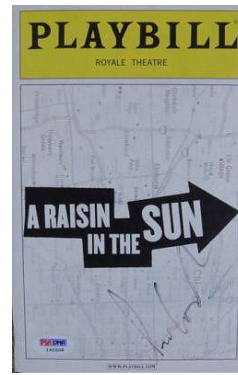


*Act/Scene summaries of.....*

## **“A Raisin in the Sun” by Lorraine Hansberry**



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### **Act I, Scene 1**

The Younger family lives in a cramped, "furniture crowded" apartment that is clearly too small for its five occupants in one of the poorer sections of Southside Chicago. Walter Lee wants to invest Mama's \$10,000 insurance check in a liquor store venture with two of his friends. Because of her religious convictions against liquor drinking, Mama is uninterested in Walter's dream of getting rich quickly with this scheme. Ruth, Walter's wife, is so exhausted from overwork that she too is unsympathetic to Walter's obsession with the money. Mama makes it clear that part of the check will go toward Beneatha's education in medical school. At the beginning of the play, money is the focal point of everyone's conversation, leading to arguments. Walter leaves for his chauffeur's job, and Travis leaves for school. Ruth prepares for her job as a cleaning woman as Mama reprimands Beneatha about her fresh talk. At the end of the scene, Mama discovers that Ruth has fainted and fallen to the floor.

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### **Act I, Scene 2**

The following morning, Saturday, is the day that the check is expected to arrive. Beneatha and Mama are busy doing weekend housecleaning when Ruth comes in, announcing sadly that she is pregnant. Mama is upset when she realizes that Ruth is contemplating an abortion. Joseph Asagai brings Beneatha a gift of African records and some Nigerian robes. After he leaves, Travis brings in the insurance check from the mailbox, and Walter seizes this opportunity to discuss his business plans again. Mama, however, ignores Walter in the same way that Walter earlier ignored Ruth's attempts to tell him about her pregnancy. Mama eventually has to be the one to tell him about Ruth's dilemma and is surprised that his desire for the money overshadows his concern for both Ruth and his unborn child.

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## Act II, Scene 1

Later that Saturday, dressed in her new Nigerian robes and headdress, Beneatha dances to African music while simultaneously giving Ruth an impromptu lesson in its significance. Walter comes in, after having had a few too many drinks, and joins in Beneatha's ritualistic dance. The doorbell rings suddenly, and George Murchison arrives for his theater date with Beneatha. He gets into a heated debate with her over the history and heritage of black people, all of which he belittles as insignificant. He then antagonizes Walter by dismissing Walter's attempts to discuss his "big" business plans with him.

After George's exit, Walter Lee and Ruth reminisce about their early days together and contrast their early dreams and warm feelings for one another, compared to now, when they seem to be slipping away from one another. Mama returns unexpectedly and announces to Travis especially — and also to Walter and Ruth — that she has put a hefty down payment on a house in an all-white neighborhood. Ruth cannot contain her happiness at the thought of their finally being able to move out of the overcrowded apartment. Walter, however, is crushed by Mama's news; to him, Mama has "butchered his dream."

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## Act II, Scene 2

The scene opens a few weeks later, on a Friday night; packing crates fill the Younger apartment in preparation for the move. Beneatha and George come in from their date and after a brief disagreement, George leaves, puzzled. Mama, still mad over Walter's previous accusation that she "butchered" his dream, decides to entrust Walter with the responsibility for the remaining money, stipulating that he first deposit \$3,000 for Beneatha's education. Filled with renewed hope, Walter tells Travis about his dreams for the future and says that he is about to embark on a new venture — a transaction that will change their lives.

In this scene, another character is introduced, a neighbor, Mrs. Johnson. This character, however, was cut from the original stage production in order to reduce production costs. The most recent editions (the complete version) of *Raisin* includes this character, as did the American Playhouse presentation of this play.

When Mrs. Johnson enters, she brings the Youngers a newspaper that tells of a bombing of a black family's home in an all-white neighborhood. Mrs. Johnson's intent is clearly to belittle the importance of the Youngers' getting away from the horrid

conditions of their cramped apartment. Still, her warning to the Youngers was a reality in 1959, when this play opened, and, unfortunately, in some communities, even today.

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### **Act II, Scene 3**

This scene begins one week later. Ruth and Beneatha are in good spirits; this is the day that the family will move to their new neighborhood. Ruth tells Beneatha that on the previous evening, she and Walter had gone on a date to the movies. Walter comes in and is dancing playfully with Ruth when a white man comes to the door, asking for Lena Younger. Walter tries his new status as "head of the household," by telling the stranger that he handles his mother's "business matters."

The man, Karl Lindner, acting as representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, makes a very generous offer to buy the Youngers' new home (in order to keep them from moving into Clybourne Park). At first, Walter listens then tells Lindner to get out. When Lena returns, they each try to shield her from the reality that Lindner represents by giving her the housewarming gifts they'd purchased. Soon afterwards, Bobo arrives to tell Walter that Willy ran off with their money. Both Mama and Walter explode with feelings of loss, anger, helplessness, and grief.

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### **Act III**

An hour later, having no knowledge of the Youngers' financial reversals, Asagai drops by the apartment, hoping to help with the packing, but instead he is greeted by a changed Beneatha. Seemingly, she is in shock. Very simply, she states, "He gave away the money." Her previous positive idealism has been replaced by a loss of faith in humanity. The money that should have paid for her medical education is gone.

She wants and expects sympathy from Asagai, but instead, he scolds her for her materialistic outlook. (Later, in her often quoted "measure him right" speech, Mama too will challenge Beneatha's ideas about the loss of the money.) Beneatha listens, then agrees to consider Asagai's proposal of marriage, along with his invitation that she move to Nigeria to practice medicine.

Later, Walter comes in and begins searching frantically for Lindner's telephone number while ignoring Beneatha's insults. Mama suggests that they give up on their dream of

moving and that they make themselves satisfied with the apartment in which they are presently living, a suggestion that seems to upset Ruth more than anyone else.

Shortly thereafter, we learn that Walter has decided to accept Lindner's offer of paying them generously not to move in. Aghast, the three Younger women watch as Walter rehearses how he will greet Lindner. However, moved by Mama's word about black pride, Walter changes his mind and disappoints Lindner. He tells him that he and his family have decided to live in Clybourne Park