

A RAISIN IN THE SUN: ASSIGNMENT #3

Objectives:

- To visualize setting and its dramatic function
- To create a descriptive essay

“My Room at the Lilac Inn” by John J. Regan, *The Purple Testament* (1949)

As I look around this room in this third-rate boarding house, my eyes are greeted first by the entrance to its gloomy interior. The door is painted a dirty cream color. There is a crack in one panel. The ceiling is the same dingy color with pieces of adhesive tape holding some of the plaster in place. The walls are streaked and cracked here and there. Also on the walls are pieces of Scotch tape that once held, I presume, some sexy girls, pictures of *Esquire Magazine* origin. Across the room runs a line; upon it hang a shirt, a grimy towel, and washed stump socks belonging to my roommate, Jack Nager. By the door near the top sash juts a piece of wood on which is hung—it looks like an old spread. It is calico, dirty, and a sickly green color.

Behind that is a space which serves as our closet; next to that is the radiator, painted the same ghastly color. The landlady must have got the paint for nothing. On top are Jack’s black suitcase, his green soap dish, and a brightly colored box containing his hair tonic. Over by the cracked window are a poorly made table and chair. On top of the table, a pencil, shaving talcum, a glass, a nail file; one of my socks hangs over the side. Above the table is our window, the curtains of cheese cloth held back by a string. There is also a black, fairly whole paper shade to dim such little sunlight as might enter.

This window is my only promise of a better future. Through it, I can see the well-lit and nicely furnished living room of a modern apartment house across the street. Someday I’ll live like that.

There, next to the window, leaning against an aged bureau, as if resting, are my faithful crutches. In the oilcloth covering the top of the bureau lie some seventeen-odd books. These I used at the _____ University here in Washington, D.C. I am attending a six-month course, getting the fundamentals needed to be a Service Officer for veterans. There are enough books on that bureau to take at least a year’s reading for absorption. Beard’s *American Government and Policy*, *Anatomy*, *How to Interview*, *Soldier to Civilian*, government laws, manuals, textbooks, a public-speaking guide and what-have-you are all reflected in the cloudy mirror. On the bureau stands a picture of my love, my faithful wife. I think of her. I wish I were with her tonight.

Standing alongside this bureau is this *thing*. A leather cup, straps and buckles dropping from it. Below this cup, the flesh-colored *thing* and calf, and on its foot a brown sock and oxblood shoe. This is a prosthesis. I’ve called this wooden leg a lot of other things. This is the replacement for the real one that was shot off in France. O, what the hell! A leg isn’t everything. You’ve got to keep living. There are a lot worse things in this world to reckon with than an artificial leg.

On the parlor chair, here probably because here’s no other place for it, my brown pants are thrown, together with my old khaki shirt. In the floor my recently painted foot locker that was in many an army camp with me is still doing service.

Jack Nager grunts alongside me in the double bed as he turns over; his is getting a good sleep tonight. His below-the-knee stump quivers as he touches some close-to-the-skin nerve on the bed. His foot was also a donation for democracy. I reach to turn out the twenty-five-watt bulb on the shadeless lamp; I find the light switch. The room is in darkness. From the street three stories below comes the sound of a motor car; it fades away. Occasionally a click, click of heels hitting the pavement as someone passes by. Within the house the sound of muffled voices, the flushing of a toilet, someone blowing his nose.

I forget everything and concentrate on sleep.

Discuss the details:

- The author’s use of color
- The concentration on one specific detail
- The author’s tone
- The overall mood

Setting:

The description of the Youngers' apartment on Chicago's South Side indicates the impoverished, overcrowded conditions under which the family lives. This is responsible for discontentment with the status quo, and aspirations to a better way of life.

A Raisin in the Sun Act I scene i

The Younger living room would be a comfortable and well-ordered room if it were not for a number of indestructible contradictions to this state of being. Its furnishings are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years—and they are tired. Still, we can see that at some time, a time probably no longer remembered by the family (except perhaps for Mama), the furnishings of this room were actually selected with care and love and even hope—and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride.

That was a long time ago. Now the once loved pattern of the couch upholstery has to fight to show itself from under acres of crocheted doilies and couch covers which have themselves finally come to be more important than the upholstery. And here a table or a chair has been moved to disguise the worn places in the carpet; but the carpet has fought back by showing its weariness, with depressing uniformity, elsewhere on its surface.

Weariness has, in fact, won in this room. Everything has been polished, washed, sat on, used, scrubbed too often. All pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room.

Moreover, a section of this room, for it is not really a room unto itself, though the landlord's lease would make it seem so, slopes backward to provide a small kitchen area, where the family prepares the meals that are eaten in the living room proper, which must also serve as dining room. The single window that has been provided for these "two" rooms is located in this kitchen area. The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights its way through this little window.

At left, a door leads to a bedroom which is shared by Mama and her daughter, Beneatha. At right, opposite, is a second room (which in the beginning of the life of this apartment was probably a breakfast room) which swerves as a bedroom for Walter and his wife, Ruth.

Time: Sometime between World War II and the present.

Place: Chicago's Southside.

At Rise: It is morning dark in the living room. Travis is asleep on the make-down bed at center. An alarm clock sounds from within the bedroom at right, and presently Ruth enters from that room and closes the door behind her. She crosses sleepily toward the window. As she passes her sleeping son she reaches down and shakes him a little. At the window she raises the shade and a dusky Southside morning light comes in feebly. She fills a pot with water and puts it on to boil. She calls to the boy, between yawns, in a slightly muffled voice.

Ruth is about thirty. We can see that she was a pretty girl, even exceptionally so, but now it is apparent that life has been little that she expected, and disappointment has already begun to hang in her face. In a few years, before thirty-five even, she will be known among her people as a "settled woman."

She crosses to her son and gives him a good, final, rousing shake.

Discuss the details:

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- The concentration on one specific detail

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Read "May Morning" by Harold Fontanella and notice the lightness of tone and atmosphere; this is in contrast to the first two-descriptions.

"May Morning" by Harold Fontanella

As I sit at my desk this May morning, the yellow sunlight swirls round the green walls and brightens Jane's golden hair under the open window at my left. Through the window comes a breeze laden with spring and the smell of flowering earth. In front of me Joe suddenly turns round to borrow my eraser. As he sees me glance again toward the window, his freckled red face widens in a grin. I hear the squeak of wheels as Mr. French rolls back his chair and walks slowly toward the windows, his back very straight, his black hair shining in the sun, his full lips curved in an

