

THE PLANET

by C J Nolan
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**Adapted from the pages of The Duplex Planet
Conceived/produced/arranged by David B. Greenberger**

Poetry by Ernest Noyes Brookings

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CHARACTERS

- ERNIE** - Late 80's. A poet.
- HERBIE** - Late 80's. Has many regrets and suffers from osteoporosis.
- FERGIE** - Late 70's. Full of wit and wisdom in no particular order.
- ABE** - In his 70's. Always a hat and a smile.
- ROBERT** - In his 70's. A reflective and relaxed man with a twinkle in his eye.
- FRANCIS** - In his 70's. A straight shooter.
- BILL** - In his 70's.. A big, gentle man.
- KEN** - Late 60's. A black man who enjoys life and loves to talk.
- STEVE** - In his mid-twenties. Works at the home.

The play takes place at the Duplex Nursing Home for Men on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts. The time is December 1980, five days before Christmas.

ACT I

A spotlight comes up on a small man in his eighties standing downstage center. He carries a dictionary, a bible and a loose-leaf notebook under his arm. This is ERNIE.

ERNIE

The planet!

Full of size and expanse.

Diversity and variety.

It is our home. Yours and mine.

With its sun rising and night falling, in brilliance and perpetuity.

The Duplex - 12 Harris Avenue - was also my home for an occasional time.

Home for my friends and me during what some would call our twilight . . .

But not as dark as you may think.

Worlds go on within worlds. Within worlds.

And no one ever calls or asks us out for sporting.

Still - we are here. Still breathing in and out.

Still in wonder at our home.

The planet.

Scene 1 - In The Beginning, There Were Cavemen

(Lights up slowly on the interior of the Duplex. Upstage right is the kitchen area with a table at its center. Further right is a hallway that leads to the "Rec Room" where the television resides and the men can smoke. Center stage is the Living Room. There are two, large upholstered chairs downstage and on either side of a large upholstered sofa. The furniture is worn, but not poverty stricken. By the downstage right chair is an old stereo cabinet with a small vase of flowers of its lid. The right wall has a long unused fireplace with a mantel and an oil painting of a "tall ship" on the sea above it. In front of the sofa is a wide coffee table. The left wall has a

small bay window that looks out onto the street. Near the window are two cushioned, straight backed chairs. Everything looks comfortable. Upstage left is the front door to the Duplex. Further upstage is an entranceway that leads to the first floor rooms and the stairs, which we can just see, to the second floor.

As the lights come up, STEVE walks from the kitchen to ERNIE.)

STEVE

Hi, Ernie! You're up early this morning.

ERNIE

Mornings are just fine with me, Steve. Will the others be waking soon?

STEVE

I do believe I hear stirring upstairs.

ERNIE

Steve, is it time for our coffee?

STEVE

All ready.

ERNIE

Good. Then I will take my seat at the table.

(ERNIE sits as ABE and KEN, using a walker, enter from the hallway.)

ABE

I think he was a, whadayacall, a dinosaur.

KEN

In last night's movie?

ABE

Yeah.

KEN

Godzilla was a dinosaur . . . Well, you're probably right. I would have said a lizard myself.

STEVE

Good morning, gentlemen.

ABE

Good morning!

KEN

And it is a fine morning, Steve. Just fine.

ABE

Eh, you mean like a snake? It was no snake.

(Enter HERBIE, using a cane for support and fussing with his clothes.)

STEVE

Good morning, Herbie. How did you sleep last night?

HERBIE

Ah, will you look at me? Look what the nurse left me to wear. This belt is too big. Made out of paper. No foolin'. I'm afraid my pants will fall down, then I'll fall down and that'll be a hell of a joke!

STEVE

You're pants aren't going anywhere, Herbie.

HERBIE

Dirty trick is what it is. Dirty trick. Got me licked. *(Shuffles off toward the table. ROBERT emerges from the back rooms.)*

KEN

No! No snakes! I hate snakes. *(Pause)* He came up from the water. Could've been a fish.

ROBERT

(To Steve) Good morning to you, sir.

STEVE

Good morning, Mr. Cleaves. Sleep well?

ROBERT

Like a lamb. Has the paper arrived yet?

STEVE

I believe it is on your chair.

(BILL and FRANCES come down the stairs into the living room.)

FRANCES

(Taking a deep breathe) I love winter mornings. It's a great time for a walk!

BILL

Good morning everyone.

ERNIE

I believe dinosaurs were mammals, not lizards.

KEN

I guess so.

STEVE

Where did you see a dinosaur?

ABE

Well, I know it wasn't a fish!

KEN

That's good 'cause I hate fish, too!

STEVE

I thought you said it was a dinosaur?

HERBIE

Yah. They were watching those scary movies last night.

BILL

(Takes his coffee and sits at the sofa center stage.) Good morning, Robert.

ROBERT

And how are you, Mr. Niemi? Care for the sports page?

KEN

They had Godzilla on the Late Show last night. I had forgotten that - whatsisname - Ironsides was in it.

STEVE

Oh, you mean Raymond Burr.

KEN

That's the one!

ABE

Who's this "Ironsides"?

(*FERGIE enters*)

ERNIE

Perry Mason.

ABE

Oh.

FRANCIS

What? Was he the dinosaur?

KEN

(*Laughing*) No, no, no

FERGIE

He must have been the caveman.

STEVE

Morning, Fergie.

FERGIE

And good morning to you!

KEN

There was no caveman!

STEVE

What can I get you, Fergie?

FRANCIS

Well, if there were dinosaurs, there must have been cavemen.

ABE

Eh, there might have been cavemen . . .

FERGIE

If there were cowboys, there must have been Indians! Or cowgirls.

KEN

But not in this movie! I've seen that movie twenty times, swear to God. And I know there are

KEN(cont.)

no cavemen.

STEVE

Well, what can any of you tell me about cavemen?

ABE

I don't know about cavemen. If it were something else it would be different.

STEVE

Fergie, you tell us about cavemen.

FERGIE

I'll be a son-of-a-bitch if I've got an angle on that!

KEN

Christ, cavemen were here long before Christ! I read it in books at the Harvard Library and in pictures.

FRANCIS

Cavemen were strong. Cavemen used stones to fight enemies. Cavemen were good fighters and good hunters, too.

STEVE

They were also artists. They used to draw pictures on the walls of their caves and the pictures told stories that related the history of their lives.

ERNIE

They wrote on the walls!?

STEVE

They had no paper back then and no language that we know of. So their stories were told with pictures on the walls.

ABE

What I know about cavemen is this . . . The cave was shut on one side and open on the other. And they had to live in the light. Cavemen were always looking for food so they could live in the cave. Cavemen usually liked to have food in their stomachs. And they also go to bed early

ABE(cont.)

because they were tired from the fields. They eat and then go to bed. Let's see now . . .
Cavemen make paraffin so they can stay up at night, especially if someone is sick in the family.

HERBIE

I know cavemen didn't get paid for workin'! A hell of a thing.

STEVE

Anyway, so back before Christ, as Ken said . . .

KEN

Way, way before . .

STEVE

. . . there were cavemen and dinosaurs.

FERGIE

There is nothing wrong with dinosaurs. If you treat them right, they'll treat you right. If they want to be mean they can be, if they want to be sweet they can be. It depends on how you treat them. If you treat them kindly, they'll treat you kindly. But if you give them trouble, they sure as Christ will give you trouble! We got along with dinosaurs very well and we treat them very well. Their lady friends will tell you we treat them very well.

ERNIE

I didn't know dinosaurs had lady-friends.

FERGIE

Well, if you meet one, just be kind.

KEN

Steve, you know what is crazy about cavemen? Damn, I'm almost positive if you look at an ape in the zoo, you'll see a caveman. I'm positive. Apes were made from cavemen, early cavemen. They walk the same! You can't call an ape a monkey! No way I can.

ABE

Eh, I might call it a monkey.

KEN

But look- they don't have tails. The apes don't. See, to me, when I see an ape and when I see

KEN(cont.)

pictures Hollywood makes of them, they look like human beings. You look at an ape, really look at it good. Look at the way it walks - and concentrate, don't be afraid of it. If it looks at you just look right back. Your eyes will focus and you will see a human being. That's the way I see it.

STEVE

I'll have to look into that, Ken.

KEN

You do that.

ROBERT

(Listening) It's interesting to think about it. The Dawn of Creation. I never understood why people make such a fuss over the theory of evolution. I like to think it was God's idea to have us evolve that way- in stages, you know. When you give it some thought, to progress from amoebae to gorilla to man is no small feat! The whole Garden of Eden story is much too flamboyant, too flashy. God has always struck me as being a bit less obvious in his work.

HERBIE

How can a man drink his coffee!? Monkeys, snakes, gorillas. . . Chrissakes, I need a cigar.

STEVE

I'll help you up, Herbie. More coffee, gentlemen?

BILL

No, thank you.

ROBERT

If you would. Please.

(Now ABE, FRANCIS, and KEN leave the table and come over to the couch to join the others.

STEVE begins to clear breakfast plates.)

BILL

What were you going on about over there?

ABE

We were talking about gorillas.

KEN

Not gorillas. Cavemen. Mr. Cleaves must know about cavemen. He went to Harvard.

ROBERT

All I know about cavemen is when they wanted a new wife, they could just go out, hit her over the head with a club and bring her home. That's all you need to know about cavemen.

BILL

I've seen pictures. They were very hairy. Never shaved.

FRANCIS

I don't think they shaved back then.

KEN

Well, even in Our Lord's day, hair on the face was considered very respectful for a man.

HERBIE

I ain't had a shave. No shower either.

ROBERT

Our Lord had a beard.

ABE

Eh, then He couldn't have served in the Navy.

FRANCIS

Of course he could have! If they knew it was Our Lord, they'd let him join.

ABE

Only if He shaved.

BILL

"Jesus was a sailor." Wasn't that a song?

FERGIE

(Coming center with STEVE and ERNIE) He was a sailor. A glorious sailor. S-A-I-L-O-R.

STEVE

Is shaving really necessary?

FRANCIS

In the military it is.

ROBERT

Not today. They don't have to.

FRANCIS

You have to shave every day!

ROBERT

Not on the ships, they don't.

FRANCIS

How do you know?

BILL

(to FRANCIS) He went to Harvard.

ROBERT

I served in the Navy.

FRANCIS

Oh.

KEN

Only when they come into port, then they have to shave. If you want liberty, you have to shave.

ROBERT

That is true.

BILL

On submarines, it's the same thing.

ABE

In the Navy and the merchant marines, eh, they do not have to have a clean face.

FRANCIS

Even in the Coast Guard? They don't shave?

KEN

Out at sea they don't have to shave.

ROBERT

In port they do.

HERBIE

How come rabbi's don't shave? I seen them. How come they never shave?

ABE

They're outside the military.

HERBIE

I don't know nothing about them in the service. I'm saying here, never mind the service.

FRANCIS

Rabbi's don't have to shave 'cause they're outside the military.

BILL

When rabbi's are in there, they probably have to shave I s'pose.

FRANCIS

That's right.

HERBIE

(to Francis) Ah, hooley.

FRANCIS

Hey now . . .

ERNIE

(Interjecting) I met a rabbi when I was in the V.A. after the war. I believe he had a beard.

BILL

Well, you can get permission. Get permission for a mustache. Only so big . . .

KEN

Yeah, they have to cut it all the time. Trim it, keep it in shape. You have to have Captain's permission to have a mustache.

STEVE

Did you have a mustache, Bill?

BILL

No, Steve. I wasn't in the Navy. Besides, I look like hell with one.

STEVE

What about me?

ROBERT

You?

STEVE

Yeah. What if I grew a mustache?

BILL

You want to grow a mustache?

STEVE

I've had one before. Back in college. I've been thinking about growing it again.

ROBERT

Well, that's your business, isn't it? Maybe your wife's business, too. Does she like you with a mustache?

STEVE

Um . . . no. Not really.

ROBERT

There you go.

FERGIE

Ha! She'd throw you in the yard if you grew a damn mustache! *(The men all laugh.)*

BILL

You're fine just the way you are, Steve. It's good to have a clean face. Very handsome.

HERBIE

The nurse didn't shave me yet.

KEN

(Laughing) Well, dogs got mustaches, don't they? Cats got mustaches?

FRANCIS

Sure.

KEN

Rats.

BILL

Some lieutenants.

ABE

Birds don't have mustaches. I think fish do.

FRANCIS

The Indians don't shave. The Chinese don't shave much.

ROBERT

Yes they do. They have very clean faces.

FRANCIS

Not in John Wayne movies, they don't.

BILL

To be sharp, use Gillette blades. To feel sharp, use Gillette blades. For the, ah, . . . I forget the rest. But to be sharp, use Gillette blades. My mother works for Gillette. At least she used to.

FERGIE

That's a wonderful company.

BILL

She got all kinds of razors. They give 'em to her at a discount.

STEVE

Robert, what if Santa Claus was clean shaven?

ROBERT

There would be no Santa Claus.

KEN

Man, Santa Claus was born with the whiskers. That's why he's Santa Claus!

BILL

Maybe they don't have Gillette blades up there in the North Pole.

FRANCIS

North Pole? I thought he came from Cuba? Doesn't Castro look like Santa Claus?

ROBERT

Bite your tongue, Francis.

FRANCIS

Ahhhh . . .

STEVE

He's a very popular guy.

ABE

Who? Castro?

BILL

Santa Claus?

STEVE

Well, both.

ABE

Eh, Santa Claus is more popular than Castro.

KEN

That's because of his beard! The beard is a very important part of the script.

HERBIE

Nah, it's the suit. The red suit!

FRANCIS

Communist suit.

HERBIE

Whah? No! No!

FRANCIS

Red and white suit. That's Communist!

HERBIE

So he wears a red suit. Ya, a red suit and a white beard.

KEN

All Russians have beards.

ABE

Maybe they don't have blades.

FRANCIS

Because they're Communist! That's all. Big suits and big beards.

HERBIE

Ahh, ya got me licked on this one . . .

ROBERT

They wear those heavy suits - the way they dress over there is for the cold! It is very cold. They are very poor in Russia. Damn poor.

FRANCIS

Truthfully speaking, I'm no Rockefeller myself. But I've always been clean shaven.

STEVE

All right, gentlemen. Simmer down. Let's forget the suit for a moment. Ernie, what if Santa Claus was clean shaven?

ERNIE

That would depend on the individual personality. He could still be jovial.

STEVE

Okay. Ken, you think there would be no Santa Claus without the beard, correct?

KEN

Man, that's his main point, isn't it? That's how he is pointed out to be a saint! That's how you can tell if he's the real Santa and not some faker.

STEVE

Fergie, what do you think about Santa Claus?

FERGIE

If I saw him I'd ask him for a smoke! And if he said yes, we'd both have one. And if he said no, I'd tell him to move on!

STEVE

There you are. Oh, speaking of Santa, I'm going to pick up our tree today. There was a pretty, blue spruce for sale down the street yesterday. Anyone wish to come with me?

BILL

Actually, that was a very good idea.

ROBERT

What idea is that, William?

BILL

Ferguson's. I feel like having a smoke. (*Gets up and head for the Rec Room off right.*)

FRANCIS

I'm with you.

KEN

Look at these clowns - cigarettes, cigarettes, cigarettes! Every two minutes they want a cigarette.

HERBIE

Steve, can you give me a hand here? (*STEVE helps him to his feet as the rest of the men head off right.*)

KEN

Well, I am a fool for a cigarette myself. Wait, I'm right behind you. (*Goes off*)

STEVE

(*Going off with HERBIE*) Okay. I'll go by myself, but you don't know what your missing. The Christmas bustle of people. The brisk cold air . . .

HERBIE

Does anyone have a cigar? Dress me in a slipper and pajamas, Jesus.

(*Only ERNIE and ROBERT remain. ROBERT begins to stand and clutches the back of his chair.*)

ROBERT

Oh my . . .

ERNIE

Are you all right, Robert?

ROBERT

Yes . . . Yes. Such a strange feeling.

ERNIE

Are you dizzy? In pain?

ROBERT

No, no. It was like a wave . . . a warm feeling. Heh, it's nice to know that I can still get hot flashes at my age. (*Exits up left. The lights begin to dim as ERNIE comes center stage.*)

Scene 2 - "Candy"

ERNIE

(He is carrying two small books - a Bible and the dictionary - and a thin notebook under one arm.) I was born in 1898. My middle name is Noyes. Dr. Noyes was the doctor in attendance. It is in the records. *(He puts his free hand in his pocket, finds something and pulls it out for inspection.)* Ah - "Squirrel Nut". I will save this for later. When Steve and I go out, sometimes we go into Sid's Variety down on Center Street. The other fellas buy smokes or newspapers or books of crosswords. I don't smoke, but I am partial to sweets. A "Squirrel Nut" is made of caramel and crushed nuts. They are very tasty and, eh, very sticky. I don't have enough to go around, so I will share a poem instead. *(Opens his notebook.)* Title - "Candy".

Candy sweets made from sugar syrup
Occasionally to flavor add the meat of nuts
But while chewing like a tart - burrup
And if strangling blocks body guts.

At a navy camp on the New England coast
One gob to his partner - like some chewy candy?
Yes but it's not comparable to a turkey roast
But naturally the water place is always sandy.

At a marine base in Quantico, Virginia
Quote quartermaster - like candy with chocolate flavor?
Yes but a large quantity will spin ya
And drastically increase tasty savor.

At a large Ringling Brothers circus
The group bought candy at a local store
The proprietor - please don't skirt us
Because one sample demands more.

ERNIE (cont.)

At home around family dinner table

Quote - pray God that all food be blessed

In unison - yes you are mentally able

Pray God and He will do the rest.

Thank you. (ERNIE *gathers his books and walks off right as lights shift to inside the living room.*)

Scene 3 - I Dream Of Byrd

(FRANCIS *comes to the front door. It is snowing. He is so bundled from head to toe that you can only see his eyes. He stands there for a moment, then begins to stamp his feet on the mat.*)

FRANCIS

(*Unwinding his scarf*) It's snowing. (*He unsnaps his hat and begins to remove his gloves. The following monologue is as much to himself as it is to the audience.*) The boys are still at Brigham's. Having an ice cream. Truthfully speaking, I did not want to spoil my lunch. (*Stuffs his hat and gloves in his coat pockets.*) My mother and father raised me proper. (*Removes his coat and hangs it on the coat rack by the door.*) It is very cold. But I'm a game old rooster. Cold doesn't bother me. (*Goes to the chair and starts to unbuckle his boots.*) It's snowing. I have dreams about snow. I have dreams about walking in the snow. As a younger man. (*Pause. He sits back.*) I dream about Byrd. Admiral Byrd. (*Pause.*) I remember a sign on Brimmer Street. I don't understand it, but I do dream about it at nighttime. I remember a sign on Brimmer Street - "Go To The South Pole". It was cold. It was snowing, but I'm dressed. I'm young. (*Pause*) Brimmer is where the State House is. There is a sign, in my dream. Go to the South Pole. (*Pause*) Why do I dream at night that I go to the South Pole? (*Pause*) All the excitement. I was excited. I signed on to go with Admiral Byrd. "We're going to Little America", he said. But . . . I made a mistake. I don't recall what. I asked him . . . Did I dream . . .? I made a mistake and he quit. I dreamt Byrd got in a violent argument with us. I made a mistake! And he quit when we got to Scotchgrade. Where the Englishman, Scott, died. Where he froze. (*Pause*) But the Americans went on and discovered it. "Little America". That's my dream. (*He looks down at his boots, begins to reach for them and pulls back.*) I think my hands froze. (*Tests his*

FRANCIS (cont)

hands again and begins to remove his boots.) Truthfully speaking, I like the summer. The summer's a beautiful time of the year. You can put into operation all your winter thoughts. *(Looks at hands again.)* Arthritis. Sometimes I wake up and my side is numb. Then I know I've gone to the South Pole. I must have gotten frozen. *(He stands and sets his boots by the door.)*

Scene 4 - Fergie

(FERGIE enters, passing FRANCIS as he exits.)

FRANCIS

Hello, Ferguson.

FERGIE

(Cheery) Hello!

(STEVE comes in the front door and begins to remove his coat and gloves.)

STEVE

Hi, Fergie!

FERGIE

(Same as before) Hello!

STEVE

You should see the tree I got for us! It a wonderful, blue spruce - full, fragrant. I think it will look quite nice in the window. You know, so you see it from the street as you pass by.

FERGIE

(Sits) Indeed.

STEVE

Indeed. So, what did the nurse have to say?

FERGIE

Mary says I'm fit as a fiddle and full of pep! But she says I shouldn't smoke, the snake!

STEVE

Well, she only wants what's best for you. Maybe you shouldn't smoke.

FERGIE

Maybe we all should. Maybe we all shouldn't. Who's to say? Maybe me.

STEVE

Maybe you're right. Has Mary seen Herbie yet?

FERGIE

Sweet Lord in Heaven! That man has more complaints than Carter's got little liver pills! P-i-l-l-s.

(STEVE goes about setting up the stand for the tree as BILL, ABE and ERNIE enter through the front door.)

BILL

Whew! Hello, Fergie.

FERGIE

Is it snowing?

ABE

Eh, ya. Snowing and colder than a witch's tit.

FERGIE

Ha! A witch's tit!

ABE

Heh, heh . . .*(looks at STEVE)* Eh, it's, it's just a term. An expression.

ERNIE

The English language can be very tricky.

FERGIE

So are the people who use it.

(Everyone but FERGIE starts to head for the rec room off right.)

BILL

(Calling ahead) Say, Robert. I brought you a crossword. *(Exits)*

ERNIE

Oh, Steve, there is a Christmas tree right outside the door. I don't know whose it is. Maybe you can ask around. *(Exits)*

STEVE

Thanks, Ernie. (*Goes outside to get the tree.*)

FERGIE

And for chrissake, someone close this door! I'll catch my death. (*FERGIE shuts the front door just as STEVE starts to enter with the tree. There is subsequently a knock at the door. FERGIE opens it part way.*) Hello?

STEVE

Hi, Fergie. Cold outside. (*Enters with tree*)

FERGIE

That's what I keep telling everyone! (*STEVE brings in tree, bottom first, and tries to guide it, somewhat blindly, into the stand by the window.*) That's a cute dance you're doing. Is it the jitterbug or one of those new hippy dances?

STEVE

(*Finally setting the tree in the stand*) There! Done. We can decorate it later, right? Right. (*Sits down on sofa.*) So, Fergie, what's going on in the world?

FERGIE

Everything! E-v-e-r-y thing. Consider the postage stamp, my son. It's existence consists of the ability to stick to one thing until it reaches it's destination.

STEVE

I hadn't thought of it that way.

FERGIE

Of course not! You have to stick that in your head and shove it all the way up. (*STEVE laughs*) Pretty, pretty tree. The best place to hide is in the top of a tree. I used to tell those children, 'If you want to hide from your mother, you climb up in that tree!' And hide? I'll tell you, they'd hide so I couldn't even find them. And I don't mean any small trees like that one. I mean trees that were fifty, sixty feet! And they'd fall out of those trees like you'd smoke a pipe. I used to have lots of pipes until the children got into them. And they hid them. You know where they hid them?

STEVE

No idea.

FERGIE

In the trees! You know, children are the makers of our land.

STEVE

How so?

FERGIE

Well, what those children do later on, we've done already. But they're going to do it over. And if we show them a good example, they'll show us a good example. But if we show them a dirty trick, they'll follow that trick.

STEVE

I know what you mean. I've always thought we show children too many dirty tricks.

FERGIE

Well, stop it! You know how they are. Show 'em a trick once and they remember it for life.

STEVE

You've always lived here, right? In Massachusetts?

FERGIE

Since I was born and probably before then. My mother lived here. I went to school at Wentworth Institute - a mechanical school, a trade school. A very, very good school.

STEVE

Do you like living in Massachusetts?

FERGIE

What a cute question. Why do you ask it?

STEVE

Just curious.

FERGIE

Ha! My feet are like you're head - empty! (*Laughs*) You know, Massachusetts is one of the greatest shoe states in the country.

STEVE

What's a "shoe state"?

FERGIE

Shoes! Shoes! Like feet, shoes.

STEVE

Oh. I got it.

FERGIE

Especially ladies shoes. (*Confidentially*) They have ladies shoes that go right up to your knee. And I mean all the way up! And they didn't used to have much on. So when they'd lace those babies up, you could see from here to Winston Churchill and you know what a tall son-of-a-bitch he was!

STEVE

(*Laughing*) Well, the things I learn in an afternoon!

FERGIE

If you keep your ears open, you can learn everything Our Lord puts on your plate.

STEVE

I do my best.

FERGIE

Now, let me know when lunch is ready. I will be watching the television.

STEVE

That's right. It's time for your favorite show, isn't it?

FERGIE

Is it? If you say so.

STEVE

Gilligan's Island? Didn't you tell me that was your favorite program?

FERGIE

Is that what it's called?

STEVE

Yes.

FERGIE

Thank you. That's what I will watch.

STEVE

It's a classic. Do you know who wrote Gilligan's Island?

FERGIE

Of course not! Do you?

STEVE

Well, no. Was it Chaucer? Hemingway? Dickens? Maybe Shakespeare?

FERGIE

How the hell should I know? He might have. In fact, he did! It was called "Gilligan's Island". I think his name was Joseph. I'm positive it was Joseph. William Joseph Shakespeare. Gilligan's Island was a lost island. It was never supposed to be found. But it was found by William Joseph Shakespeare. Right near New Hebrides. The Hebrews owned that island. Every soul on Earth lived on the island. It was like a people symphony - everyone lived on that island. It was his best play, the best play he ever wrote. A classic of the ages! "Gilligan's Island". Any more questions?

STEVE

(Surrendering) Nope. I'm done.

FERGIE

Good. G-o-o-d.

(Lights out.)

Scene 5 - Join The Navy, See The World

(Lights up on the Rec Room. Some of the men are smoking, reading and FERGIE and HERBIE are playing cards. STEVE, ERNIE and FRANCIS enter.)

FRANCIS

Well, the dishes are done.

HERBIE

I used to work in the kitchen but I got a broken hip and they're afraid I'll fall. Got me knocked

HERBIE(cont.)

out, I guess. You caught me here like a pair of pants!

STEVE

It's all right, Herbie. We all know you would help if you could.

ERNIE

That was a fine meal.

ABE

Better than mess food. Eh, Army food.

KEN

Oh man, don't ever talk about Army food!

ROBERT

Or Navy food for that matter.

KEN

I remember when we were federalized in 1941 and we went to Fort Dix? We opened that camp. It was closed since World War I.

ERNIE

I served in World War I. But not at Fort Dix.

KEN

Now, see, there was the Yankee Division and the 37th Regiment, first time together since World War I. And all they served us - all we could get - was liver, liver, liver!

HERBIE

Yuck! I hate liver! No foolin'.

ROBERT

And so does he.

KEN

Morning, noon and night. Breakfast, dinner and supper. I wish there was somebody here that was in that outfit - they would tell you this story is true! We stayed at Fort Dix until the bombin' of Pearl Harbor and then we went to New York to do guard duty. I left that outfit and was sent to Fort Watchupa in Arizona, where many colored soldiers were sent. From there I went to Italy

KEN(cont.)

with the 92nd - and it was liver the entire time! Well, you know, meat was hard to come by in those days.

ABE

Ah, you couldn't get meat back then. Not unless you knew somebody.

KEN

Yeah, and it was sky-high!

STEVE

That's funny. My dad told me it was hard to get meat because all the meat was being sent to the soldiers.

KEN

I don't know about that. I didn't see any of it. Just liver and sometimes fish. Which I hate.

BILL

I think the officers got all the meat. Not us non-coms.

(FRANCIS begins to play his harmonica in the background.)

ROBERT

We in the Navy had meat, oh, yes! The staple of a sailor's diet was full of meat - the ever popular S.O.S. as we used to call it. "Shit-on-a-Shingle". *(The men all laugh.)*

HERBIE

Ha! Shit on a shingle!

ERNIE

Also known as chipped beef on toast, I believe.

STEVE

Wait. Is that in a cream sauce of some sort?

ROBERT

You're not planning on serving that to us, are you?

STEVE

No, I think I've eaten that. I'm sure of it. My mom used to make it for my dad when I was a kid. And they called it "shit on a shingle"?

ABE

Why do you think they call it “mess food”?

FERGIE

(Laughs) It won't kill ya, for chrissake. Just stunt your growth! I for one loved it. Loved it!

ROBERT

(Laughing) Well, I didn't join the Navy just for the food. Their slogan was “Join The Navy - See The World”. And we did. Free ride over to Africa and a free ride back!

ABE

Eh, we were sent to Germany. First, France, then Germany. Let's see . . . I used to take photos of my Army days in Germany. My friends from, eh, the barracks. German girls. There were three albums of photos . . .

STEVE

Do you still have those, Abe?

ABE

Oh no, Steve. They're all dead now. Nothing I can do about it. I'm lucky to be alive, I guess.

KEN

Oh, man, I hated the Army. I'm saying we had a job to do and we did it. But don't believe for one minute I enjoyed the Army! You'd have to be crazy! But how else would I have seen Italy? Like my friend Robert says - “Join The Navy, See The World”. Well, we saw the world, alright.

STEVE

So that was your only trip overseas, Ken?

KEN

Hell yes! See, I had no father and my mother, God rest her soul - she worked 'till she died. And I worked hard, too, as much as I could. But only Uncle Sam has the money to send a poor black man to Europe. Or Africa, for that matter. So be it, so be it. I can't bitch. Because Italy was beautiful.

FERGIE

I've been to Venezuela, which is a good trip. Over near Italy.

KEN

Say what?

FERGIE

And we went like a son-of-a-bitch! What I mean is fifty or sixty miles an hour. There's a group of islands there and Venezuela is like New York is to Massachusetts.

STEVE

How so?

FERGIE

Figure it out yourself! Do I have to tell you everything?

KEN

I seen a lot of villages that I had read on a map here in the States, that I never thought I'd ever see. And I'll tell you the God's truth. American people? They say "Rome". It's not "Rome", it's "Ro-ma".

BILL

Isn't the Vatican in Rome?

KEN

But it's not "Rome". They say "Ro-ma".

HERBIE

It's not Rome?

KEN

Uh-uh.

HERBIE

Then where the hell is the Vatican?!

ROBERT

They pronounce the name "Ro-ma". (*Said trilling his "r"*)

HERBIE

Aah, you got me licked on that one.

ERNIE

How do you spell "Ro-ma"?

KEN

I don't know, but I know there's an "a" at the end. When you get there you can find out the correct pronunciation of different things. I knew about Pisa, Viareggio, Forte dei Marmi. I knew all that. But I was surprised to find out that one night I was sleeping right outside the Pisa. On the ground in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa! I almost shit!

FERGIE

Good thing you didn't!

STEVE

How much of Italy did you get to see, Ken?

KEN

I went all over Italy, fighting Mussolini. I can't pronounce all the names. From Naples right to the end.

BILL

And, Robert, you went to Africa?

ROBERT

Yes, my ship went to Tripoli and then Casablanca.

BILL

You must have seen some action there.

FERGIE

You weren't in Casablanca! I saw that movie and I would have remembered.

ROBERT

No, it is a real place. In fact, the only ship we fired on - just knocked out her engines - was a French ship. Vichy French. They were against us at the time. You know, I actually enjoyed the Navy. They just don't pay enough to live on.

KEN

I hear that. I hear that!

ROBERT

It's a nice life when you're at sea.

BILL

It can be dangerous if you're sent to one of those tropical areas. When you're in the service, you've got to be careful out in those jungles and swamps. You don't know what kind of bugs or animals or snakes you're going to meet.

HERBIE

I hate snakes, no foolin'. "Snake in the grass" they used to say.

ERNIE

I believe rattle snakes have been seen over here on Blue Hill Avenue, but I would have to verify that for you.

FERGIE

Snakes are the finest things in the world, but they're one of the finest things to leave alone. There's different lengths of snakes, different types of snakes. How many, God only knows. Our Lord Jesus Christ would know. If you saw Him, He could tell you. It's very rare that you see Our Lord Jesus Christ. Very, very rare . . . It's rare that you see a snake, too.

HERBIE

(Pause) Geez, has anybody got a cigar? Bad enough the closest I come to beer is coffee these days.

STEVE

Well, I'm fresh out of cigars. Do you want more coffee, Herbie?

HERBIE

No, no, no, don't mind me.

ERNIE

What was Germany like, Abe?

ABE

My division was there. Eh . . . we came through France. *(Pause)* They'd try to attack us through the air and whoever can be saved by the parachute. There would be flack - fire - in the air so the Americans couldn't get through. If they got caught, they would be burned up. The pilot had to avoid the flack. Some got away, but others were burned up in the air. *(Pause)* It was quite a show. We would march through small towns. Maybe rest. Maybe eat. You had to be careful.

ABE(cont.)

There was women activity goin' on to kill American soldiers. I had to know what the instructions were. Some got hurt. Eh . . . we were young guys back then. Let's see . . . There were beautiful trees. From a distance, they had their tanks and mortar shells and, uh, this was not known until the party came out to investigate what was said. The, uh, directions had to be read because the soldiers could be attacked by shells. Some shells landed in the thick mud and soldiers had to stay hiding until the end of the mortar shells. One cigarette would give them away on the bridge. It would blow up the bridge and so many would be dead. There were many explosions and soldiers were running. Em, we were directed to keep our heads down so we could see through the smoke. I could see trees and the hills in front. I followed the instructions . . . *(Pause)* I'm not too good with these stories, Steve. I had pictures . . .

STEVE

That was a fine story, Abe.

KEN

Amen to that.

FERGIE

(To HERBIE) Gin!

HERBIE

Aw, you got me knocked out! Geez!

STEVE

Francis, you served didn't you?

FRANCIS

Of course! Darn right, I served my country! I just didn't travel like these fellas.

ROBERT

Were you in the Guard?

FRANCIS

I was an air raid warden right here in Boston. That was important. Important to protect our shores!

STEVE

No one said it wasn't. You didn't have to be in combat to be part of the war effort.

FRANCIS

We weren't afraid of combat! We were alert and ready at all times. I was protecting our shores, you understand?

BILL

Relax, Francis. You don't have to . . .

FRANCIS

I believe this is the greatest country in the whole world. "God Bless America" - like the song says. *(Pause - winding down a bit)* But I've got no use for wars. There should be genuine peace all over.

KEN

I'm with you there. If only this whole world could just say it- "peace". God damn . . .

FRANCIS

I say Man's greatest invention is Peace. And Loyalty. And Kindness.

BILL

You know, World War II was the worst thing that ever happened to this country. It ruined this country. I mean, doesn't it seem like we spend all our time and money preparing for the next war? And sure enough, here comes another one.

STEVE

I guess some people just don't know when to stop.

HERBIE

(Gets up and begins to move away) I've had enough of this. I've had enough!

ERNIE

What's wrong, Herbie?

HERBIE

What are ya? Commies!? You don't know nothing! What are ya, a bunch of Commies!

FRANCIS

Watch who you're calling a Commie, wise guy!

HERBIE

I can't listen to ya. If you want to be Commies, why don't you just go down to the toilet.

FRANCIS

I can still put up my dukes! I'll show ya who I am!

FERGIE

You're General Shitcake!

STEVE

Fergie, you're not helping. Francis, it's all right. Sit back down.

HERBIE

Ya don't deserve to be here. In this great country. If we didn't fight wars, none of ya'd be here today!

KEN

Hell, I fought and I almost wasn't here today.

ROBERT

Herbert, that's enough.

FRANCIS

Just watch your yap!

HERBIE

Ah, you all got me licked anyway. Christ, I'm caught like a rat in a trap. Why don't you just throw me in the river and be done with it? (*Walking out*) Ain't showered yet. Can't get a decent cup of coffee . . . (*Exits*)

FRANCIS

What's the matter with him, anyway?

STEVE

Don't let him get your goat.

ABE

Eh, I think Mr. Caldwell was just popping off again.

FERGIE

You know, I always beat him at cards. You've either got it or you don't.

FRANCIS

Well, I ain't a Communist.

STEVE

Some people believe - erroneously, of course - that if you oppose war, you're unpatriotic or hate the military.

BILL

That's not true.

STEVE

Of course not, but . . .

FRANCIS

We should protect our shores and our families and that's all I have to say.

STEVE

Fair enough.

ROBERT

Well, (*coughs*) I was glad for the chance to travel. Actually, the Navy wasn't such a bad place . . . (*coughs*) Free coffee all day long. Cigarettes were ten cents a pack, I believe. I understand they have girls aboard ship now.

STEVE

Well, female sailors, yes.

ROBERT

Gee, that must be kind of funny. (*FRANCIS resumes playing the harmonica*) Of course, they had the W.A.V.E.S. when I was in, but they had shore duty.

ABE

Never on board.

FERGIE

Never overboard either.

ROBERT

What - do they have one for each hammock?

STEVE

(Laughing) I have no idea.

ROBERT

Gosh, they treat the boys alright now.

BILL

(Laughing) Still, I don't think anyone is joining the Navy for the pretty girls!

KEN

Usually you join the Army or the Navy to get away from the pretty girls! I knew a number of fellas did that.

ROBERT

So what do you think, Steve? Giving the Navy some thought?

STEVE

Um, on that note . . . *(Gets up to leave.)*

BILL

Ah ha! *(All the men laugh.)*

STEVE

No, really, I have to stop at the Woolworths on my way home. We need more lights for the tree.

ABE

You can run, but you can't hide! *(Laughter)*

STEVE

Honest, I'm not hiding.

KEN

Yet!

STEVE

You guys are terrible. Goodnight. *(Exits as their laughter continues)*

(Light dim on the scene as ERNIE comes forward.)

Scene 6 - "Pajamas"

ERNIE

It says here that there will be five more "shopping days" until Christmas. I do not know what a

ERNIE(cont.)

“shopping day” is. It is not mentioned in Webster’s. But the news made the front page. You see - the item right next to the weather and above an article concerning unemployment. I have not had someone to purchase a gift for in quite some time. But my niece writes to me occasionally, so I decided to send her a poem for Christmas. Title, “Pajamas”.

Pajamas garment worn for sleeping
Are essential over entire earth
Diapers to babies after creeping
Pajamas made in factories - what are they worth?

In a hotel room, husband to his wife
Are your pajamas thinly light?
Yes, they do not cause a strife
But are filled with all my might.

In a local merry nursing home
One patient to another pal
Do you wear pajamas in which to roam
Or to please your happy gal Sal?

In a not too distant nursery
Chief nurse: all kids wearing pajamas
They enjoy their early history
Quote: please do not badly wham us.

After days work comes the night
Before retiring body covered with pajamas
Normally all wearers sleep tight
Except llamas.

ERNIE(cont.)

I believe now we will have a short repose. In Gaelic, it's called "de slanter" - to sleep. You can just call it intermission.

END OF ACT I

Act II

Scene 7 - Ken's Corner

(The lights come up on the Living Room. STEVE enters from the front door wearing a knapsack. He stuffs his knit hat and his gloves into his jacket and leaves his shoes on the mat. Grabbing his pack and singing to himself, he walks to the stereo cabinet downstage right. He takes off the flowers, opens the lid and proceeds to remove records from his knapsack. There are 78's, 45's and 12-inch vinyl disks. He places a 78 on the turntable and goes to the Rec Room door right.)

STEVE

Hey, Ken! Are you busy? *(Goes offstage)* Mr. Eglin, may I have the pleasure of your company in the outer room?

KEN

(offstage) You certainly may. I'll be right with you.

(STEVE re-enters the room and starts playing the record he has selected. The audience hears the opening strains of Ted Lewis' song "When My Baby Smiles At Me". KEN enters.)

KEN

Hey! Wait a minute. What's that I'm hearin'? You can't fool me. That's my man! God damn, that's Ted Lewis!

STEVE

Yep. I remembered you mentioning him a while back.

KEN

He's my man! Ted Lewis and his boys. Now this is the old music. Those were the old, old days when people were still dancing the foxtrot and just starting the jitterbug. And Ted Lewis had style. He had this beat up old top hat and a cane.

STEVE

Did you ever see him play?

KEN

My Lord, yes! We would go down to Storyville or the Coconut Grove and listen to swing, jazz.

KEN(cont.)

That was our music. And . . . oh, listen up! Hear that? “Is everybody happy?” That was his slogan. And, you know, everybody always was.

STEVE

Good. I’m glad you like that record. I wasn’t sure I had the right one.

KEN

This is a very old record. I haven’t seen these in years. Where did you find this?

STEVE

There is this great store down by the university. They had really wonderful vintage stuff.

KEN

Oh. Oh.

STEVE

I bought a bunch of different records. Why don’t I play a few of them for you and you can tell me what you think.

KEN

Well, I’m ready. Bring ‘em on.

STEVE

Okay. *(Takes a 45 out of the bag and places it on the turntable.)* This song is by The Incredible Casuals. *(STEVE plays the song “Picnic Ape”.)*

KEN

(Listening) That’s crazy! It’s really groovy - or, as you say today, it’s really nice. But I say it slang. It’s groovy!

STEVE

We kids still use slang like that. I mean, maybe we don’t say “groovy”, but we might say it’s hip. It’s cool.

KEN

My generation said “cool”. Man, that’s cool. You could say the song was hep.

STEVE

Right. It's hot. It rocks. It's funky.

KEN

It's righteous!

STEVE

It rules!

KEN

Hm-hmm. I like those guitars, they're very good. And then the bass is in there, you can't help but hear the bass. Everything was beautiful, the beat and everything. Good for dancin', I guess. The way I see kids dancin' out there.

STEVE

I've danced to that song.

KEN

Well, heh, I don't know about that! But, honest to God, the music out there today is much better than it was thirty or forty years ago.

STEVE

Really? You think so?

KEN

Sure! To me, it's understanding. I understand it. You loosen your body up. Thirty or forty years ago, you start to loosen your body up, the cops would be right there and tell you, "Move on"!

STEVE

I didn't know there were any laws against dancing. Were these "blue laws" or something?

KEN

Well, in a manner of speaking, you could say. Now, what I'm trying to tell you - segregation was a bitch. Thirty or forty years ago, we couldn't play music like that without the police, the Irish cops, raising hell. We'd be dancin' the Lindy Hop on the Boston Commons, goin' wild, smokin' reefers. And we'd be dancin' and some pounder would come over and say, "Hey, that's my cousin you're dancin' with, boy".

STEVE

Because they didn't like the music?

KEN

Didn't like the music. Didn't like us having fun. Mostly, they didn't like me dancin' with the white girls. I didn't care. I grew up with them! When I was a lifeguard at Magazine Beach, there was nothing but white girls. All the other lifeguards were white. A lot of my friends were white. That was my group.

STEVE

So, they would harass you because, as a black man, you weren't in your place, so to speak.

KEN

I guess that's it.

STEVE

Unfortunately, you can still see folks acting that way.

KEN

I can dig that.

STEVE

Here, tell me what you think of this record. (*Plays Lightning Hopkins' "Stool Pigeon Blues".*)

KEN

(*Listening*) That's the blues alright. Oh yes, indeed! Who is this?

STEVE

Lightning Hopkins.

KEN

Oh, yeah. He's passed away, he's gone beyond. You don't hear music like this no more. B. B. King's the only one left.

STEVE

John Lee Hooker is still alive.

KEN

Is he, now? Well, I do like that song. Stool pigeons. The Lord had a stool pigeon, that's what he said. The street's full of stool pigeons. Out there, they're all stool pigeons.

STEVE

How do you mean?

KEN

Just what I said.

STEVE

You mean, you shouldn't trust anyone?

KEN

You trust yourself, you understand? You keep it to yourself and you'll be better off. Now, I know from experience. You trust yourself and you trust your mother. That's all. Because a man is by himself in this world. Believe it.

STEVE

That's a bit cold for me. I think I have more faith in people, more faith in the good side of human nature.

KEN

I don't mean no offense . . .

STEVE

No, no. None taken.

KEN

I always watch out for myself. Those Cambridge cops . . . It was a crime to be drinkin'. It was a crime to be dancin'. It was a crime to be on the streets after dark! The cops chased me all over the place. Seems I hung around graveyards and alleys all my life. I'm not afraid of the darkness.

STEVE

Were you ever in jail?

KEN

Once. They put me in jail for slappin' a girl one month before she died. I waited nineteen months for a trial and the judge threw the case out. *(Pause.)* Heh . . . I'll tell you somethin'. In jail? That's where I met the biggest stool pigeon ever! I'm not lying to ya, they put me in a cell with Specs O'Keefe! You know about Specs O'Keefe?

STEVE

Um, no. Who was he?

KEN

Well, he was the stool pigeon of the Brinks robbery! Right there in the East Cambridge House of Correction! They put him there for protection.

STEVE

Wow!

KEN

Specs O'Keefe. We got to be very good friends. *(Pause)* What else have you got there?

STEVE

Oh. Ummm . . . O.K. Tell me if you like this one. *(Plays "Hearts Of Stone" by Southside Johnny.)*

KEN

(Listens for awhile) Oh, that's beautiful. It's sad but beautiful. Is this a new song?

STEVE

Within the last five years.

KEN

Who's that boy singing? I've got to know!

STEVE

His name is Southside Johnny.

KEN

Chicago boy?

STEVE

New Jersey.

KEN

Hmm, I don't know him. But he has got it! Johnny has got the feeling. And the band is right there with him. The drummers right there with him. And that guitar player! See, that brings tears to my eyes. They've got me. They've got my heart and my feet. I'm - I'm all tied up. Those boys have got something there. This will go. This song will do just fine. Thank you.

KEN(cont.)

Thank you very much.

STEVE

My pleasure entirely. I like this song a lot.

KEN

See, these kids today - they've got it. They've got their own thing and it's beautiful. But if those kids would only quiet down and play like this, they'd be somebody. You gotta go quiet sometimes. Take each note as it comes, each word and study it. You're sittin' there at night with maybe a tear in your eye. And she puts her head on your shoulder and you can't see nothing but her. You've got your woman and you've got to quiet down.

STEVE

I know what you mean. It seems many young people today don't know about romance. They don't know what it is, they've never seen it. Except maybe on television.

KEN

I know, but I don't even mean romance. Just slow down. Everything is so much nicer when you slow it down.

STEVE

Words of wisdom, Mr. Eglin. Well, I've got one more for you. This one I think you'll know.
(Plays Elvis Presley's "Blue Suede Shoes".)

KEN

Ha! Yes, yes, yes! Elvis Presley, I know that! That boy was great. Every song he sang was my ideal. I rate him over Bing Crosby, I really do! (*Listens*) Oh man, "stay off of my blue suede shoes"! Damn! You know, I bought me some blue suede shoes.

STEVE

You didn't!

KEN

Hell, yes! Two pairs. I got them at McAnn's in Cambridge before they closed. Never wore them. I just kept them in the boxes. Don't know where they are now. Elvis was the King, like they say.

STEVE

You know, I'm glad you still get a kick out of the music, young and old.

KEN

Music is in your soul, you know what I'm saying? Oh man, music gives you life no matter how old or new. Gives you your dreams! Always keep your music. I know I keep mine. I hear stuff like this and the rhythm and the beat start grabbin' my blood and inside me, I'm movin'! I'm liftin' some girl in the air and we're swinging . . . But it's my right leg that's holdin' me up, the left leg won't do it. You don't know how many times I've wanted to get up and dance across the patio there. *(He starts to exit)* But I've got these rubber soles on my shoes and I've got this walker. But someday, I'm gonna get there again. I'm gonna get it and go, and I'm gonna walk. You'll see it. I'm going to.

STEVE

I look forward to it, Ken. *(KEN exit. Lights start to dim.)*

Scene 8 - A Word From Our Sponsor

(Lights stay up center while STEVE puts away the records. ERNIE enters.)

ERNIE

Steve?

STEVE

Oh. Hi, Ernie! What's up?

ERNIE

Can you come here a moment?

STEVE

I sure can. *(He comes center with ERNIE.)* What can I do for you?

ERNIE

If it is all right with you, I think these people would like to know who you are.

STEVE

(Mildly surprised) Oh. You mean, um, these people out here?

ERNIE

Yes. Explain yourself simply and let them know who you are. I will stand here with the dictionary if you need a word.

STEVE

Well, um, let's see . . . I'm five-foot eleven solid, a Sagittarius and my favorite color is red. Is that what you mean?

ERNIE

Is your favorite color red?

STEVE

Yes. Definitely red.

ERNIE

Oh. Actually, can you amplify for us why you are here?

STEVE

At the Duplex?

ERNIE

Yes.

STEVE

Ah. Well, first, I was an art student at one of the local Boston colleges. And I know music. I play in a local rock and roll band. So someone thought that that, um, qualified me to be Activities Director here at the Duplex. Because I was artistic, sort of. So it was my first job - two years ago - which was good because I had just gotten married and needed a job. Art and music jobs being hard to come by and, um, financially lacking.

ERNIE

Have I met your wife?

STEVE

Sure. She's been here a time or two. Remember that young woman who came with us on our picnic last week?

ERNIE

Oh. Yes, indeed! She wore a red sweater with yellow buttons.

STEVE

That's her.

ERNIE

And her name again?

STEVE

Anna.

ERNIE

Anna. She is very lovely.

STEVE

Thanks. I'll tell her you said so. You know, I started working here because it was a job. After a while - and still today - I'm here because these men are my friends. They have been very open and gracious to a strange young man in their midst. It didn't have to be that way. But, um, these - my friends share their lives with me and I share with them as best I can. Our time together is really rather precious to me. And, um, that's, that's about all I have to say. Did I mention I'm five eleven?

ERNIE

Thank you, Steve. *(As they walk off)* You are a very nervous young man.

STEVE

I know.

ERNIE

Perhaps a course in public speaking?

STEVE

Do you think . . .? *(They exit. Lights out.)*

(Center spot fades out as lights come up on the Rec Room.)

Scene 9 - Hearts & Scrabble

(ERNIE enters the Rec Room. It is the next day. Some of the men are watching television. KEN, BILL, ABE and FRANCIS are playing scrabble. ROBERT is coughing.)

ERNIE

Are you all right, Robert?

ROBERT

Oh, fine. Just a tickle.

ERNIE

Maybe you should talk to the nurse.

ROBERT

Rest assured. When she comes in this evening.

(ERNIE takes a seat on the sofa and watches television. STEVE enters dressed in a suit jacket and a floral tie. He may have just come from Sunday services.)

STEVE

Good afternoon, Gentlemen! *(There is little response. ERNIE waves.)* Well, everybody seems to be settled in for the day, huh? *(He walks about the room.)* Hi, Herbie.

HERBIE

Oh, for chrissake! I keep telling you I'm old.

STEVE

O-kay. *(Stands watching the men for a moment.)* Bill, can you do a voice like John Wayne?

BILL

Aw, he's dead. Leave him be.

STEVE

Uh-huh. Abe, how about a run?

ABE

Eh, you run and I'll think of it.

STEVE

Hmmm, I sense lethargy in here today. *(ROBERT coughs.)* Mr. Cleaves, that sounds like a bad cough.

ROBERT

Well, what does a good cough sound like?

STEVE

Well, it's . . .

ROBERT

Listen, why don't you go downstairs and see if there's a pretty widow with a bottle of whiskey for me. Would you do that for an old man?

STEVE

(Laughing) Okay, okay. I can take a hint. I'll be gathering the decorations for the tree if anyone needs anything. *(Exits)*

FERGIE

(Calling after him) I hope that jacket is waterproof because that tie's a pisser!

FRANCIS

There. "Circus".

FERGIE

C-i-r-c-u-s.

FRANCIS

That's five, seven, thirteen, eighteen . . . twenty-one points.

ERNIE

What are we watching?

HERBIE

Ah, a show I guess.

ERNIE

I've never seen this program before. *(Note: Maybe they are tuned to re-runs of "Star Trek" or "Charlie's Angels", something that would look very strange to the men.)*

BILL

Okay. "Cigar". That's all I can do.

HERBIE

It's a new program or something.

FERGIE

C-i-g-a-r. Maybe we should have a smoke?

ABE

Eh, you know I could make a word out of these letters if I knew how to spell it.

ERNIE

Would you like to use my dictionary?

ROBERT

No. (*Coughs*) That would be cheating.

HERBIE

Christ, I had a cigar. I'm supposed to have a cigar and a shower and I haven't had either yet.

Guess I'm knocked out.

ROBERT

He's only to use the dictionary to do checking (*Coughs*) That's it.

ABE

I've got fifteen letters here!

FRANCIS

Put down anything.

ABE

Eh . . . okay.

ROBERT

"Bibles".

BILL

And a triple score. Well, Abe is ahead.

ROBERT

Damn! (*Coughs*) Goes to show you can have a poker face in scrabble as well. "Radish".

FERGIE

Vegetables! My favorite.

BILL

Radishes are very good for you. I read that somewhere.

ERNIE

All vegetables are important to one's well-being and nutrition.

HERBIE

I get gas. I can't eat radishes or turnips or beets. But I would like a cup of coffee, I suppose.

FERGIE

Vegetables are wonderful for children. I like corn. You got to chew like crazy, but what the hell.

ROBERT

Ken?

KEN

Oh, sorry. My mind is wandering all over today. There.

ABE

"Mother".

BILL

And a double word score.

KEN

(Pause) Do any of you gents know what day this is?

FERGIE

It's Tuesday.

BILL

Isn't it Sunday?

FERGIE

It's Sunday.

FRANCIS

I'm sure it's Sunday.

KEN

Well, then it is just about time for me to go up and visit my mother.

ERNIE

Where does she live, Ken?

KEN

Oh, she's passed on now. She's in boot hill since 1971. You see, every year, just before Christmas, I go up to Cambridge where she was laid and put new flowers on her grave. She

KEN(cont.)

always liked flowers. Some years I didn't make it because I was sick, but . . . Maybe Steve can take me over.

FRANCIS

You miss your mother most at the holidays.

BILL

Yeah.

FRANCIS

She'd be cookin'. Everything would be clean and in it's place. Good smells in the house . . .

ERNIE

I seem to remember a plum pudding she used to make.

ABE

There were, let's see now, lights and warmth. Maybe new shoes if things were good.

KEN

But it's not just . . . you see, it was always me and my mother. Honest to God truth. We were all we had in the world. She would do for me and I would do for her.

HERBIE

My mother was a good woman. Ya, a hard worker. Good at washin' and everything. Good at clothes hanging. Once in a while she'd sing and the kids would join in.

ROBERT

(Coughs) Oh, my mother could sing as well. Mostly at Sunday Mass. She enjoyed it, but I wouldn't say the same for the rest of the congregation!

HERBIE

We all worked to pay the rent. I worked on a farm in Danvers, ya. She'd wear a gingham dress or something. *(Pause)* Passed on a couple of years ago. Got me knocked out.

FRANCIS

"Safe". Ten points. My mother raised five children. Three boys and two girls. Everyone was healthy and happy.

KEN

Well, things were never the same after the war. I can never forgive the Japanese because they bombed Pearl Harbor and I had to go into the Army. I couldn't stay home with my mother. (ROBERT *coughs*) I tried my best. I swear to God I did. I told her, "You stay home. I don't want you to work. I don't want you to even spell that word. I'll pay the rent and the phone bill." And I meant every word I said, I swear it. And she knew I meant what I said because she saw the tears comin' from my eyes.

ABE

Mothers work hard for the children. My mother worked on the land there, for hours. She built a garage and, ah . . . Next thing is that she used to make dresses. She sat up late hours to do the cloth material, patches and house work, And she loved the fruit of the trees. She planted many trees and a big, large vegetable garden on the land and . . . oh, ya - she made ends meet.

ERNIE

I wish I could remember my mother more . . .

FERGIE

Well, my mother is a hundred and sixty-six years old, has tits and two legs and two arms and a good set of teeth. She weighs a hundred and sixty-six pounds! That's a lot of weight for a woman.

BILL

Especially if you are 166 years-old!

FERGIE

168. 170. Sometimes she gets up to 200 when she eats a bit too much. She's kind, very kind and she's graceful. Very pretty. She's not like I am, homely. She's a very pretty girl.

ROBERT

(*Coughs*) You're a pistol, Ferguson. (*Coughs twice more.*) Dear me . . .

BILL

"Wolf". Six points. Christ, I'm drawing a blank here.

ERNIE

I wonder what my mother thinks sometimes. If she thinks I did well. If she was proud of me.

ROBERT

(Fitfully coughing) You gentlemen must excuse me. I feel the need to lie down.

BILL

Should I have Steve call the nurse? Do you need help?

ROBERT

No . . . no. I'm just a bit tired. Go on. Go on. Ernest, will you take over my tiles?

ERNIE

If you wish but . . .

ROBERT

Thank you. *(Coughs)* Continue. *(ROBERT exits.)*

ERNIE

(Looks at the tray a moment, then places a word on the board.) "Heart".

KEN

I will tell you the truth. When I lost my mother, that broke my heart. I didn't give a damn anymore. I started drinkin' and runnin' around with girls. No girl ever broke my heart, though. I'll never tell any girl I love her. I'll never say that to any girl in my life. Only my mother.

FRANCIS

I never had a broken heart. To be quite honest, I met my wife and we've been married ever since. We've had many good times together. I have no regrets or hard feelings.

ABE

I was thinking about how I used to write some songs. It was not a sweetheart, but it was a girl and she sang a couple of my songs on television and the radio. The songs were something about her she thought, so she started takin' a liking to me. That's all. She had to make up her mind about what I was doin' and she realized that I fell in love with somebody else. She was nice lookin' and so forth.

BILL

Robert always says pretty girls are like trolley cars - if you miss one there'll be another right along.

ABE

Eh, now, they both worked in the hospital. There was a party and I met her at the party - she was there. They both were there. One nurse talking to another, they got so friendly and that's how they found out. One did like it and one didn't like it. After a while they both dislike me and I told 'em where to go.

FERGIE

I've never had a problem. Women are like freight trains. If you miss one, be thankful it didn't run you over!

ERNIE

I don't recall the date now, but my first broken heart came when I was in the Veteran's Hospital in Bedford. The doctor came in and told me that my wife, Merta Elizabeth Munro, died of breast cancer. This was after the First World War. We were married September 15, 1928 in Burlington Vermont on Colchester Avenue. I believe it was a private home. *(Pause)* I didn't know she had died until they told me so.

BILL

I'm sorry.

ERNIE

Thank you, Bill. It was many years ago.

KEN

I couldn't do it. I don't know what love is. They say to me, "I love her" and I say "Okay, get married. Enjoy yourself". And three months later they're in court for a divorce and I'm sittin' there listening and laughing and they say, "Kenny, you were right". Honest to God. Herbie! Herbie, you never had a girl break your heart, did you?

HERBIE

Hah? *(Pause)* Ya, I had one. Can't say much. A girlfriend or somethin'. Rosie. Rosie Spears.

ABE

Finally! I've got a word. "Peace".

HERBIE

I had a date with her and she run off and leave me, I guess. But I'm supposed to have a lot of

HERBIE(cont.)

beds made. No shave for me and no beds to make. See what I got on - I've got a shirt and a zipper and the zipper don't work!

BILL

I'm tired of scrabble. I'm going to look in on Robert. *(Gets up and exits.)*

HERBIE

Jesus Christ, I'm stuck alright. This is a summer shirt!

FRANCIS

"Man oh Maneshevitz, what a wine!"

HERBIE

My zipper's broken. See that? It's probably broken. I showered and it broke on me! Them zippers aren't any good. *(All the men start to leave.)*

ABE

Eh, I'm going down to Center Street. A walk would be pleasant.

FRANCIS

Oh, I'm a great walker. I can walk from now until midnight and never get tired.

KEN

Well, I'm going to take a nap. *(One by one the men exit.)*

Scene 10 - God Bless Rosie

(The lights focus in on HERBIE. As he starts to talk, he empties his pockets onto the table in front of him, as well as the sofa. Paper clips, rubber bands, loose change, books of matches from forgotten places, pieces of paper with faded writing, Kleenex and his wallet, which he inspects closely. These are his worldly possessions.)

HERBIE

It's a dirty trick! They all go sportin' and leave me for the undertaker. *(Pause)* Rosie Spears of Danvers. She looked pretty good. She looked good. We used to go out nights. We'd go to Salem or something. I used to give her presents. Chocolates or flowers, pinks or something I guess. *(Pause)* A ring or something. We'd go sportin'. It was a pretty good year. *(Pause)* I put

HERBIE(cont.)

on pajamas this morning by mistake, you know it? I'm not foolin'. Now I got on khaki pants. And the belt's too tight. Aw geez, I don't feel too good. I think it's gonna snow. Every time it's gonna snow, my nose gets all blocked up. *(Pause)* What a clown I am. Takin' this stuff outta my pockets. What did I take all this out for? I oughta get rid of some of this junk. I used to have a bible but I don't know where it is now. The way I'm going now I'm going backwards I guess. *(Pause)* I drive everyone out. But . . . That brother of mine. How could he sneak off with that radio of mine? I had a brand new radio! I've got a toothbrush. I got up this morning and the toothbrush was there but I don't have any teeth. No teeth. Like a baby. It's a dirty trick. *(Pause)* I used to work! Even here. I used to make beds. I used to work in the kitchen but I got a broken hip and the doctor's afraid I'll fall. I . . . You go someplace and you have to go to the door! No one takes me out. I guess the only one takes me out is the undertaker. You never see me going sportin', do ya? Everybody else goes sportin' . . . The hell with it! Those fellas are walkin' around, havin' a good time and I'll fall down on my back and down comes the undertaker! *(Pause)* I used to have brand new pants. No foolin'. I had a top coat and a shine. I used to go dancin' and stayin' out all night. Me and Rosie Spears. We would go down to Salem Willows and ride the merry-go-round. We saw Halley's Comet there. A blaze in the sky! I gave her a ring or somethin'. She . . . *(Pause)* But I won't do it anymore by the looks of it. I think I'm licked. No shower. No more hot showers. I can't go home. I think I'm licked. Dirty trick, knock a man out like that, huh? *(Pause. He crosses himself and folds his hands together.)* Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. God bless Mother. God bless Father and the doctor in Bedford. And God bless Rosie. God bless Rosie. *(Lights fade out.)*

Scene 11 - An Interlude

(Lights come back up on the living room. KEN, FERGIE, ABE and FRANCIS are all reading various popular magazines.)

ABE

Eh, I was reading some magazines in here a while back and there was a movie section in it and they said that Johnny Weissmuller is a raving maniac in some hospital in California.

KEN

He's a wealthy man. Johnny Weissmuller jumped off the George Washington Bridge in a movie - the police were chasing him. I did guard duty on that bridge! That's Hollywood, though. I go along with Hollywood. Hollywood can do anything.

FRANCIS

He did that at the Golden Gate there in California for the movies. That goes back a few years.

ABE

He must be past sixty.

FRANCIS

I think he's over seventy.

KEN

I used to know all those actors ages.

ERNIE

(Entering) Excuse me. Have any of you seen Bill recently?

ABE

(Pause) Eh, Steve took him over to the hospital.

KEN

(Pause) They went to the VA to see Robert.

ERNIE

Oh. I didn't know. *(Pause)* Thank you. *(Stays standing. The room is silent.)*

FERGIE

(Suddenly) Did you know there is a Paris-France, a Paris-Texas and a Paris-Massachusetts?

There is also Plaster Paris.

FRANCIS

Which one's the best?

FERGIE

Oh, Plaster Paris. Because if I get a broken leg or a broken arm, I can't plaster it with France, but I can with Paris!

Scene 12 - Adios, Amigo

(Lights go down on the living room and up on a hospital bed downstage left. ROBERT lies on the bed with a respirator mask on his face and his eyes closed. Slowly, BILL enters into the light. He stands just off from the bed, holding a hat in his hands.)

BILL

Hello, Robert. *(Pause)* I brought your hat. You left it behind. I thought you might need it in case you wanted to go out or down the hall or . . . A fellow shouldn't be without his hat, one way or another. *(Pause)* I'll put it here. *(He walks to the bed and places that hat at ROBERT's side. He then pulls a chair next to the bed and sits, facing the audience.)* The nurses here seem very nice. They showed me to this room and said you were sleeping. *(Pause)* Are you sleeping, Robert? *(Pause)* Sleep is very important. Sleep is the passage of your mind and body into a period of rest. So you can function better the next day or the days to come. *(Pause)* I see you have no television. That's all right. As you say, television won't last unless they put something good on. The news is all the same. There's an awful lot of murders and sexual harassments of different kinds. This country is still making those nuclear bombs. I think they're horrible. They could annihilate the whole human race, couldn't they? So people who make them must be some kind of savage beast! Scientists and gun makers and professors and teachers, even. They are not upholding the credit of our country or their profession making things like that. *(Pause)* There was some good news, good news indeed. Some woman, who was a patient at Boston City Hospital, she died in 1921 and her will came up at probate and she had left six million dollars to the Hospital! Isn't that something? *(He looks at ROBERT for a moment.)* Um, everyone at the Duplex wishes you well. Some of the other fellows wanted to see ya. They did. Some of the fellows. But to tell the truth, you know how it is. Some people feel they've seen quite enough of the inside of a hospital. Quite enough. The others were . . . scared. *(Pause)* I bet you're scared, too. And P.O.'d, if you pardon my French. It's a rotten thing to do, I think. Making our bodies fall apart on us. He keeps our minds, our feelings alive and kicking, but our limbs waste away like old tissue! It's not fair, is it, Robert? I know. But it does no good to shake your fist at Him. That's His business. What can you do? He's got His plan. He's got His plan and life goes on and time does what it does best. It passes. Somehow, Robert . . . somehow I think we all wind

BILL(cont.)

up in the right place. *(Stands to leave)* Well, I should be going now, Robert. It's almost suppertime and Steve is waiting for me outside. He's a good man. I just wanted to bring your hat. You get your rest. Take all the rest you need. *(He walks to the door, then turns back.)*
Adios, amigo. *(He exits. Lights out.)*

Scene 13 - "My Jobs"

(Lights come up center as ERNIE walks out.)

ERNIE

You may have noticed I always carry these things with me. There are my reading glasses in their case. My note pad for jotting down words I come across, thoughts I have. And two books - a King James Bible and a copy of Webster's Dictionary. I marvel at the stories both these books tell. I am convinced that the Bible is just the Dictionary with the words in a different order. I look to both these books for inspiration and guidance. *(He puts on his glasses and opens his notepad.)* I would like to read you this new poem. It will tell you a little about my life. I think most of these words can be found in the Bible. Title - "My Jobs".

About January 15, 1918 after military release
From 2 Hill Place, Green Mountains, Springfield Vermont
Was employed by Jones and Lamson Machine Company
All employees often friendly taunts.

Products- Hartness flat turret and Fay automatic lathe
Hartness screws, thread comparator, cast iron body
When in operation reflected light on chart-no rain
Independent- a place where products were shoddy.

Heat treating gas fired oven furnace
After parts past dark gone all red

ERNIE(cont.)

Were quenched in oil or water, no burnishes
But at times enough could be bred.
After-when placed in trays for production
Placed in machine to finish as directed
From there, there is no reduction
But all results were as expected.

When a telegram urgent came
Travel to auto production places
The process is a great game
Workers have no scars on faces.

After returning from Midwest
Went to my home 2 Hill Place
God organized all the rest
We did not plummet into space.

Thank you. Now, I must get ready. We are trimming the tree tonight!

Scene 14 -So This Is Christmas . . .

(Lights shift to entire Living Room as ERNIE walks back. John Lennon's "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)" plays in the background. A table, on which boxes of ornaments sit, is set near the Christmas tree. HERBIE and KEN are sitting on the couch stringing popcorn. BILL, ABE and FRANCIS are decorating the tree with ornaments while FERGIE randomly tosses tinsel in the general direction of the tree.)

STEVE

(Entering with a box.) Here are the stockings, Ernie.

ERNIE

Thank you very much.

KEN

I am really pissed off about the whole thing, Steve! I am teared down about that. It's not right! It's not right to shoot anybody down. Not like that.

STEVE

I know, Ken. A lot of people, a great many friends of mine are very upset and angered over what happened. Some folks I know took the day off from work or classes to sort out their feelings.

KEN

Now that man who did it is sick, but I don't care. He has got to be punished! They should punish him very badly.

ERNIE

What happened, Ken?

STEVE

We were talking about John Lennon of the Beatles.

BILL

Oh! They were a musical organization, weren't they? It was on television that one of them was murdered in New York, that John Lennon.

ERNIE

Yes, I saw that, too. A terrible thing.

ABE

It was the older brother, wasn't it? He had a weak heart condition and finally had a stroke in the streets. Eh, they found him outside.

KEN

No, somebody shot him!

FRANCIS

Shot him outright, huh? Jesus, that's tough. Was it a fight over a girl?

STEVE

No, I don't believe so.

FRANCIS

What was it, gambling? Crap game? Was he coming from a bar?

STEVE

Nothing like that. It was just someone crazy.

KEN

Yeah, somebody sick!

FRANCIS

That's too bad. I don't know much about the Beatles. I never saw them.

FERGIE

The beetles are beetles. They clean up all the vermin.

STEVE

Different beetles, Fergie.

FERGIE

Oh, they're the sweetest little animal you ever saw. They come right up to you and chew the ice cream for you. And they hand the pecans to you. And those pecans aren't celluloid either.

They're the real thing.

FRANCIS

Aw, go on with ya!

BILL

It is a shame. They'll probably have to re-organize the whole dance band.

KEN

Well, he was the head man of the Beatles, yes he was. Did you know, it all started in Memphis.

STEVE

(Working on the lights) Memphis?

KEN

I was surprised, too. I thought it started in Europe, but it started right here, down South. Then they went to London and that's when they started to actually get popular.

ABE

I recall, ah, the Beatles had a crowd here in Boston. The police couldn't stop anybody singin' those songs. They had a crowd and the crowd was inside and the other half outside. I think it was Boston Garden that they performed their musical talent. I understand that off the records,

ABE(cont.)

they made an invention, eh, that puts an emblem on those sweatshirts or t-shirts. The older brother Lennon took that to heart and put an emblem on the t-shirts, sweaters and so on and so forth. *(Pause)* I never heard the music.

FRANCIS

Well, I never saw them or heard them. Say, did you ever hear the Mill Brothers? *(A general affirmation from all the men.)*

KEN

Oh, yeah!

BILL

They were a wonderful combo. They were brothers, too.

ERNIE

I like the old songs. "Apple Blossom Time". "Glow Worm".

ABE

Remember "Paper Doll"?

KEN

Well, let's face it. They're the best in the world, for chrissake! They are still up there. Stuck by each other all these years.

FRANCIS

My favorite is still "God Bless America".

STEVE

All set. All hooked up and ready to go.

KEN

Who's gonna put up the star?

STEVE

What?

HERBIE

Ya, That tree has no star. I ain't foolin'.

BILL

Well, it's too high for me.

STEVE

The tree looks fine. Why do we need a star up there?

FERGIE

Where else would you put it?

ABE

Oh, we need a star up there. Right there at the top. It's too high for me. Eh, my back . . .

ERNIE

The star signifies the point on the tree which is closest to Heaven.

KEN

And outer space! The star that shone on Jesus when he was born.

STEVE

All right, all right. I bow to the majority. Let me grab a chair.

FERGIE

And the star was in space. All the stars were out there. In space. Like the North Star. In fact, it was the North Star. So named because it always pointed north, usually.

BILL

I used to know all the stars. In the Navy, remember? The stars were a sailor's friend.

STEVE

(Fixing the star to the top of the tree.) So, what do you gents think of outer space? What did you think of men landing on the moon?

FRANCIS

Baloney!

KEN

Outer space is this century's greatest invention. It is amazing!

FERGIE

I'll take you to the moon. For the view! And when you see those beautiful dames, you'll want two or three. Then you'll say, "Oh, I love the moon!"

FRANCIS

I say baloney! I don't believe it. They could never reach the moon in a thousand years. Lotta hoaxes around!

HERBIE

Too many hoaxes and that's no joke.

FERGIE

Well, I've been to the moon. And there's a lot of assholes up there, too!

STEVE

Fergie!

ERNIE

Steve, I read somewhere that the government sent up a rocket that sent a message into outer space. Is that true?

STEVE

It is true, Ernie.

KEN

What did they say?

STEVE

Um, now that you mention it - I'm not sure. What message would you send into space, Ken?

KEN

(Pause) I love you God. That's about it.

STEVE

Good. *(He plugs in the lights and the tree stands illuminated before the group.)*

ERNIE

Beautiful

FRANCIS

Amen.

BILL

Look at that.

STEVE

How about we sing one Christmas carol and call it a night. Okay?

ABE

Sure

FERGIE

Lovely!

KEN

Let's do it.

(ERNIE digs into one of the boxes and retrieves a handful of old choral booklets. He distributes them as STEVE brings out a small Casio keyboard.)

BILL

Geez, I haven't seen these in years! Or maybe last Christmas.

STEVE

How about "Silent Night"?

ERNIE

Page thirteen.

(Most everyone stands around the tree, except HERBIE who stays on the couch. The men, with varying degrees of success, sing.)

"Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in Heavenly peace.
Sleep in Heavenly peace."

(There is silence as the group stands in thought, watching the lights play on the tree. Suddenly:)

HERBIE

(At the top of his voice) "Ave Mar-eeeeeee-eeeeeee-aaaaa!"

FRANCIS

For chrissakes!

BILL

(Laughing) That'll be enough of that.

HERBIE

What? What!?

ERNIE

I don't think they want to sing anymore.

KEN

Ha! Damn, Herbie, you are no Perry Como. That's for sure! Well, good night folks.

(All the men begin to exit, talking amongst themselves and heading for the back bedrooms.)

STEVE

Look, Ernie. The snow is really piling up out there!

ERNIE

Oh, my. A brand new winter blanket. Just in time for the festivities.

STEVE

Outside it looks a lot like Christmas.

ERNIE

Inside, too.

STEVE

Very true. Are you coming?

ERNIE

In a moment.

STEVE

Well, an early "Merry Christmas" to you.

ERNIE

Thank you, Steve. My congratulations to you as well.

STEVE

Good night, Ernie. *(Exits)*

(The lights dim. ERNIE walks around the Christmas tree until he comes center.)

ERNIE

From the time I was young, I was assured that the one definite rule of life is everything that has a beginning will have an ending, too. That is not harsh. Simply true. Endings happen here all the time. With every month comes a time for one of our friends to move on. Bon Voyage, I say. We will meet again soon. I'm sure of it. *(Pause)* I do not fear death. Look at this tree. This beautiful Christmas tree will die, too. This tree will be here for a week. Hopefully two. Then, after all the time it has taken to grow to this height, it will have to leave. But, in its last short time on the planet, this tree will light our room. It will shine on us, warm us. . . inside. Reflecting back all the memories of places and friends and loves. I love this Christmas tree for giving us it's best right to the end. Ah, Life! The one true gift we all possess. And the gift we should share always. Good night. *(ERNIE exits.)*

(Lights out.)

THE END