

DAILY Actor

THE DINING ROOM by A.R. Gurney

HARVEY: *(Coming well Downstage, pulling a chair down, away from the table)* I'll sit here. We can look out. There's a purple finch who comes to the feeder every evening. Brings his young. *(Taking an envelope from his inside pocket)* Now, I want to go over my funeral with you. I want to do it. There are only a few more apples left in the barrel for me.

You're my eldest son. I can't do it with anyone else. Your mother starts to cry, your brother isn't here, and your sister gets distracted. So concentrate, please, on my funeral.

First, here is my obituary. For both newspapers. I dictated it to Miss Kovak down at the office, and I've read it over twice, and it's what I want. It's thorough without being self-congratulatory. I mention my business career, my civic commitments, and, of course, my family. I even touch on my recreational life. I give my lowest score on golf and weight of the sailfish I caught off the Keys. The papers will want to cut both items, but don't you let them.

I also want them to print this picture. *(He shows it)* It was taken when I was elected to chair the Symphony drive. I think it will do. I don't look too young to die, nor so old it won't make any difference.

(Fussing with other documents) Now I want the funeral service announced at the end of the obituary, and to occur three days later. That will give people time to postpone their trips and adjust their golf games. And I want it at three-thirty in the afternoon. This gives people time to digest their lunch and doesn't obligate us to feed them dinner. Notice I've underlined the word *church*. Mr. Fayerweather might try to squeeze the service into the chapel, but don't let him. I've lived on this city all my life, and know a great many people, and I want everyone to have a seat and feel comfortable. If you see people milling around the door, go right up to them and find them a place, even if you have to use folding chairs. Are we clear on that?

I've listed the following who works to be played by Mrs. Manchester at the organ. This Bach, this Handel, this Schubert. All lively, you'll notice. Nothing gloomy, nothing grim. I want the service to start promptly with a good rousing hymn – "Onward, Christian Soldiers" – and then Fayerweather may make some brief – underlined *brief* – remarks about my life and works. Do you plan to get up and speak, by the way? Don't, if you don't want to. There's nothing more uncomfortable than a reluctant or unwilling speaker. On the other hand, if you, as my eldest son, were to get your feet and say a few words of farewell...

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Good. Then I'll write you in. *(He writes)* "Brief remarks by my son Richard." You won't make it sentimental, will you? Brad Hoffmeister's son got up the other day and made some very sentimental remarks about Brad. I didn't like it, and I don't think Brad would have liked it. On the other hand, you won't make any wisecracks, will you? You have that tendency, Dick. At Marcie's wedding. And your brother's birthday. You got up and made some very flip remarks about all of us. Smart-guy stuff. Too smart, in my opinion. If you plan to get into that sort of thing, perhaps you'd better not say anything at all.

Now at the graveside, just the family. I want to be buried beside my brothers and below my mother and father. Leave room for your mother to lie beside me. If she marries again, still leave room. She'll come back at the end.

Invite people back here after the burial. Stay close to your mother. She gets nervous at any kind of gathering, and makes bad decisions. For example, don't let her serve any of the good Beefeater's gin if people simply want to mix it with tonic water. And when they're gone, sit with her. Stay in the house. Don't leave for a few days. Please. *(Putting documents back in the envelope)* And that's my funeral. I'm leaving you this room, you know. After your mother dies, the table and chairs to you. It's the best thing I can leave you, by far.

Now we'll rejoin your mother. *(He gets slowly to his feet)* I'll put this envelope in my safe-deposit box, on top of my will and the stock certificates. The key will be in my left bureau drawer. *(He starts out, then stops)* You didn't see the purple finch feeding its young.