The Dining Room
By A.R. Gurney Jr.

Characters: Arthur – With his father dead and his mother now living in Florida, Arthur needs to divide his parents’ belongings between himself and his sister. Sally – Arthur’s sister, Sally has adult children but still reverts to childish behavior in her brother’s presence. She wants the dining room furnishings partly because they remind her of her happy, secure childhood and partly because of her brother wants them.

Situation: This play has just one set, a dining room. The playwright portrays dining rooms as symbolic of the changing lifestyle of the American upper middle class. In this play the dining room was once the center of family life but is now neglected and cluttered.

Arthur: The dining room.
Sally: Yes...
Arthur: Notice how we gravitate right to this room.
Sally: I know it.
Arthur: You sure mother doesn’t want this stuff in Florida?
Sally: She hardly has room for what she’s got. She wants us to take turns. Without fighting.
Arthur: We’ll just have to draw lots then.
Sally: Unless one of us wants something, and one of us doesn’t.
Arthur: We have to do it today.
Sally: Do you think that’s enough time for us to divide up the whole house?
Arthur: I have to get back, Sal. (He looks in the sideboard) We’ll draw lots and then go through the rooms taking turns. (He brings out a silver spoon) Here. We’ll use this salt spoon. (He shifts it from hand to hand behind his back, then holds out two fists) Take your pick. You get the spoon, you get the dining room.
Sally: You mean you want to start here?
Arthur: Got to start somewhere. (Sally looks at his fists.)
Sally: (Not choosing) You mean you want the dining room?
Arthur: Yeah.
Sally: What happened to the stuff you had?
Arthur: Jance took it. It was part of the settlement.
Sally: If you win, where will you put it?
Arthur: That’s my problem, Sal.
Sally: I thought you had a tiny apartment.
Arthur: I’ll find a place.
Sally: I mean your children won’t want it.
Arthur: Probably not.
Sally: Then where on earth?...
Arthur: Come on, Sal. Choose. *(He holds out his fists again. She starts to choose.)* You don’t want it.
Sally: Of course I want it.
Arthur: I mean you already have a perfectly good dining room.
Sally: Not as good as this.
Arthur: You mean you want two dining rooms?
Sally: I’d give our old stuff to Debbie.
Arthur: To Debbie?
Sally: She’s our oldest child.
Arthur: Does Debbie want a dining room?
Sally: She might.
Arthur: In a condominium?
Sally: She might.
Arthur: In Denver?
Sally: She just might, Arthur.
Arthur: *(Shuffling the spoon behind his back again; then holding out his fists)* I don’t want to fight. Which hand? *(Sally starts to choose, then stops.)*
Sally: Are you planning on putting it in storage?
Arthur: I might.
Sally: I checked on that. That costs an arm and leg.
Arthur: So does shipping it to Denver. *(He holds out his fists)*

Sally: *(Almost picking a hand, then stopping)* I know what will happen if you win.

Arthur: What?

Sally: You’ll end up selling it.

Arthur: Selling it?

Sally: That’s what will happen. It will kick around for a while, and you’ll end up calling a furniture dealer.

Arthur: I am absolutely amazed you’d say that.

Sally: I don’t want to fight, Arthur.

Arthur: Neither do I. Maybe we should defer the dining room. *(He starts for door. Stage R.)*

Sally: *(Following him)* Maybe we should.

Arthur: Selling the dining room? Is that what you told mother I’d do?

Sally: *(Following him out)* I told her I’d give you the piano if I can have the dining room...

Arthur: I’ll be lucky if I get to keep this spoon.

Sally: I’ll give you the piano and the coffee table if I can have the dining room.

*Scene*