

## **A DREAM DEFERRED**

Setting: Empty Stage with Small table, two chairs, waste basket

Props: 2 Signs upstage: Centerville Community Theater Auditions tonight for A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry and A Poster: A Play is only a Dream until Performed

Folder of headshots, clipboard, pencils

Script: A Raisin in the Sun

### **Characters**

**A DIRECTOR,**

**A STAGE MANAGER:** Marsha or Marshall

### **Scene One**

**DIRECTOR:** Hi Marsha, Do you have the headshots and information sheets for all those waiting to audition for the show?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Yes, Director. Here is a stack

**DIRECTOR:** Great! Lots of interest, I see! I am encouraged we may actually put up this show! I have been dreaming about this production for almost a year!

**STAGE MANAGER:** That's a long time!

**DIRECTOR:** Not if we want to do an amazing job on this show!

**STAGE MANAGER:** What's special about A Raisin in the Sun?

**DIRECTOR:** (listing off counting his fingers) It only won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. It was written by the first black woman playwright to open a show on Broadway, It took four Tony Award nominations including Best Play, and the screen adaptation won a special award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961. Lorraine Hansberry is celebrated for her profound impact on American culture and the civil rights movement. It's significant!

**STAGE MANAGER:** I never heard of it before.

**DIRECTOR:** Which, the play or the Civil Rights Movement?

**STAGE MANAGER:** We learned about the Civil Rights Movement in school. I just never heard of A Raisin in the Sun.

**DIRECTOR:** You haven't read it?

**STAGE MANAGER:** No. I just wanted something to do and the Producer asked me to Stage Manage.

**DIRECTOR:** (grunts and begins leafing through the folder) Marsha, I don't see the head shot for Jaxon Playwell! Is he not here? I have had my eye on him for months. He is perfect to play the lead, Walter Lee!

**STAGE MANAGER:** I'm sorry! I sent him a special invitation like you asked, but I didn't get a response until today.

**DIRECTOR:** (expectantly) So, he's going to be late? Coming tomorrow night for call-backs?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Well, no. He sends regrets. He has accepted the role of Hoke in Driving Miss Daisy across town. The dates conflict so he cannot do Raisin.

**DIRECTOR:** (slumps) Well, that is sad news. How is it we didn't look at the surrounding theatres to see if there would be a drain on the few minority actors here?

**STAGE MANAGER:** I don't know. Nobody seems to look at that during the season line-up. This year we are up against Driving Miss Daisy and Fences – Everyone seems to want to feature minorities this season. They are doing Ragtime at the Realto and Porgy and Bess at the Opera House. It has happened before.

**DIRECTOR:** (dryly) I am surprised no one is doing a stage play of Gone With the Wind or Glory.

**STAGE MANAGER:** Wha....?

**DIRECTOR:** Well, we will just have to see who shows up then, shall we? Maybe a miracle will happen! We may be surprised with a dead-ringer for Sidney Poitier!

**STAGE MANAGER:** Who?

**DIRECTOR:** Never mind. How's it look out there?

**STAGE MANAGER:** We have a great turnout. I am excited!

**DIRECTOR:** Yes, well, let's get excited when we can get this show cast. It will be a challenge to find enough African-Americans. (looks up at Stage Manager) I'm sorry, is that the current acceptable description?

**STAGE MANAGER:** I think it is 'person of color' now.

**DIRECTOR:** Ok, then. Well, our community theatre doesn't have a lot of actors that fit Hansberry's play. We cannot very well cast it against its original intent with a bunch of White or Asian actors that miss the whole point of A Raisin in the Sun. Color-blind won't work here.

**STAGE MANAGER:** (confused) I didn't know color-blindness was a requirement.

**DIRECTOR:** (looking up in disgust) It isn't, Marsha. Casting without regard to the need for 'persons of color' is.

**STAGE MANAGER:** I guess so.

**DIRECTOR:** Marsha, they are actors, but make-up can only go so far. We wouldn't want to appropriate another race or culture now, would we?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Uh Uh. Whatever.

**DIRECTOR:** So, did you give them the gist of what we are looking for? Do they know the play is set in a poor Chicago tenement apartment at the height of segregation? Do they know the story about the Youngers; a black family whose fortunes are about to change? We need Eight actors. Seven African Americans and One Token White guy. (chuckles at the joke).

**STAGE MANAGER:** (not laughing) Well, here is the list of folks auditioning. We have sixteen interested in Mr. Murchison, and 7 "people of color" for the Younger family.

**DIRECTOR:** Well, that's about right.

**STAGE MANAGER:** The folder has their headshots and list of previous shows and what role they want. Shall I send someone in?

**DIRECTOR:** (with hope and encouragement) Sure, send in the first actor. Hand them an audition side to match color, gender and age. Okay?

### **End Scene One**

### **Scene Two: Sometime Later**

**STAGE MANAGER:** I have the paperwork for the actors chosen.

**DIRECTOR:** You mean those who showed up? The only one chosen was to cast Mr. Murchison from the two men and fourteen women and who wanted that role. Casting Murchison was never going to be an issue. We could always put in a woman and make him a missus; but the Younger family!? We had exactly 7 actors suitable for 7 African American roles...that isn't a choice. That is a disaster waiting to happen.

**STAGE MANAGER** Well, to be fair we have only cast 6 of 7. The Producer wants to hold open the role of Joseph Asagai until we find an actual Nigerian to play him.

**DIRECTOR:** (groans) Do you call this (shakes the folder with the cast papers) a cast? It falls under the category of potential farce!

**STAGE MANAGER:** I don't follow you! I thought Raisin was a drama!

**DIRECTOR:** It is..

**STAGE MANAGER:** Aren't the actors able? It was amazing that exactly the right number of folks showed up for the Youngers!

**DIRECTOR:** (gives the stage manager a jaundiced look) Well, we almost got a cast. Don't forget our phantom Nigerian. How many conflicts on rehearsal and performance dates do we have? Of course, not being available on a show night will disqualify the actor. (Points to Stage Manager in jest and smiles)

**STAGE MANAGER:** (smiles back and nods absently) Let me give you a run-down of conflicts. I'll use the character names, okay? (Director nods) Beneatha has work commitments, five times a week, Ruth is having a root canal three hours before opening night (points to the calendar and hands to Director), and Mama has a hair appointment that will run long so she won't be able to make it to the rehearsal here (she points over DIRECTOR's shoulder), it's highlighted in yellow too (points), Ooh that's Dress Rehearsal! (bites lip)

**DIRECTOR:** What else?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Travis has the Junior High track meet that is over in the next county...it is an overnight, so he'll not be here for (points to the calendar) and these 4 meets. His mom doesn't want him to rehearse past 7 pm on school nights, and he gets frequent migraines.

**DIRECTOR:** (pinches the bridge of his nose, waves her on)

**STAGE MANAGER:** (Ignores DIRECTOR) And Mrs. Johnson has voice lessons that conflict (points) here and here.

**DIRECTOR:** Only two days!

**STAGE MANAGER:** No, two days every week for the rest of rehearsals. She has a speech impediment.

**DIRECTOR:** Anything else I should know about?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Walter Lee has a surgery scheduled for this date (points to calendar) but he hopes he will be able to walk on his knee replacement by...

**DIRECTOR:** (Groans) no...no

**STAGE MANAGER:** (reassures) He'll have a whole week before we open to be in rehab. I think his age won't present a problem. He is willing to dye his grey hair black! And it's hardly noticeable at all that he wears a hearing aid!

**DIRECTOR:** eh?

**STAGE MANAGER** (looks up in puzzlement) What?

**DIRECTOR** (waves her on)

**STAGE MANAGER:** Where were we?

**DIRECTOR:** Walter Lee's grey hair, hearing aid and knee replacement.

**STAGE MANAGER:** He's gonna be great! He has such a good sense of humor! Do you know what he said?

**DIRECTOR:** Do tell.

**STAGE MANAGER:** He says he's Seventy-Eight years young!

**DIRECTOR:** Of course...that would only make Mama 110!

**STAGE MANAGER:** (ignores DIRECTOR) He says he can play a ‘younger’ Younger! Isn’t that cute?

**DIRECTOR:** Is that all, I hope?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Well, Mama does mention one thing that might be a showstopper.

**DIRECTOR:** Showstopper is not an adjective I am comfortable with. What is it beyond missing Dress Rehearsal to do her hair?

**STAGE MANAGER:** She has to leave her calendar open. Her availability is contingent upon her cat going into heat.

**DIRECTOR:** WHAT? (Director leaps to his feet and begins to stalk the Stage Manager)

**STAGE MANAGER:** (backing away) She has a rare Bengal cat and will have to take it to the breeders when the cat goes into heat. She has to transport the cat out of state and will be gone about five days.

**DIRECTOR:** I can’t even....

**STAGE MANAGER:** (watches DIRECTOR warily) So, it is just a little uncertain. We have to wait. We cannot predict. We will be waiting on the cat. (tries to smile)

**DIRECTOR:** Are you kidding me?

**STAGE MANAGER:** I’m not kidding. I’m the stage manager!

**DIRECTOR:** Don’t remind me. (collapses on the desk)

**STAGE MANAGER:**(trying to be encouraging) Guess what? The good news is the actor for George Murchison has zero date conflicts and will do anything else that is needed. He has offered to fill in for anyone who has to be absent from a rehearsal and will understudy all the roles since his part is small!

**DIRECTOR:** He’s going to fill in for who, exactly? George Murchison is the only white guy in the play!

**STAGE MANAGER** (ducks away from DIRECTOR who has taken a swipe at her) he said he could play anyone! He’ll even wear a dress and wig to play Ruth, Beneatha or Mama!

**DIRECTOR:** (under his breath) It IS a farce!

**STAGE MANAGER:** What?

**DIRECTOR:** (head in hands) Never mind. It’s wonderful, Whatever could go wrong?!

**STAGE MANAGER:** (unaware of the sarcasm) He does have one regret.

**DIRECTOR:** And what might that be?

**STAGE MANAGER:** He regrets he cannot understudy Travis.

**DIRECTOR:** (pretends astonishment) And why not?

**STAGE MANAGER:** He can't fit into Travis' costume!

**DIRECTOR:** Why would we expect he could play a ten-year-old boy?

**STAGE MANAGER:** (ignores DIRECTOR again) His data here says he is six feet seven, and two hundred and eighty-five pounds.

**DIRECTOR:** That explains a lot. Wasn't he in the last show? Didn't he play Frankenstein's Monster?

**STAGE MANAGER:** I don't know, but he thinks he is little big to play a small child, I guess.

**DIRECTOR:** I'm glad he noticed (glaring at STAGE MANAGER)

**STAGE MANAGER:** (going on) But there's more! He can run sound and lights!

**DIRECTOR:** (gasps) Presumably from onstage as he portrays the entire Younger family simultaneously?

**STAGE MANAGER:** (confused) Huh? I don't think...

**DIRECTOR:** (head on desk)

**STAGE MANAGER:** What's wrong? We got a cast! We had people audition for the 8 roles we needed. We did the best we could. We've already sold half the tickets! The show must go on!! (smiles at her own brilliance)

**DIRECTOR:** You do realize how much time, money and effort has already been spent on the expectation we could realize this show on stage? I have been dreaming about this show for months! It satisfies a dream! My dream! Hansberry's dream! Martin Luther King Jr's dream!

**STAGE MANAGER:** But, it is only community theatre, the audience won't care. They won't even know the difference!

**DIRECTOR:** (losing it) What do you mean? I'll know the difference, Lorraine Hansberry from her grave will know the difference! We cannot possibly put forth a serious production of this show with hair appointments, track meets, speech impediments, a root canal, a geriatric Walter Lee, and the possibility that Mama's cat might need to get laid during production!

**STAGE MANAGER:** But it might be okay. Nobody expects perfection.

**DIRECTOR:** (last straw) Do you know the poem by Langston Hughes that was the inspiration for this play?

**STAGE MANAGER:** Langston Who?

**DIRECTOR:** Not Who! Hughes!

(Opens the Raisin in the Sun Script and reads)

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

● *or does it explode?*

(**DIRECTOR** tosses his script into the trash can that explodes in a cloud of confetti)

**END**