**Ceremonies in Dark Old Men**

**By Lonne Elder III**

A floundering Harlem barbershop is the setting and the cauldron of action that leads to tragic consequences. Russell B Parker, a former vaudeville hoofer, is a man of big dreams but small ambitions. He hardly works at all in fact, often spending the time incessantly playing checkers with his friend, William Jenkins. Parker lives with Theopolis and Bobby, his two unemployed sons, and Adele, his hard-working daughter. The ghost of his dead wife, a woman who drove herself into an early grave working to support the family, nags at his conscience.

Adele deeply resents that she is carrying the entire family financially. She announces that she's done supporting her father's failing shop and freeloading brothers. If they do not find paying jobs immediately, she'll shutter the barbershop and kick them out on the street. Theo proposes they go into business selling "black lightning," his homemade corn whiskey, and convinces his father to meet Harlem crime boss Blue Haven. Blue gets them started and receives a cut of the profits in exchange for protection from police raids or rival criminals.

When the operation proves successful, Theo becomes the household's new breadwinner, but the family becomes divided. Adele blinds herself to their criminal activities through a romantic distraction. Bobby conspicuously spends time away from the shop and is rumored to be in involved in a rash of city burglaries. And Parker often steals money from the operation's till, so he may entertain a Young Girl that has become the object of his affection.

While the family disintegrates and the retribution of Parker's choices threatens everything, he retreats into atmospheric tales of his life in vaudeville. In the final stages of the play, he even attempts to summon dance steps of his youth to little avail. Parker and his family's dreams of a better life cannot shake the spectre of a racist society, bringing their story to a tragic conclusion.