

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry— Act-by-Act Synopses

ACT I, SCENE 1

The play opens in the cramped, well-worn living room of the Younger family apartment on the Southside of Chicago, sometime between World War II and the present. The stage directions describe the furniture as having once been chosen "with care and love and even hope," but weariness has long since won out. The only natural light struggles through a small kitchen window. The apartment was meant to be temporary—a starting point for a young married couple—but it has become a permanent fixture in the family's life, far outlasting its original purpose.

It is very early in the morning. **Travis**, a sturdy, handsome boy of about ten or eleven, is asleep on the pullout sofa—his "bedroom," since the apartment has no spare room for him. His mother, **Ruth**, enters. She is about thirty years old. The stage directions note that she was once an exceptionally pretty girl, but "disappointment has already begun to hang in her face." She rouses Travis and sends him toward the bathroom while she prepares for the day, carefully orchestrating the family's shared use of the single bathroom they must also share with a neighboring family.

Ruth calls for her husband, **Walter Lee**, to wake up. Walter appears sleepily, described as "a lean, intense young man in his middle thirties, inclined to quick nervous movements and erratic speech habits." Almost immediately, the first thing Walter asks is: "*Check coming today?*"—referring to the life insurance check following the recent death of his father, Walter Younger Sr. Ruth, irritated, reminds him that it was supposed to come Saturday, and it is only Friday.

Walter reads the newspaper while Ruth prepares breakfast. Despite saying he doesn't want scrambled eggs, Ruth scrambles them anyway—a small but telling detail about the state of their marriage. Walter lights a cigarette, which Ruth protests. He tells her she looks young this morning, then quickly qualifies the compliment, which annoys her further. The morning tension between them is thick and habitual.

Travis reenters and asks Ruth for fifty cents for school. Ruth says she doesn't have it, which leads Travis to suggest maybe his grandmother or Walter would have money. He asks if he can earn money after school by helping carry groceries. Ruth doesn't give him a direct answer but sends him to make his bed. When he is ready to leave, they have a tender moment—she teases him, they hug, and her love for him is clear.

Walter enters and overhears that Ruth refused Travis the fifty cents. He gives Travis the money and adds an extra fifty cents so Travis can do something fun—a move that clearly undermines Ruth's decision. Travis leaves cheerfully. Ruth glowers at Walter for contradicting her in front of their son.

Now alone, Walter tries to talk to Ruth about a business idea proposed by his friend **Willy Harris**. Ruth dismisses Willy as a "good-for-nothing loud mouth." Walter pushes back, pointing out that she also called his old friend Charlie Atkins a loud mouth, and Charlie now grosses \$100,000 a year from the dry-cleaning business he invited Walter to join. Walter wants Ruth to help him convince his mother to invest the insurance money in a liquor store he would co-own with Willy and their friend **Bobo**. The cost would require roughly \$10,000 plus a few hundred more in bribes to speed along the liquor license.

Ruth says pointedly: *"You mean graft?"* Walter bristles at the word and defends the practice: *"Baby, don't nothing happen for you in this world 'less you pay somebody off!"*

When Ruth tells him to eat his breakfast, Walter erupts in one of the play's most memorable early speeches, describing the suffocating dynamic he feels trapped in: *"That's it. There you are. Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs...Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say—Your eggs is getting cold!"* He accuses Ruth of failing to build him up the way a man needs from his woman, and then generalizes bitterly that Black women don't understand how to make their men feel like somebody.

Beneatha, Walter's younger sister, enters. She is about twenty, slim and intense like her brother, with a lean, intellectual face. Her speech is noticeably more educated than the rest of the family's, shaped by college. She is trying to get into the bathroom. Walter and Beneatha trade good-natured insults. Walter asks whether she has decided for certain about medical school. She confirms she has. Walter brings up the insurance money: *"Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?"*

Beneatha snaps back that the money belongs to their mother, who can do with it as she pleases. Walter guilties her, noting that Mama might use some of it for Beneatha's tuition—which, if it came from the same pot, would reduce what is available for his liquor store. He suggests that if Beneatha is so interested in sick people, she should *"be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet."* Beneatha is indignant. This exchange clarifies that the money in question is the insurance payout on their deceased father, Walter Younger Sr.

Walter leaves for work, but immediately returns—he needs Ruth to give him money for the bus. Ruth teases him with *"Fifty cents?"* before giving him cab fare. He leaves, and **Lena Younger—Mama**—enters, woken by all the noise.

Mama is described as a woman in her early sixties, full-bodied and strong, with a quiet grace and beauty that takes a moment to notice. Her face reflects a lifetime of endurance. The first thing she does is tend to a small, feeble potted plant on the kitchen windowsill. She says

tenderly: *"Lord, if this little old plant don't get more sun than it's been getting it ain't never going to see spring again."*

Mama questions Ruth about what Travis ate for breakfast, prying in a way that irritates Ruth slightly. She asks why Beneatha and Walter were fighting. Ruth brings up the liquor store idea. Mama says flatly: *"We ain't no business people, Ruth. We just plain working folks."* Ruth defends Walter's need for the chance, however, admitting: *"Something is happening between Walter and me. I don't know what it is—but he needs something—something I can't give him any more."* Mama is morally opposed to a liquor business.

Noticing Ruth's exhaustion, Mama urges her to call in sick, reminding her that they are expecting \$10,000. Ruth confirms the money is Mama's to decide about. When she asks what Mama plans to do with it, Mama explains that some will go toward Beneatha's education, and she has been thinking about using the rest to put a down payment on a house.

Mama reflects on her marriage to Walter Sr. They had moved into the apartment shortly after their wedding and intended to buy a house within a year—but they never did. The years wore on. They lost a baby, a son named Claude, and the loss nearly destroyed Big Walter. Mama says quietly: *"I guess that's how come that man finally worked his self to death like he done. Like he was fighting his own war with this here world that took his baby from him."*

She recalls Big Walter's words about fatherhood and dreams: *"Seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams—but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile."*

Beneatha returns, complaining about the vacuum cleaner noise from upstairs. Ruth scolds her for her language. Beneatha announces she will be home late—she is starting guitar lessons. Mama sighs, noting that Beneatha enrolls in one activity after another and then abandons them all. Beneatha defends herself: *"I don't flit! I—I experiment with different forms of expression."*

Beneatha mentions that she is going out with **George Murchison** tomorrow. Both Mama and Ruth light up—George comes from a wealthy Black family. But Beneatha deflects their enthusiasm, saying she could never be serious about George because *"he's so shallow."* Ruth is astonished that Beneatha has no intention of marrying him. Beneatha points out that George's family would never approve of her anyway, and firmly declares: *"Listen, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet—if I ever get married."*

The word *"if"* sends Mama and Ruth into a gentle panic. Beneatha reassures them she probably will marry, but she is definitely becoming a doctor. Mama says *"God willing,"* and Beneatha responds that she doesn't believe in God. Mama is shocked and slaps her, forcing Beneatha to repeat: *"In my mother's house there is still God."* Mama exits. Beneatha, to Ruth, calls her mother a tyrant but adds quietly: *"But all the tyranny in the world will never put a God in the heavens."*

She leaves. Ruth, covering for Beneatha, goes to Mama's door and tells her Beneatha apologized. Mama reenters, telling Ruth that her children frighten her. Walter is consumed by

money, and Beneatha she simply cannot understand. Ruth comforts her. Mama tends her plant again, saying: *"I always wanted me a garden like I used to see sometimes at the back of the houses down home. This plant is close as I ever got to having one."*

She asks Ruth to sing her song. But Ruth has gone quiet—and then collapses into the chair. Mama cries Ruth's name as the scene ends.

ACT I, SCENE 2

The next morning, everyone except Travis is working, scrubbing the apartment clean. Beneatha is killing cockroaches. Travis is sent outside after complaining about the chemical fumes.

Walter is on the phone, calling for **Willy Harris**, asking about paperwork from a lawyer and whether the investment is still on track. The insurance check has not yet arrived, but will soon. Mama tells Beneatha quietly that she suspects Ruth went to the doctor. There is a loaded implication in the way Mama speaks. Beneatha asks if Ruth might be pregnant, and Mama's ambiguous response suggests it is possible—and that the situation may be more complicated than a simple pregnancy.

The phone rings. Beneatha answers and invites someone over. Mama asks who is coming. Beneatha explains it is **Joseph Asagai**, a Nigerian scholar she knows from school. She pronounces his name for Mama—"Ah-sah-guy"—and begs her not to ask *"a whole lot of ignorant questions about Africans."*

Ruth returns. She confirms she is two months pregnant. The mood in the room shifts. Beneatha asks if it was planned. Ruth tells her to mind her own business. Beneatha catches herself and says: *"I—I think it is wonderful."* Mama notices that Ruth accidentally referred to the doctor as "she," and becomes suspicious. Ruth grows anxious, barely holding herself together, as Mama quietly leads her to lie down.

The doorbell rings and **Asagai** enters. He is described as "a rather dramatic-looking man," warm and lively, carrying a package. He greets Beneatha as *"Alaiyo"*—a Yoruba nickname he has given her. He observes that she seems upset and she jokes: *"Yes, we've got acute ghetto-itis."*

Asagai opens his package, which contains records and a colorful set of Nigerian robes—sent by his sister from Nigeria specifically for Beneatha. He teases her about her hair, which she has chemically relaxed in the American style, calling it *"mutilated hair"* and suggesting she should wear it naturally. Beneatha is sensitive about this, but Asagai insists he is only teasing because she takes everything so seriously.

He recalls meeting Beneatha at school, laughing as he mimics her: *"You came up to me and I thought you were the most serious little thing I had ever seen—you said: 'Mr. Asagai—I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity!'"*

Beneatha does not find it funny. She becomes offended when he suggests that assimilation is popular in her country. He softens, telling her that the robes are a gift from his sister. Beneatha is genuinely moved. He makes clear he has romantic feelings for her. She pushes back, insisting there can be more than one type of feeling between a man and a woman. Asagai disagrees: *"Between a man and a woman there need only be one kind of feeling. I have that for you."*

Mama enters. Asagai greets her graciously, apologizing for coming at such an hour on a Saturday. Mama surprises him by repeating phonetically what Beneatha had told her about Africa. She offers him home-cooked meals—noting that he must be far from his mother. Asagai is genuinely touched.

Before he leaves, Mama asks about the nickname "*Alaiyo*." Asagai explains it is a Yoruba word meaning "*One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough*." Beneatha is visibly moved to learn this.

After Asagai leaves, Mama says warmly that she understands why Beneatha has become so interested in Africa. She exits, and Beneatha tries on the Nigerian dress, attempting to move in front of the mirror as she imagines a Nigerian woman might. Travis catches her and stares. Beneatha dashes off, saying she is going "*to become a queen of the Nile!*"

Ruth returns, insisting she does not need to rest. Travis goes to borrow cleanser from the neighbors. The family debates whether the neighbors are genuinely low on supplies or just being stingy. The doorbell rings—the mailman has arrived.

Travis brings the envelope back. Mama holds it and tells everyone to be quiet: "*It's just a check.*" They open it and stare at the contents in awe—\$10,000. Mama looks at it unhappily, murmuring: "*Ten thousand dollars they give you. Ten thousand dollars.*" She is troubled by the inadequacy of the sum as compensation for a man's life.

She tells Ruth to put it away. Ruth comments that Mama has made herself upset over it. Mama admits that if it were just for herself, she might have put it in savings or given it to the church.

Mama then presses Ruth about where she went. Ruth confirms again that it was a doctor—but Mama confronts her directly: "*You went to see that woman, didn't you?*"—meaning a woman who performs abortions. Ruth defends herself, but the truth hangs in the air.

Walter enters, immediately asking if the money arrived. Mama scolds him for not even offering a Christian greeting first. He confirms that Willy has had the investment agreement put on paper and is ready to move. Mama tells him plainly she will not be investing in liquor.

Walter grows frantic. He shouts: "*WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE LISTEN TO ME TODAY!*" Mama reprimands him. Walter starts to leave. Ruth begs him to stay and talk. Mama orders him to sit and speak to his wife civilly. Ruth erupts: "*Oh, let him go out and drink himself to death! He makes me sick to my stomach!*" Walter fires back: "*And you turn mine too, baby!*"

Ruth retreats to their bedroom and slams the door. Mama warns Walter he has been acting like a crazy man and that Ruth has been patient. Walter claims Ruth does nothing for him. He insists on leaving. Mama says quietly: "*It's dangerous, son...When a man goes outside his home to look for peace.*"

Walter is tired of driving white people around, of opening doors, of servitude. He tells his mother: "*Because it is life, Mama!*" when she asks why he is so obsessed with money. She responds:

"So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life." She insists he should appreciate how far they have come.

She then tells Walter that Ruth is pregnant—and that she believes Ruth is seriously considering an abortion. Walter is stunned but fails to argue against it. He says nothing on behalf of the child. Mama is devastated by his silence, calling him "*a disgrace to your father's memory.*" Ruth reenters and admits that she left a down payment for the procedure.

The act ends in painful silence, with Walter unable or unwilling to fight for his child or his marriage.

ACT II, SCENE 1

The scene takes place later that same day. Ruth is ironing. Beneatha enters in the Nigerian robes Asagai brought her, declaring: *"Enough of this assimilationist junk!"* She puts on one of Asagai's Nigerian records and begins to dance, her eyes going somewhere far away as she sings along in Yoruba. Ruth watches, intrigued.

Walter enters, drunk, and is instantly captivated by the music. He joins Beneatha, grabbing an imaginary spear, crying out about Ethiopia and the glory of African warriors. For a brief, transcendent moment, both siblings are somewhere else entirely—transported by the music toward an ancestral pride they cannot quite name.

George Murchison arrives to take Beneatha to the theater. He is well-dressed, composed, and visibly unimpressed by what he finds. Walter greets him as *"Black Brother!"*—which George flatly rejects. Ruth comments dryly: *"He's had a little to drink...I don't know what her excuse is."*

George tells Beneatha to change—they are going to the theater, not performing in it. Beneatha accuses him of being *"ashamed of his heritage"* and proclaims: *"I hate assimilationist Negroes!"* George condescendingly explains to Ruth that *"assimilationist"* is just a college girl's way of calling people Uncle Toms. Beneatha corrects him furiously: *"It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case oppressive culture!"*

George dismisses African heritage as *"nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!"* Beneatha erupts, defending Africa as the first civilization to smelt iron and to perform surgery while the English were still painting themselves with blue dragons. Ruth pushes her toward the bedroom to change.

While Beneatha changes, Walter tries to connect with George, lying about having been to New York, mocking his shoes, then pivoting to ask about a potential meeting with George's wealthy father to discuss investment ideas. George is polite but noncommittal, which stings Walter. Walter grows bitter, mocking George's college education: it teaches sociology and psychology, he says, but not *"how to be a man"* or *"how to take over and run the world."* George dismisses Walter as bitter. Walter says he is *"a volcano."*

Beneatha returns, changed. George compliments her appearance. As they leave, George refers to Walter—under his breath—as *"Prometheus."* Walter asks Ruth who Prometheus is. She doesn't know.

Alone, Walter redirects his frustration onto Ruth, warning her not to nag him about where he goes or how much money he spends. She tries to calm him, offering hot milk or coffee. He asks bitterly: *"Why you always trying to give me something to eat?"* She says simply: *"What else can I give you, Walter Lee Younger?"* He asks how they ended up speaking to each other with such constant anger. Ruth says softly that life can be better than this.

Mama enters and announces she went downtown to *"tend to some business."* She is evasive. Travis returns home late, and as Ruth scolds him, Mama calls him over and tells him she has bought a house with the insurance money—that it will be his one day.

Walter is furious. Ruth is thrilled. The house has three bedrooms and a yard for Mama's garden. When Mama reveals it is in **Clybourne Park**, however, Ruth's face falls. Walter's anger deepens. Clybourne Park is an all-white neighborhood.

Ruth tries to recover her excitement, asking Mama whether the house has *"a whole lot of sunlight."* Mama says it does. Ruth says goodbye to the old apartment and forgives Travis for coming home late because she no longer has the heart to punish him on such a day.

Alone with Walter, Mama explains her reasoning: *"I just seen my family falling apart today...just falling to pieces in front of my eyes...We was going backwards 'stead of forwards—talking 'bout killing babies and wishing each other was dead."* Walter's response is bitter and wounded: *"You butchered up a dream of mine—you—who always talking 'bout your children's dreams."* He walks out, leaving her alone.

ACT II, SCENE 2

Several weeks later, on a Friday. The apartment is half-packed. Beneatha and George return from a date. He tries to kiss her. She steps back and wants to continue talking. He becomes irritated: *"I want you to cut it out, see—the moody stuff, I mean. I don't like it."* He tells her she is a nice-looking girl and that is enough—she doesn't need atmosphere. He tells her the purpose of school is to *"get grades—to pass the course—to get a degree."* Beneatha says quietly: *"I see"*—and tells him good night.

After George leaves, Mama appears. Beneatha tells her that George is *"a fool."* Mama replies: *"Well—I guess you better not waste your time with no fools."*

The phone rings. It is Walter's employer. He has not come to work in three days. If he isn't there tomorrow, he is fired. As Ruth handles the call, Walter appears in the doorway. He tells Mama and Ruth that for two days he borrowed a car and just drove. Today he couldn't get the car, so he walked. Then he went to the **Green Hat**, a bar where, he says, *"you can just sit there and drink and listen to them three men play and you realize that nothing don't matter worth a damn, but just being there."*

Ruth leaves the room. Mama addresses the empty air, as if to her late husband: *"Oh, Big Walter, is this the harvest of our days?"*

Then she turns to her son and makes a pivotal decision. She tells him: *"I say I been wrong, son. That I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you."* She has paid \$3,500 as a down payment on the house. Of the remaining \$6,500, she wants him to put \$3,000 in a savings account for Beneatha's medical school tuition. The rest—\$3,500—is his to manage as the head of the family: *"It ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting it in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be."*

Walter is overwhelmed, asking if she really trusts him that much. She says: *"I ain't never stop trusting you. Like I ain't never stop loving you."* Walter takes the money and leaves the apartment, visibly transformed.

ACT II, SCENE 3

One week later. Ruth is happily packing. Beneatha enters with a guitar case. Ruth shows her the new curtains she bought for the house. She says Walter has changed—he took her to the movies last night and held her hand.

Walter enters in high spirits, puts on a record, and begins to dance with Ruth. They are playful and tender together, a glimpse of who they might have been. Beneatha teases them, calling them "*old-fashioned Negroes*," and Walter laughingly teases her back—mocking the idea of her as a doctor who stops mid-surgery to ask her patient about his views on civil rights.

The doorbell rings. Beneatha opens it to find a quiet, middle-aged white man in a business suit, holding his hat and a briefcase. He checks a small piece of paper. He is looking for Mrs. Lena Younger.

Walter, now comfortable in his role as "*Man of the House*," welcomes the visitor. The man introduces himself as **Karl Lindner**, a representative of the **Clybourne Park Improvement Association**, specifically the *New Neighbors Orientation Committee*. Walter offers him a drink. Lindner declines, uncomfortable.

Lindner explains that his job is to go around and give new neighbors a sense of "*the way we do things out in Clybourne Park*." He mentions—carefully, diplomatically—that there have been "*incidents*" in various parts of the city when people of color have moved into certain neighborhoods, and that the residents of Clybourne Park "*deplore that kind of thing*." He suggests that "*most of the trouble exists because people just don't sit down and talk to each other*."

Beneatha is instantly suspicious. Lindner builds toward his central argument: that the people of Clybourne Park, not meaning to be unkind, believe "*for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities*." He then, on behalf of the association, offers to **buy the house back from the Youngers at a financial gain** to the family—money collected "*through the collective effort*" of the neighborhood.

Walter orders him to leave. Lindner is surprised by the family's anger. He apologizes, leaves his card, and offers parting words: "*You just can't force people to change their hearts, son*." Walter "*pushes the door with stinging hatred*."

The three stand in silence.

Mama returns with Travis. Beneatha sarcastically tells Mama she had a visitor from the "*Welcoming Committee*"—the one thing Clybourne Park is "*just dying to have*" is a "*fine family of colored people*." Mama understands immediately. She asks: "*Did he threaten us?*" Beneatha and Ruth explain the offer. Beneatha asks: "*What do they think we going to do—eat 'em?*" Ruth replies: "*No, honey, marry 'em*."

Mama goes to tend her plant. Beneatha asks if she is really taking *"that raggedy-looking old thing"* to the new house. Mama says simply: *"It expresses me."*

Then, spontaneously, Walter embraces Mama. The family has wrapped a gift—*"the first present of her life without its being Christmas"*—a brand-new set of gardening tools. Travis adds a hatbox containing a wildly ornate gardening hat. Beneatha laughs that it looks like something Scarlett O'Hara might wear. But Mama declares: *"Bless your heart—this is the prettiest hat I ever owned."* She urges everyone back to packing.

The doorbell rings. Walter freezes. He tells the others he is expecting someone. Ruth asks why he won't answer it. He says: *"Cause sometimes it hard to let the future begin."*

He opens the door to **Bobo**—a slight, frightened little man. Walter asks immediately where Willy is. Bobo says: *"He ain't with me."* Ruth stands still in the background, *"as though somehow she senses death."*

Bobo tells Walter the story haltingly. He and Willy were supposed to go to Springfield to spread money around to speed up the liquor license. Bobo got to the train station. Willy never showed. Willy has disappeared—with all of the money. Both Walter's and Bobo's contributions are gone.

Walter falls apart. He sobs: *"Man...I trusted you...Man, I put my life in your hands...Man...that money is made out of my father's flesh."*

Mama interjects. Walter confesses: he did not set aside the \$3,000 for Beneatha's tuition as instructed. He invested all of it. Everything is gone—the full \$6,500.

Mama describes watching her husband age before his time, *"working and working and working like somebody's old horse...killing himself"*—all for money Walter lost in a single day. She doubles over, praying for strength, as the act ends.

ACT III

An hour later. Walter lies on his bed staring at the ceiling, utterly hollow. Beneatha sits among the packing crates, which now feel *"almost ominous."*

Asagai arrives, full of energy, ready to help pack. He says: *"Ah, I like the look of packing crates! A household in preparation for a journey!...Something full of the flow of life, do you understand? Movement, progress...It makes me think of Africa!"*

Beneatha tells him what happened. She describes the childhood moment that made her want to be a doctor—a neighborhood boy who badly injured his face sledding, and who returned from the hospital with only *"a little line down the middle of his face."* To a young Beneatha, the doctor's ability to *"fix him up—sew up the problem, make him all right again"* seemed almost godlike. She wanted that power—to heal what was broken.

But now, she tells Asagai, she no longer seems to care. It doesn't feel deep enough or true enough anymore. Asagai challenges her fiercely, accusing her of being *"grateful"* to her brother for losing the money because it gives her an excuse to give up. He shouts: *"I live the answer!"*—describing his own commitment to slow, unglamorous progress in Nigeria, progress that may never be recognized and could even cost him his life. But he will not stop.

Then, softly, he offers something unexpected: *"That when it is all over—that you come home with me."* Beneatha thinks he is making a romantic joke at a terrible time. He clarifies: he is asking her to return to Africa with him. To become a doctor there. To serve her ancestral homeland. He tells her: *"Just sit awhile and think...Never be afraid to sit awhile and think."* He leaves.

Walter enters, searching frantically for a small piece of paper. Beneatha attacks him with venom: *"I look at you and I see the final triumph of stupidity in the world!"* Walter finds what he needs and leaves, ignoring her entirely. Ruth enters. Beneatha is bitter.

Mama comes into the living room, crestfallen. She picks up her plant. She opens the window and places it outside on the sill—letting it get some air before the move. Then she steadies herself and tells Beneatha and Ruth to begin unpacking. She says: *"Lord, ever since I was a little girl, I remembers people saying, 'Lena—Lena Eggleston, you aims too high all the time. You needs to slow down and see life a little more like it is.'" She has decided they are not moving. They will improve the apartment instead.*

Ruth refuses to accept this. She begs, promising to work *twenty hours a day* if necessary to help cover the mortgage. She pleads: *"We gotta MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!!"* Mama is unmoved, saying gently: *"Sometimes you just got to know when to give up some things...and hold on to what you got."*

Walter returns, out of breath. He announces he has called Karl Lindner back and told him to come over—they are going to *"do business with him."* He tells Mama and Ruth that life is

divided between *"the takers and the 'taken'"* and that people like Willy Harris are never taken because they don't worry about right and wrong. He will put on a show for Lindner, play the part, and squeeze even more money out of him than was originally offered.

Mama is appalled. She tells him: *"Son—I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers—but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor."*

Walter argues that he did not make the world the way it is. He wants his piece of it, even if it means humiliating himself. He performs an agonizing, exaggerated impression of a deferential, shuffling enslaved man—then breaks down in tears and retreats to the bedroom.

Beneatha says coldly: *"That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat."* Mama turns on Beneatha with quiet power: *"Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most; when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain't through learning—because that ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in his self 'cause the world done whipped him so."*

Travis bursts in: the moving men have arrived outside. Lindner appears at the open door. He is pleased, assuming the family is about to accept his offer. He asks who will be negotiating.

As Walter approaches, Ruth tries to send Travis outside. But Mama stops her—she tells Travis to stay. She speaks directly to Walter: *"You make him understand what you doing, Walter Lee. You teach him good. Like Willy Harris taught you. You show where our five generations done come to."*

Walter puts his arm around Travis's shoulders. He begins to speak to Lindner—looking down, shuffling his feet, stammering. He starts to play the role he planned. But then something shifts.

Looking at his son, Walter straightens. He tells Lindner that his family has always been made up of simple working people. And then he says what he truly means: *"We have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it. We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes—but we will try to be good neighbors."* Travis is the sixth generation of the Younger family in this country. His sister is going to be a doctor. And the family is moving in.

Lindner turns to Mama, appealing to her as the older, wiser head of the household. Mama tells him quietly that Walter has spoken, and she has nothing to add.

Lindner shakes his head, gathers his briefcase, and leaves. Ruth cheers. Mama directs the family back to work.

Beneatha tells Mama that Asagai has asked her to marry him and go to Africa. Mama says she is too young to marry. Walter suggests she marry someone like George, who has money. They argue passionately as they walk out of the apartment—full of noise and life.

Ruth and Mama are left alone briefly. Mama says: *"He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain..."* Ruth agrees with pride. She leaves.

Mama is alone in the apartment. She takes one slow, final look around at the place that has held them for so long. Despite herself, *"a great heaving thing rises in her and she puts her fist to her mouth."* She puts on her coat and hat. She picks up her plant. And she walks out the door.