember, just a short amount of time for each. I'll go see what I can do about pictures.

BETTY LOU: I like the idea.

SCOTTY: I will see you later. *(Exit on opposite sides of the stage. The curtain opens.)*

## Act I: Morning

### Scene 1

*The lights come up and in walks Horace Ferguson. He is a sixty-something man, thin, wiry frame, and clean shaven. He is dressed in jeans with a parka with a hood, which he removes as he comes inside. He has on black work shoes. He holds in his hand an elongated box, white, unwrapped, which he places carefully next to his thermos. He removes his parka. He is wearing a flannel shirt underneath the parka. He shudders as if cold and moves to a thermostat on the wall.*

HORACE: "It's a cold one outside today, Mary. It's freezing. I gotta turn up the heat. *(Moves to the thermostat and makes an adjustment. Rubs his hands together as he sits at his workbench. Looks Up.)* Well, Mary, today's the day. Eight hours and I'm done, finished, retired. And on Christmas Eve! Forty- two years and downsized into retirement. *(Shakes his head reflectively)* I still don't believe it. Who would have ever thought a cemetery would change ownership? *(Raising his eyes, looking up)* I'll be honest with you; I don't feel right about this, but I'll be fine. It just doesn't seem right. Yes, I know I have no choice, but I'm not ready to leave this place.

*Knock on the outside door. Enters Mr. Dungy wearing black top coat and carrying a shopping bag in his hand.*

DUNGY: Horace?

HORACE: Yes, Mr. Dungy.

DUNGY: (*Enters. Looks around*) I thought I heard you talking to someone.

HORACE: Just talking to myself, Mr. Dungy. Nobody's here.

DUNGY: It's just as well. I just dropped by to give you this. (*Removes a plaque from the bag and hands it to Horace. Horace reads it to himself.*)

HORACE: Well, Mr. Dungy, I don't know what to say. I never received any thing like this in my life. (*Reads aloud from the plaque*) To Horace Ferguson for forty-two years of Outstanding Service to the St. Jerome Cemetery Association awarded this Day, December 24, 2011 by the Board of Directors, with The Best Wishes for a happy retirement. (*Pause*) I never received any award in my life. Thank you, Mr. Dungy, and would you please thank the Board on my behalf.

DUNGY: Believe me, Horace. It was their pleasure. The vote to present the award was unanimous. And while it's not on the plaque, I think you should know this was the last official act of the Board of Directors. They really did want to thank you for all your years of service.

HORACE: What about you, Mr. Dungy? You've been here over thirty-five years. You deserve the award as much as I do, maybe more because if you hadn't been here I might have left long ago.

DUNGY: I appreciate those words, Horace, but they couldn't give me an award because I was part of the deal to sell the place. I had to agree to a six month contract. Oh, but they're going to pay me well for it, so I'm not complaining.

HORACE: You couldn't use an assistant, could you? I would work cheap.

DUNGY: Don't think I didn't try, Horace. All they want from me is to tell them where to look for the records. They're placing everything on computers and they need someone to collect the old information. As soon as I get it together for them, I'm gone. (*Pause*) I'm going to miss you, Horace. We've been together a long time.

HORACE: Mr. Dungy, I have sincerely enjoyed every one of those years. I wish I had another ... let's just say few years, but I guess that's not in the cards for me.

DUNGY: Nor for me. By June, I'll be gone. In fact, my daughter is already beginning to look for a place for me in California, so I can be near the grandkids. I'm not staying here. (*Pause*) Oh, I almost forgot the most important part. (*Reaches into his pocket of his suit jacket and removes an envelope*) A little something extra to accompany the award. They wanted me to make certain I delivered it to you in person. (*Hands the envelope to him*).

HORACE: (*Opens the envelope and pulls out a check. Looks at the check then back at Dungy.*) There must be a mistake here. This is for ten thousand dollars.

DUNGY: (*Smiling*): Consider it a Christmas bonus, and it's no mistake. It's a little going away present, a gift of appreciation from the board.

HORACE: (*With emotion*) I'm truly touched, Mr. Dungy. I never received a bonus in my life ---- Not that I'm complaining. This board has been more than fair to me .... More than fair. But this.... I don't know what to say.

DUNGY: You don't have to say anything, Horace. You have been the longest and most dedicated employee we have ever had. None of those on the Board could remember a day when you were not here. But most important, nobody could remember a negative word said about you.

HORACE: I always try to be pleasant, Mr. Dungy. (*Pause*) Please tell the Board I'm speechless. I don't know what to say, except thank you. (*Pause*) I can't wait to tell Beverly and the family. They're taking me to dinner tonight.

DUNGY: A little celebration? That's nice. (*Pause*) Oh, one other thing. (*Reaches into the shopping bag*). You're going to like this, too. (*Hands him a newspaper*) Turn to page three.

HORACE: Well, Mr. Dungy you are full of surprises today. (*Takes the paper and begins flipping until he finds the page. Reads it. Then looks up as if somewhat confused.*) "When.... Who?"

DUNGY: You remember that young man I brought by last week to talk with you?

HORACE: Yes. From the county college. The one who said he had to do an interview with a man with an unusual occupation.

DUNGY: That's the one.

HORACE: He was a reporter?

DUNGY: Not exactly. He's a Journalism major at county. His professor called and asked if I had someone working here with an unusual occupation who might not mind being interviewed for a story. It's part of their outreach internship at the college. I told him about you and your coming retirement. The professor liked the idea. He said if the story the kid wrote was good enough, it would be sent to the local papers. I got a call a few days ago from the Courier trying to confirm some information. I asked if they could hold the story until Christmas Eve, your last day. They agreed. I hope you don't mind?

HORACE: Mind? I'm deeply appreciative. This is a surprise, and a darn nice surprise, too. Look at these pictures. I didn't realize that he was taking so many of them. He just

kept asking me questions and snapping away. These are good -- real good. Thank you, Mr. Dungy. You know, I will have to go out and buy a couple of more copies for the family.

DUNGY: Don't worry about that. I have a bunch of copies in my office, compliments of the paper and I'll get them to you later today. (*Pause*) One other thing, Horace. If you want anything from here -- those boxes of decorations, tools—anything, just let me know. I'll take it off the inventory.

HORACE: Well, thank you again, Mr. Dungy, but I can't say I have a need for anything. As to those dozens of boxes of decorations in the back room, I won't be making anymore wreaths. And I don't intend to be working with any of these gardening tools. So, Mr. Dungy, I'm gonna leave everything just where it is. About the only thing I will take with me is this list (*opens a drawer and takes out a yellow sheet*). You know those graves that I always put wreaths on?

DUNGY: Your client list?

Horace: You have a good memory, Mr. Dungy. That's what I used to call it. This is the original list. I don't need to look at it anymore. I got it all up here (*pointing to his head*), but, you know, maybe years from now I might begin to forget a few names, so I'll just take this with me --- that's the only thing I need to make me remember this place.

DUNGY: Mind if I take a look at it?

HORACE: Not at all. I know all the names: Elizabeth L. Woolston, Jeff Harbinger, Larry Francois, Colin S. Montgomery Harold Kitterling, Reverend William Ignatious, Sara Sazabo; Wilomina Thomson; Henry Winkingham: Silas Phelps. I could go on, but you get the idea.

DUNGY: Did you ever know any of these people?

HORACE: Not a one, Mr. Dungy. I only knew that none of them ever had decorations on their graves at Christmas. That's one thing I've always wondered about. Why? Every other grave around them had grave blankets or flowers, but not these people. They had nothing.

DUNGY: So, you took them on as clients?

HORACE: It seemed like the right thing to do, Mr. Dungy. I recycled a few ornaments when I cleaned the graves. That was the beginning of all this. (*Points to the wreaths on the wall.*)

DUNGY: If you wouldn't mind, I would like to take this list back to the office. Maybe I can laminate it or find another way to give it a couple of more years of life.

HORACE: I would really appreciate that, Mr. Dungy. It's about the only thing from here I want to take with me.

DUNGY: I'll see what I can do. In the meantime, you take it easy today, okay. Just play it safe; do nothing strenuous, okay? I'll be back later with the other copies of the paper.

HORACE: Thanks, Mr. Dungy. .

*(Dungy exits)*

*Horace looks at the wreaths. Goes to the back wall and removes two of them.*

HORACE: *(Looks up)* Time to get to work, Mary. *(Horace puts on his coat and exits)*

### Act I: Scene 2

*The lights dim to suggest a slight passage of time. Four wreaths are missing from the back wall. The outside door opens and in comes Beverly and her son Richie, the grandson of Horace. She is a thirty-something woman, a prosperous middle class woman, stylishly dressed but not excessively. She wears a leather coat – open. Her son is approximately 16, dressed in jeans, a New York Giants jacket with a sport jersey underneath. He wears a hat with the brim turned to the side. He has an old Voightlander camera case around his neck.*

RICHIE: Grandpa? Grandpa? *(Walks to the inner room to have a look. Comes back to the main room.)* He's not here, mom.

BEVERLY: Don't worry, he's not far. Here's his thermos. He probably just stepped out for a moment.

RICHIE: Wow, look at these wreaths. You think I should take some pictures of them?

BEVERLY: Yes, of course. *(Pause)* You sure you don't want to use the digital camera? It's right outside in the car.

RICHIE: Mom, this is a Voightlander. It's one of the best German cameras ever made. That's what my teacher at school said when I showed it to him, and he should know. He owns one.

BEVERLY: But you have to develop the film.

RICHIE: Mom, it's only an hour process. It's not like in the stone ages where you had to wait a week to have pictures developed. They can do it while you wait.

BEVERLY: I just think it would be easier to use the digital. You can save them and run them off on the home computer.

RICHIE: Mom, I know the technology. I am studying this stuff in my photography class and a lot of us think it's better to use a 35MM for effect. There's something real about the quality. You can adjust the apertures and distances for the lighting that makes for some really good artistic shots.

BEVERLY: All I'm saying is that your father brought us a really good digital camera. You can take a picture, check the quality, and if you don't like it, you take another. You can download it to our computer and we can e-mail copies to your uncles.

RICHIE: Mom, you just don't understand this thing about artistic quality.

BEVERLY: Do you understand that I want the pictures ready for tonight's party? I want to give them to grandpa, tonight.

RICHIE: Wow. Look at this wreath, Mom. *(Points to one in the middle row of exceptional beauty.)* Oh, I gotta take some pictures of this one. I wonder when he got the time to make these things. They're really something. *(Keeps snapping pictures).*

BEVERLY: You're not working with a digital here. You're going to have to pay for every picture you take.

RICHIE: It will be worth it, believe me. *(Pause)* I wish grandpa were here. I'd like to take a few pictures of him holding some wreaths in his hand. Or maybe making one. *(Pause)* Mom? Do you think he would mind if I move some of his tools – you know, to make an artistic shot.

BEVERLY: I'm sure he won't mind. Just don't break anything.

RICHIE: *(While snapping away)* I wonder where grandpa's at?

BEVERLY: Why don't you go outside to look for him? He's probably putting out some wreaths on those graves of his. You could take some pictures of him working. And you can take pictures of the outside of the hut. Maybe with grandpa standing next to it.

RICHIE: Good idea, mom. Thanks.

BEVERLY: And don't forget to wear your hat and zip up your jacket. It's cold out there.

RICHIE: I won't be out there that long. *(Stuffs his hat into his pocket. Exits)*

*Beverly walks to the back wall and looks at the wreaths. Inspects a few of the lower ones. From the side room, comes the sound of a door opening and closing.*

BEVERLY: Dad?



*From the Inner Room comes Will Goodman, a man in his early forties, tall, dark eyes, confident. He is dressed in business casual clothes with a wool winter jacket- open.*

WILL: No. Will Goodman, RFD, Construction and Demolition.

BEVERLY: Demolition?

WILL: Yes, Ma'man.

BEVERLY: But why?

WILL: That's what I'm paid to do.

BEVERLY: I meant why today? This is my father's last day on the job and you're already talking about tearing down this place?

WILL: It's not going to happen today. We're just doing a little preliminary field work, that's all.

*From the back room:*

DAN: Uncle Will?

WILL: Be there in a minute. *(To Beverly)*: My nephew. He's taking some measurements laying out a possible grid pattern -- making markings on the wall. .

DAN: *(off stage)* : Uncle Will, you got to see this. *(Comes out from side room. He is dressed in jeans and jacket)* The walls of this place must be four feet thick, and if I'm not mistaken, that's reinforced concrete. *(Sees Beverly)* I'm sorry to interrupt. I didn't realize someone was here.

WILL: Ah *(Looks at Beverly and motions to suggest she venture a name)*

BEVERLY: Beverly.

WILL: Beverly, meet Dan, my nephew.

DAN: Please to meet you, ma'am. *(Pause)* Uncle Will, this place is a bunker. The walls and the roof are made of reinforced concrete. I swear, Uncle Will, you could drop a bomb on the roof and not do any damage. I'm worried about the drill bits. This place is.....

WILL: Don't say indestructible.

DAN: Extreme. The word I wanted was extreme.

WILL: That's the word. Maybe that's why the old owners just left the place alone. But we'll get it down. Lay out a plan B pattern. That should do the job.

DAN: That's going to mean a lot of extra drilling. I better double check the outside measurements. (*Exits front entrance*)

BEVERLY: Drilling?

WILL: For the placement of the charges. We place an explosive in the holes and detonate them.

BEVERLY: My father's house, - not to mention the neighbors --- are right across the street.

WILL: That's why we're going with a Plan B pattern --- drilling a lot of holes. The more holes the less explosive the charge we have to place in each one. We might rattle a few of your dad's windows, but that will be the extent of any damage. We'll make certain he and the neighbors will be out of their houses -- - just as a precaution.

*From the side room enters Horace.*

HORACE: I was wondering what all those voices were in here. Beverly, when did you get here?

BEVERLY: Just a short time ago, Dad. (*Pause*) Dad, did you know these men have come to demolish the building?

HORACE: What are you talking about?

WILL: (*Extending his hand*) Will Goodman, RFD, Construction and Demolition.

HORACE: Is that your man outside?

WILL: That's my nephew, Dan. We're just here to doing some preliminary field work. I didn't know anyone was working on Christmas Eve.

HORACE: At least for the next few more hours. So when does it all happen?

WILL: Not before the end of the year. We'll try not to be in the way.

HORACE: So they're going to demolish this place?

WILL: To make way for a new Reception Center.

HORACE: So you work for the new owners?

WILL : Yes. They have a few people already in the office as part of the transition team. They're updating the records, so we thought as long as some of our people were here, we would get in a little head start on our part of the project.

BEVERLY: Couldn't you have waited one day? (*Pointing to her father*) It's his last day!

WILL: We didn't know anyone would be here. The owners said all non-essential personnel had been dismissed.

BEVERLY: My father is not non- essential personnel! He's been at this place for over forty-two years.

WILL: I didn't mean to offend. That's what I was told.

HORACE: Nobody has said anything to me about the new plans for this place. Who are the new owners?

WILL: The Davis Crematory Corporation?

HORACE: They're going to build a crematorium here?

WILL: Among other things. In a year from now, you won't even recognize this place. The new Reception Center that will be built on this spot will be state of the art. You'll be able to come into the place and find the location of any grave and the details of a person's life.

BEVERLY: Dad, it's your last day for crying out loud.

DAN: (*From the side room*) Uncle Will, what are we going to do with all the stuff in the back room?

HORACE: (*To Dan*): That's just my unused decorations. I don't care what you do to those things. You can just push them aside. As for the tools, I think you should ask Mr. Dungy about those things.

WILL: (*To Dan*) Make an inventory of the things back there and I'll give it to Dungy.

DAN: I'll get right on it.

WILL: (*Looking at the wreaths*): You do nice work.

HORACE: Thank you.

WILL: They're like little works of art. (*Exits to the side room shaking his head in admiration.*)

*Horace moves to the back wall and takes down two wreaths. He places them on the workbench, and begins making a few adjustments to them.*

BEVERLY: Dad! Aren't you the least bit upset by what just happened here? They're planning to blow up this place and you haven't even turned in your keys. Don't you think you should at least talk to Mr. Dungy?

HORACE: It's my last day, Bev. They're not going to blow up this place before five-thirty. After that, it none of my business. Besides, you heard the man, nobody is going to do anything until after the first of the year, and I can't change that.

BEVERLY: It's wrong, Dad. They could have at least waited until after Christmas. I think you ought to talk to Mr. Dungy and have them leave the place. They have no right to be here.

HORACE: Bev, it's my last day. Just leave it alone. Here, take a look at this. *(Hands her the plaque.)*

BEVERLY: *(Reads)* Dad, why didn't you tell me about this? This is wonderful.

HORACE: I got it this morning from Mr. Dungy. It came with a \$10,000 check. A bonus. Now you see why I really don't want to rock the boat?

BEVERLY: Ten thousand dollars! Dad, that's really wonderful.

HORACE: It surprised me, too. I never had that much money at one time in my whole life, and I'm not yet sure what I'm going to do with it, but it sure will be good to have.

BEVERLY: For once, dad, spend the money on yourself. For once in your life, buy something you always wanted to buy.

HORACE: It's really odd, Bev. I've always dreamed of having money like this and now that I have it, I can't think of anything I want to buy. I mean if your mother were still around...I know she would...

BEVERLY: Dad, spend.... it.... on..... yourself! That's what she would want.

HORACE: *(Hands her the paper)* Look at page three. They got a whole story on me.

BEVERLY: Today's paper?

HORACE: Page three, complete with pictures. *(Beverly picks up the paper, folds back the front page and reads)* Mr. Dungy arranged it all.

BEVERLY: Dad, this is....

HORACE: I know: wonderful

BEVERLY: We're going to have to have this page framed. *(Pause)* We need more copies.

HORACE: Mr. Dungy will be dropping off some later today. He got a few advanced copies. *(Pause)* You say, Richie came to take pictures of my last day?

BEVERLY: He's out looking for you right now, and Dad, he insisted. You should have seen how excited he was this morning. Dad, he really loves his grandpop. That's why I want you to go to Florida with us. It would make the transition so much easier for him. Even if it were just for a few weeks – just until he gets settled. You don't have to sell the house. Just make it a short visit. With Bob so much on the road, I could use the help. *(Pause)* We do need you, Dad.

HORACE: Don't push the issue, Bev. Give me a little time.

BEVERLY: For what, Dad? Nobody will be here anymore. *(Pause)* Listen, Dad, I know you don't like Iowa. And Matt and Jennifer don't have the room. You and Richie get along so well, and we have the extra room, and I know you like Florida and you even have friends there.

HORACE: I'm not arguing with you, Bev. I know what you're saying is right, but I need time. I can't explain it. I just need it.

BEVERLY: You sure it's not me, or Richie, or living in our house?

HORACE: *(Emphatically)* It's not you or Richie. I think my grandchildren are the greatest in the world and I love them all, and you and Bob ..... I am deeply touched that you want me to live with you.

BEVERLY: Dad, I know your roots in the city go deep. But the town I remember as a child isn't here anymore. Our church, my high school.... our old neighborhood --- gone. All gone. Even Grandmom's house --- gone. Dad, there's not a place I can visit here anymore except for your house and my grammar school, and that's not even the same anymore. It's a private charter school, now. And now your street is in a redevelopment area. What hasn't been bulldozed is scheduled to be bulldozed, and that goes for this building. You heard Mr. Goodman. By next week, this building will be a pile of rubble.

HORACE: Bev, this is my last day on the job. Let me enjoy it.

BEVERLY: *(As if given a reality check)* I'm sorry, Dad. You're right. It is your last day. And I brought Richie here because he insisted that your last day be documented. I didn't think you would mind.

HORACE: Mind? I appreciate it.

BEVERLY: And just to show you my heart's in the right place, I'm going to tell you something that I couldn't tell you before today because I wasn't sure. Just before I left, I received two calls. John and Barbara are flying in with the kids. I'm supposed to pick them up at the airport at three thirty. And Matt and Jennifer and the kids are driving down from Maine. They'll be here about six.

HORACE: They're all coming home today?

BEVERLY: Of course, Dad. This is a special day for you, and we love you... *(Kisses him on the cheek)* You're going to have dinner catered tonight, Dad. It's going to be a really nice night.

*(Outside door opens)*

RICHIE: Mom, you forgot grandpop's lunch. Grandpop! You're here! I was outside looking all over for you. I took some pictures of the hut outside and there were a couple of guys out there doing some measuring so I took a few pictures of them.

HORACE: Good for you. *(To Beverly)* Now what was this you said about my lunch?

BEVERLY: Dad, I know you bring lunch everyday, your usual bologna sandwich and some chips, but I decided to do something special: your favorite: homemade fried chicken, complete with potato salad and some cole slaw.

HORACE: Why what a wonderful surprise! To tell you the truth, I didn't pack a lunch today. I thought I might ..... I don't know..... be too nervous to eat. But this --- I can hardly wait for lunch now. *(Pause)* I can't believe your brother and sister and the kids are coming home today.

RICHIE: Everyone's coming home? Why didn't you tell me, mom?

BEVERLY: I wasn't sure because it's winter. Route 95 is clear so Uncle Matt and Aunt Jennifer are coming down with the kids. And there was a snow delay in Des Moines, so I thought your Uncle John and Aunt Barbara wouldn't make it. But they called from the airport and said their flight had been cleared. I'm supposed to pick them up Newark at around three- thirty. So it looks like we're all going to be home for grandpop's retirement.

RICHIE: Can I go? To the airport? .

BEVERLY: Sure. Are you finished taking pictures?

RICHIE: Not yet. Can you can pick me up when you're leaving?

BEVERLY: Dad, would you mind if he stays?

HORACE: Of course not. If he gets bored, he can go back to my house. Here, take the keys now.

RICHIE: Thanks, grandpa.

BEVERLY: Okay. *(To Richie)* Just don't you eat any of your grandfather's fried chicken. I made it especially for him.

RICHIE: You know I don't like any fried chicken except KFC. And besides, if I get hungry I can walk to McDonalds. It's right next door to the Rite- Aid where I'll take the pictures to be developed. *(Pause)* Should I should take them there before we go?

HORACE: I would think so.

BEVERLY: Okay, so we have a plan. I'll pick you up about at about two thirty. We'll get to the airport for 3:30 and I'll be back here before you close up shop. I want to be here, Dad, when you walk out.

HORACE: Okay.

BEVERLY: Thanks, Dad, *(Kisses him on the cheek and exits)*

HORACE: Okay, Richie, let's take some shots with these wreaths. Then, we'll go outside and you can help me do a little work.

RICHIE: Sure thing, Grandpa

*Lights dim to dark.*

### Act I : Scene 3

*Another row of wreaths have been removed from the back wall. From the outside door enter Richie and Horace. Richie comes in with a McDonalds' bag. Horace goes to the workbench where his lunch has been placed. They talk as they set up for lunch.*

HORACE: Thank you, Richie, you were a big help out there.

RICHIE: Thank you for buying lunch, grandpa.

HORACE: Well, I didn't want to eat alone. After all, your mother packed me a lunch of her famous fried chicken, and you know how much I like your mom's fried chicken.

RICHIE: She said she uses grandmom's old recipe.

HORACE: Which is why it makes it my favorite meal. Oh, this really looks good.

RICHIE: And so does this. I don't think there is any better burger in the whole world that a McDonalds' Double Cheese. *(Pause)* You know grandpa that was fun to do— putting out the wreaths. I mean it felt kinda good to decorate those graves. It made me feel more Christmasy, if you know what I mean.

HORACE: I know exactly what you mean, which is why I have been doing it for over thirty years.

RICHIE: That's a long time, grandpa. *(Pause)* Grandpa, what was your first job here?

HORACE: In the beginning, I did a little bit of everything; I was even a grave digger.

RICHIE: A grave digger? A real grave digger?

HORACE: Yes, a real grave digger. Somebody had to dig the holes to put in the caskets. We used pickaxes and shovels to dig six foot holes in the ground. Of course, there were a few more of us back then.

RICHIE: Do you still dig graves?

HORACE: No, not anymore. Now I'm a caretaker. We have a company that digs the holes and my job now is to check to see that they dig them in the right spots. We wouldn't want them to make any mistakes, would we?

RICHIE: I guess not. *(Pause)* *(As if confused)* Caretaker? What else does a caretaker do?

HORACE: He takes care of a place. When people come to a cemetery they want to see it nice and clean. They want to be able to read the names on the stones, especially those on the ground, so somebody has to keep those stones clean. That's part of what I do. And I remove all the dead leaves and flowers from the grave sites. I prune the trees and trim the bushes that you see all around this place. In the summer, I cut the grass. In autumn, I rake the leaves, which is a very big job in a place like this. And in the winter, I plow the roads and clean off the graves.

RICHIE: Who's going to do all that when you're gone?

HORACE: Probably nobody. After me, they'll just hire a bunch of contractors to do different jobs. Some will cut the grass and others will clean up the litter. Someone will be called to plow the roads. I don't think anyone will shovel the snow off the graves anymore. *(Pause)* But enough of that. Tell me, how do you feel about moving to Florida?



RICHIE: I don't think I'm going to mind it too bad. I like the house down there. It's really close to the water, and I like to fish. You remember the time we went on a fishing boat? And we got those really big fish?

HORACE: That was at the Oregon Inlet, near Daytona.

RICHIE: That was the greatest fishing ever, and it wasn't too far from Tampa Bay, was it?

HORACE: Well, it's far, but not too far. *(Pause)* But aren't you going to miss your friends?

RICHIE: I really don't have friends here, grandpa. We text message and blog and maybe meet at the mall once in a while, but it's not like I can't do that from Florida, all except for the meeting with them at the mall. But that was just hanging out. Half of my friends don't even go to the same school. In Florida, I had real friends. We would go out everyday. To the mall, to the beach. To the club house at my friend's house. And we had fun. And those kids kept asking me when I'm going to move to Florida, and now I am, so it's not going to be too bad. And when it's time to go to college, I'll be going to college in Florida. That's every kids dream in high school, isn't it?.

HORACE: It was in my day. So I guess you're okay with the move?

RICHIE: I am. *(Pause)* Grandpa, mom and dad want you to move with us. Do you know she added a casita to the house?

HORACE: What is a casita?

RICHIE: A small apartment, like a guest house. Some people use it for visitors. It's right in back of the house and it shares the yard, except mom doesn't call it a yard anymore. She says it's now a courtyard.

HORACE: A courtyard?

RICHIE: Yes. And if you're sitting outside and we're sitting outside, we'd both be in the same courtyard and you can have dinner with us every night and watch television and when you want, you can go back to your own place. And I can visit there sometimes.

HORACE: It sounds nice.

RICHIE: I would be neat if you were there. You and me could always fish; my friends down there don't fish. I mean they live in a great fishing area, and they don't like fishing. They like sailing and stuff like that, but I like to fish, and you like to fish. So I could sail with them and fish with you. I'm sure I could convince dad to buy a boat. He won't do it just for me, but if he knows that you and me and mom will use the boat, I

know dad. He'll buy a nice boat, and he might even do some fishing with us when he's not on the road.

HORACE: It sounds like you got it all figured out.

RICHIE: So, why don't you come, grandpa? You know the area. You liked it down there. And now that mom has added the casita.

*The exterior door opens. Mr. Dungy enters.*

HORACE: *(As if pleased with the interruption)* Mr. Dungy!

DUNGY: Didn't mean to interrupt your lunch, but I was going out to lunch myself and decided to drop off those extra copies of the paper. I have five. Is that enough?

HORACE: More than enough. Thanks.

DUNGY: This must be Richie?

HORACE: It is.

DUNGY: Did you show him the article yet?

RICHIE: What article?

DUNGY: You're grandfather is a celebrity today. They have a whole page in today's paper on his retirement, complete with pictures of him at his workbench.

RICHIE: Where? *(Dungy hands him a paper)*

DUNGY: Page three. *(To Horace)* He's really grown up. I remember the times he used to play underneath the desk in my office. *To Richie: (Still reading)* Do you remember that?

RICHIE: Yes, sir. *(Still reading)* Look grandpa, they even mentioned the grandchildren. Wow. Wait until Bobby and Melinda see this. *(Pause)* Grandpa, after lunch I want to take a picture of you holding this page of the paper.

HORACE: Okay.

DUNGY: Is that your camera? A Voightlander. I haven't seen one of those in years.

RICHIE: My photography teacher says it's one of the best, and he should know.

DUNGY: I'm sure he does. *(To Horace)*: So he's here to take pictures of you on your last day. That's a nice thing to do. *(Pause)* *(To Richie)* You grandfather tells me you're going to move to Florida.

RICHIE: We were just talking about that. We're trying to get grandpa to move down there with us.

DUNGY: *(To Horace)*: Is that right?

HORACE: Nothing definite yet. But maybe. I'd have to sell the house and do a few other things.

DUNGY: I see. *(Pause)* My niece is a real estate agent. She can handle the details from here if you decide to go.

RICHIE: Grandpa?

HORACE: We'll see.

DUNGY: You seem to have a lot to discuss. *(Pause)* I almost forgot the other reason I stopped by. You might see some strange people around here later today. Most are in a panic over the sale of this place. If any drop by here, just send them to the office.

HORACE: I'll do that.

DUNGY: Enjoy your lunch. I'll see you before you leave.

HORACE: I'll be here.

*(Dungy exits)*

HORACE: You really remember hiding under his desk and playing in his office?

RICHIE: I do. They were fun days. You used to buy me ice cream and go into Mr. Dungy's office and I would sit under the desk with my ice cream until it was time to leave. Sometimes I would play outside.

HORACE: Everyone in the office knew you. You were like the office favorite, and they all used to watch out for you. Now he's the only one left.

RICHIE: He's a nice man. *(Pause)* That was some news story about you in the news paper, grandpa.

HORACE: Yes it was. And if what Mr. Dungy says is true, I'm glad I don't have a phone out here.

RICHIE: Why?

HORACE: (*Laughing*) They'd probably be transferring all the calls to me.

RICHIE: Did you ever have a phone out here?

HORACE: No. It wouldn't have been of much use. I'm out of the building more times than I'm in it. And Mr. Dungy always knows where to find me.

RICHIE: Do you think he meant it about selling your house?

HORACE: Probably. He would get me a fair price for the place, especially if his niece gets the commission. He's a good businessman. But he's going to have his own place to sell. So, we'll see.

HORACE: Grandpa, one of the reasons that mom wants you to come with us is that so she can travel with Dad. If you were living with us.....

HORACE: I never thought of that.

RICHIE: Mom and dad have. And while they're away, you and me can do whatever we want.

HORACE: You got it all figured out, haven't you?

RICHIE: You know grandpa, I remember coming here with mom at Christmas.

HORACE: She used to pick up grave blankets for her grandmother, my mom.

RICHIE: She never told me that. Or if she did, I don't remember. I just knew every year we came here. Why didn't you put them out?

HORACE: That's a good question. Your great grandmother, my mother, used to worry that nobody would put flowers on her grave when she died. She didn't trust men to do that, which meant my dad and me. So your mother made a promise to my mother to decorate her grave when she died. (*Pause*) After a while, I just did it myself.

RICHIE: I remember how you used to try to scare me when I came here. Once you even jumped out of a grave hole. It was fun. That's why I wanted to take some pictures today. I mean after today ....You know grandpa, you've been here my whole life.

HORACE: And most of mine. But I've enjoyed every minute in this place. I hope you're as lucky when you find a job.

RICHIE: (*Pause*) Why don't you come to live with us?

HORACE: Maybe I will. But not just right now. When it's time, I'll know.

RICHIE: But how, grandpa?

HORACE: When did you know you really WANTED to move to Florida? At first, I know you didn't want to go. Isn't that right?

RICHIE: You're right about that grandpa. I was scared about moving – leaving my school and my friends. Then, one day I was talking to my best friend, Stephen Jennings and he said I was an idiot for not wanting to move to Florida --- you know, the gulf.... sailing.... the beaches. His mom and dad have a summer home down there, and he would give anything to live there. And he said if I moved there, he would have a friend down there every summer. His parent's summer home is about forty minutes away. And he said we'd both be driving soon, which means we could see each other any time. And I got to thinking that maybe that's what I really wanted to do – move to Florida.

HORACE: That's how I'll know, too.... when everything seems to make sense. I don't know what those things are, but I expect to find out soon.

RICHIE: When you retire?

HORACE: We'll see. *(Pause)* You want to put out some more wreaths?

RICHIE: Sure thing, grandpa.

HORACE: Let's take those three on the right. *(Points to the ones)*

RICHIE: Okay, grandpa.

*(They remove the three wreaths and exit through the front entrance. Lights darken to suggest the passage of time. Christmas music plays in the background.)*

*(When the lights come up, the door to the outside opens and Horace stands in the doorway facing out.)*

HORACE: Thanks again, Richie. I'll see you later. Don't forget to pick up those pictures.

*(Mr. Dungy enters from side room)*

HORACE: Mr. Dungy! Looking for me?

DUNGY: No, just doing a little inventory when I heard your voice. *(Pause)* Aside from the machines outside, I don't think there's anything we need to worry about. Whatever you don't want, we'll just leave here. *(Pause)* So tell me, Horace, what's this about moving to Florida?

HORACE: That's more Beverly's idea than mine. She and the boy want to go, and I'm not saying it's a bad idea, but I just don't feel right about it. Not yet.

DUNGY: Why not? Our work is done here. I'll move to California, and you'll move to Florida, and we'll send each other Christmas cards of our grandchildren. I think a change like that will do us both a lot of good.

HORACE: Maybe. But I just don't feel ready.

DUNGY: Remember, if you're worried about selling your house, my niece will list it for you. I'll make sure you get a good price. You are in a redevelopment area, and there's an open lot behind your place, so you could get very lucky. Just let me know.

HORACE: I'll do that. *(Pause)* So you're going to California to be with Rachel and the kids.

DUNGY: Rachel has already sent me a dozen possibilities. Thank God, the real estate market has tanked in the San Diego area. I should be able to find a comfortable place.

HORACE: You're planning to retire?

DUNGY: Not yet. I expect to find a place in sales. New Jersey isn't the only place that has cemeteries, you know. And at least I'll be close to the grandkids. That's the real reason for the move. Besides, the weather is perfect out there. So, what about you?

HORACE: I don't know what I want to do. I guess I'm afraid of doing anything until I'm absolutely sure that I'm making the right decision.

DUNGY: It's the right decision, Horace. Everything's changing around here. You should see the new people in the office updating all the records. They're young and eager and they want to computerize every piece of paper in this place. Every grave and plot will be mapped and documented. All the rest of the maintenance work will be farmed out. I'm not saying it's a bad thing but it's not the way of life that both of us have liked for a long time.

HORACE: They're going to demolish this building and make a new reception center.

DUNGY: I know.

HORACE: What about the office?

*Enter Will Goodman from the back.*

WILL: Maybe I can answer that. We're going to tear down the office to make room for a few more burial sites.

DUNGY: What difference will those few additional sites make? Add a year or two to capacity?

WILL: It will buy us the time we need. We're going to build huge mausoleums all over this place. Think of them as sky rises for the average dead man.

DUNGY: You can't build on top of grave sites!

WILL: I'm telling you what I'm commissioned to build. We're going to build mausoleums on columns over the current grave sites. The original graves will be like the ground floor level, like an historical area. But above those graves will be these huge elaborate burials halls. They will add a hundred years to the current life expectancy of the place.

DUNGY: They can do that?

WILL: We got most of the approvals, at least the important ones.

DUNGY: Well, I'll be! I never imagined building over the graves!

WILL: This place will be the first of its kind, anywhere. We'll begin in the older sections where everybody seems to agree that it's better to enclose the old graves. Less wear and tear on the old tomb stones. It's what's called a win- win for everybody, including the municipal government that collects the taxes.

DUNGY: I don't know why we didn't think of it.

WILL: We have contracts like this all over the country, but this one will be the first one built.

HORACE: Suddenly, I feel very old.

DUNGY: It's the Burial Biz, Horace. The last things the baby boomers will destroy with their numbers will be the cemeteries.

HORACE: This is too much for me. *(Takes two wreaths from the back wall)* If you don't mind, Mr. Dungy, I got some work to do. I'll see you later. *(Exits)*

WILL: That's not a happy camper.

DUNGY: Can you blame him? For forty years, he took care of this place and you just told him in another few years it will all be destroyed.

WILL: Destroyed? In another decade this place would have been abandoned. Now it's going to have another hundred years of usefulness. I think he would be glad to see that.

DUNGY: Maybe. Just not today. It is his last day...

WILL: I'm really sorry to have upset him. I thought he wanted to know. Really.

DUNGY: It's not your fault.

WILL: Things change, Mr. Dungy. I know because I'm in the changing business. What we build today we tear down tomorrow – that's the American way. For all those years, he worked on these grounds; now they'll be updated and new people will take on new jobs at the same place. They will create their own jobs, just the way he created his and my Nephew Dan will recreate my job when it's his turn to lead the family business. You and I both know that's the way it works.

DUNGY: So does Horace. He just doesn't want to remember that now. *(Pause)* Let's get back to the office and finish up the rest of the paperwork. It won't take long.

*Dungy and Will exits. Set darkens.*

#### Act 1: Scene 4

*Eight wreaths remain on the walls. They are the finest of the twenty.*

*A young girl approximately six years old comes in from the front entrance. She is dressed in a new dress but in a style slightly dated yet strangely appropriate to her age and not entirely out of style. The girl looks at the wreaths on the wall. She wanders around the place then decides to sit on the floor. She removes a set of jacks and a rubber ball from a small crocheted purse and begins playing.*

*Lights come up. Horace enters from the side room.*

HORACE: And who might you be young lady?

SISSY: My name is Sissy Sorenson and my mom told me to come in here for a little while.

HORACE: I can see why. Where is your jacket? It is cold outside.

SISSY: I don't have a jacket with me and I can't tell the reason why.

HORACE: Maybe because your mother's car has a heater but she doesn't want to leave you alone in the car while it's running.



SISSY: *(Shrugs as if she neither accepts nor rejects the explanation)* Did you make these things? *(Pointing to the remaining wreaths on the wall)*

HORACE: Yes, I did. Do you like them?

SISSY: I like them very much. They look like round Christmas trees.

HORACE: Well, I never thought of them that way but I'm glad you think so. Are you ready for Christmas?

SISSY: I can't wait for Christmas. It is my favorite day of the whole year.

HORACE: It's my favorite day of the whole year, too. Have you been a good girl?

SISSY: Yes, I have.

HORACE: Then I guess that Santa Claus will be very good to you. Do you have a special present you want from Santa this year?

SISSY: I want new jacks.

HORACE: New jacks?

SISSY: I am very good at playing them. I can beat anyone in my class.

HORACE: And what class would that be?

SISSY: First grade. Miss Hutchinson's class. *(She continues with her game)*

HORACE: I didn't think little girls played jacks anymore. I thought everybody watched television and played with computers.

SISSY: My mommy won't let me watch television and I don't know anything about comutters.

HORACE: Well, you don't know how delighted I am to hear that. So many young children do not know how to play jacks or jump rope.

SISSY: I like to skip rope and play jacks.

HORACE: This is very much of a surprise to me. And what else do you like?

SISSY: I like to play with my dolls and I like it when my mommy reads to me.

HORACE: Your mommy reads to you? Well, I think that's just wonderful. And what are your favorite books?

SISSY: I like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and I like Little Red Riding Hood.

HORACE: Two of my favorites. What else do you like?

SISSY: I like playing Hide and Seek and Ring around the Rosey and tag.

HORACE: You are a remarkable young lady. Hide and Seek and Ring Around the Rosey! Those were my favorite games when I was your age. The boys and girls in my neighborhood used to play those games every day. *(Pause)* Tell me, do you have a boyfriend yet?

SISSY: I don't like boys – they keep teasing me and calling me names and taking my books, especially Jimmy Kennell. My mommy says its because he likes me, but Mrs. Hutchinson doesn't think so. She thinks he's just being mean.

HORACE: Is he mean to you?

SISSY: No. But I just wish he wouldn't pull my curls and do other things like that. *(Pause)* Boys can be so ..... impossible. That's what my mommy keeps saying.

HORACE: Yes, they can be but you just wait, one day they will be tripping over themselves to buy you ice cream cones.

SISSY: That would be fun. I like ice-cream. *(Pause)* I think Jimmy is jealous because I can play jacks better than he can. He can't get past fivezies. But I can get them all. You want to see?

HORACE: Yes, I would. *(Sissy begins playing)* Do you think I could try?

SISSY: Why yes you can. We can start a new game. You can go first.

HORACE: Let me see, first we roll the jacks and then we throw the ball up in the air and try to snatch the jacks one at time.

SISSY: *(Looks up)* I have to go. I hear my mommy calling.

HORACE: I don't hear anything.

SISSY: *(Snatching up the jacks and putting them in her crocheted purse)* I have to go. It was very nice meeting you. But my mommy's calling.

HORACE: It was very nice meeting you Sissy. *(Sissy exits. Horace goes to the door, looks outside and comes back shaking his head. He returns to his workbench where he begins making some adjustments to the wreaths on his workbench. From the side enters Dan).*

DAN: Mr. Ferguson, about the back room...

HORACE: Just push anything aside; it's just recycled decorations.

DAN: I can't get to the back wall, which means those things have got to be moved.

HORACE: I certainly hope you find someone to move them because nobody's here but me, and I don't plan on doing anything on my last day.

DAN: I guess I can't blame you for that. I guess I could just throw everything outside.

HORACE: Or you could wait until after the New Year and do it then. It is, after all, the holiday season.

DAN: I guess you're right about that, too. And since this isn't our place until after the New Year, I guess it can wait.

HORACE: Exactly.

DAN: But I sure would like to get some work done today. Do you mind if I remove some of these wreaths and begin marking a drilling grid. I'll put them back when I'm finished.

HORACE: Just lay them on the workbench. There'll be fine.

DAN: (*Begins removing the last of the wreaths.*) You know these wreaths are really very nice. I mean really nice.

HORACE: I'm glad you like them.

DAN: I do. But why make wreaths in a cemetery? Every place I see that sells Christmas trees makes blankets for the graves.

HORACE: At one time I did too. But through the years fewer and fewer people came here to put out blankets, so I didn't have much material to work with. But we have funerals here every week. So I recycled parts from all the sprays and wreaths that the funeral directors left on top of the graves. That where I got all the iron rings. I added them to the ribbons and other decorations from the Christmas graves and I had enough parts to make dozens of Christmas wreaths every year.

DAN: You do nice work. (*Pause*) My uncle told me you've been here over forty years.

HORACE: Forty-two to be exact.

DAN: I find that unbelievable. (*Shakes his head*) Forty-two years!

HORACE: It went by fast. *(Pause)* You uncle tells me that you have fourteen years experience in demolition, and you're still a young man. Think of how many years you'll have when you're my age. More than forty-two I'll wager.

DAN: I guess you're right about that, too. My Uncle Will put me to work as soon as I could get my working papers, and he paid me twice the minimum wage, whatever it was back then. I just remember it was double what my friends were making.

HORACE: So he hooked you with money? Is that how it begins?

DAN: It's part of the way. Building and demolition is the family business, so as soon as I was old enough to get my working papers my Uncle Will had a job for me. In my first summer, he allowed me to push the plunger and when I saw my first building go down, I was hooked. I wanted to learn as much as possible about how to take down buildings. Now he has me laying out the grid work and supervising the setting of the charges. He still has the final say but I don't mind that because in this business you can't afford to make mistakes.

HORACE: It seems like dangerous work.

DAN: It is if you're careless and make mistakes. But the same thing could be said of any job in construction. You've got steel workers who walk on girders a hundred stories off the ground and others who work with high voltage electricity. I can think of a dozen jobs as dangerous as mine and yet they think because mine involves explosives that the danger is greater. It's not. I would rather do this job than build a bridge across a river. Now that's dangerous work.

HORACE: What are those marks you're making on the wall?

DAN: Just a preliminary grid pattern. We'll take a few photographs, run some computer simulations to see how it works. Everything will be pre-planned. If we do our job right, we won't even break a pane of glass on the houses across the streets.

HORACE: Good thing because that's where I live.

DAN: I wouldn't worry too much. We'll be sending our people to cover any windows facing the area, but I don't think you have to worry about any damage. This will be a nice, smooth job. My uncle calls it a surgical operation, which means we will confine damage to the site.

HORACE: I hate to see this place going down. It's been here as long as I can remember.

DAN: It is an incredible piece of work. My Uncle Will thinks it might have been old ammunition bunker, some kind of proto-type building made before World War 2. It has walls three feet thick and fortified with iron bars.

HORACE: Can you get it down?

DAN: My uncle can take down anything. He has a motto: If it's built by men it can be destroyed by Goodman.

HORACE: It just seems a shame to take down a building like this. You don't see any like this around anymore.

DAN: You're right about that. But it's showing its age. You wouldn't think that a building made of concrete and steel would crumble, but it's happening. Those old builders didn't know that iron will rust in concrete. If we did nothing, I bet this building would crumble in another fifty years; it would destroy itself from the inside.

HORACE: Iron rusts in concrete?

DAN: You can see for yourself on the outside corners. It's crumbling. Nobody hit it with a hammer; it's falling apart on its own. That should make our demolition a bit easier. *(Pause)* I have really developed a new respect for those old Roman buildings. They have stood for centuries because they used a special type of concrete and no metal.

HORACE: They weren't worried about a battleship firing a sixteen inch gun at them.

DAN: You've got that right. In that case, I want as much concrete and steel between me and that shell as possible, but in the long term....buildings built this way won't last another fifty years.

*Door opens. Mr. Dungy enters with newspapers under his hand.*

DUNGY: Horace, glad to find you here. I thought you might be out putting out the last of the wreaths.

HORACE: You almost guessed right.

DUNGY: Here are a few extra copies of the paper. You would be surprised at the response we're getting. We have had over two dozen calls since the story broke. You can't imagine their concerns. I had four calls from women asking me if they will still be allowed to be buried next to their husbands. Others asked about if their perpetual care contracts would still be in effect. *(Pause)* I had to get away. And just for my own satisfaction. Are you selling any extra wreaths?

HORACE: No.

DUNGY: I didn't think so. You would be surprised at how many people asked us about them. The story in the paper has made you a kind of folk artist.

DAN: I told you they were good.

HORACE: These are the last, believe me.

DUNGY: Well, don't be surprised if you see more than the usual amount of people around here. If any of them become a problem, just direct them to me.

HORACE: I'll be fine. I'll be spending a lot of time in the old section. Not many people go there, so I shouldn't have any problems.

DUNGY: Remember what I said earlier. Take it easy. And, don't forget, I still have to return that list to you. I'll drop it by later this afternoon. *(He begins walking to the door, pauses, checks his watch and says matter of fact).* Horace, would you mind turning on the radio for a moment: 1450 AM WCTC.

HORACE: Sure thing Mr. Dungy. *(Horace goes to the radio, plays with the dial until he comes to the station)*

***And now we have a special Christmas dedication going to Horace Ferguson who today will be retiring as caretaker of St. Jerome Cemetery in Center City after forty-two years of service. Horace, from your daughter Beverly and your son Mike and your three grandchildren --- Richie, Elizabeth and Bobby ---- who know you take great pride in your Christmas wreaths--- we have a request to dedicate to you: It's Beginning to Look a lot like Christmas. Happy Retirement, Horace. (Song Plays)***

HORACE: My favorite Christmas song. *(He begins singing it. Mr. Dungy joins in and so does Dan.)*

DAN: That's was fun.

HORACE: *(To Mr. Dungy)* You knew that was going to happen.

DUNGY: Beverly told me what she had arranged to have the dedication. She wanted to be here herself, but she had to go to the airport and she knew she wouldn't be here. She asked if I might drop by at three to make sure you turned on the radio. The singing was not part of the deal but it seemed like too much fun to pass up.

HORACE: Mr. Dungy... this is turning out to be one heck of a day for me. It seems every hour brings some other surprise. Thank you.

DUNGY: I'll see you later. *(Dungy exits)*

DAN: That's really a nice man. I can almost see how you can stay here all those years...He seems like a nice man to work for.

HORACE: Like your Uncle Will?

DAN: Like my Uncle Will. One of the reasons I like this job so much is because I work with him..... but...

HORACE: But ????

DAN: Well, don't get me wrong; I like my job because it's never the same. One week I'm in Massachusetts and the next week I'm in New Orleans. One month I might have to go to London and the next month I'm off to Paris. We go where the job is. Right now I've seen more of the world than most people will see in a lifetime and I enjoy that. And I enjoy working with My Uncle Will. It's like playing with the biggest firecrackers a kid can play with.

HORACE: But...???

DAN: I want to go back to college and finish my degree. When Uncle Will asked me to go full time, I had almost two years done. Then I got so caught up in the job that I had to drop out. I mean I don't have to worry about the job security, but I want to learn more about business because demolition is a business. But you can't go to college if you're moving around from place to place every month.

HORACE: Have you told your Uncle Will?

DAN: Not in so many words. He knows I want to go back to school. I mean if I could just stay in one spot..... or maybe I might just have to take off a couple of months a year, but ... in this line of work...

HORACE: Take an old man's advice, son: Money is not worth the sacrifice of dreams. Work at a job you love and your life will be pleasant, even if you're a ditch digger. If the job pays the bills and you like it, you're a rich man.

DAN: I like that idea, Mr. Ferguson. If the job pays the bills and you like it, you're a rich man. *(Pause)* I'll have to mention that to my Uncle Will. *(Pause)* Just out of curiosity, what about you? Did you ever do any other type of work?

HORACE: Just basic young man's work. I was a dishwasher, road worker, warehouse man, and a few other things, none of which I found much to my liking. Then one day I came here. It was outside work and they left me alone, and I liked the freedom and here I stayed.

DAN: You never thought of doing anything else?

HORACE: Maybe I did sacrifice a few dreams along the way, but when you raise a family, you have to make sacrifices, but the rewards you get afterward more than balances the ledger.

DAN: You're a lucky man if you can say that after forty-two years. *(Pause)* Has Mr. Dungy been here as long as you?

HORACE: Nobody has been here as long as me. But Mr. Dungy has been here a long time. Over thirty-five years.

DAN: I remember when my Uncle Will told me my retirement year --- 2041. Imagine that! I laughed when he told me. I figure at the end of my career I'll be demolishing the buildings that replaced the buildings that I'm demolishing now. *(Pause)* And speaking about my uncle, I better get to that outside and do some of that work that he wanted me to do.

HORACE: Hand me a few of those wreaths. I might as well join you for a little outside work myself while I have the chance. *(Places two wreaths on each arm)* Let's go. *(Both exit. Set darkens.)*