

The play *Lost in Yonkers* is set in New York City during the 1940s. In the play, brothers Arty and Jay live with their grandmother and Aunt Bella in an apartment above the family's candy store. In this excerpt, the boys are falling asleep after Jay visits the store for a midnight snack of ice cream when their Uncle Louie shows up unexpectedly. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from **Lost in Yonkers**
by Neil Simon

(They put out the flashlight and turn to go to sleep . . . A moment passes . . . Then the front door opens. We see a man in a hat enter, closing the door, then slowly, quietly cross toward the window. He carries a small black bag)

JAY Who's that?

5 *(Turning the flashlight on the man)*

LOUIE Get that light outa my face and go back to sleep, kid.

JAY There's nothing here to steal, mister. I swear.

LOUIE Is that you, Jay?

JAY Yeah. Who are you?

10 LOUIE It's Uncle Louie.

JAY Uncle Louie? No kidding? . . . Arty! It's Uncle Louie.

ARTY Uncle Louie? . . . Really? Hi, Uncle Louie.

LOUIE Is that Arty?

ARTY Yeah. It's Arty . . . Hi, Uncle Louie.

15 LOUIE Wait a second. *(LOUIE turns on the lamp. LOUIE KURNITZ is about thirty-six years old. He wears a double-breasted suit with a hanky in the breast pocket, black pointy shoes, a dark blue shirt, and a loud tie. He also wears a fedora hat and carries a small black satchel, not unlike a doctor's bag)* Whaddya know? Look at you! Couple a big guys now, ain't you? . . . You don't come around for
20 a while and you grow up on me . . . Come here. Come on. I want a hug. You heard me. Move it. *(The boys look at each other, not thinking LOUIE was the hugging type. They quickly climb out of bed and go to him. He puts his arms*

around both their shoulders and pulls them in to him. He looks at JAY) Picture of
your mother. Pretty woman, your mother . . . (To ARTY) And you. You look like a
25 little bull terrier. Is that what you are, a bull terrier? (He musses ARTY's hair)

ARTY Yeah, I guess so.

LOUIE (Fakes a punch at JAY's midsection) Hey, watch it! What are you now, a
middleweight or what? Who's been beefin' you up?

JAY Aunt Bella. She's a good cook.

30 LOUIE (Taking off his hat) And a couple a midnight trips down to the ice cream
freezer, heh? Diggin' into the boysenberry with your flashlight? . . . That's
breakin' and enterin', kid. Two to five years.

JAY You saw me?

LOUIE (Crosses to GRANDMA's door and listens) I been down there since Ma closed
35 the store.

JAY Sitting in the dark?

LOUIE Yeah. Waitin' for her to go to sleep. I wasn't in no mood for long
conversations.

JAY (Looks at ARTY, then at LOUIE) I just took a fingerful, that's all. I love
40 boysenberry.

LOUIE Big mistake, kid. Mom reads fingerprints. She'll nail you in the morning.

JAY Are you serious?

LOUIE Get outa here. What are you? A couple a pushovers? Like your old man
. . . What'd he bring up for you, Arty? A thumbful of pistachio?

45 ARTY No. Nothing. I wasn't hungry.

LOUIE You think your pop and I didn't do that when we were kids? That was the
beauty part. Never took nothin' durin' the day. A ton a ice cream, a store full a
candy, anything we wanted. Never took nothin' . . . But as soon as Ma let her

50 braids down and turned out the lights, we were down there lappin' up the cream and meowin' like cats . . . Ain't that the way? It's only fun when there's a chance a gettin' caught. Nothin' sweeter than danger, boys, am I right?

JAY I guess so.

LOUIE Damn right.

ARTY I didn't know Pop was like that.

55 LOUIE Yeah, well, he was no good at it anyway. Ma knew what was goin' on. She could tell if there was salt missin' from a pretzel . . . But she wouldn't say nothin'. She'd come up from the store with the milk, siddown for breakfast, knowin' that two scoops of everything was missin', and she'd just stare at you . . . right into your eyeballs, pupil to pupil . . . never blinkin' . . . Her eyes
60 looked like two district attorneys . . . and Eddie couldn't take the pressure. He'd always crack. Tears would start rollin' down his cheeks like a wet confession . . . and Whack, he'd get that big German hand right across the head . . . But not me. I'd stare her right back until her eyelids started to weigh ten pounds each . . . And she'd turn away from me, down for the count . . . And you know what?
65 She loved it . . . because I knew how to take care of myself . . . Yeah, me and Ma loved to put on the gloves and go the distance.