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# **cicada**

By  
**JERRE DYE**

**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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JERRE DYE

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(CICADA)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-352-7

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*cicada* was workshopped and premiered through Voices of the South Theatreworks, Memphis, in 2009.

CAST:

LILY .....Alice Berry  
ACE..... Adam Maldonado  
LANORA..... Cecelia Wingate  
PREACHER.....Steve Swift  
MOMMA ..... Virginia Ralph  
DAD .....Jerre Dye  
GRANNY..... Susan Chrietzberg  
AUNT SISTER.....Elaine Blanchard  
CHORUS OF WOMEN..... Ondine Geary, Ashley Innerarity

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Leslie Ann Barker  
Producer ..... Jenny Odle Madden  
Sound Design .....David Newsome  
Original Music ..... Virginia Ralph  
Lighting Design ..... Laurie Land, Jared Land  
Costume Design.....Joyce Bamman  
Stage Management..... Lena Wallace Black  
Assistant Director.....Sean Christian Taylor

The play was later premiered in 2014 by Route 66 Theatre Company at the Greenhouse Theatre Center in Chicago.

#### CAST

LILY ..... Amy Matheny  
ACE..... Aaron Kirby  
LANORA..... Cecelia Wingate  
PREACHER.....Robert Breuler  
DAD .....Josh Bywater  
MOMMA ..... Stacy Stoltz  
GRANNY..... Susan Monts-Bologna  
AUNT SISTER ..... Melissa Riemer  
BIG SIS ..... Elodie Tougne

#### PRODUCTION:

Director .....Erica Weiss  
Scenic and Lighting Designer.....Brian Sidney Bembridge  
Original Music/Sound Designer ..... Christopher Kriz  
Costume Designer.....Alarie Hammock  
Properties ..... Jesse Gaffney  
Dialect Coach.....Eva Breneman  
Production Manager..... Janice Pytel  
Stage Manager ..... Corinne Kabat  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Matthew Bonaccorso  
Assistant Director..... Rebecca Willingham  
Movement Consultant..... Alexis Atwill  
Dramaturg ..... Christopher Tiffany



# **cicada**

## **CHARACTERS**

LILY: 30s, a mother.

ACE: 17, Lily's son.

LANORA: Over 60, a widow, Lily's neighbor.

PREACHER: LaNora's husband, a ghost.

MAN/DAD: Lily's husband and Ace's father, a ghost.

MOMMA: Lily's mother, a ghost, a CHORUS member.

GRANNY DUVALL: Lily's grandmother, a ghost, a CHORUS member.

BIG SIS: 10, Lily's older sister, a ghost, a CHORUS member.

AUNT SISTER: Lily's great aunt, a ghost, a CHORUS member.

PLACE: Rural Mississippi. A house in decline near the railroad tracks. An overgrown yard.

TIME: July 1974. The play begins before dawn on July 29 and ends on the morning of July 30.

Production notes can be found in the back of the book.



# cicada

## The pine sap of it

*(It's late July. The sounds of a rural Mississippi night fill the space. The only sources of light are from the moon and a porch light. Faintly, we hear whispers and broken conversation. A mysterious CHORUS of shadows stir in silhouette. They follow their nightly routine, wandering the house, keeping watch.)*

## “Prologue Song”

CHORUS.

A SOUTHERN NIGHT  
THE AIR IS LIQUID, FAMILIAR  
WINDCHIMES ON THE PORCH  
THE SETTLING HOUSE  
SHUFFLING OF OLD GHOSTS KNOWN AND  
UNKNOWN  
THE DULL HUM OF THE POWER LINES  
OTHER VOICES, OTHER LIVES  
SO UNBELIEVABLY FAR AWAY FROM YOUR OWN  
BODIES TURNING, SLOWLY STIRRING IN THE HEAT  
SOUND ASLEEP AND DON'T EVEN KNOW IT  
BURIED IN WHITE SHEETS AND MEMORIES  
A STAGNANT NIGHT FECUND WITH POSSIBILITY

*(ACE, a teenage boy, sits on the edge of his bed. He stares out his open bedroom window into the night, wrapped in a well-worn quilt. He shines in the moonlight.*

*On the other side of the stage sits LILY. She is alone at a small kitchen table in dim light. The small transistor radio beside her speaks.)*

RADIO (*V.O.*). “And verily I say unto you ... whosoever believes in Him shall not perish ... but shall have everlasting life.” Lemme say it again. “Whosoever believes in him SHALL NOT perish, but have everlasting life ... everlasting ...”

*(The radio softens as ACE looks out his bedroom window.)*

ACE (*listening*). I hear Momma’s late night radio talkin’ at me through the cracks in the plaster walls, talkin’ about streets a’gold and life everlastin’.

RADIO (*V.O.*). And the church said ...

CHORUS (*unison, softly*). Amen.

ACE. But what’s the use of forever when things keep bein’ the same?

*(LILY turns the channel on the transistor radio, arriving on a heartbroken country song. The CHORUS begins to stir again. One member places a bowl of fresh tomatoes on the table. Another takes LILY’s cigarette from her fingers and snubs it out. Yet another member places a deck of cards on the table in front of her. LILY does not seem to see the CHORUS as they perform these routines.)*

ACE (*cont’d*). There’s ghosts in this house. Everywhere. Stubborn ones. Heels dug in.

Lingerin’ ’round corners, pacin’ the floors, makin’ themselves known here and again. Emptied out shells clingin’ to anything left livin’. Makin’ sense of the darkness. Troublin’ night with even more night.

*(ACE pulls out an old picture of his father from beneath his mattress. The CHORUS reacts. He examines the picture.)*

ACE (*cont’d*). When you die inside this house you get stuck, I think. Held up in the pine sap of it. Wedged in between

the floorboards like an old penny. Soul goes to flyin' out the window, and I'll be damned if it don't get hung up in the drapes. Hangin' there forever. Suspended in nothin' wantin' somethin'. Cold stars way away.

Whole lives stitched up in the hem of a quilt. Left to lay there, starin' up at the cracks in the ceilin' for all eternity. Livin' on longin' and little else. Been around it my whole life. Ghosts everywhere. Stuck right here in this house with me. And Momma.

*(LILY takes a long drag off her cigarette.)*

*ACE examines the picture again.)*

ACE (*cont'd*). 'Cept for you.

*(The CHORUS reacts.)*

ACE (*cont'd*). Hard to breathe here, sometimes. Much less, think. Especially when quilts have points of view and floorboards have opinions. Walls feelin' sorry for you. Cryin'.

*(LILY begins playing solitaire.)*

*ACE hears her stirring in the next room and puts the photo away. He closes his eyes, listening for his mother in the next room.)*

ACE (*cont'd*). Momma's playin' solitaire again, the cards black wings flappin' as they meet the table. Three of hearts ... (*Sound of a card on the table.*) red king ... (*Sound of a card on the table.*) black queen ...

*(LILY pulls the ace of hearts.)*

LILY (*under her breath*). Ace.

*(A chorus member turns down the volume on the radio, so they can all listen together for the sound of a train they know is coming.)*

LILY (*cont'd*). Ace!

ACE. I hear my name through these walls—through the damp wallpaper, streetlamp buzzin' in moth burn, the road like a skillet, still hot from the hand of noon ...

LILY. Ace?

ACE. I don't answer her.

LILY. Ace?

ACE. There are two kinds of ghosts ...

*(Train sounds grow in intensity.)*

LILY (*anxiously checks her watch, to herself*). What time is it?

ACE. The ones you inherit / and the ones you choose. Night after night, window open, radio groanin', cards slappin' one after the other upon the kitchen table.

LILY (*to herself*). It's late.

Two of hearts ... three of diamonds ...

ACE. This is how she forgets. This is how she disappears.

LILY (*voice rising with the sound of the train*). It'll pass. It'll pass. It'll pass.

It'll pass. It'll pass. It'll pass ... (*Continues under the action.*)

*(LILY rises and walks toward the window, the train sounds moving into abstraction—the train seeming to rush through the center of the house. One last, long, bone-shattering whistle as LILY covers her ears and eyes. The CHORUS exits briskly as LILY yells out of the kitchen window.)*

LILY (*cont'd*). And screw you, jackass! You hear me? Screw you!

(*Silence.*

*LILY turns. She sees ACE standing in the doorway, wrapped in his quilt.)*

ACE. Hey, you.

(*Their eyes connect.*)

LILY. What?

ACE. I said, "Hey, you."

LILY. Hey.

ACE. You keep yellin' out the window like that, they're gonna come lock you up.

LILY. That's not funny and don't drag the quilt across the kitchen floor. It isn't swept.

ACE. Drive up here in a white truck and cart you off to Whitfield / droolin' in a straightjacket 'fore you can say Jack Robinson.

LILY. That's not cute.

I fail to see the humor in mental illness, Ace. That's ugly.

(*ACE grabs LILY's coffee mug. He smells it.*)

LILY (*cont'd*). It's decaf.

ACE. It's bourbon.

LILY. It's decaf and bourbon. I'm nervous. Do you love me?

ACE. Yes, I love you.

LILY. How much?

ACE. Whole bunch.

(*She embraces her son.*)

LILY. How much?

ACE. Come on, Lily.

LILY. How much?

ACE. Very much. You've been smokin'.

LILY. Just one.

ACE. Or twelve.

LILY. Don't change the subject and don't call me by my first name. (*Embracing him tighter.*) Say it!

ACE. Say what?

LILY. You know what I'm talkin' ... say it.

ACE. Noooooowha.

LILY. "Like Jesus opened his arms and died."

ACE. I'm not sayin' it. It's creepy.

LILY. It is not creepy. Saaay it.

ACE. I can't breathe, Lily. You're stranglin' me.

LILY. I'm not lettin' you go until you say it and stop callin' me by my first name.

ACE (*giving in*). Dear God, "like Jesus opened his arms and died!" I love you "like Jesus opened his arms and died" is how much! There. Happy?

LILY (*laughing, releasing him*). I am.

ACE. It's weird.

LILY. You didn't think it was weird when you were a baby.

ACE. I was a weird child.

LILY. You were a perfect child, and for the record, there is nothin' weird about the death, resurrection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ our Lord and ...

ACE. Can you actually HEAR yourself speakin' when the words come out?

LILY. The crucifixion is a beautiful thing, Ace.

ACE. What the hell do you know about crucifixions? You don't even go to church. You don't go anywh—

LILY. For your damn information, you do not have to go to church to believe in the death and resurrection of / Jesus Christ. And you better trust me when I say I know a goddamn thing or two about sacrifice, you hear me?

ACE. OK ... OK ...

Calm down.

LILY. Calm down?

ACE. Yeah. Calm ...

LILY. Was that your goal in comin' down here? To calm me down?

To cheer me up? Is this your idea of cheerin' me up, Ace?

ACE (*under his breath*). At your service.

LILY. What did you say to me?

ACE. Nothin'.

LILY. Because I do not appreciate bein' talked to like I'm ...

ACE. I'm sorry.

LILY. Not one bit, Ace!

ACE. I'm sorry.

LILY. NOT ONE BIT!

(*Silence.*)

ACE. Yes, ma'am.

LILY (*in tears*). And don't you patronize me!

(*A moment. ACE quickly embraces his mother.*)

ACE. Shhhhhh ... I'm sorry. (*She calms in his arms.*) I'm being silly. Shhhhhhhhh. Lady. It's OK.

LILY. If I could just / get a little sleep.

ACE. I know.

I know. Let me fix you somethin' ... some milk or somethin'.

LILY. I have coffee.

ACE. And bourbon.

LILY. Don't push it.

ACE (*acknowledging the tomatoes on the table*). You puttin' up tomatoes today?

LILY (*collecting herself*). I was gonna make a big batch a chow-chow, 'course hardly see the point, now. Halfway decent ones gone.

ACE. Gone?

LILY. Gone.

ACE. Gone where?

LILY. Gave 'em away.

ACE. Why'd you give 'em away?

LILY. It's neighborly. That's what neighbors do. They are neighborly.

ACE. So, you walked up and down the block at dusk sneakin' paper sacks of tomatoes onto people's front porches.

LILY. That is correct.

ACE. And why would you give 'em away yesterday, if you need the self-same tomatoes for chow-chow today?

LILY. Because yesterday I was neighborly, and today I am not.

ACE (*looks out the window*). Want me run across the street and snag the bag you left on the Johnson's porch?

LILY. What? They haven't brought 'em in yet? (*She rushes to the window too.*) That Eileen Johnson! That's the last (*Spelling.*) D-A-M-N thing I do for that rotted woman.

ACE. Easy now.

LILY. Always s'nasty to me, 'cause Momma wouldn't sell that damn land to Rainey.



ACE. They're outta town. Milt's brother from Mantachee drowned a couple a days ago and they took off for the funeral. *(Goes for the paper.)* Look.

LILY. I don't read that paper no more.

ACE. Also up on that trashy-ass flashin' sign in front of Pickle's Funeral Parlor.

LILY. How the hell am I suppose to know which Johnson died? They breed like flies. Prolly have a damn relative die every damn week. *(She gazes at heaven.)* I didn't mean that! *(Pressing palms into eye sockets.)*

ACE *(slowly putting away the paper)*. Yeah, ya did.

LILY. I know. See? That's my problem. I'm not a nice person. What's wrong with me?

We don't hate anyone, Ace.

ACE. We don't?

LILY. No! We don't. And I don't.

ACE. I just don't think it's worth havin' a fit over.

*(The ghost of LILY's MOMMA appears. MOMMA wraps her apron across her hips and ties the strings as the scene continues.)*

LILY. Don't call 'em "fits," kay? Momma had fits. Always with her damn fits.

Hated her for it. *(Looking upwards toward heaven again.)*  
See. I didn't mean that either, Momma.

*(MOMMA reacts. LILY feels her judgment in the back of her skull ... behind her eyes.)*

ACE. You all right?

*(MOMMA exits.)*

LILY. My eyes hurt.

ACE. Want me to rub it out?

LILY. Oh God, please. Yes. That'd be nice.

*(LILY is seated. ACE moves around to the back of the chair and begins rubbing her temples.)*

LILY. Do you love me?

ACE. You know I do.

LILY. I just need to hear it sometimes.

ACE. I know.

LILY. Is that bad? It's bad. It is.

ACE. Hey ... hey ...

LILY. But I love you so much.

ACE. I know.

LILY. I just ... I love you so, so much you can't possibly ...

ACE. I know.

LILY. No. You can't, actually. You just ...

ACE. I know.

*(LILY reaches around with both arms on either side of the chair and gently squeezes the back of ACE's legs as he continues to massage her temples. She begins to relax.)*

LILY. Didn't do a damn thing but stare out that window all day today ... summer grabbin' ahold of everything. Chargin' everything so fast. I was imaginin' what it would be like if one mornin' you and me were the only ones left. Like everybody just disappeared off the face of the earth. Armageddon. Houses empty, TV goin' in the distance, lawn mower runnin' in the Johnson's yard, telephone poles buzzin', not a single voice movin' through 'em. Just us.

ACE. And these sad ass *tomatas*.

LILY. What's left of 'em. (*Amused and very relaxed.*) Yeah.  
Sleepy all the sudden.

ACE (*still massaging*). Good. Sleep.

LILY. Just me and you like a king and a queen, swingin' in the swing, eatin' the ripe ones and throwin' the green ones over the fence into LaNora's yard. How 'bout that?

ACE. Helluva way to spend my birthday.

LILY. Oh, no! Oh, shit. No. No.

ACE. Shhhhhh ... now.

LILY. It's tomorrow.

ACE. Hush ...

LILY (*even sleepier*). Shit baby, I almost forgot. Oh my God.  
I'm so sorry. What's wrong with me ...

ACE (*still massaging*). Shhhhhh ... hush now.

LILY. Tomorrow's your birthday.

ACE. Yeah.

LILY. Oh God, you're so grown. I just don't know if I like that.

ACE. Shhhhhh ...

LILY. Don't do that, OK?

ACE. Do what?

LILY. Grow up.

ACE. OK.

LILY. Just don't.

ACE. OK.

LILY. You promise?

ACE. Shhhhhh ...

*(We hear the first sound of cicadas in the night.)*

ACE (*cont'd*). Listen to that.

LILY (*sleepily*). I'm not ready.

ACE. You hear 'em?

*(ACE moves away from LILY, looking out, listening deeply to the cicada sounds rising.)*

LILY. So old.

*(The MAN appears in silhouette. ACE senses the presence of this single, shadowed figure.*

*The cicada sounds penetrate the world, yet LILY doesn't seem to hear them. Instead, she sits nearly slack in her chair as the sounds grow in intensity.)*

ACE. How do they make that sound?

LILY (*drowsily*). A grown man. So beautiful, standin' there.

ACE. Glass wings pushin' LILY. I'll to sing to you ...  
presence into the night ...

A thin-reed scream ...

The world closing in ...

Slowly ... all around.

Make your favorite cake ...

*(Almost nodding off.)* White  
cake ... chocolate frosting.

If I can just ... sleep through  
the night ... then ... then I  
... could ...

*(The CHORUS has entered, softly singing a hollowed-out version of "Happy Birthday." They lift LILY from her chair as if she were a marionette. They take her sleepwalking body offstage.*

*Meanwhile, ACE continues to stare out at the night, the silhouette of the MAN fading as darkness turns to day.)*