

Lorraine Hansberry's

*The Sign in
Sidney Brustein's
Window*

A Drama in Two Acts

Revised Stage Edition



Samuel French, Inc.

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The Sign in
Sidney Brustein's
Window

A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

REVISED STAGE EDITION



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RAISIN (The Musical)

THE SIGN IN SIDNEY BRUSTEIN'S WINDOW
(Revised Stage Edition)

TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK

For
Robert Nemiroff
and
Burt D'Lugoff
and
the committed everywhere

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A NOTE ABOUT THIS REVISED EDITION

When the original production of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* opened in 1964, Lorraine Hansberry was in the midst of a real-life drama of her own that transcended anything on stage: the battle against the remorseless cancer which finally claimed her life three months later. In the critical period of the play's staging, it was thus impossible for her, except very sporadically, to attend rehearsals to put the finishing touches on the work which had occupied her, on and off, for four years. Hansberry was able to see the entire play on its feet only a few nights before the opening and, overall, was gratified by what she saw. But she did feel the need for tightening, for some small but important clarifications of relationships and themes, some shifts in dramatic pacing, and (in one area) a restructuring to sharpen the focus on Sidney and Iris. She did some telling rewrites at that time—too late, alas, to go into performance until after the opening—and she discussed with me others that she planned. But she could not complete the final honing she felt the play needed to achieve its full potential.

The present script addresses that task. It is the fruit of those last discussions with Lorraine Hansberry about the play and of my own observations—as producer of the original and as the playwright's literary executor—of many productions over the years; and of, in some instances invaluable, discussions with the principals in some of these (I am particularly grateful to the late great director Alan Schneider for his insights and help in this regard). In completing it, I went back, too, to the playwright's original working drafts to draw upon those lines and approaches that might prove most cogent in effectuating the result she sought.

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The culmination of this process came with a showcase production by New York's Richard Allen Center, where it was possible to try out and put ideas to the test. The result was unmistakable: the response of the audience overwhelming, the reviews unqualified. Significantly, these emphasized not just the power of individual scenes, the humanity and strength of the characters, as had always been the case,* but the *unity* of the play and the contemporaneity of the playwright's vision.

Still I needed to be sure. I offered the revised script to other local productions and some outside New York. The results were the same.

The present revision, then, incorporates into the play cuts, clarifications and some restructuring, with material by Lorraine Hansberry from earlier drafts and some additions of my own.

In sum, my own additions are too small to call it an adaptation. This is Lorraine Hansberry's play—in form, finally, I believe, to achieve its full impact and the recognition it has always deserved.

Robert Nemiroff

HANSBERRY ARCHIVES: For the Lorraine Hansberry Archives, we would be grateful to receive programs, reviews, pressclips, etc., and any pertinent comments concerning productions of the Hansberry plays. Please address these to Robert Nemiroff, c/o Samuel French, 45 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10011.

*For a sampling of reviews through the years, see back cover and pp. 140–143.

THE SIGN IN SIDNEY BRUSTEIN'S WINDOW was first presented by Burt C. D'Lugoff, Robert Nemiroff and J. I. Jahre at the Longacre Theatre, New York City, N.Y., on October 15, 1964, with the following:

CAST OF CHARACTERS*

(in order of their appearance)

SIDNEY BRUSTEIN	Gabriel Dell
ALTON SCALES	Ben Aliza
IRIS PARODUS BRUSTEIN	Rita Moreno
WALLY O'HARA	Frank Schofield
MAX	Dolph Sweet
MAVIS PARODUS BRYSON	Alice Ghostley
DAVID RAGIN	John Alderman
GLORIA PARODUS	Cynthia O'Neal

Directed by Peter Kass

Scenery by Jack Blackman

Lighting by Jules Fisher

Costumes by Fred Voelpel

"The Wally O'Hara Campaign Song" by Ernie Sheldon

Production Associate: Alan Heyman

Associate to the Producers: Beverly Landau

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the Brustein apartment and adjoining courtyard in Greenwich Village, New York City, in the early 1960's.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: Early Evening. The late spring.

SCENE TWO: Dusk. The following week.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: Just before daybreak, next day.

SCENE TWO: Evening. Late summer.

SCENE THREE: Primary Night. Early September.

SCENE FOUR: Several hours later.

SCENE FIVE: Early next morning.

*The original production also included the walk-on role of a detective, played by Josip Elic, which has been eliminated.

PRODUCTION NOTES: THE SETTING

The setting is Greenwich Village, New York City—the preferred habitat of many who fancy revolt, or, at least, detachment from the social order that surrounds us.

At the rear are all the recognizable sight symbols of the great city. They are, however, in the murk of distance and dominated by a proscenium foreground which is made up of jutting façades. These are the representative bits and pieces of architecture which seem almost inevitably to set the character of those communities where the arts and bohemia try to reside in isolation—before the fact of their presence tends to attract those others who wish to be *in* bohemia if not *of* it—and whose presence, in turn, paradoxically tends to drive the rents beyond the reach of the former. Tenements of commonplace and unglamorized misery huddle together with cherished relics of the beginning days of a civilization: the priceless and the unworthy leaning indiscriminately together in both arty pretentiousness and genuine picturesque assertiveness.

Thus, here is a renovation of a “Dutch farmhouse”; there, a stable reputed to have housed some early governor’s horses; and here the baroque chambers of some famed and eccentric actor. And leading off, one or two narrow and twisty little streets with squared-off panes of glass that do, in midwinter, with their frosty corners, actually succeed in reminding of Dickensian London. The studio apartment of the Brustains, at Left, is the ground floor of a converted brownstone, which—like a few other brownstones in the Village—has an old-fashioned, wrought-iron outside staircase arching over a tiny patio where city-type vegetation miraculously and doggedly

grows. Beneath the staircase landing is the Brustains' private entrance. Nearby, Downstage Right, is a tree.

In the cut-away interior of the apartment the walls are painted, after the current fashion in this district, the starkest white. To arrest the eye—because those who live here think much of such things—the colors which have been set against it are soft yellows and warm browns and, strikingly, touches of orange, vivid sharp orange, and that lovely blue associated with Navajo culture. We can see at once that the people who live here would not, even if they did have a great deal of money—which they certainly do not—spend it on expensive furnishings. They prefer by pocket book and taste—to the point of snobbery perhaps—to scrounge about the Salvation Army bargain outlets; almost *never* the “Early American” shops which are largely if not entirely priced for the tourist trade. In any case, a few years ago most things would have been discernibly “do-it-yourself” modern in these rooms, but that mood is past now and there is not a single sling chair or low, sharply angled table. “Country things” have come with all their knocked-about air and utilitarian comfort. But there remain, still, crafted ceramic pots of massive rhododendrons in various corners and, everywhere, stacks of last year’s magazines and a goodly number of newspapers. The result is that—while it is not a dirty place—*clutter* amounts almost to a motif. Prints range through reproductions of both the most obscure and the most celebrated art of human history, and these, without exception, are superbly and fittingly framed. And there is a sole expensive item: a well-arranged hi-fidelity unit, and, therefore, whole walls of long-playing records, and not one of them at an angle. Fighting them for supremacy of the walls, however, are

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hundreds and hundreds of books. And on one wall—
Sidney's banjo.*

In fine, it is to the eye and spirit an attractive place. Its carelessness does not make it less so. And, indeed, one might lounge here more easily than in some other contemporary rooms—and, perhaps, *think* more easily. Upstage Center is the bedroom door. To its Right, the bathroom. Downstage Left is part of the kitchen area, which disappears Offstage. Downstage of the whole apartment is the street through which characters may enter from right or left. And, dominating all, Upstage Left, the large irregularly shaped bay window, angled out from the building wall in a skylight effect, in which will presently hang—the *Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*.

*Or some other appropriate instrument if the actor happens to play one.

The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

TIME: *The early Sixties. An early evening in late spring.*

PLACE: *Greenwich Village.*

AT RISE: *SIDNEY BRUSTEIN and ALTON SCALES enter arguing D.L. and cross to the apartment door, each burdened down with armloads, two or three each, of those wire racks of glasses that are found in restaurants. They have carried them several blocks and are out of breath as they struggle with the loads.*

SIDNEY is in his late thirties and inclined to no category of dress whatsoever—that is to say, unlike his associates, who tend to the toggle-coated, woven, mustardy, corduroy appearance of the post-war generation of intellectuals in Europe and America. This has escaped SIDNEY: he wears white dress shirts as often as not, usually for some reason or other open at the cuffs—but not rolled; old college shoes; and whichever pair of trousers he has happened to put on with whichever jacket he has happened to reach for that morning. It is not an affectation; he does not care. He is, in the truest sense of the word, an intellectual: his passion is ideas, words, language. If he cannot control his world, at least he can articulate it—which, more often than not means to mock it. He is not a pedant, but a man who questions ev-

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everything—and has a great deal of fun about it—yet retains the capacity for wonder and a free-wheeling lust for life. An idealist and, more than a little, a clown—who laughs at himself as much as the world. He does not wear glasses.

ALTON is a youth of 27, lithe, dark, with close-cropped hair and the mustardy, corduroy and sweatered look of the Village. He is, to the eye of the audience, white, but his manner and speech are rich with the colorings and inflections of black idiom.

SIDNEY. . . . It's your story, man, but Jesus Christ—*(attempting to balance the glasses and find his keys)* it's not about Imperialism and the Ghetto!

ALTON. The hell you say. Any time a black kid—

SIDNEY. And it's not about his mother either. *(fumbling with key and lock)* Damn. *(He opens the door and deposits his load in the middle of the living room floor. ALTON kicks door shut behind them and racks his glasses on top of SIDNEY's.)* Never mind the kid's mother, for Christ's sake! And never mind the tears in his sister's eyes. *(as ALTON straightens to face him)* Look, even if it is Willie Johnson—if you're gonna write for *my* newspaper, Alton, write it like you figure we already *care* without you sending up organ music. Follow?

ALTON. *(stiffly)* I hear what you are saying.

SIDNEY. But compassion is *consuming* your heart and you want us to *know* it, right?

ALTON. He may die. The doctors said—

SIDNEY. And you think I don't know that? You think I'm not *there* right with him? But *this*—*(pulling a half-dozen typed pages out of his pocket)* is not going to save him! Look, baby, from now on: *(indicating himself)* new publisher—new policy! When you write for the *new*

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Village Crier, let's forget we absolutely *love* mankind. Don't venerate, don't celebrate, don't—

ALTON. Don't cogitate, don't agitate—

SIDNEY. (*nodding*) Our readers don't want it. That's why Harvey had to unload the paper.

ALTON. You're gonna wear out your ass sitting on that fence, man.

SIDNEY. And above all else: keep your conscience to yourself. It's the only form of compassion left. (*hands ALTON the story; lights a cigarette and wanders back to the glasses which he suddenly confronts; with mock funereal gravity, making the sign of the cross over the racks*) So there they are: the last remains of Walden Pond.

ALTON. You're better off—what the hell did you know about running a nightclub, man?

SIDNEY. (*old refrain*) It wasn't a *nightclub*.

ALTON. You can say that again. Not with a name like Walden Pond. And it wasn't a restaurant or a coffee house or anything else that anybody ever heard of.

SIDNEY. I thought there'd be an audience for it. A place just to listen to good folk records. For people like me. There gotta be people like me somewhere.

ALTON. There are. And *they* don't go to nightclubs to listen to records either.

SIDNEY. It wasn't *supposed*—

ALTON. (*cutting in*) “. . . to be a nightclub.” I know. (*dryly*) “Walden Pond.”

SIDNEY. Well, whatever it was, let's drink to it. (*picks out two glasses*)

ALTON. Bourbon for me.

SIDNEY. (*lifting out one of several bottles in the racks*) You can have vodka *with* ice or vodka *without* ice. (*Pours; they toast and drink.*) Let's get to work. (*Hauls*

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out huge pad and marking crayon and sits at drawing board, which is framed by the window; it is angled almost horizontally to serve as his desk.)

ALTON. (*idle curiosity—that is not so idle*) Ahh—Sid . . . Does Iris know you've *bought*—and I use the term loosely—the paper yet?

SIDNEY. (*laying out the first page with broad strokes*) Not yet.

ALTON. Well, don't you think she oughta know? I mean, like, a wife—

SIDNEY. Yes, I'll tell her.

ALTON. When? It's been two weeks already.

SIDNEY. (*trapped, therefore evasively*) When I get a chance, I'll tell her.

ALTON. She's going to have a lot of opinions about it.

SIDNEY. She always has opinions. You know what? I think I'd like to try our first issue in reverse. White print, black paper. What's with this black on white jazz all the time? People get in ruts.

(*IRIS enters D.R. with armful of groceries and crosses to door. Not yet thirty, she is quick with a gamin vivacity that utterly charms, and possesses vast quantities of long dark hair, done up in a French twist. Whatever her talent on stage, IRIS is an actress, given to playful mimicry and overdramatization which, at least with SIDNEY, she plays to the hilt. Between them, though this is not their actual age relationship, there is more than a little of the adolescent girl showing off for father, seeking his approval, testing the limits of his knowledge and authority. He has been her lover, mentor, universe, god. But, increasingly of late, there has been the insistent, though as yet unidentified need to break*