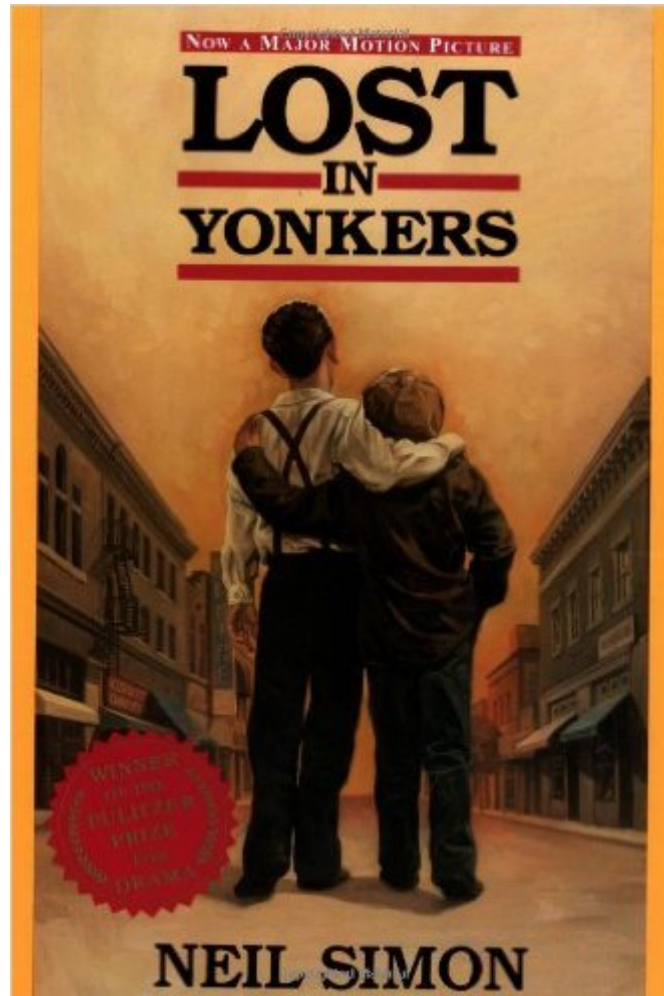


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Lost In Yonkers (Drama, Plume)



Synopsis

Neil Simon's inimitable play about the trials and tribulations that test family ties — winner of the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. What happens to children in the absence of love? That is the question that lies at the heart of this funny and heartrending play by one of America's most acclaimed and beloved playwrights. Debuting at the Richard Rodgers Theatre in 1990, *Lost in Yonkers* went on to win four Tony Awards, including Best Play, as well as the Pulitzer Prize, and tells the moving drama about the cruelties and painful memories that scar a family. It is New York, 1942. After the death of their mother, two young brothers are sent to stay with their formidable grandmother for the longest ten months of their lives. Grandmother Kurnitz is a one-woman German front — a refugee and a widow who has steeled her heart against the world. Her coldness and intolerance have crippled her own children: the boys' father has no self-esteem . . . their Aunt Gert has an embarrassing speech impediment . . . their Uncle Louie is a small-time gangster . . . and their Aunt Bella has the mentality of a child. But it is Bella's hunger for affection and her refusal to be denied love that saves the boys — and that leads to an unforgettable, wrenching confrontation with her mother. Filled with laughter, tears, and insight, *Lost in Yonkers* is yet another heartwarming testament to Neil Simon's talent.

Book Information

Series: Drama, Plume

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Plume; Reprint edition (January 1, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0452268834

ISBN-13: 978-0452268838

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (34 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #64,753 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #76 in Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Movies > Direction & Production #139 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Regional & Cultural > United States #6404 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

Customer Reviews

The SkinnyJay and Arty come to live with Grandma and Aunt Bella after their mother dies. Their father, Eddie, cannot serve in the military, so he is a traveling salesman throughout the south. He

sells metals — steel, mostly — to benefit the military and contribute to the war. They learn interesting things about their Aunt Bella and Uncle Louie, both who have their own struggles, while trying to please their hard-nosed German grandmother. The Players Jay — called Yakob by Grandma Arty — called Artur by Grandma Eddie — Jay and Arty's father, he is a traveling salesman selling metals for the military, known to be sickly Grandma — a hard, cold German woman, escaped Berlin, owns a candy store Aunt Bella — Jay and Arty's aunt, she lives with Grandma and works in the candy store, has the mindset of a child Uncle Louie — Jay and Arty's uncle, he is rarely around and seems to take part in nefarious activities Aunt Gert — Jay and Arty's aunt, she has a speech impediment The Highs and Lows Jay and Arty. The two are wide-eyed coming to live with Grandma. They know virtually nothing about their relatives, since they've never really visited. They are a quiet, cute duo who are piecing together and learning the history of Grandma, Bella, Louie and Gert. Grandma. She is a hard, cold, steeled woman who does not believe in showing any emotion. A display that could be interpreted as weakness disgusts her. She suffered in her escape from Berlin, and although she has buried her husband and even some of her own children at young ages, she does not cry. In this, she has pushed the rest of her children away. She keeps a tight reign on the candy store and knows when even a pretzel has gone missing.

Set in Yonkers, New York, in 1942, this Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-winning play captures the tumult of the period by focusing on the lives of three generations of one family, all of whom are dealing with personal issues in addition to the traumas of World War II. Arty, age 13, and Jay, age 15, whose mother has just died of cancer, must move in with their stern immigrant grandmother and sweet, but ditzy, Aunt Bella while their father works for ten months in the South. Grandma Kurnitz, who (ironically) runs a sweet shop, is embittered by her life: only four of her six children survive, and none of them are close to her. She does not know her grandchildren and does not want them living with her and messing up her life and her house, facts she makes plain to the boys from the outset. Ruling with an iron hand, she terrifies everyone around her. The coming-of-age of Arty and Jay, as they learn to deal with Grandma and eventually learn to respect her, is not without its complications as the rest of the family involves the boys in their own issues. Aunt Bella, who is mentally and emotionally a child, falls in love. Aunt Gert, who can speak only as she exhales, and wheezes as she inhales (the result of a childhood trauma involving Grandma), checks in periodically on Grandma and Bella but tries to avoid Grandma. Uncle Louie is a bagman for the mob, and he is on the run. Their father, who maintains a dramatic presence through his letters, cannot come home until he has earned enough to pay off the loan sharks to whom he is indebted for the money for his

wife's cancer treatments. Moments of great drama, wit, and poignancy play out within the apartment, with all the action revolving around Grandma.

First and foremost, Neil Simon is a brilliant playwright, and *Lost in Yonkers* is another feather in his cap. Set in Yonkers, New York in 1942 during the second world war, two children-Jay and Artie-must stay for one year (while a debt is being cleared by their father) with their cold-hearted, inflexible, emasculating and miserly Grandmother Kurnitz, a hardened survivor and also a woman whose own inner emotional "icing up" (because of her own uncommunicated tragedy) turned her own kids into a petty thug (Louie), a childlike simpleton (Bella), a castrated doormat (Eddie) and a stuttering fool whom many privately mock (Aunt Gert). And under the intense conditions that this one woman evokes, Jay and Artie must struggle to live or rather survive, for a house without love or any caliber of human warmth whatsoever can quickly change these two boys from innocence and humor to the very spitting image of their deeply flawed aunts and uncle, and they themselves realize this; they must be steely and unfeeling, as their grandmother would love to have happen, for anything opposite that would be a sign of weakness and failure. And that is what makes *Lost in Yonkers* sad, disturbing and frightening, because those very elements are the ingredients for a very dysfunctional adulthood, and that is sometimes the worst weapon of all--the lacking of human love and warmth. But with the strict, life-sucking obedience that the kids must adhere to in order for there to be some semblance of peace and cohesion, one would think that there would be no possible glimmer of hope at all. Yet, the hope comes in the form of Jay and Artie's childlike aunt, Bella, whose simplicity will simply not allow her to be an unfeeling android who goes through the motions of life.

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