

Gravedigger

A Play in One Act

By Eric Luthi

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DEDICATION

For Richard and Hank, for their advice and criticism, for their encouragement, and mostly for their friendship.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Here is a dark, suspenseful play that follows the life of Tiburtius Gerhardt, the gravedigger. As the cemetery he has worked in all his life fills up and comes to its end, Tiburtius tries to cope with his demanding and demeaning boss; his deceased uncle; and two other denizens who should -- or should not -- really be there. It's enough to drive a man to his grave. Approximate running time is 35 to 45 minutes.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

The play premiered on February 23rd, 2005 at the John Lion New Plays Festival at Cal State University, Los Angeles, with the following cast:

TIBURTIUS JONES:	Clint Palmer
UNCLE NICK:	John Ortiz
WALKER:	Joe Metzger
RANDOLPH POTTER:	Fernando Soltero
SALLIE BRYANT:	Avear Carey

CHARACTERS

(2 m, 1 w, 2 flexible. See casting notes next page.)

TIBURTIUS JONES: A gravedigger.

UNCLE NICK: A ghost.

MISTER or MISSUS WALKER: The undertaker.

RANDOLPH or REGINA POTTER: A ghost.

SALLIE BRYANT: A ghost.

TIME / PLACE

Early twentieth century. A cemetery.

SETTING

An old-style cemetery complete with standup monuments and headstones, some of them leaning with age. A large headstone is at the upper left. In the foreground is a grave which Tiburtius can stand knee-deep in, digging. The grave he digs will need to get deeper as the show progresses. There are also three graves from which the ghosts rise (enter).

PROPS

Shovel	Shoulder bag
Lantern	Bottle
Wheelbarrow	Tarp

SOUND EFFECTS

Church bells, deep and somber.

NOTES ON CASTING AND LANGUAGE

If desired, Mr. Walker or Mr. Potter could be cast as females. Various pronouns would have to be changed. In addition, if Walker becomes female, you should consider changing Abigail Fitzsimmons into Abraham (Abe) Fitzsimmons. Even though Fitzsimmons is not an actual character, the change would preserve more of the story. Still, it would require a couple of line changes.

Original:

POTTER: *(Aside to BRYANT.)* The sainted spinster. Always thought she was better than us. Look where she is now.

Change to:

POTTER: *(Aside to BRYANT.)* The confirmed bachelor. Always thought he was better than us. Look where he is now.

And:

Original:

UNCLE NICK: And old Abigail, well, I think she'll enjoy the company.

SALLIE: It's probably the first time she's ever lain down with anyone.

POTTER: And God knows he never could get a live one.

Change to:

UNCLE NICK: And old Abe, well, I think he'll enjoy the company.

SALLIE: It's probably the first time he's ever lain down with anyone.

POTTER: And God knows she never could get a live one.

LANGUAGE

Several words within the script may not fit within local community standards. In such cases, the playwright grants permission to modify such words.

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: The day is spent. TIBURTIUS, in the foreground, stands knee-deep in a grave, digging. Next to the grave is a shoulder bag with the top of a bottle just visible. SFX: A church bell sounds once, deep and somber. As he digs, Tiburtius looks around carefully at the headstones.)

TIBURTIUS: Don't think that I don't see you. *(Beat.)* Been here too long, much too long. *(Beat.)* So, don't think that I don't see you. *(Beat.)* I see everything. *(Beat.)* I see the bodies come, in ones and twos, sometimes more, maybe there's an accident or...a pestilence. They just keep coming. Never ending. Nobody lives forever, nobody and nothin', even though sometimes we like to pretend we do. Don't we, Tibby. Yeah, that's right. Place's filling up. Mr. Walker keeps bringing me bodies to plant. Young Mr. Walker. Took over after his old man died. Old Mr. Walker, now there was a good man. It's getting so I can't seem to keep my hands clean anymore. Fifty-six spots left. That one over there *(Indicates USL)*. That's Mr. Potter, or what's left of him. Someone took a baseball bat to his head. Crushed his skull just like a soft-boiled egg under a silver spoon, that was. Very bloody. So I heard. Buried him four – no, five weeks ago. That's his stone there, all black and polished. Expensive. Just like him to show off his money, even after he's dead. Yeah, you, Potter. I'm talking to you. This world's better off without you. This one here's for a lady. A real lady. Left too soon. Couldn't breathe anymore. That's what happens with someone's hands around your neck. All I have to do is square off these corners and put away the tools and hide the dirt. I'll make it nice and neat for you, Missus Bryant. You can count on me. It's the least I can do. That's Uncle Nick's spot, over there. Dead and buried two weeks ago. Police think he fell off the bridge at Big Creek. I guess he never did learn to swim. I miss you, Uncle Nick, I really do. It would have been an honor to dig your grave. I'm sorry, Uncle Nick. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you.

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UNCLE NICK: *(Offstage.)* Tibby. Should've dug my grave, Tibby.

TIBURTIUS: Who's there? My name's Tiburtius. Who's calling me like he was my friend?

UNCLE NICK: *(Offstage.)* Should've dug my grave, Tibby. It would have been right. I would have dug yours.

TIBURTIUS: Who's there? Show yourself. I've been here too long, seen it all, you won't scare me.

(UNCLE NICK, in his burial suit, stands up in the grave Tibby is digging and brushes the dirt from his clothes.)

UNCLE NICK: Here I am, Tibby.

TIBURTIUS: Aahh!

(TIBURTIUS scrambles out of the grave and runs offstage. UNCLE NICK follows. LIGHTS dim.)

End of Freeview

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