

# THE LYONS

BY NICKY SILVER



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THE LYONS  
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THE LYONS was produced by the Vineyard Theatre  
(Douglas Aibel, Artistic Director; Jennifer Garvey-Blackwell, Executive Producer),  
New York City, 2011.

Original Broadway production produced by Kathleen K. Johnson.

The Lyons *is dedicated*  
*to Jerry Silver, 1930 – 2010*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Normally, if there is an “Author’s Note” in these DPS publications, they serve as a place where the playwright gives some guidance as to how to do the play you’re about to read. That is not my plan. I just have to take a moment to say something about the experience of putting *The Lyons* on stage. First of all, most of the theaters in New York passed on the play. Part of this, I suspect, is because the two plays I had opened immediately prior were grim exercises indeed. I’m not saying they weren’t good (nor am I claiming they were), I am just pointing out that they were dark, dark journeys. I relied on my relationship with the Vineyard Theatre to get the play produced. I must take this moment to publicly acknowledge them, the lovely family that is the Vineyard. A warmer or more dedicated group of people one simply cannot find. From the first preview, audiences responded so warmly it was dizzying! Great torrents of laughter, followed by the heartbeat of an audience genuinely moved. And, as I write this, *The Lyons’* journey continues. In two months we will open on Broadway.

I am not, however, being self-deprecating when I say much of this good fortune is luck. I am so lucky. A beautiful production, directed by Mark Brokaw. And an acting ensemble — what can I say? Linda Lavin, is Linda Lavin because she earned it. She is a genius and as warm, as generous a person as I’ve ever worked with. The wonderful and moving Dick Latessa, the perfect Kate Jennings Grant, the spectacular (and so handsome) Gregory Wooddell, and the divine Brenda Pressley — and lastly my closest friend and as fine an actor as I have ever seen, the heartbreaking Michael Esper. With that group the play would really have to stink out loud not to be a hit! I am so lucky.

Thanks to them.

THE LYONS received its world premiere at The Vineyard Theatre (Douglas Aibel, Artistic Director; Jennifer Garvey-Blackwell, Executive Director) in New York City, on October 11, 2011. It was directed by Mark Brokaw; the set design was by Allen Moyer; the costume design was by Michael Krass; the lighting design was by David Lander; the original music and sound design were by David Van Tieghem.; the production stage manager was Roy Harris; and the assistant stage manager was Denise Yaney. The cast was as follows:

RITA ..... Linda Lavin  
BEN ..... Dick Latessa  
LISA ..... Kate Jennings Grant  
CURTIS ..... Michael Esper  
NURSE ..... Brenda Pressley  
BRIAN ..... Gregory Wooddell

THE LYONS subsequently opened on Broadway at the Cort Theatre. It was produced by Kathleen K. Johnson. The cast and all personnel remained the same with the following exceptions: the production stage manager was Robert Bennett; the stage manager was Lois Griffing; the general manager was Manny Kladitis.

## **CHARACTERS**

BEN LYONS, late 70s, a dying man. Although he is at the end of his life, he is not without energy.

RITA, 60s to 70s, his wife.

LISA, late 30s, their daughter.

CURTIS, 30s, their son.

A NURSE, 40s.

BRIAN, 27 to 35, a very attractive real estate broker.

## **TIME AND PLACE**

### **ACT ONE**

“The Lyons”

One evening in a Manhattan hospital room.

### **ACT TWO**

Scene 1: “Location, Location, Location”

One week later, a vacant studio apartment.

Scene 2: “Most Poor Sons of Bitches”

Three days later in a hospital room.

# THE LYONS

## ACT ONE

### “The Lyons”

*A hospital room, the bed and two chairs. Ben Lyons, a curmudgeon, is in bed, attached to a drip and perhaps a monitor. A vast array of medication sits on the table next to the bed. There are some get well cards and the remnants of an assorted box of chocolates on the window sill. Ben is watching as the Nurse makes a notation on his chart. Rita, Ben's wife, is seated in a chair, looking through an issue of House Beautiful. Rita turns a page in her magazine.*

RITA. Look at that.

BEN. What?

RITA. What?

BEN. What'd you say?

RITA. I thought you were sleeping.

BEN. What'd you say?

RITA. (*The Nurse exits.*) I said look at that.

BEN. Look at what?

RITA. I'm trying to get ideas — for the living room.

BEN. I like the living room.

RITA. Yes, I know dear, but I don't. I hate it. I've always hated it.

BEN. (*Under his breath.*) Christ.

RITA. I'm trying to remember where I saw it. This room. The most *beautiful room*. Maybe a magazine. Pale blue walls. Icy blue. Glacier blue. *Stunning*. And a sofa — the *exact* same color in a silk moiré — but the same cold blue, like icicles, so it almost disappears

into the wall. Gorgeous! It wasn't a magazine. I saw it, I think. I think I saw it. I mean in person — Bunny Barsch! Remember Bunny Barsch? She always had fantastic taste, beautiful taste, elegant taste. Like goyim. Of course that was years ago, then she had that accident and she was never quite the same. I don't even know where she lives now. Frieda Bronstein told me she was *arrested*. Can you believe that? For shoplifting. *Lipsticks* of all things. I suppose you never really know what people are like, behind closed doors. Then you find out one day. You look back and you realize and lots of things make perfect sense. For instance whatever happened to that Limoges I lent her. Service for twelve with a soup tureen and a matching ladle and a gravy boat with a scroll pattern —

BEN. *What the fuck are you talking about!?*

RITA. Is filthy language really called for?

BEN. Dear fucking god.

RITA. You know I don't like it. You never used to curse. You used to just shoot icy glares. Now every other word out of your mouth is shit and fuck and cocksucker. I don't think it's becoming.

BEN. Go fuck yourself.

RITA. There. You see? You see? It's as if you're incapable of having a decent conversation.

BEN. I'm not.

RITA. When did you get to be so vulgar?

BEN. My head hurts.

RITA. I'm sure if they thought you needed more pain medication they'd give it to you. Isn't that what that drip is? Isn't that what it's for? You don't want to get addicted.

BEN. Why not? What's the difference?

RITA. Well ... I don't know but it doesn't seem like a very good idea. Do you want to look at pictures for the living room?

BEN. I like the living room.

RITA. I know, dear. You said that. But everything is so threadbare. And I *never* liked it. Not really. And you never let me buy anything really nice. Money, money, money.

BEN. It's comfortable.

RITA. What would you think of a Marrakech theme? You know, Middle Eastern.

BEN. I'm getting a headache.

RITA. I mean, I realize you won't actually *be there* to enjoy it, but I'd like to think you'd like it.



BEN. I wouldn't.

RITA. Try to keep an open mind. Burnt desert colors, pointed arches, mosaics on the floor.

BEN. I don't care.

RITA. It'd be sweet. Think Bedouin.

BEN. Who gives a shit.

RITA. You could feign interest to be polite.

BEN. I don't want to. Why should I?

RITA. Is it so much to ask? To pretend that you care? I have been saddled with the same living room furniture for thirty years. All mismatched and grotesque. Every stain on every piece of fabric is a reminder of some horrible thing, some disastrous day that I had to live through. Is it too much to want a fresh start? Is it too much to hope for a clean palate. I look at the sofa. I know it was cream when we bought it. Now it's just some washed-out shade of dashed hopes. The chairs are the color of disgust. And the carpet is matted down with resignation.

BEN. What the hell does that mean?

RITA. Is it wrong of me to want a new beginning? I'm not that old. I'm not so old that I should just give up. People who quit are quitters and people who fight are fighters — well, that's sort of obvious, isn't it? I don't want to just dry up and crumble away. Now, you can participate or you can just complain. *(She returns to her magazine. Beat.)*

BEN. I'm dying, Rita.

RITA. Yes, I know. But try to be positive. My mother used to say "Dying's not so bad. Not when you consider the alternative." Was that it? Is that what she said? Maybe it was the other way around.

BEN. I'm scared.

RITA. Of what? Jews don't believe in hell.

BEN. Some do.

RITA. We don't.

BEN. You mean *you* don't.

RITA. You mean you do? You believe in hell?

BEN. I don't know.

RITA. Well, even if there is a hell, I can't believe you're going. I mean it's a little grandiose of you, don't you think, to think you're going to hell? Who are you to get into hell? What have you ever done? Were you nice? No. But so what? Who's nice? And isn't hell really for people like Hitler and Pol Pot? You're just a little man

with little sins, if you believe in sin. Try not to think about it. What do you think of Chinese modern? Everything low, low to the ground. Eating on pillows and sleeping on mats. Or the other way around. Do you think you'd like that?

BEN. No.

RITA. Fine. (*She closes the magazine. Beat.*) Do you want to play cards?

BEN. No.

RITA. Do you want to watch TV?

BEN. No.

RITA. Do you want to stare blankly into space?

BEN. Are the kids coming?

RITA. Lisa's on her way. I told her to call Curtis.

BEN. Oh god, does he have to come!?

RITA. What do you mean?

BEN. I don't like him.

RITA. That's a terrible thing to say.

BEN. He's creepy.

RITA. He's your son!

BEN. He doesn't like me.

RITA. (*Dismissive.*) Well.

BEN. He's so "affected."

RITA. By what? What do you mean?

BEN. And what kind of name is Curtis anyway? I named him Hilly, after my father.

RITA. No one thought that was a good idea.

BEN. He was a good man. My father was a good man.

RITA. Didn't he sell Zyklon B to the Nazis during World War Two?

BEN. He sold *sweaters*.

RITA. I remember it differently.

BEN. They never proved anything! Not a goddamn thing! He was kind and caring and firm. And he could fish.

RITA. So?

BEN. He was an athlete. (*She returns to her magazine.*)

RITA. So the man could fish. Isn't that something.

BEN. Everyone liked him. He was a man's man.

RITA. I don't even know what that means. What does that mean? It sounds homosexual.

BEN. It's the opposite. It's someone very manly.

RITA. (*Re: the magazine.*) French provincial?  
BEN. He would've hated Curtis.  
RITA. Because he doesn't fish?  
BEN. Because he's homosexual.  
RITA. You see? You see there? Curtis is a man's man. I mean in the actual, literal meaning of the word.  
BEN. I think about him a lot. I think about him all the time.  
RITA. Curtis? I thought he never crossed your mind.  
BEN. My father.  
RITA. Oh.  
BEN. I still miss him. He's been gone all these years and I can still hear his voice and smell his odor.  
RITA. He had an odor?  
BEN. A scent.  
RITA. You said odor. You mean like BO? Like body odor?  
BEN. Like hard work. Like the outdoors.  
RITA. I don't remember that.  
BEN. You barely knew him.  
RITA. But I'd remember if he smelled funny.  
BEN. He didn't smell funny.  
RITA. All right then, if he smelled bad.  
BEN. Stop saying that!  
RITA. You brought it up. It's your theory. Your father smelled. You said it.  
BEN. Oh, shut the fuck up.  
RITA. I never said he smelled. You did.  
BEN. He didn't smell! I mean he smelled like himself. Everyone smells. Everyone smells like who they are. I smell. You smell. Everyone smells like something!  
RITA. Fine.  
BEN. You're just trying to get under my skin. I can't walk out of the room so you have me where you want me. I'm trapped. I have to lie here and listen to you. You knew what I meant. You knew what I meant all along. My father was a great man, a giant man and you just want to tear him down. You want to degrade him and I have to lie here while you go on and on!  
RITA. You're very crabby.  
BEN. Fuck you!  
RITA. This cancer eating away at you, has put you in a terrible mood, a foul humor.

# THE LYONS

by Nicky Silver

3M, 3W

THE LYONS starts in a hospital room. As Ben Lyons lies dying, his wife of forty years, Rita, flips through decorating magazines, planning a living room make-over. "I know you won't actually be there to enjoy it, but I'd like to think you'd like it." It's clear Ben and Rita have been at war for many years, and that Ben's impending demise has brought no relief. When they're joined by their children, Lisa and Curtis, all efforts at a pleasant visit or a sentimental goodbye to the dying patriarch are soon abandoned. Terrible secrets and vicious accusations replace sentimental memories. In Act Two we follow Curtis. His desperate attempt to make a new connection ends so disastrously that the remaining Lyons are reunited at the hospital. We watch as each of them take the first tentative steps toward new human connection.

*"Hilariously frank, clear-sighted, compassionate and forgiving ... laughter that rises in close and regular waves ... Sure, from a distance the title characters of THE LYONS ... are hilarious as they kick the ego out of one another. But look at them close — no, closer — and you're likely to find an intimate mirror of your own frightened self ... Welcome to Broadway at last, Mr. Silver. And might I add that that this cozy-but-nasty family portrait is just the right vehicle to bring you here?"* —The New York Times

*"Silver's humor is mordant, dark and rich. He's a writer who knows all too well the unsaid hurt that can infect families."* —Associated Press

*"Black-comedy perfection."*

—The Hollywood Reporter

*"Silver's in top form ... As comedy about death, THE LYONS isn't trying to make a case for freshness or formal innovation. It's simply trying tell a funny, furious little tale of family annihilation with honesty, savagery, and humanity, a story about how we all, ultimately, pick out our own urns. It succeeds marvelously."* —New York Magazine

*"Smart and funny and moving."*

—The New York Observer

Also by Nicky Silver  
THE FOOD CHAIN  
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