

FENCES

Screenplay by

August Wilson

Based upon his play

BLACK SCREEN

TITLE: AUGUST WILSON'S FENCES

The screen remains black. The sound of a truck rumbling along a street. Two men are heard talking:

BONO (v.o.): Troy, you ought to stop that lying!

TROY (v.o.): I ain't lying! The nigger had a watermelon this big. Talking about . . . "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" I like to fell out! "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" . . . And it sitting there big as life.

BONO (v.o.): What did Mr. Rand say?

TROY (v.o.): Ain't said nothing. Figure if the nigger too dumb to know he carrying a watermelon, he wasn't gonna get much sense out of him. Trying to hide that great big old watermelon under his coat. Afraid to let the white man see him carry it home.

EXT. WYLIE AVENUE, THE HILL, PITTSBURGH—
EARLY SEPTEMBER—MORNING

The rear of the garbage truck, god's point of view: Troy Maxson and Jim Bono hang on to either side of the truck as it heads toward its next collection point.

Troy is fifty-three years old, a large man with thick, heavy hands; it is this largeness that he strives to fill out and make an accommodation with. Together with his blackness, his largeness informs his sensibilities and the choices he has made in his life.

Of the two men, Bono is obviously the follower. His commitment to their friendship of thirty odd years is rooted in his admiration of Troy's honesty, capacity for hard work, and his strength, which Bono seeks to emulate.

BONO: I'm like you . . . I ain't got no time for them kind of people.

TROY: Now what he look like getting mad 'cause he see the man from the union talking to Mr. Rand?

BONO: He come talking to me about . . . "Troy Maxson gonna get us fired." I told him to get away from

FENCES

me with that. He walked away from me calling you a troublemaker. (anxious) What Mr. Rand say?

TROY: Ain't said nothing. He told me to go down to the commissioner's office next Friday. They called me down there to see them.

The truck halts. Troy gets down and heads for heavy garbage cans at the curb; Bono uses Troy's shoulder to ease himself down.

BONO: Well, as long as you got your complaint filed, they can't fire you. That's what one of them white fellows tell me.

TROY: I ain't worried about them firing me. They gonna fire me 'cause I asked a question? That's all I did. I went to Mr. Rand and asked him—"Why? Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting?" Told him, "What's the matter, don't I count?"

TITLE: THE HILL, PITTSBURGH

TITLE: 1957

TROY: You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck? That ain't no paper job. Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all the whites driving and the coloreds lifting?

The truck's white driver watches the collectors in his side mirror.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: He told me, "Take it to the union." Well, hell, that's what I done! Now they wanna come up with this pack of lies.

BONO: I told Brownie if the man come and ask him any questions . . . just tell the truth! It ain't nothing but something they done trumped up on you 'cause you filed a complaint on them.

Bono returns the last empty can. Troy climbs up on the truck.

TROY: Brownie don't understand nothing. All I want them to do is change the job description. Give everybody a chance to drive the truck. Brownie can't see that. He ain't got that much sense.

Bono in place, Troy slaps the truck. As it starts moving, Troy pulls a lever and the compactor crushes the trash.

EXT. SANITATION YARD—AFTERNOON

Men stream out of the yard, Troy and Bono among them.

How you figure he be making out with that gal be up at Taylors' all the time . . . that Alberta gal?

TROY: Who?

BONO: Brownie!

FENCES

TROY: Same as you and me. He getting as much as we is.
Which is to say nothing.

BONO: It is, huh? I figure you doing a little better
than me . . . and I ain't saying what I'm doing.

TROY: Aw, nigger, look here . . . I know you. If you
had got anywhere near that gal, twenty minutes
later you be looking to tell somebody. And the
first one you gonna tell . . . that you gonna want
to brag to . . . is gonna be me.

BONO: I ain't saying that. I see where you be eyeing
her.

TROY: I eye all the women. I don't miss nothing. Don't
never let nobody tell you Troy Maxson don't eye
the women.

BONO: You been doing more than eyeing her. You done
bought her a drink or two.

TROY: Hell yeah, I bought her a drink! What that mean?
I bought you one, too. What that mean 'cause I buy
her a drink? I'm just being polite.

BONO: It's all right to buy her one drink. That's what
you call being polite. But when you wanna be buy-
ing two or three . . . that's what you call eye-
ing her.

TROY: Look here, as long as you known me . . . you
ever known me to chase after women?

BONO: Hell yeah! Long as I done known you. You for-
getting I knew you when.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Naw, I'm talking about since I been married to Rose?

BONO: Oh, not since you been married to Rose. Now, that's the truth, there. I can say that.

TROY: All right then! Case closed.

EXT. THE HILL DISTRICT—TROY AND ROSE'S STREET—AFTERNOON

Troy and Bono make their way down the street to a narrow house. A pair of lawn chairs sit on the small front porch. They take the short cut through the side alley into the back yard. It is Friday, payday, and the one night of the week the two men engage in a ritual of talk and drink.

BONO: I see you be walking up around Alberta's house. You supposed to be at Taylors' and you be walking up around there.

TROY: What you watching where I'm walking for? I ain't watching after you.

BONO: I seen you walking around there more than once.

TROY: Hell, you liable to see me walking anywhere! That don't mean nothing because you seen me walking around there.

BONO: Where she come from anyway? She just kinda showed up one day.

FENCES

TROY: Tallahassee. You can look at her and tell she one of them Florida gals. They got some big healthy women down there. Grow them right up out the ground. Got a little bit of Indian in her. Most of them niggers down in Florida got some Indian in them.

BONO: I don't know about that Indian part. But she damn sure big and healthy. Woman wears some big stockings. Got them great big old legs and hips as wide as the Mississippi river.

TROY: Legs don't mean nothing. You don't do nothing but push them out of the way. But them hips cushion the ride!

BONO: Troy, you ain't got no sense.

TROY: It's the truth! Like you riding on Goodyears!

Troy cracks the seal of the bottle of gin, pours some out on the ground . . . for the folks that are long gone.

EXT. TROY'S AND ROSE'S BACKYARD— AFTERNOON

In the center of the yard, a large tree, two chairs beneath it. A battered baseball hangs from a rope tied to a tree limb; a big weathered bat leans against the trunk.

The yard is bordered on either side by fences and houses. At the rear,

AUGUST WILSON

there's a derelict wooden house with boarded windows. The remnants of a fence are strewn between the wild lot behind the abandoned house and the Maxsons' yard.

Materials for a new fence . . . a couple of wooden sawhorses waiting for the lumber stacked under a tarp. One or two chairs of dubious value sit at one end where the kitchen window opens onto the porch. An old-fashioned ice box stands silent guard at the other end.

Rose maxson comes out onto the porch, holding a bowl of snap peas. She is ten years younger than troy. Her devotion to him stems from the recognition of the possibilities of her life without him: a succession of abusive men and their babies, a life of partying and running the streets, the church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration. She recognizes troy's spirit as a fine and illuminating one and she either ignores or forgives his faults, only some of which she recognizes. Though she doesn't drink, her presence is an integral part of the friday night rituals.

FENCES

ROSE: What you all out here getting into?

TROY: What you worried about what we getting into for?
This is men talk, woman.

ROSE: What I care what you talking about? Bono, you gonna stay for supper?

BONO: No, I thank you, Rose. But Lucille say she cooking up a pot of pigfeet.

TROY: Pigfeet! Hell, I'm going home with you! Might even stay the night if you got some pigfeet. You got something in there to top them pigfeet, Rose?

ROSE: I'm cooking up some chicken. I got some chicken and collard greens.

TROY: Well, go on back in the house and let me and Bono finish what we was talking about. This is men talk. I got some talk for you later. You know what kind of talk I mean. Go on and powder it up.

ROSE: Troy Maxson, don't you start that now!

TROY (PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER): Aw, woman . . . come here. Look here, Bono . . . When I met this woman . . . I got out that place, say, "Hitch up my pony, saddle up my mare . . . there's a woman out there for me somewhere. I looked here. Looked there. Saw Rose and latched on to her." I latched on to her and told her—I'm gonna tell you the truth—I told her, "Baby, I don't wanna marry, I just wanna be your man." Rose told me . . . tell him what you told me, Rose.

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: I told him if he wasn't the marrying kind, then move out the way so the marrying kind could find me.

TROY: That's what she told me. "Nigger, you in my way. You blocking the view! Move out the way so I can find me a husband." I thought it over two or three days. Come back—

ROSE: Ain't no two or three days nothing. You was back the same night.

TROY: Come back, told her . . . "Okay, baby . . . but I'm gonna buy me a banty rooster and put him out there in the backyard . . . and when he see a stranger come, he'll flap his wings and crow . . ." Look here, Bono, I could watch the front door by myself . . . it was that back door I was worried about.

ROSE: Troy, you ought not talk like that. Troy ain't doing nothing but telling a lie.

TROY: Only thing is . . . when we first got married . . . forget the rooster . . . we ain't had no yard!

BONO: I hear you tell it. Me and Lucille was staying down there on Logan Street. Had two rooms with the outhouse in the back. I ain't mind the outhouse none. But when that goddamn wind blow through there in the winter . . . that's what I'm talking about! To this day I wonder why in the hell I ever stayed down there for six long years. But see, I didn't know I could do no better. I thought only white folks had inside toilets and things.

FENCES

ROSE: There's a lot of people don't know they can do no better than they doing now. That's just something you got to learn. A lot of folks still shop at Bella's.

TROY: Ain't nothing wrong with shopping at Bella's. She got fresh food.

ROSE: I ain't said nothing about if she got fresh food. I'm talking about what she charge. She charge ten cents more than the A&P.

TROY: The A&P ain't never done nothing for me. I spends my money where I'm treated right. I go down to Bella, say, "I need a loaf of bread, I'll pay you Friday." She give it to me. What sense that make when I got money to go and spend it somewhere else and ignore the person who done right by me? That ain't in the Bible.

ROSE: We ain't talking about what's in the Bible. What sense it make to shop there when she overcharge?

TROY: You shop where you want to. I'll do my shopping where the people been good to me.

ROSE: Well, I don't think it's right for her to overcharge. That's all I was saying.

BONO: Look here . . . I got to get on. Lucille be raising all kind of hell.

TROY: Where you going, nigger? We ain't finished this pint. Come here, finish this pint.

BONO: Well, hell, I am . . . if you ever turn the bottle loose.

AUGUST WILSON

Troy hands him the bottle.

TROY: The only thing I say about the A&P is I'm glad Cory got that job down there. Help him take care of his school clothes and things.

Rose straightens up. Cory is a sore subject.

TROY: Gabe done moved out and things getting tight around here. He got that job . . . he can start to look out for himself.

ROSE: Cory done went and got recruited by a college football team.

TROY: I told that boy about that football stuff. The white man ain't gonna let him get nowhere with that football. I told him when he first come to me with it. Now you come telling me he done went and got more tied up in it. He ought to go and get recruited in how to fix cars or something where he can make a living.

ROSE: He ain't talking about making no living playing football. It's just something the boys in school do. They gonna send a recruiter by to talk to you. He'll tell you he ain't talking about making no living playing football. It's a honor to be recruited.

TROY: It ain't gonna get him nowhere. Bono'll tell you that.

BONO: If he be like you in the sports . . . he's gonna be all right. Ain't but two men ever played base-

FENCES

ball as good as you. That's Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson. Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than you.

TROY: What it ever get me? Ain't got a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of.

ROSE: Times have changed since you was playing baseball, Troy. That was before the war. Times have changed a lot since then.

TROY: How in hell they done changed?

ROSE: They got lots of colored boys playing ball now. Baseball and football.

BONO: You right about that, Rose. Times have changed, Troy. You just come along too early.

TROY: There ought not never have been no time called too early! Now you take that fellow . . . what's that fellow they had playing right field for the Yankees back then? You know who I'm talking about, Bono. Used to play right field for the Yankees.

ROSE: Selkirk?

TROY: Selkirk! That's it! Man batting .269, understand? .269. What kind of sense that make? I was hitting .432 with thirty-seven home runs! Man batting .269 and playing right field for the Yankees! I saw Josh Gibson's daughter yesterday. She walking around with raggedy shoes on her feet. Now I bet you Selkirk's daughter ain't walking around with raggedy shoes on her feet! I bet you that!

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: They got a lot of colored baseball players now. Jackie Robinson was the first. Folks had to wait for Jackie Robinson.

TROY: I done seen a hundred niggers play baseball better than Jackie Robinson. Hell, I know some teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make! What you talking about Jackie Robinson. Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody. I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play. Don't care what color you were. Come telling me I come along too early. If you could play . . . then they ought to have let you play.

Troy takes a long drink.

ROSE: You gonna drink yourself to death. You don't need to be drinking like that.

TROY: Death ain't nothing. I done seen him. Done wrassled with him. You can't tell me nothing about death. Death ain't nothing but a fastball on the outside corner. And you know what I'll do to that! Lookee here, Bono . . . am I lying?

Handing Bono the bottle, Troy picks up the bat and takes a gentle whack at the tethered ball. He assumes a batter's stance.

TROY: You get one of them fastballs, about waist high, over the outside corner of the plate where you can get the meat of the bat on it . . .

(he swings, smacking the ball hard:)

FENCES

And good God!

*The ball flies in fast circles around the
tree limb. Troy looks up into the sky.*

TROY: You can kiss it good-bye. Now, am I lying?

BONO: Naw, you telling the truth there. I seen you do it.

TROY: If I'm lying . . . that 450 feet worth of lying! That's all death is to me. A fastball on the outside corner.

ROSE: I don't know why you want to get on talking about death.

TROY: Ain't nothing wrong with talking about death. That's part of life. Everybody gonna die. You gonna die, I'm gonna die. Bono's gonna die. Hell, we all gonna die.

ROSE: But you ain't got to talk about it. I don't like to talk about it.

TROY: You the one brought it up. Me and Bono was talking about baseball . . . you tell me I'm gonna drink myself to death. Ain't that right, Bono? You know I don't drink this but one night out of the week. That's Friday night. I'm gonna drink just enough to where I can handle it. Then I cuts it loose. I leave it alone. So don't you worry about me drinking myself to death. 'Cause I ain't worried about Death. I done seen him. I done wrestled with him.

Rose could recite this story herself.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Look here, Bono . . . I looked up one day and Death was marching straight at me. Like Soldiers on Parade! The Army of Death was marching straight at me. The middle of July, 1941. It got real cold just like it be winter. It seem like Death himself reached out and touched me on the shoulder. He touch me just like I touch you. I got cold as ice and Death standing there grinning at me.

ROSE: Troy, why don't you hush that talk.

TROY: I say . . . "What you want, Mr. Death? You be wanting me? You done brought your army to be getting me?" I looked him dead in the eye. I wasn't fearing nothing. I was ready to tangle. Just like I'm ready to tangle now. The bible say be ever vigilant. That's why I don't get but so drunk. I got to keep watch.

ROSE (TO BONO): Troy was right down there in Mercy Hospital. You remember he had pneumonia? Laying there with a fever talking plumb out of his head.

TROY: Death standing there staring at me . . . carrying that sickle in his hand. Finally he say, "You want bound over for another year?" See, just like that . . . "You want bound over for another year?" I told him, "Bound over hell! Let's settle this now!" It seem like he kinda fell back when I said that, and all the cold went out of me. I reached down and grabbed that sickle and threw it just as far as I could throw it . . . and me and him commenced to wrestling. We wrestled for three days and three nights. I can't say where I found the strength

FENCES

from. Every time it seemed like he was gonna get the best of me, I'd reach way down deep inside myself and find the strength to do him one better.

ROSE: Every time Troy tell that story he find different ways to tell it. Different things to make up about it.

TROY: I ain't making up nothing. I'm telling you the facts of what happened. I wrestled with Death for three days and three nights and I'm standing here to tell you about it . . . All right. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where we can't hardly move. Death stood up, throwed on his robe . . . had him a white robe with a hood on it.

Troy mimics a Klansman's hood. Bono laughs at this; Rose does the same in spite of herself.

TROY: He throwed on that robe and went off to look for his sickle. Say, "I'll be back." Just like that. "I'll be back." I told him say, "Yeah, but . . . you gonna have to find me!" I wasn't no fool. I wasn't going looking for him. Death ain't nothing to play with.

INT. FRONT ROOM—AFTERNOON

Lyons, 34, enters from the street, guitar case in hand. He is troy's son from a previous marriage. Although he fancies himself a musician, he is more caught up in the rituals and "idea" of

AUGUST WILSON

being a musician than in the actual practice of the music. He hears troy's voice and heads to the back door, where he stands, listening.

TROY (o.s.): And I know he's gonna get me. I know I got to join his army . . . his camp followers. But as long as I keep my strength and see him coming . . . as long as I keep up my vigilance . . . he's gonna have to fight to get me. I ain't going easy.

EXT. THE BACK YARD—AFTERNOON

BONO: Well, look here, since you got to keep up your vigilance . . . let me have the bottle.

TROY: Aw hell, I shouldn't have told you that part. I should have left out that part.

ROSE: Troy be talking that stuff and half the time don't even know what he be talking about.

TROY: Bono know me better than that.

BONO: That's right. I know you. I know you got some Uncle Remus in your blood. You got more stories than the devil got sinners.

TROY: Aw hell, I done seen him too! Done talked with the devil.

ROSE: Troy, don't nobody want to be hearing all that stuff.

Lyons comes out on the porch.

FENCES

LYONS: Hey, Pop.

TROY: What you come "Hey, Popping" me for?

LYONS: How you doing, Rose?

He kisses her.

LYONS: Mr. Bono. How you doing?

BONO: Hey, Lyons . . . how you been?

TROY: He must have been doing all right. I ain't seen him around here last week.

ROSE: Troy, leave your boy alone. He come by to see you and you wanna start all that nonsense.

TROY: I ain't bothering Lyons.

Troy offers Lyons the bottle.

TROY: Here . . . get you a drink. We got an understanding. I know why he come by to see me and he know I know.

LYONS: Come on, Pop . . . I just stopped by to say hi . . . see how you was doing.

TROY: You ain't stopped by yesterday.

ROSE: You gonna stay for supper, Lyons? I got some chicken cooking in the oven.

As she heads toward the house, Rose picks up Troy's apron and gloves from the back porch, carrying them inside.

LYONS: No, Rose . . . thanks. I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by for a minute.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: You was in the neighborhood all right, nigger.
You telling the truth there. You was in the neighborhood 'cause it's my payday.

LYONS: Well, hell, since you mentioned it . . . let me have ten dollars.

TROY: I'll be damned! I'll die and go to hell and play blackjack with the devil before I give you ten dollars.

INT. HOUSE—AFTERNOON

Troy heads into the house, making his way up front to the sitting room. Lyons pursues, Bono follows. Troy sits on the sofa, watching Rose set the table.

BONO: That's what I want to know about . . . that devil you done seen.

LYONS: Pop done seen the devil? You too much Pops.

TROY: Yeah, I done seen him. Talked to him too!

ROSE: You ain't seen no devil. I done told you that man ain't had nothing to do with the devil. Anything you can't understand, you want to call it the devil.

TROY: Look here, Bono . . . I went down to see Hertzberger about some furniture. Got three rooms for two- ninety-eight. That what it say on the radio. "Three rooms . . . two- ninety-eight." Even made

FENCES

up a little song about it. Go down there . . . man tell me I can't get no credit. I'm working every day and can't get no credit. What to do? I got an empty house with some raggedy furniture in it. Cory ain't got no bed. He's sleeping on a pile of rags on the floor. Working every day and can't get no credit. Come back here—Rose'll tell you—madder than hell. Sit down . . . try to figure what I'm gonna do. Come a knock on the door. Ain't been living here but three days. Who know I'm here? Open the door . . . devil standing there bigger than life. White fellow . . . got on good clothes and everything. Standing there with a clipboard in his hand. I ain't had to say nothing. First words come out of his mouth was . . . "I understand you need some furniture and can't get no credit." I liked to fell over. He say, "I'll give you all the credit you want, but you got to pay the interest on it." I told him, "Give me three rooms' worth and charge whatever you want." Next day a truck pulled up here and two men unloaded them three rooms. Man what drove the truck give me a book. Say send ten dollars, first of every month to the address in the book and everything will be all right. Say if I miss a payment the devil was coming back and it'll be hell to pay. That was fifteen years ago. To this day . . . the first of the month I send my ten dollars, Rose'll tell you.

ROSE: Troy lying.

Rose returns to the kitchen. Troy's voice follows her. As she goes about

AUGUST WILSON

*readying the food with a
perfectionist's care:*

TROY: I ain't never seen that man since. Now you tell me who else that could have been but the devil? I ain't sold my soul or nothing like that, you understand. Naw, I wouldn't have truck with the devil about nothing like that.

*Rose brings a plate of cornbread to
the dining table. Lyons has his guitar
out, tuning it.*

TROY: I got my furniture and pays my ten dollars the first of the month just like clockwork.

BONO: How long you say you been paying this ten dollars a month?

TROY: Fifteen years!

BONO: Hell, ain't you finished paying for it yet? How much the man done charged you?

TROY: Aw hell, I done paid for it. I done paid for it ten times over! The fact is I'm scared to stop paying it.

ROSE: Troy lying. We got that furniture from Mr. Glickman. He ain't paying no ten dollars a month to nobody.

TROY: Aw hell, woman. Bono know I ain't that big a fool.

LYONS: I was just getting ready to say . . . I know where there's a bridge for sale.

FENCES

TROY: Look here, I'll tell you this . . . it don't matter to me if he was the devil. It don't matter if the devil give credit. Somebody has got to give it.

ROSE: It ought to matter. You going around talking about having truck with the devil . . . God's the one you gonna have to answer to. He's the one gonna be at the Judgment.

Rose heads back into the kitchen.

LYONS: Yeah, well, look here, Pop . . . let me have that ten dollars. I'll give it back to you. Bonnie got a job working at the hospital.

TROY: What I tell you, Bono? The only time I see this nigger is when he wants something. That's the only time I see him.

LYONS: Come on, Pop, Mr. Bono don't want to hear all that. Let me have the ten dollars. I told you Bonnie working.

TROY: What that mean to me? "Bonnie working." I don't care if she working. Go ask her for the ten dollars if she working. Talking about "Bonnie working." Why ain't you working?

LYONS: Aw, Pop, you know I can't find no decent job. Where am I gonna get a job at? You know I can't get no job.

TROY: I told you I know some people down there. I can get you on the rubbish if you want to work. I told you that the last time you came by here asking me for something.

AUGUST WILSON

LYONS: Naw, Pop . . . thanks. That ain't for me. I don't wanna be carrying nobody's rubbish. I don't want to be punching nobody's time clock

TROY: What's the matter, you too good to carry people's rubbish? Where you think that ten dollars you talking about come from? I'm just supposed to haul people's rubbish and give my money to you 'cause you too lazy to work. You too lazy to work and wanna know why you ain't got what I got.

ROSE: What hospital Bonnie working at? Mercy?

LYONS: She's down at Passavant working in the laundry.

TROY: I ain't got nothing as it is. I give you that ten dollars and I got to eat beans the rest of the week. Naw . . . you ain't getting no ten dollars here.

LYONS: You ain't got to be eating no beans. I don't know why you wanna say that.

TROY: I ain't got no extra money. Gabe done moved over to Miss Pearl's, paying her the rent, and things done got tight around here. I can't afford to be giving you every payday.

LYONS: I ain't asked you to give me nothing. I asked you to loan me ten dollars. I know you got ten dollars.

TROY (ATTACKING): Yeah, I got it. You know why I got it? 'Cause I don't throw my money away out there in the streets. You living the fast life . . . wanna be a musician . . . running around in them clubs and things . . . then, you learn to take care of

FENCES

yourself. You ain't gonna find me going and asking nobody for nothing. I done spent too many years without.

LYONS: You and me is two different people, Pop.

TROY: I done learned my mistake and learned to do what's right by it. You still trying to get something for nothing. Life don't owe you nothing. You owe it to yourself. Ask Bono. He'll tell you I'm right.

LYONS: You got your way of dealing with the world . . . I got mine. The only thing that matters to me is the music.

TROY: Yeah, I can see that! It don't matter how you gonna eat . . . where your next dollar is coming from. You telling the truth there.

LYONS (ANNOYED): I know I got to eat. But I got to live too. I need something that gonna help me to get out of the bed in the morning. Make me feel like I belong in the world. I don't bother nobody. I just stay with my music 'cause that's the only way I can find to live in the world. Otherwise there ain't no telling what I might do. Now I don't come criticizing you and how you live. I just come by to ask you for ten dollars . . . I don't wanna hear all that about how I live!

TROY: Boy, your mama did a hell of a job raising you.

LYONS: You can't change me, Pop. I'm thirty-four years old. If you wanted to change me, you should have

AUGUST WILSON

been there when I was growing up. I come by to see you . . . ask for ten dollars and you want to talk about how I was raised. You don't know nothing about how I was raised.

ROSE: Let the boy have ten dollars, Troy.

TROY (TO LYONS): What the hell you looking at me for? I ain't got no ten dollars. You know what I do with my money.

(to Rose)

Give him ten dollars if you want him to have it.

ROSE: I will. Just as soon as you turn it loose.

TROY (REACHING IN HIS POCKET): There it is. Seventy-six dollars and forty-two cents. You see this, Bono? Now, I ain't gonna get but six of that back.

ROSE: You ought to stop telling that lie. Here, Lyons.

She hands him the money.

LYONS (PACKING UP HIS GUITAR): Thanks, Rose. Look . . . I got to run . . . I'll see you later.

TROY: Wait a minute. You gonna say, "thanks, Rose," and ain't gonna look to see where she got that ten dollars from? See how they do me, Bono?

LYONS: I know she got it from you, Pop. Thanks. I'll give it back to you.

TROY: There he go telling another lie. Time I see that ten dollars . . . he'll be owing me thirty more.

LYONS: See you, Mr. Bono.

FENCES

BONO: Take care, Lyons!

LYONS: Thanks, Pop. I'll see you again.

Lyons is out the door.

TROY: I don't know why he don't go and get him a decent job and take care of that woman he got.

BONO: He'll be all right, Troy. The boy is still young.

TROY: The boy is thirty-four years old.

ROSE: Let's not get off into all that.

BONO: Look here . . . I got to be going. I got to be getting on. Lucille gonna be waiting.

Troy goes to Rose, puts his arm around her.

TROY: See this woman, Bono? I love this woman. I love this woman so much it hurts. I love her so much . . . I done run out of ways of loving her. So I got to go back to basics. Don't you come by my house Monday morning talking about time to go to work . . . 'cause I'm still gonna be stroking!

ROSE: Troy! Stop it now!

BONO: I ain't paying him no mind, Rose. That ain't nothing but gin-talk. Go on, Troy. I'll see you Monday.

Bono goes through the door. As he does, Troy calls to him:

TROY: Don't you come by my house, nigger!

AUGUST WILSON

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH—LATE AFTERNOON

Bono walks down the front steps as we hear . . .

TROY (O.S.): I done told you what I'm gonna be doing.

**INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY- TROY AND ROSE'S
BEDROOM DOOR—NIGHT**

Camera slowly pushes in as we hear sounds of lovemaking emanating from inside as we cut to . . .

INT. CORY'S ROOM—NIGHT

Teenager-messy, cleats and football equipment, books and clothes strewn about. On his desk, a photo of Cory and Rose sits next to an envelope with the logo of The Elizabeth City State Teacher's College.

Cory is in bed, pillow clamped over his head to block the sounds of his parents . . .

BLACK SCREEN

The darkness fades to light as Rose is heard singing:

FENCES

ROSE (v.o.): . . . Just ask Jesus to be a fence around
you,
And you never have to worry anymore.
Just bow down . . .
Jesus be a fence all around me every day.

INT. TROY'S AND ROSE'S BEDROOM— MORNING

*Rose's singing hauls Troy up from a
deep slumber . . .*

ROSE (o.s.): When you get burdened—
Jesus, I want you to protect me
As I travel on the way.
When you get lonely—

*He gets slowly out of bed,
disoriented. He looks out of the
window. Rose is in the backyard,
hanging wet clothes on the line.*

ROSE: Jesus be a fence all around me every day
Jesus, protect me
As I travel on my way.

INT. SECOND STORY LANDING—MORNING

*Troy comes out of the bedroom. He sees
Cory's bedroom door is closed.*

EXT. BACK YARD—MORNING

Troy comes out of the house feeling like Superman. Rose is at the foot of the porch steps, cranking laundry through a mangle atop a bucket.

ROSE: Morning. You ready for breakfast? I can fix it as soon I finish hanging up these clothes.

TROY: I got the coffee on. That'll be all right. I'll just drink some of that this morning.

ROSE (CRANKING THE MANGLE): That 651 hit yesterday. That's the second time this month. Miss Pearl hit for a dollar . . . seem like those that need the least always get lucky. Poor folks can't get nothing.

TROY: Them numbers don't know nobody. I don't know why you fool with them. You and Lyons both.

ROSE: It's something to do.

TROY: You ain't doing nothing but throwing your money away.

Rose stops wringing out the clothes and takes him on.

ROSE: Troy, you know I don't play foolishly. I just play a nickel here and a nickel there.

TROY: That's two nickels you done thrown away.

ROSE: Now I hit sometimes . . . that makes up for it. It always come in handy when I do hit. I don't hear you complaining then.

FENCES

TROY: I ain't complaining now. I just say it's foolish. Trying to guess out of six hundred ways which way the number gonna come. If I had all the money niggers . . . these Negroes, throw away on numbers for one week—just one week—I'd be a rich man.

Troy heads inside as Rose brings the laundry basket to the line and hangs it.

ROSE (TO TROY IN THE KITCHEN): Well, you wishing and calling it foolish ain't gonna stop folks from playing numbers. That's one thing for sure. Besides . . . some good things come from playing numbers. Look where Pope done bought him that restaurant off of numbers.

Troy comes out, cup of coffee in hand.

TROY: I can't stand niggers like that. Man ain't had two dimes to rub together. He walking around with his shoes all run over bumming money for cigarettes. All right. Got lucky there and hit the numbers . . .

ROSE: Troy, I know all about it.

TROY: Had good sense, I'll say that for him. He ain't throwed his money away.

Troy goes down the steps toward the ruined fence.

TROY: I seen niggers hit the numbers and go through two thousand dollars in four days. Man brought him that restaurant down there . . . fixed it up

AUGUST WILSON

real nice . . . and then didn't want nobody to come in it! A Negro go in there and can't get no kind of service. I seen a white fellow come in there and order a bowl of stew. Pope picked all the meat out the pot for him. Man ain't had nothing but a bowl of meat! Negro come behind him and ain't got nothing but the potatoes and carrots. Talking about what numbers do for people, you picked a wrong example. Ain't done nothing but make a worser fool out of him than he was before.

Rose comes out from behind the hanging laundry.

ROSE: Troy, you ought to stop worrying about what happened at work yesterday.

TROY: I ain't worried. Just told me to be down there at the commissioner's office on Friday. Everybody think they gonna fire me. I ain't worried about them firing me. You ain't got to worry about that.

(pause)

Where's Cory? Cory in the house?

(loud)

CORY!

ROSE: He gone out.

TROY: Out, huh? He gone out 'cause he know I want him to help me with this fence. I know how he is. That boy scared of work. He ain't done a lick of work in his life.

FENCES

ROSE: He had to go to football practice. Coach wanted them to get in a little extra practice before the season start.

TROY: I got his practice . . . running out of here before he get his chores done.

ROSE: Troy, what is wrong with you this morning?

Troy grabs a shovel goes to a corner of the yard.

ROSE: Don't nothing set right with you. Go on back in there and go to bed . . . get up on the other side.

TROY: Why something got to be wrong with me? I ain't said nothing wrong with me.

ROSE: You got something to say about everything. First it's the numbers . . . then it's the way the man runs his restaurant . . . then you done got on Cory. What's it gonna be next? Take a look up there and see if the weather suits you . . . or is it gonna be how you gonna put up the fence with the clothes hanging in the yard.

TROY: You hit the nail on the head then.

ROSE: I know you like I know the back of my hand. Come on in here and get you some more coffee . . . see if that straighten you up.

(going into the house)

'Cause you ain't right this morning.

Troy starts to pace out the fence

AUGUST WILSON

line . . . He stops at the sound of a young girl's shout which seems to come from the abandoned house. Troy looks, listens: Nothing. Then the unsettling silence is broken by faint singing . . .

GABRIEL (O.S.): *Yes, ma'am, I got plums
You ask me how I sell them
Oh ten cents apiece—Three for a quarter
Come and buy now . . .*

EXT. SIDE ALLEY—MORNING

Troy heads up the dark alley toward the street. The singing gets louder, intermingled with children's voices, chanting, mocking the singer.

EXT. THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE—
MORNING

Troy sees his brother gabriel coming down the street, followed by the neighborhood kids. He is seven years younger than troy. Injured in world war ii, he has a metal plate in his head. He carries an old trumpet tied around his waist and believes with every fiber of his being that he is the archangel gabriel. He carries a

FENCES

chipped basket with an assortment of discarded fruits and vegetables he has picked up in the strip district and which he attempts to sell.

GABRIEL (SINGING): 'Cause I'm here today and tomorrow
I'll be gone.

As the kids see Troy heading their way, they scatter.

GABRIEL: There's Troy . . . Hey, Troy!

TROY: Hey, Gabe.

Rose comes out on the porch.

GABRIEL: Hey, Rose!

ROSE: How you doing, Gabe?

She continues down the steps, past Troy, and up to Gabe. Troy looks up and down the street, embarrassed. One or two old people are watching from windows and stoops.

ROSE: What you got there?

GABRIEL: You know what I got, Rose. I got fruits and vegetables.

Rose looks through his basket, treating the produce carefully.

ROSE: Where's all these plums you talking about?

GABRIEL: I ain't got no plums today, Rose. I was just

AUGUST WILSON

singing that. Have some tomorrow. Put me in a big order for plums. Have enough plums tomorrow for Saint Peter and everybody.

Gabriel shoots an anxious glance to Troy.

GABRIEL (TO ROSE): Troy's mad at me.

TROY: I ain't mad at you. What I got to be mad at you about? You ain't done nothing to me.

GABRIEL: I just moved over to Miss Pearl's to keep out from in your way. I ain't mean no harm by it.

TROY: Who said anything about that? I ain't said anything about that.

GABRIEL: You ain't mad at me, is you?

TROY: Naw . . . I ain't mad at you, Gabe. If I was mad at you I'd tell you about it.

GABRIEL: Got me two rooms. In the basement. Got my own door too. Wanna see my key?

He fishes out a key on a string and shows Rose and Troy.

GABRIEL: That's my own key! Ain't nobody else got a key like that. That's my key! My two rooms.

TROY: Well, that's good, Gabe. You got your own key . . . that's good.

ROSE: You hungry, Gabe? I was just fixing to cook Troy his breakfast.

FENCES

GABRIEL: I'll take some biscuits. You got some biscuits?

Rose tries to lead Gabriel by the hand into the house.

GABRIEL (TO ROSE): Did you know when I was in Heaven . . . every morning me and Saint Peter would sit down by the Gate and eat some big fat biscuits?

Troy sees a pair of old ladies across the street, whispering.

GABRIEL: Oh, yeah! We had us a good time. We'd sit there and eat us them biscuits and then Saint Peter would go off to sleep and tell me to wake him up when it's time to open the Gates for the Judgment.

ROSE: Well, come on, I'll make up a batch of biscuits.

GABRIEL: Troy . . . Saint Peter got your name in the book. I seen it. It say . . . Troy Maxson. I say . . . I know him! He got the same name like what I got. That's my brother!

TROY: How many times you gonna tell me that, Gabe?

GABRIEL: Ain't got my name in the book. Don't have to have my name. I done died and went to Heaven. He got your name though. One morning Saint Peter was looking at his book . . . marking it up for the Judgment . . . and he let me see your name. Got it in there under M. Got Rose's name . . . I ain't seen it like I seen yours . . . but I know it's in there. He got a great big book. Got everybody's

AUGUST WILSON

name what was ever been born. That's what he told me. But I seen your name. Seen it with my own eyes.

TROY: Go on in the house there. Rose going to fix you something to eat.

GABRIEL: Oh, I ain't hungry. I done had breakfast with Aunt Jemimah. She come by and cooked me up a whole mess of flapjacks. Remember how we used to eat them flapjacks?

TROY: Go on in the house and get you something to eat now.

GABRIEL: I got to go sell my plums. I done sold some tomatoes. Got me two quarters. Wanna see?

He shows his quarters to Troy, then pockets them.

GABRIEL: I'm gonna save them and buy me a new horn so Saint Peter can hear me when it's time to open the Gates.

(turning with a sudden violence)

Hear that? Hear that? That's the hellhounds. I got to chase them out of here. Go on get out of here! Get out!

(singing softly)

*Well, all you hypocrite members,
You wasting your time away.
My God's calling for workmens
And you had better obey.*

(louder)

FENCES

Better get ready for judgment!

Gabriel walks away singing as neighborhood kids give chase. Troy starts after him, then stops, looking at the old ladies, watching. He goes into the house.

INT. THE KITCHEN—MORNING

Troy comes into the kitchen. Rose, apron on, is making biscuit batter.

ROSE: Where's Gabe?

TROY: He gone off somewhere.

ROSE: He ain't eating right. Miss Pearl say she can't get him to eat nothing.

TROY: What you want me to do about it, Rose? I done did everything I can for the man. I can't make him get well. Man got half his head blown away . . . what you expect?

Troy pours himself a second cup of coffee.

ROSE: Seem like something ought to be done to help him.

TROY: Man don't bother nobody. He just mixed up from that metal plate he got in his head. Ain't no sense for him to go back into the hospital.

ROSE: Least he be eating right. They can help him take care of himself.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Don't nobody wanna be locked up, Rose. What you wanna lock him up for? Man go over there and fight the war . . . messin' around with them Japs, get half his head blown off . . . and they give him a lousy three thousand dollars. And I had to swoop down on that.

ROSE: Is you fixing to go into that again?

TROY: That's the only way I got a roof over my head . . . 'cause of that metal plate.

ROSE: Ain't no sense you blaming yourself for nothing. Gabe wasn't in no condition to manage that money. You done what was right by him. Can't nobody say you ain't done what was right by him. Look how long you took care of him . . . till he wanted to have his own place and moved over there with Miss Pearl.

TROY: That ain't what I'm saying, woman! I'm just stating the facts. If my brother didn't have that metal plate in his head . . . I wouldn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of. And I'm fifty-three years old. Now see if you can understand that!

*He turns and goes to the front door.
He grabs his jacket and hat. Rose is
in the kitchen doorway, holding the
mixing bowl.*

ROSE: Where you going off to? You been running out of here every Saturday for weeks. I thought you was gonna work on this fence?

FENCES

TROY: I'm gonna walk down to Taylors'. Listen to the ball game. I'll be back in a bit. I'll work on it when I get back.

He goes out the front door, closing it hard. Rose looks down at the mixing bowl, surprised that she's holding it. She goes to the kitchen trash can and starts to dump the batter, but she can't. She sits at the table. She finds the ball game on the radio. She gets a metal cooking sheet, returns to the table, wipes her hands and starts lumping batter onto the sheet. Soon her fingers are covered with batter. She scrapes vigorously at her hands to clean them, then stops, her hands shaking. She exerts her will, steadying them. CLOSE UP on her hands; time passes, the light changes.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN—DAY

CORY (O.S.): Mama? You all right?

Two hours later. Rose sits, unmoving. The lumps of dough on the sheet have hardened. The game is still in progress. She turns as if waking up. Cory's behind her in his muddy workout clothes, holding his shoulder pads and

AUGUST WILSON

cleats. Rose wipes her hands, switches off the radio, then carries the baking sheet to the trash can, scraping off the ruined biscuits with a knife.

ROSE: Your daddy like to had a fit with you running out of here this morning without doing your chores.

CORY: I told you I had to go to practice.

ROSE: He say you were supposed to help him with the fence.

CORY: He been saying that the last four or five Saturdays, and then he don't never do nothing, but go down to Taylors' . . . Did you tell him about the recruiter?

He opens the refrigerator and imagines the possibilities

ROSE: Yeah, I told him.

CORY: What he say?

ROSE: He ain't said nothing too much. You get up there and get started on your chores before he gets back. Go on and scrub down them steps before he gets back here hollering and carrying on.

Rose tosses the baking sheet in the sink.

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH—LATER THAT DAY

Rose, dressed nicely, checks the front door to make sure it's locked. She

FENCES

picks up a covered pie that she's put on one of the chairs. Troy comes silently up the front steps, grabbing Rose from behind. Startled, she jumps!

ROSE: Troy!

He laughs.

ROSE: Go on, now. You liked to scared me to death. What was the score of the game? Lucille had me on the phone and I couldn't keep up with it.

TROY: What I care about the game? Come here, woman.

He tries to kiss her.

ROSE: I thought you went down Taylors' to listen to the game. Go on, Troy! You supposed to be putting up the fence.

Attempting to kiss her again.

TROY: I'll put it up when I finish with what is at hand.

ROSE: Go on, Troy. I ain't studying you.

Playfully chasing after her.

TROY: I'm studying you . . . fixing to do my homework!

He lunges again, grabs her.

ROSE: Troy, you better leave me alone.

TROY: Where's Cory? That boy brought his butt home yet?

ROSE: He's in the house doing his chores.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY (CALLING): Cory!! Get your butt out here, boy!

(with lust in his eyes)

When you coming back?

ROSE (ENJOYING THIS:) I'll be right back.

TROY: When?

ROSE: I'm just going down the street.

As Rose leaves, Troy turns, climbs the steps.

EXT. THE BACKYARD—DAY

Troy comes out of the house. He goes to the tarp covering the lumber. Cory comes out onto the porch.

TROY: You just now coming in here from leaving this morning?

CORY: Yeah, I had to go to football practice.

TROY: Yeah, what?

CORY: Yessir.

TROY: I ain't but two seconds off you noway. The garbage sitting in there overflowing . . . you ain't done none of your chores . . . and you come in here talking about, "Yeah."

CORY: I was just getting ready to do my chores now, Pop . . .

FENCES

TROY: Your first chore is to help me with this fence on Saturday. Everything else come after that. Now get that saw and cut them boards.

*Cory takes the saw and begins cutting the boards. Troy continues working.
There is a long pause.*

CORY: Hey, Pop . . . why don't you buy a TV?

TROY: What I want with a TV? What I want one of them for?

CORY: Everybody got one. Earl, Ba Bra . . . Jesse!

TROY: I ain't asked you who had one. I say what I want with one?

CORY: So you can watch it. They got lots of things on TV. Baseball games and everything. We could watch the World Series.

TROY: Yeah . . . And how much this TV cost?

CORY: I don't know. They got them on sale for around two hundred dollars.

TROY: Two hundred dollars, huh?

CORY: That ain't that much, Pop.

TROY: Naw, it's just two hundred dollars.

(pointing with his pencil)

See that roof you got over your head at night?
Let me tell you something about that roof. It's
been over ten years since that roof was last

AUGUST WILSON

tarred. See now . . . the snow come this winter and sit up there on that roof like it is . . . and it's gonna seep inside. It's just gonna be a little bit . . . ain't gonna hardly notice it. Then the next thing you know, it's gonna be leaking all over the house. Then the wood rot from all that water and you gonna need a whole new roof. Now, how much you think it cost to get that roof tarred?

CORY (STOPS SAWING): I don't know.

TROY: Two hundred and sixty-four dollars . . . cash money. While you thinking about a TV, I got to be thinking about the roof . . . and whatever else go wrong around here. Now if you had two hundred dollars, what would you do . . . fix the roof or buy a TV?

CORY: I'd buy a TV. Then when the roof started to leak . . . when it needed fixing . . . I'd fix it.

*Cory hurls a finished plank aside and
grabs the next one.*

TROY: Where are you gonna get the money from? You done spent it for a TV. You gonna sit up and watch the water run all over your brand-new TV.

CORY: Aw, Pop. You got money. I know you do.

TROY: Where I got it at, huh?

CORY: You got it in the bank.

TROY: You wanna see my bankbook? You wanna see that \$73.22 I got sitting up in there?

FENCES

CORY: You ain't got to pay for it all at one time. You can put a down payment on it and carry it home with you.

TROY: Not me. I ain't gonna owe nobody nothing if I can help it. Miss a payment and they come and snatch it right out your house. Then what you got? Now, soon as I get two hundred dollars clear, then I'll buy a TV. Right now, as soon as I get two hundred and sixty-four dollars, I'm gonna have this roof tarred.

CORY: Aw . . . Pop!

TROY: You go on and get you two hundred dollars and buy one if ya want it. I got better things to do with my money.

CORY: I can't get no two hundred dollars. I ain't never seen two hundred dollars.

TROY: I'll tell you what . . . you get you a hundred dollars and I'll put the other hundred with it.

CORY: All right, I'm gonna show you.

TROY: You gonna show me how you can cut them boards right now.

Cory begins to cut the boards. There is a long pause.

CORY: The Pirates won today. That makes five in a row.

TROY: I ain't thinking about the Pirates. Got an all-white team. Got that boy . . . that Puerto Rican boy . . . Clemente. Don't even half-play him.

AUGUST WILSON

That boy could be something if they give him a chance. Play him one day and sit him on the bench the next.

CORY: He gets a lot of chances to play.

TROY: I'm talking about playing regular. Playing every day so you can get your timing. That's what I'm talking about.

CORY: They got some white guys on the team that don't play every day. You can't play everybody at the same time.

TROY: If they got a white fellow sitting on the bench . . . you can bet your last dollar he can't play! The colored guy got to be twice as good before he get on the team. That's why I don't want you to get all tied up in them sports. Man on the team and what it get him? They got colored on the team and don't use them. Same as not having them. All them teams the same.

CORY: The Braves got Hank Aaron and Wes Covington. Hank Aaron hit two home runs today. That makes forty-three.

TROY: Hank Aaron ain't nobody. That's what you supposed to do. That's how you supposed to play the game. Ain't nothing to it. It's just a matter of timing . . . getting the right follow-through. Hell, I can hit forty-three home runs right now!

CORY: Not off no major-league pitching, you couldn't.

TROY: We had better pitching in the Negro leagues. I

FENCES

hit seven home runs off of Satchel Paige. You can't get no better than that!

CORY: Sandy Koufax. He's leading the league in strikeouts.

TROY: I ain't thinking of no Sandy Koufax.

CORY: You got Warren Spahn and Lew Burdette. I bet you couldn't hit no home runs off of Warren Spahn.

TROY: I'm through with it now. You go on and cut them boards.

(pause)

Your mama tell me you done got recruited by a college football team? Is that right?

CORY: Yeah. Coach Zellman say the recruiter gonna be coming by to talk to you. Get you to sign the permission papers.

TROY: I thought you supposed to be working down there at the A&P. Ain't you supposed to be working down there after school?

CORY: Mr. Stawicki say he gonna hold my job for me until after the football season. Say starting next week I can work weekends.

TROY: I thought we had an understanding about this football stuff? You suppose to keep up with your chores and hold that job down at the A&P. Ain't been around here all day on a Saturday. Ain't none of your chores done . . . and now you telling me you done quit your job.

AUGUST WILSON

CORY: I'm gonna be working weekends.

TROY: You damn right you are! And ain't no need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing nothing.

CORY: Hey, Pop . . . you can't do that. He's coming all the way from North Carolina.

TROY: I don't care where he coming from. The white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football no way. You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you have something can't nobody take away from you. You go on and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling people's garbage.

CORY: I get good grades, Pop. That's why the recruiter wants to talk with you. You got to keep up your grades to get recruited. This way I'll be going to college. I'll get a chance . . .

TROY: First you gonna get your butt down there to the A&P and get your job back.

CORY: Mr. Stawicki done already hired somebody else 'cause I told him I was playing football.

TROY: You a bigger fool than I thought . . . to let somebody take away your job so you can play some football. Where you gonna get your money to take out your girlfriend and whatnot? What kind of foolishness is that to let somebody take away your job?

FENCES

CORY: I'm still gonna be working weekends.

TROY: Naw . . . naw. You getting your butt out of here and finding you another job.

CORY: Come on, Pop! I got to practice. I can't work after school and play football too. The team needs me. That's what Coach Zellman say . . .

TROY: I don't care what nobody else say. I'm the boss . . . you understand? I'm the boss around here. I do the only saying what counts.

CORY: Come on, Pop!

Troy comes right up to Cory, in his face.

TROY: I asked you . . . Did you understand?

CORY: Yeah . . .

TROY: What?!

CORY: Yessir.

TROY: Yessir.

CORY (PAUSE): Can I ask you a question?

TROY: What the hell you wanna ask me? Mr. Stawicki the one you got the questions for.

CORY: How come you ain't never liked me?

TROY: Liked you? Who the hell say I got to like you? What law is there say I got to like you? Wanna stand up in my face and ask a damn fool-ass ques-

AUGUST WILSON

tion like that. Talking about liking somebody.
Come here, boy, when I talk to you.

Cory hesitates, then goes to Troy.

TROY: Straighten up, goddamn it!

Cory does.

TROY: I asked you a question . . . what law is there
say I got to like you?

CORY: None.

TROY: Well, all right then! Don't you eat every day?

Cory looks down.

TROY: Answer me when I talk to you! Don't you eat every
day?

CORY: Yeah.

TROY: Nigger, as long as you in my house, you put that
sir on the end of it when you talk to me!

CORY: Yes . . . sir.

TROY: You eat every day.

CORY: Yessir!

TROY: Got a roof over your head.

CORY: Yessir!

TROY: Got clothes on your back.

CORY: Yessir.

TROY: Why you think that is?

FENCES

CORY: 'Cause of you.

TROY: Aw, hell, I know it's 'cause of me . . . but why do you think that is?

CORY (HESITANT): 'Cause you like me.

TROY: Like you? I go out of here every morning . . . bust my butt . . . putting up with them crackers every day . . . 'cause I like you? You about the biggest fool I ever saw. It's my job. It's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house . . . sleep your behind on my bedclothes . . . fill you belly up with my food . . . 'cause you my son.

*Rose is in the kitchen, listening
through the screen door.*

TROY: You my flesh and blood. Not 'cause I like you! 'Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you! Let's get this straight right here . . . before it go along any further . . . I ain't got to like you. Mr. Rand don't give me my money come payday 'cause he likes me. He gives me 'cause he owe me. I done give you everything I had to give you. I gave you your life! Me and your mama worked that out between us. And liking your black ass wasn't part of the bargain. Don't you try and go through life worrying about if somebody like you or not. You best be making sure they doing right by you. You understand what I'm saying, boy?

CORY: Yessir.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Then get the hell out of my face, and get on down to that A&P.

Cory runs up the stairs, yanks open the screen door to discover Rose, standing there. He pushes past her, letting the door slam. She comes out onto the porch.

ROSE (COMING DOWN INTO THE YARD): Why don't you let the boy go ahead and play football, Troy? Ain't no harm in that. He's just trying to be like you with the sports.

TROY: I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get. You the only decent thing that ever happened to me. I wish him that. But I don't wish him a thing else from my life.

He starts to put away the sawhorses.

TROY: I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn't getting involved in no sports. Not after what they did to me in the sports.

ROSE: Troy, why don't you admit you was too old to play in the major leagues? For once . . . why don't you admit that?

TROY: What do you mean too old? Don't come telling me I was too old. I just wasn't the right color. Hell, I'm fifty-three years old and can do better than Selkirk's .269 right now!

ROSE: How's was you gonna play ball when you were

FENCES

over forty? Sometimes I can't get no sense out of you.

TROY: I got good sense, woman. I got sense enough not to let my boy get hurt over playing no sports. You been mothering that boy too much. Worried about if people like him.

ROSE: Everything that boy do . . . he do for you. He wants you to say, "Good job, son." That's all.

TROY: Rose, I ain't got time for that. He's alive. He's healthy. He's got to make his own way. I made mine. Ain't nobody gonna hold his hand when he get out there in that world.

ROSE: Times have changed from when you was young, Troy. People change. The world's changing around you and you can't even see it.

TROY (SLOW, METHODICAL): Woman . . . I do the best I can do. I come in here every Friday. I carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard. You all line up at the door with your hands out. I give you the lint from my pockets. I give you my sweat and my blood. I ain't got no tears. I done spent them. We go upstairs in that room at night . . . and I fall down on you and try to blast a hole into forever. I get up Monday morning . . . find my lunch on the table. I go out. Make my way. Find my strength to carry me through to the next Friday. That's all I got, Rose.

Troy starts into the house.

TROY: That's all I got to give. I can't give nothing else!

AUGUST WILSON

He goes inside. The door swings shut behind him. Rose, alone, watching him go.

INT. CITY HALL—AFTERNOON

We're moving at a rapid walking pace looking up at a ceiling fresco of wpa-era heroic worker figures laying sewers. The sound of footsteps. The camera pans down to catch the back of a white deputy commissioner. He hurries past various businessmen and -women, all white, to find troy sitting in the chair against the opposite wall, looking nervous, hat in hand.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER: Mr. Maxson?

Troy stands.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER: The commissioner will see you now.

Close up on Troy's face.

CUT TO

BLACK SCREEN

In the black we hear Troy and Bono.

BONO (v.o.): He told him the same thing he told you.
Take it to the union.

FENCES

TROY (v.o.): (excited)

Brownie ain't got that much sense. Man wasn't thinking about nothing. He wait until I confront them on it . . . then he wanna come crying seniority.

(calls out)

ROSE! HEY ROSE!

EXT. FRONT OF TROY'S AND ROSE'S HOUSE—
AFTERNOON

Troy peacocking, Bono walks beside him. Across the street, a couple of people look out of their windows.

BONO: I wish I could have seen Mr. Rand's face when he told you.

TROY: He couldn't get it out of his mouth! Liked to bit his tongue! When they called me down there to the commissioner's office . . . he thought they was gonna fire me. Like everybody else.

BONO: I didn't think they was gonna fire you. I thought they was gonna put you on the warning paper.

EXT. SIDE YARD—AFTERNOON

TROY: HEY ROSE!

(to Bono)

Yeah, Mr. Rand like to bit his tongue.

AUGUST WILSON

BONO: I see you run right down to Taylors' and told that Alberta gal.

TROY (CALLING): HEY ROSE!

(to Bono)

I told everybody. HEY ROSE!

(for Bono)

I went down there to cash my check.

EXT. BACK YARD—CONTINUOUS

Rose sticks her head out of the kitchen window.

ROSE: Hush all that hollering, man! I know you out here. What they say down there at the commissioner's office?

TROY (WITH MOCK PRIDE): You supposed to come when I call you, woman. Bono'll tell you that.

(to Bono)

Don't Lucille come when you call her?

ROSE: Man, hush your mouth. I ain't no dog . . . talk about . . . "come when you call me."

Rose pulls her head back in and shuts the window. Troy, still peacocking, heads up the steps and makes a show of opening the back porch door for her.

FENCES

TROY (LOUD FOR ROSE TO HEAR): You hear this, Bono? I had me an old dog used to get uppity like that. You say, "C'mere, Blue!" . . . and he just lay there and look at you.

Rose hurries out onto the back porch.

TROY: End up getting a stick and chasing him away trying to make him come.

ROSE: I ain't studying you and your dog. I remember you used to sing that old song.

TROY (HE SINGS:): *Hear it ring! Hear it ring!*
Had an old dog his name was Blue.

ROSE: Don't nobody want to hear you sing that old song.

TROY (SINGING): *You know Blue was mighty true.*

ROSE: Used to have Cory running around here singing that song.

BONO: Hell, I remember that song myself.

TROY (SINGING): *You know Blue was a good old dog.*
Blue treed a possum in a hollow log.
That was my daddy's song. My daddy made up that song.

ROSE: I don't care who made it up. Don't nobody wanna hear you sing it.

TROY (MAKES A SONG LIKE CALLING A DOG): Come here, woman.

ROSE: You come in here carrying on, I reckon they

AUGUST WILSON

ain't fired you. What they say down there at the commissioner's office?

TROY (PUTS HIS ARM AROUND ROSE): Look here, Rose . . . Mr. Rand called me into his office today when I got back from talking to them people down there . . . it come from up top . . . he called me in and told me they was making me a driver.

ROSE: Troy, you kidding!

TROY: No I ain't. Ask Bono.

ROSE: Well, that's great, Troy. Now you don't have to hassle them people no more.

Lyons comes out from inside.

TROY: Aw hell . . . I wasn't looking to see you today. I thought you was in jail. Got it all over the front page of the Courier about them raiding See-fus' place . . . where you be hanging out with all them thugs.

LYONS: Hey, Pop . . . that ain't got nothing to do with me. I don't go down there gambling. I go down there to sit in with the band. I ain't got nothing to do with the gambling part. They got some good music down there.

TROY: They got some rogues . . . is what they got.

LYONS: How you been, Mr. Bono? Hi, Rose.

BONO: I see where you playing down at the Crawford Grill tonight.

FENCES

ROSE: How come you ain't brought Bonnie like I told you. You should have brought Bonnie with you, she ain't been over in a month of Sundays.

LYONS: I was just in the neighborhood . . . thought I'd stop by.

TROY: Here he come . . .

BONO: Your daddy got a promotion on the rubbish. He's gonna be the first colored driver. Ain't got to do nothing but sit up there and read the paper like them white fellows.

Lyons comes down the steps and joins them.

LYONS: Hey, Pop . . . if you knew how to read you'd be all right.

BONO: Naw . . . naw . . . you mean if the nigger knew how to *drive* he'd be all right. Been fighting with them people about driving and ain't even got a license. Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license?

TROY: Driving ain't nothing. All you do is point the truck where you want it to go. Driving ain't nothing.

BONO: Do they know you ain't got no driver's license? That's what I'm talking about. I ain't asked if driving was easy. I asked if Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license.

TROY: He ain't got to know. The man ain't got to know

AUGUST WILSON

my business. Time he find out, I have two or three driver's licenses.

LYONS (GOING INTO HIS POCKET): Say, look here, Pop . . .

TROY: I knew it was coming. Didn't I tell you, Bono? I know what kind of "look here, Pop" that was. The nigger fixing to ask me for some money. It's Friday night. It's my payday. All them rogues down there on the avenue . . . the ones that ain't in jail . . . and Lyons is hopping in his shoes to get down there with them.

Lyons takes out a ten dollar bill and holds it out to Troy.

LYONS: See, Pop . . . if you'd give somebody else a chance to talk sometime—you'd see that I was fixing to pay you back your ten dollars like I told you. Here . . . I told you I'd pay you when Bonnie got paid.

TROY: Naw . . . you go ahead and keep that ten dollars. Put it in the bank. The next time you feel like you wanna come by here and ask me for something . . . you go on down there and get that.

LYONS: Here's your ten dollars, Pop. I told you I don't want you to give me nothing. I just wanted to borrow ten dollars.

TROY: Naw . . . you go on and keep that for the next time you want to ask me.

LYONS: Come on, Pop . . . here go your ten dollars.

FENCES

Lyons tries again to hand the money to Troy.

ROSE: Why don't you go on and let the boy pay you back, Troy?

LYONS: Here you go, Rose. If you don't take it I'm gonna have to hear about it for the next six months.

He hands her the money.

ROSE: You can hand yours over here too, Troy.

TROY: You see this Bono, you see how they do me?

BONO: Yeah, Lucille do me the same way.

Gabriel is heard singing . . .

GABRIEL: *Better get ready for the judgement!*

Better get ready for . . .

Hey! . . . Hey! There's Troy's boy!

LYONS: How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL: Lyons . . . The King of the Jungle!

He surveys the backyard, finding Rose, who's come to greet him.

GABRIEL: Rose . . . hey, Rose. Got a flower for you.

Gabe rummages in his basket till he finds a torn-off branch of a rose vine. He hands it to Rose.

GABRIEL: Picked it myself. That's the same rose like you is!

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: That's right nice of you, Gabe.

LYONS: What you been doing, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL: Oh, I been chasing hellhounds and waiting on the time to tell Saint Peter to open the Gates.

LYONS: You been chasing hellhounds, huh? Well . . . you doing the right thing, Uncle Gabe. Somebody got to chase them.

GABRIEL: Oh, yeah . . . I know it. The devil's strong. The devil ain't no pushover. Hellhounds snipping at everybody's heels. But I got my trumpet waiting on the Judgment time.

LYONS: Waiting on the Battle of Armageddon, huh?

GABRIEL: Ain't gonna be too much of a battle when God get to waving that Judgment sword. But the people's gonna have a hell of a time trying to get into Heaven if them Gates ain't open.

LYONS (PUTTING HIS ARMS AROUND GABRIEL): You hear this, Pop? Uncle Gabe, you all right!

GABRIEL (LAUGHING WITH LYONS): Lyons! King of the Jungle.

ROSE: You gonna stay for supper, Gabe? Want me to fix you a plate?

GABRIEL: I'll just take a sandwich, Rose. Don't want no plate. Just wanna eat with my hands. I'll take a sandwich.

ROSE: How about you, Lyons? You staying? Got some short ribs cooking.

FENCES

LYONS: Naw, I won't eat nothing till after we finished playing.

(pause)

You ought to come down and listen to me play, Pop.

TROY: I don't like that Chinese music. All that noise.

ROSE: Go on in the house and wash up, Gabe . . . I'll fix you a sandwich.

GABRIEL (TO LYONS AS HE GOES INSIDE): Troy's mad at me.

LYONS: What you mad at Uncle Gabe for, Pop.

ROSE: He thinks Troy's mad at him 'cause he moved over to Miss Pearl's.

TROY: I ain't mad at the man. He can live where he want to live at.

LYONS: What he move over there for? Miss Pearl don't like nobody.

ROSE: She don't mind him none. She treats him real nice. She just don't allow all that singing.

TROY: She don't mind that rent he be paying . . . that's what she don't mind.

ROSE: Troy, I ain't going through that with you no more. He's over there 'cause he want to have his own place. He can come and go as he please.

TROY: Hell, he could come and go as he please here. I wasn't stopping him. I ain't put no rules on him.

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: It ain't the same thing, Troy. And you know it. Now, that's the last I wanna hear about that. I don't wanna hear nothing else about Gabe and Miss Pearl. And next week . . .

(Gabe calls from the kitchen)

GABRIEL (O.S.): I'm ready for my sandwich, Rose.

ROSE: And next week . . . when that recruiter come from that school . . . I want you to sign that paper and go on and let Cory play football. Then that'll be the last I have to hear about that.

TROY (TO ROSE AS SHE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN): I ain't thinking about Cory nothing.

LYONS: What . . . Cory got recruited? What school he going to?

TROY: That boy walking around here smelling his piss . . . thinking he's grown. Thinking he's gonna do what he want, irrespective of what I say. Look here, Bono . . . I left the commissioner's office and went down to the A&P . . . that boy ain't working down there. He lying to me. Telling me he got his job back . . . telling me he working weekends . . . telling me he working after school . . . Mr. Stawicki tell me he ain't working down there at all!

LYONS: Cory just growing up. He's just busting at the seams trying to fill out your shoes.

TROY: I don't care what he's doing. When he get to the

FENCES

point where he wanna disobey me . . . then it's time for him to move on. Bono'll tell you that. I bet he ain't never disobeyed his daddy without paying the consequences.

Troy offers Bono the bottle. Bono takes it.

BONO: I ain't never had a chance. My daddy came on through . . . But I ain't never knew him to see him . . . or what he had on his mind or where he went. Just moving on through. Searching out the New Land. That's what the old folks used to call it. See a fellow moving around from place to place . . . woman to woman . . . called it Searching out the New Land. I can't say if he ever found it. I come along, didn't want no kids. Didn't know if I was gonna be in one place long enough to fix on them right as their daddy. I figured I was going searching too.

Bono sips, hands the bottle to Lyons, who takes a big swig.

BONO: As it turned out I been hooked up with Lucille near about as long as your daddy been with Rose. Going on sixteen years.

TROY: Sometimes I wish I hadn't known my daddy. He ain't cared nothing about no kids. A kid to him wasn't nothing. All he wanted was for you to learn how to walk so he could start you to working. When it come time for eating . . . he ate

AUGUST WILSON

first. If there was anything left over, that's what you got. Man would sit down and eat two chickens and give you the wing.

LYONS: You ought to stop that, Pop. Everybody feed their kids. No matter how hard times is . . . everybody care about their kids. Make sure they have something to eat.

TROY: The only thing my daddy cared about was getting them bales of cotton in to Mr. Lubin. That's the only thing that mattered to him. Sometimes I used to wonder why he was living. Wonder why the devil hadn't come and got him. "Get them bales of cotton in to Mr. Lubin" and find out he owe him money . . .

LYONS: He should have just went on and left when he saw he couldn't get nowhere. That's what I would have done.

TROY: How he gonna leave with eleven kids? And where he gonna go? He ain't knew how to do nothing but farm. No, he was trapped and I think he knew it. But I'll say this for him . . . he felt a responsibility toward us. Maybe he ain't treated us the way I felt he should have . . . but without that responsibility he could have walked off and left us . . . made his own way.

BONO: A lot of them did. Back in those days what you talking about . . . they walk out their front door and just take on down one road or another and keep on walking.

FENCES

LYONS: There you go! That's what I'm talking about.

Troy offers Bono the bottle.

BONO: Just keep on walking till you come to something else. Ain't you never heard of nobody having the walking blues? Well, that's what you call it when you just take off like that.

TROY: My daddy ain't had them walking blues! What you talking about? He stayed right there with his family. But he was just as evil as he could be. My mama couldn't stand him. Couldn't stand that evilness. She run off when I was about eight.

EXT. AN ALABAMA COTTON FIELD—DAY

A sharp colorless memory fragment:

*TROY'S FATHER, A SHARECROPPER, SEEN FROM BEHIND AS
HE STEERS A PLOW PULLED BY A MULE.*

TROY (v.o.): She sneaked off one night after he had gone to sleep. Told me she was coming back for me. I ain't never seen her no more. All his women run off and left him. He wasn't good for nobody.

EXT. THE BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

TROY: When my turn come to head out, I was fourteen and got to sniffing around Joe Canewell's daughter.

INT. THE KITCHEN—AFTERNOON

*Rose sits next to Gabriel, eating a sandwich, his trumpet on the table.
Rose is listening to Troy.*

TROY (o.s.): Had us an old mule we called Greyboy. My daddy sent me out to do some plowing and I tied up Greyboy and went to fooling around with Joe Canewell's daughter. We done found us a nice spot, got real cozy with each other. She about thirteen and we done figured we was grown anyway . . . So we down there enjoying ourselves . . . ain't thinking about nothing.

EXT. A WOODS IN ALABAMA—DAY

*Memory fragment, no color: The arms,
shoulders, legs of a teenaged girl,
pushing aside low-growing new foliage,
lying down on leaves; a quick glimpse
of a pretty face; her laughter heard
underneath Troy's voice:*

TROY (v.o.): We didn't know Greyboy had got loose and wandered back to the house and my daddy was looking for me. We down there by the creek enjoying ourselves when my daddy come up on us.

FENCES

EXT. BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

TROY: Surprised us. He had them leather straps off the mule and commenced to whupping me like there was no tomorrow. I jumped up, mad and embarrassed. I was scared of my daddy.

EXT. A WOODS IN ALABAMA—DAY

Memory fragment: Troy's father's huge arms tearing at branches, scrabbling after something that's scrambling away from his grasping hands.

EXT. THE BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

TROY: When he commenced to whupping on me . . . quite naturally I run to get out of the way. Now I thought he was mad 'cause I ain't done my work. But I see where he was chasing me off so he could have the gal for himself. When I see what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy. Right there is where I become a man . . . at fourteen years of age.

EXT. A WOODS IN ALABAMA—DAY

Memory fragment: The teenaged girl, running, terrified, deeper into the woods; Troy's father's back, his shirt

AUGUST WILSON

*being torn open by the stroke of a
leather reins; his arms raised against
further lashing.*

TROY (v.o.): Now it was my turn to run him off. I picked up them same reins that he had used on me. I picked up them reins and commenced to whupping on him. The gal jumped up and run off . . . and when my daddy turned to face me, I could see why the devil had never come to get him . . .

*Troy's father grabs the reins,
lowering his arms; a moment in which
we see his face for the first time.*

TROY (v.o.): . . . 'cause he was the devil himself.

INT. THE KITCHEN—AFTERNOON

*Gabriel stands with his trumpet,
sandwich in his other hand. Rose is
still sitting, transfixed.*

EXT. THE BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

TROY: I don't know what happened. When I woke up, I was laying right there by the creek, and Blue . . . this old dog we had . . . was licking my face. I thought I was blind. I couldn't see nothing. Both my eyes were swollen shut. I laid there and cried. I didn't know what I was gonna do.

FENCES

He stops, lost someplace inside his head.

TROY: The only thing I knew was the time had come for me to leave my daddy's house. And right there the world suddenly got big. And it was a long time before I could cut it down to where I could handle it.

Gabe comes out on the porch. A beat, then:

LYONS: What you got there, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL: Got me a ham sandwich. Rose gave me a ham sandwich.

TROY: I don't know what happened to him. I done lost touch with everybody except Gabriel. But I hope he's dead. I hope he found some peace.

LYONS: That's a heavy story, Pop. I didn't know you left home when you was fourteen.

The phone rings inside the house.

LYONS: Fourteen's kinda young to be out on your own. I don't know what I would have done.

TROY: I got up from the creek and walked on down to Mobile. I was through with farming.

(stands, goes to a safe place . . . his bat, leaning against the tree)

Figured I could do better in the city. So I walked the two hundred miles to Mobile.

AUGUST WILSON

LYONS: Wait a minute . . . you ain't walked no two hundred miles, Pop. Ain't nobody gonna walk no two hundred miles. You talking about some walking there.

BONO: That's the only way you got anywhere back in them days.

LYONS: Shhh. Damn if I wouldn't have hitched a ride with somebody!

TROY: Who you gonna hitch it with? They ain't had no cars and things like they got now.

Swinging his bat . . .

TROY: We talking about 1918.

Rose comes out onto the porch.

ROSE: What you all out here getting into?

TROY (TO ROSE): I'm telling Lyons how good he got it. He don't know nothing about this I'm talking.

ROSE: Lyons, that was Bonnie on the phone. She say you supposed to pick her up.

LYONS: Yeah, okay, Rose.

TROY: I walked on down to Mobile and hitched up with some of them fellows that was heading this way. Got up here and found out . . . not only couldn't you get a job . . . you couldn't find no place to live. I thought I was in freedom. Shhh. Colored folks living down there on the riverbanks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for them-

FENCES

selves. Right down there under the Brady Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tar paper.

Here we go.

TROY: Messed around there and went from bad to worse. Started stealing. First it was food. Then I figured, hell, if I steal money I can buy me some food. Buy me some shoes too! One thing led to another. Met your mama. I was young and anxious to be a man. Met your mama and had you. What I do that for?

Lyons is unsure if his father is joking.

TROY: Now I got to worry about feeding you and her. Got to steal three times as much. Went out one day looking for somebody to rob . . . that's what I was, a robber. I'll tell you the truth. I'm ashamed of it today. But it's the truth. Went to rob this fellow . . . pulled out my knife . . . and he pulled out a gun. Shot me in the chest. It felt just like somebody had taken a hot branding iron and laid it on me. When he shot me I jumped at him with my knife. They told me I killed him and they put me in the penitentiary and locked me up for fifteen years. That's where I met Bono. That's where I learned how to play baseball. Got out that place and your mama had taken you and went on to make a life without me.

Lyons listens, completely absorbed.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Fifteen years was a long time for her to wait. But that fifteen years cured me of that robbing stuff.

(looking at Rose)

Rose'll tell you. She asked me when I met her if I had gotten all that foolishness out of my system. And I told her, "Baby, it's you and baseball all what count with me." You hear me, Bono? I meant it too. She say, "Which one comes first?" I told her, "Baby, ain't no doubt it's baseball . . . but you stick and get old with me and we'll both outlive this baseball." Am I right, Rose? And it's true.

ROSE: Man, hush your mouth. You ain't said no such thing. Talking about, "Baby, you know you'll always be number one with me." That's what you was talking.

TROY: You hear that, Bono. That's why I love her.

BONO: Rose'll keep you straight. You get off the track, she'll straighten you up.

Rose heads to the kitchen.

ROSE: Lyons, you better get on up and get Bonnie. She waiting on you.

LYONS: Hey, Pop, why don't you come on down to the Grill and hear me play?

TROY: I ain't going down there. I'm too old to be sitting around in them clubs.

FENCES

BONO: You got to be good to play down at the Grill.

LYONS: Come on, Pop . . .

TROY: I got to get up in the morning.

LYONS: You ain't got to stay long.

TROY (STANDING): Naw, I'm gonna get my supper and go on to bed.

LYONS: Well, I gotta go. I'll see you again.

Lyons heads into the house.

TROY: Don't you come around my house on my payday.

INT. THE KITCHEN—LATE AFTERNOON

Rose is cooking.

ROSE: Pick up the phone and let somebody know you coming. And bring Bonnie with you. You know I'm always glad to see her.

Troy and Bono come into the kitchen.

LYONS: Yeah, I'll do that, Rose. You take care now. See you, Pop. See you, Mr. Bono.

(calling through the screen door)

See you, Uncle Gabe.

Gabe calls in from outside:

GABRIEL (O.S.): Lyons! King of the Jungle!

Lyons grabs his guitar and leaves.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY (TO ROSE): Is supper ready, woman? Me and you got some business to take care of. I'm gonna tear it up too.

ROSE: Troy, I done told you now!

Troy puts his arm around Bono.

TROY: Aw hell, woman . . . this is Bono. Bono like family. I done known this nigger since . . . how long I done know you?

BONO: It's been a long time.

TROY: I done known this nigger since Skippy was a pup. Me and him done been through some times.

BONO: You sure right about that.

TROY: Hell, I done know him longer than I known you. And we still standing shoulder to shoulder. Hey, look here, Bono . . . a man can't ask for no more than that. I love you, nigger.

BONO: Hell, I love you too . . . but I got to get home see my woman. You got yours in hand. I got to go get mine.

EXT. MAXSON HOUSE—FRONT PORCH

*Bono goes out onto the front porch.
Troy follows. They stop when a helmet
comes flying in Troy's direction. Cory
standing in the middle of the street,
dressed in his football uniform, he*

FENCES

gives Troy a hard, uncompromising look.

CORY: What you do that for, Pop?

Rose comes out.

ROSE: What's the matter? Cory . . . what's the matter?

CORY: Papa done went up to the school and told Coach Zellman I can't play football no more. Wouldn't even let me play the game. Told him to tell the recruiter not to come.

ROSE: Troy . . .

TROY: What you Troying me for. Yeah, I did it. And the boy know why I did it.

CORY: Why you wanna do that to me? That was the one chance I had.

ROSE: Ain't nothing wrong with Cory playing football, Troy.

TROY: The boy lied to me. I told the nigger if he wanna play football . . . to keep up his chores and hold down that job at the A&P. That was the conditions. Stopped down there to see Mr. Stawicki . . .

CORY: I can't work after school during the football season, Pop! I tried to tell you that Mr. Stawicki's holding my job for me. You don't never want to listen to nobody. And then you wanna go and do this to me!

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: I ain't done nothing to you. You done it to yourself

*Gabriel is standing across the street.
He lifts the trumpet to his lips and
tries to blow. No sound comes out.*

CORY: Just 'cause you didn't have a chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all.

*Troy comes down onto the street. Cory
backs away a little.*

TROY: Come here.

Cory reluctantly goes over to Troy.

ROSE (COMING DOWN THE STEPS): Troy . . .

TROY: All right! See. You done made a mistake.

CORY: I didn't even do nothing!

TROY: I'm gonna tell you what your mistake was.

*The football helmet is on the street
next to Troy. He kicks it with his foot
and sends it tumbling down the hill.*

TROY: See . . . you swung at the ball and didn't hit it. That's strike one. See, you in the batter's box now. You swung and you missed. That's strike one.

*Troy closes the distance, his face
leering, terrifying. Cory tries not to
flinch. Troy hisses in Cory's ear:*

TROY: Don't you strike out!

FENCES

EXT. BACKYARD—THE FOLLOWING
MORNING

CLOSE UP: We see a baseball swinging like a pendulum, in and out of focus. Cory is at the tree hitting the ball with the bat. He tries to mimic Troy but his swing is awkward, less sure. Rose watches . . . Cory swings again, misses.

ROSE: Cory, I want you to help me with this cupboard.

CORY: I ain't quitting the team. I don't care what Poppa say.

ROSE: I'll talk to him when he gets back. He had to go see about your Uncle Gabe. The police done arrested him. Say he was disturbing the peace. He'll be back directly. Come on in here and help me clean out the top of this cupboard.

Cory goes into house. Rose sees Troy and Bono enter the backyard from the side yard.

ROSE: Troy . . . What they say down there?

TROY: Ain't said nothing. I give them fifty dollars and they let him go. I'll talk to you about it. Where's Cory?

ROSE: He's in there helping me clean out these cupboards.

TROY: Tell him to get his butt out here.

AUGUST WILSON

Rose goes into the house. Troy and Bono make their way over to the pile of wood.

TROY: All they want is the money. That makes six or seven times I done went down there and got him. See me coming they stick out their hands.

BONO: Yeah. I know what you mean. That's all they care about . . . that money. They don't care about what's right.

(pause)

Nigger, why you got to go and get some hard wood? You ain't doing nothing but building a little old fence. Get you some soft pine wood. That's all you need.

TROY: I know what I'm doing. This is outside wood. You put pine wood inside the house. Pine wood is inside wood. This here is outside wood. Now you tell me where the fence is gonna be?

BONO: You don't need this wood. You can put it up with pine wood and it'll stand as long as you gonna be here looking at it.

TROY: How you know how long I'm gonna be here, nigger? Hell, I might just live forever. Live longer than old man Horsely.

BONO: That's what Magee used to say.

TROY: Magee's a damn fool. Now you tell me who you

FENCES

ever heard of gonna pull their own teeth with a pair of rusty pliers.

BONO: The old folks . . . my granddaddy used to pull his teeth with pliers. They ain't had no dentists for the colored folks back then.

TROY: Get clean pliers! You understand? Clean pliers! Sterilize them! Besides we ain't living back then. All Magee had to do was walk over to Doc Goldblum's.

They start to work . . . or not.

BONO: I see where you and that Tallahassee gal . . . that Alberta . . . I see where you all done got tight.

TROY: What you mean "got tight"?

BONO: I see where you be laughing and joking with her all the time.

TROY: I laughs and jokes with all of them, Bono. You know me.

BONO: That ain't the kind of laughing and joking I'm talking about.

Cory comes out from the house.

CORY: How you doing, Mr. Bono?

TROY: Get that saw from Bono and cut some wood. He talking about the wood's too hard to cut.

(to Bono)

AUGUST WILSON

Stand back there, Jim, and let that young boy show you how it's done.

BONO: He's sure welcome to it.

Cory goes to Bono, who hands him the saw. Cory saws fast finishing in seconds, puts the next board in place and saws.

BONO: Whew-e-e! Look at that. Big old strong boy. Look like Joe Louis. Hell, must be getting old the way I'm watching that boy whip through that wood.

CORY: I don't see why Mama want a fence around the yard anyways.

TROY: Damn if I know either. What the hell she keeping out with it? She ain't got nothing nobody want.

BONO: Some people build fences to keep people out . . . and other people build fences to keep people in. Rose wants to hold on to you all. She loves you.

TROY: Hell, nigger, I don't need nobody to tell me my wife loves me. Cory . . . go on in and see if you can find that other saw.

CORY: Where's it at?

TROY: I said find it! Look for it till you find it!

Cory goes into the house. Troy turns to Bono . . .

TROY: What's that supposed to mean? Wanna keep us in?

BONO (BONO LEADS TROY OUT OF EARSHOT): Troy . . . I done

FENCES

known you seem like damn near my whole life. You and Rose both. I done know both of you all for a long time. I remember when you met Rose. When you was hitting them baseballs out the park. A lot of them old gals was after you then. You had the pick of the litter. When you picked Rose, I was happy for you. That was the first time I knew you had any sense. I said . . . My man Troy knows what he's doing . . . I'm gonna follow this nigger . . . he might take me somewhere. I been following you too. I done learned a whole heap of things about life watching you. I done learned how to tell where the shit lies. How to tell it from the alfalfa. You done learned me a lot of things. You showed me how to not make the same mistakes . . . to take life as it comes along and keep putting one foot in front of the other.

(pause)

Rose a good woman, Troy.

TROY: Hell, nigger, I know she a good woman. I been married to her for eighteen years. What you got on your mind, Bono?

BONO: I just say she a good woman. Just like I say anything. I ain't got to have nothing on my mind.

TROY: You just gonna say she a good woman and leave it hanging out there like that? Why you telling me she a good woman?

BONO: She loves you, Troy. Rose loves you.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: You saying I don't measure up. That's what you trying to say. I don't measure up 'cause I'm seeing this other gal. I know what you trying to say.

BONO: I know what Rose means to you, Troy. I'm just trying to say I don't want to see you mess up.

TROY: Yeah, I appreciate that, Bono. If you was messing around on Lucille I'd be telling you the same thing.

BONO: Well, that's all I got to say. I just say that because I love you both.

Troy takes this in.

TROY: Hell, you know me . . . I wasn't out there looking for nothing. You can't find a better woman than Rose. I know that. But seems like this woman just stuck on to me where I can't shake her loose. I done wrestled with it, tried to throw her off me . . . but she just stuck on tighter. Now she's stuck on for good.

BONO: You's in control . . . that's what you tell me all the time. You responsible for what you do.

TROY: I ain't ducking the responsibility of it. As long as it sets right in my heart . . . then I'm okay. 'Cause that's all I listen to. It'll tell me right from wrong every time. And I ain't talking about doing Rose no bad turn. I love Rose. She done carried me a long ways and I love and respect her for that.

BONO: I know you do. That's why I don't want to see

FENCES

you hurt her. But what you gonna do when she find out? What you got then? If you try and juggle both of them . . . sooner or later you gonna drop one of them. That's common sense.

TROY: Yeah, I hear what you saying, Bono. I been trying to figure a way to work it out.

BONO (LEANING IN . . .): Work it out right, Troy. I don't want to be getting all up between you and Rose's business . . . but work it so it come out right.

TROY: Aw hell, I get all up between you and Lucille's business. When you gonna get that woman that refrigerator she been wanting? Don't tell me you ain't got no money now. I know who your banker is. Mellon don't need that money bad as Lucille want that refrigerator. I'll tell you that.

BONO: Tell you what I'll do . . . when you finish building this fence for Rose . . . I'll buy Lucille that refrigerator.

TROY: You done stuck your foot in your mouth now!

Troy stands up, grabs up a board and begins to saw. Bono starts to walk out of the yard.

TROY: Hey, nigger . . . where you going?

BONO: I'm going home. I know you don't expect me to help you now. I'm protecting my money. I wanna see you put up that fence by yourself. That's what I want to see.

AUGUST WILSON

(climbing the steps)

You'll be here another six months without me.

TROY: Nigger, you ain't right . . .

BONO: When it comes to my money . . . I'm right as fireworks on the Fourth of July.

TROY (CALLING AFTER HIM): All right, we gonna see now. You better get out your bankbook.

INT. BASEMENT—AFTERNOON

Cory sits on a crate, doing curls with barbells made from cans, cement and a pipe, an old saw in the dirt at his feet. Above him, Bono's footsteps and the kitchen door open and shut.

EXT. THE BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

Troy continues to work. Rose comes out from the kitchen

ROSE: What they say down there? What's happening with Gabe?

TROY: I went down there and got him out. Cost me fifty dollars. Say he was disturbing the peace. Judge set up a hearing for him in three weeks. Say to show cause why he shouldn't be recommitted.

ROSE: Well, what's you say? What'd you tell the judge?

FENCES

TROY: Told him I'd look after him. It didn't make no sense to recommit the man. He stuck out his big greasy palm, and told me to give him fifty dollars and take him on home.

ROSE: Where's he at now? Where'd he go off to?

TROY: He's gone on about his business. He don't need nobody to hold his hand.

ROSE: Well, I don't know. Seem like that would be the best place for him if they did put him into the hospital. I know what you're gonna say. But that's what I think would be best.

TROY: The man done had his life ruined fighting for what? And they wanna take and lock him up. Let him be free. He don't bother nobody.

ROSE: Well, everybody got their own way of looking at it I guess. Come on and get your lunch. I got a bowl of lima beans and some cornbread in the oven. Come on get something to eat. Ain't no sense you fretting over Gabe.

TROY: Rose . . . got something to tell you.

ROSE: Well, come on . . . wait till I get this food on the table.

Rose turns to go into the house. Troy follows.

INT. KITCHEN—AFTERNOON

TROY: Rose.

She turns around.

TROY: I don't know how to say this.

(pause)

I can't explain it none. It just sort of grows on you till it gets out of hand. It starts out like a little bush . . . and the next thing you know it's a whole forest.

ROSE: Troy . . . what is you talking about?

TROY: I'm talking, woman, let me talk. I'm trying to find a way to tell you . . . I'm gonna be a daddy. I'm gonna be somebody's daddy.

ROSE: Troy . . . you're not telling me this? You're gonna be . . . what?

TROY: Rose . . . now . . . see . . .

ROSE: You telling me you gonna be somebody's daddy? You telling your wife this?

From out in the back yard, Gabriel calls:

GABRIEL (o.s.): Hey, Troy! Hey, Rose!

ROSE: I have to wait eighteen years to hear something like this.

FENCES

Gabriel enters from the back porch. He carries a rose in his hand.

GABRIEL: Hey, Rose . . . I got a flower for you.

(He hands it to her)

That's a rose. Same rose like you is.

ROSE: Thanks, Gabe.

GABRIEL: Troy, you ain't mad at me is you? Them bad mens come and put me away. You ain't mad at me is you?

TROY: Naw, Gabe, I ain't mad at you.

ROSE: Eighteen years and you wanna come with this.

GABRIEL (TAKES A QUARTER OUT OF HIS POCKET): See what I got? Got a brand-new quarter.

TROY: Rose . . . it's just . . .

ROSE: Ain't nothing you can say, Troy. Ain't no way of explaining that.

GABRIEL: Fellow that give me this quarter had a whole mess of them. I'm gonna keep this quarter till it stop shining.

ROSE: Gabe, go on up front now. I got some watermelon in the Frigidaire. I'll get you a piece.

GABRIEL: Say, Rose . . . you know I was chasing hell-hounds and them bad mens come and get me and take me away. Troy helped me. He come down there and

AUGUST WILSON

told them they better let me go before he beat them up. Yeah, he did!

ROSE: You go on up front and I'll get you a piece of watermelon, Gabe. Them bad mens is gone now.

GABRIEL: Okay, Rose . . . gonna bring me some watermelon. The kind with the stripes on it.

Gabriel goes up to the front room.

Then:

ROSE: Why, Troy? Why? After all these years to come dragging this in to me now. It don't make no sense at your age. I could have expected this ten or fifteen years ago, but not now.

TROY: Age ain't got nothing to do with it, Rose.

ROSE: I done tried to be everything a wife should be. Everything a wife could be. Been married eighteen years and I got to live to see the day you tell me you been seeing another woman and done fathered a child by her. And you know I ain't never wanted no half-nothing in my family. My whole family is half. Everybody got different fathers and mothers . . . my two sisters and my brother. Can't hardly tell who's who. Can't never sit down and talk about Papa and Mama. It's your papa and your mama and my papa and my mama . . .

TROY: Rose . . . stop it now.

ROSE: I ain't never wanted that for none of my children. And now you wanna drag your behind in here and tell me something like this.

FENCES

TROY: You ought to know. It's time for you to know.

ROSE: Well, I don't want to know, goddamn it!

Rose, suffocating, heads outside. Troy follows.

INT. BASEMENT—AFTERNOON

Muffled sounds . . . Cory not sure what he is hearing.

EXT. BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

TROY: I can't just make it go away. It's done now. I can't wish the circumstance of the thing away.

ROSE: And you don't want to either. Maybe you want to wish me and my boy away. Maybe that's what you want? Well, you can't wish us away. I've got eighteen years of my life invested in you. You ought to have stayed upstairs in my bed where you belong.

TROY: Rose . . . now listen to me . . . we can get a handle on this thing. We can talk this out . . . come to an understanding.

ROSE: All of a sudden it's "we." Where was "we" at when you was down there rolling around with some godforsaken woman? "We" should have come to an understanding before you started making a damn

AUGUST WILSON

fool of yourself. You're a day late and a dollar short when it comes to an understanding with me.

TROY: It's just . . . She gives me a different idea . . . a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems . . . be a different man. I ain't got to wonder how I'm gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain't never been.

ROSE: What I want to know . . . is do you plan to continue seeing her. That's all you can say to me.

TROY: I can sit up in her house and laugh. Do you understand what I'm saying. I can laugh out loud . . . and it feels good. It reaches all the way down to the bottom of my shoes.

(pause)

Rose, I can't give that up.

ROSE: Maybe you ought to go on and stay down there with her . . . if she a better woman than me.

TROY: It ain't about nobody being a better woman or nothing. Rose, you ain't to blame. A man couldn't ask for no woman to be a better wife than you've been. I'm responsible for it. I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself.

ROSE: What the hell was I there for? That was my job, not somebody else's.

FENCES

TROY: Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But . . . You born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely . . . always looking for the curveball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike.

INT. FRONT ROOM—AFTERNOON

Gabriel sits, immobile.

EXT. BACKYARD—CONTINUOUS

TROY: If you going down . . . you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job . . . I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me. I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job. I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home.

ROSE: You should have stayed in my bed, Troy.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Then when I saw that gal . . . she firmed up my backbone. And I got to thinking that if I tried . . . I just might be able to steal second. Do you understand, after eighteen years I wanted to steal second.

ROSE: You should have held me tight. You should have grabbed me and held on.

TROY: I stood on first base for eighteen years and I thought . . . well, goddamn it . . . go on for it!

ROSE: We're not talking about baseball! We're talking about you going off to lay in bed with another woman . . . and then bring it home to me. That's what we're talking about. We ain't talking about no baseball.

TROY: Rose, you're not listening to me. I'm trying the best I can to explain it to you. It's not easy for me to admit that I been standing in the same place for eighteen years.

ROSE: I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me? Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good?

FENCES

INT. BASEMENT

*Cory moves toward the basement window,
trying to hear his mother and father.*

EXT. BACKYARD—CONTINUOUS

ROSE: You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams . . . and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom.

INT. THE FRONT ROOM

*Gabriel lifts up his trumpet, holds it
high in trembling hands. His mouth is
wide-open.*

EXT. BACKYARD—CONTINUOUS

ROSE: But I held on to you, Troy. I held you tighter. You was my husband. I owed you everything I had. Every part of me I could find to give you. And upstairs in that room . . . with the darkness falling in on me . . . I gave everything I had to try and erase the doubt that you wasn't the finest man

AUGUST WILSON

in the world, and wherever you was going . . . I wanted to be there with you. 'Cause you was my husband. 'Cause that's the only way I was gonna survive as your wife. You always talking about what you give . . . and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take . . . and don't even know nobody's giving!

Rose heads toward the house. Troy grabs her arm.

TROY: You say I take and don't give!

ROSE: Troy! You're hurting me!

TROY: You say I take and don't give.

ROSE: Troy . . . you're hurting my arm! Let go.

TROY: I done give you everything I got. Don't you tell that lie on me.

ROSE: Troy!

TROY: Don't you tell that lie on me!

Cory rushing out of the house.

CORY: Mama!

ROSE: Troy. You're hurting me.

TROY: Don't you tell me about no taking and giving.

Cory comes up from behind Troy and tries to tackle him. Troy, surprised, is thrown off balance just as Cory throws a glancing blow that catches

FENCES

*him on the chest and knocks him down.
Troy is stunned, as is Cory.*

ROSE: Troy. Troy. No!

*Troy gets to his feet and starts at
Cory.*

ROSE: Troy . . . no. Please! Troy!

*Rose pulls on Troy to hold him back.
Troy stops himself.*

TROY (TO CORY): All right. That's strike two. You stay away from around me, boy. Don't you strike out. You living with a full count. DON'T YOU STRIKE OUT!

SIX MONTH SEQUENCE

*We hear **Little Jimmy Scott's "Day By Day"** . . . Somewhere . . .*

Dead leaves falling.

EXT. BACKYARD

*Early winter, the first fence posts are
up.*

INT. BASEMENT

Cory works out feverishly.

EXT. BACKYARD

Winter, snow. Cross beams connect the posts, and the first vertical pickets begin to shut out the abandoned house.

INT. DINING ROOM

An empty room, the table is set.

EXT. BACKYARD—NIGHT

Troy bundled against the lingering cold, works alone. Rose watches him from the kitchen window.

INT. TAYLORS' BAR

Troy drinks heavily in a crowded bar.

EXT. BACKYARD

March: More pickets, the fence half done.

INT. CHURCH

Rose kneeling in prayer.

FENCES

EXT. CEMETERY

Gabe sits among the tombstones eating a sandwich.

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE—
MORNING

It's early April, and the weather's cool. Rose, looking tired, wears a light jacket and scarf over her head. She locks the front door and starts down the steps. She stops to pull weeds from among the daffodils she's growing in the planter-cans.

EXT. SANITATION YARD—LATER THAT
AFTERNOON

Men stream out of the garage, Troy among them. He sees something that makes him stop. Rose is across the street, waiting for him. He crosses the street slowly. They stand looking at one another; Then:

ROSE: Troy, I want to talk to you.

TROY: All of a sudden, after all this time, you want to talk to me, huh? You ain't wanted to talk to me for months. You ain't wanted to talk to me last

AUGUST WILSON

night. You ain't wanted no part of me then. What you wanna talk to me about now?

Rose looks around at the men who glance at her and Troy as they pass by.

ROSE: Tomorrow's Friday.

TROY: I know what day tomorrow is. You think I don't know tomorrow's Friday? My whole life I ain't done nothing but look to see Friday coming and you got to tell me it's Friday.

ROSE: I want to know if you're coming home.

TROY: I always come home, Rose. You know that. There ain't never been a night I ain't come home.

ROSE: That ain't what I mean . . . and you know it. I want to know if you're coming straight home after work.

TROY: I figure I'd cash my check . . . hang out at Taylors' with the boys . . . maybe play a game of checkers . . .

ROSE: Troy, I can't live like this. I won't live like this. You livin' on borrowed time with me. It's been going on six months now you ain't been coming home.

TROY: I be home every night. Every night of the year. That's 365 days.

ROSE: I want you to come home tomorrow after work.

FENCES

TROY: Rose . . . I don't mess up my pay. You know that now. I take my pay and I give it to you. I don't have no money but what you give me back. I just want to have a little time to myself . . . a little time to enjoy life.

ROSE: What about me? When's my time to enjoy life.

TROY: I don't know what to tell you, Rose. I'm doing the best I can.

ROSE: You ain't been coming home from work but time enough to change your clothes and run out . . . and you wanna call that the best you can do?

TROY: I'm going over to the hospital to see Alberta. She went into the hospital this afternoon. Look like she might have the baby early. I won't be gone long.

Troy starts to walk away.

ROSE (STOPPING HIM): Well, you ought to know. They went over to Miss Pearl's and got Gabe today. She said you told them to go ahead and lock him up.

He comes back.

TROY: I ain't said no such thing. Whoever told you that is telling a lie. Pearl ain't doing nothing but telling a big fat lie.

ROSE: She ain't had to tell me. I read it on the papers.

TROY: I ain't told them nothing of the kind.

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: I saw it right there on the papers.

TROY: What it say, huh?

ROSE: It said you told them to take him.

TROY: Then they screwed that up, just the way they screw up everything. I ain't worried about what they got on the paper.

ROSE: Say the government send part of his check to the hospital and the other part to you.

TROY: I ain't got nothing to do with that if that's the way it works. I ain't made up the rules about how it work.

ROSE: You did Gabe just like you did Cory. You wouldn't sign the paper for Cory . . . but you signed for Gabe. You signed that paper.

TROY: I told you I ain't signed nothing, woman! The only thing I signed was the release form. Hell, I can't read, I don't know what they had on that paper! I ain't signed nothing about sending Gabe away.

*A few men from the garage are watching
across the street.*

ROSE: I said send him to the hospital . . . you said let him be free . . . now you done went down there and signed him to the hospital for half his money. You went back on yourself, Troy. You gonna have to answer for that.

TROY: See now . . . you been over there talking to

FENCES

Miss Pearl. She done got mad 'cause she ain't getting Gabe's rent money. That's all it is. She's liable to say anything.

ROSE: Troy, I seen where you signed the paper.

TROY: You ain't seen nothing I signed. What she doing got papers on my brother anyway? Miss Pearl telling a big fat lie. And I'm gonna tell her about it too!

Troy starts to walk away . . . Turns around . . .

TROY: You ain't seen nothing I signed! Say . . . you ain't seen nothing I signed!

Rose disappointed, walks away.

CLOSE UP on Troy, we hear a phone ringing as we cut to . . .

INT. DAY ROOM—WESTERN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL—DAY

The ringing phone continues over this:

CLOSE UP on Gabe, hospital pajamas, cleaned up, haggard, sedated. A hand brings a spoonful of mashed carrots to Gabe's lips. He opens his mouth. A ruckus in the corridor outside scares him; he closes his mouth. Then he looks at the person who's holding the spoon, and opens his mouth again. The spoon goes in.

AUGUST WILSON

Troy sits across from Gabe, a bowl of mashed carrots on his lap, feeding his brother. Gabe swallows, then grins.

The ringing continues over this, and into:

INT. ROSE AND TROY'S BEDROOM—LATE NIGHT

Lightning flashes.

The phone's ringing downstairs. Rose, barely awake, switches on a small bedside table lamp, then hurries down to the phone. Troy opens his eyes as he hears Rose answering it, then silence. Troy sits up as she climbs the stairs. Cory calls from his room:

CORY (o.s.): Mama?

Rose murmurs to Cory, comes in the bedroom, closes the door.

ROSE: Troy . . . that was the hospital. Alberta had the baby.

TROY: What she have? What is it?

ROSE: It's a girl.

Troy stands, he starts getting dressed.

TROY: I better get on down to the hospital to see her.

FENCES

ROSE: Troy . . .

TROY: Rose . . . I got to go see her now. That's only right . . . what's the matter . . . the baby's all right, ain't it?

ROSE: Alberta died having the baby.

TROY (CONFUSED): Died . . . you say she's dead? Alberta's dead?

ROSE: They said they done all they could. They couldn't do nothing for her.

TROY (STUNNED, OFF BALANCE): The baby? How's the baby?

ROSE: They say it's healthy.

Troy looks around as if trying to locate the door. Rose doesn't know what to do.

ROSE: I wonder who's gonna bury her.

TROY: She had family, Rose. She wasn't living in the world by herself.

ROSE: I know she wasn't living in the world by herself.

TROY: Next thing you gonna want to know if she had any insurance.

ROSE: Troy, you ain't got to talk like that.

TROY: That's the first thing that jumped out your mouth. "Who's gonna bury her?" Like I'm fixing to take on that task for myself.

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: I am your wife. Don't push me away.

TROY: I ain't pushing nobody away.

(starting to put on his shoes)

Just give me some space. That's all.

One shoe on, the other in his hand, he stands and turns on Rose with controlled fury.

TROY: Just give me some room to breathe!

Rose is shocked by his demand. She turns, closes the door, and leaves the room. Alone, Troy realizes he's holding his shoe. He sits heavily on the bed and puts it on. As he does he starts talking to himself.

TROY: All right . . . Mr. Death. See now . . . I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard.

He goes to the window and throws it open. He leans out, breathing hard, looking down into the dark yard, the abandoned house beyond the fence. He feels the darkness pull at him, making him lean farther out. He tightens his grip on the windowsill, and says to the darkness:

TROY: See? I'm gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the

FENCES

other side. See? You stay over there until you're ready for me.

Lights start to come on and windows are being opened in the neighbors' houses.

TROY: Then you come on. Bring your army. Bring your sickle. Bring your wrestling clothes. I ain't gonna fall down on my vigilance this time. You ain't gonna sneak up on me no more.

A few people call: "Shut up!" "Are you crazy?" "Stop making a racket!" etc.

TROY: When you ready for me . . . when the top of your list say Troy Maxson . . . You come up and knock on the front door. Ain't nobody else got nothing to do with this.

We see the closed door behind Troy. Then we're on the other side of the door, on the landing. Rose is leaning hard against the door, hand on the knob, wanting to go in but knowing she mustn't. Troy's voice is loud even through the door.

TROY (o.s.): This is between you and me.

Cory comes out of his room. He walks to his mother as Troy shouts:

TROY (o.s.): Man to man. You stay on the other side of that fence until you ready for me.

AUGUST WILSON

CORY (SOFTLY, SCARED): Mama, what's—

*Rose turns to Cory, shakes her head—
"don't talk" and tries to push him
back toward his room. He won't go.
Rose holds on to him, and they listen,
not moving.*

TROY (O.S.): Then you come up and—

EXT. THE BACKYARD—LATE NIGHT

*We're looking up at Troy, leaning out
the window, shouting:*

TROY: —and you knock on the front door! Anytime you
want!

(waiting for a response)

I'll be ready for you!

*Troy waits again; no response. He
draws himself back into the room,
closes the window. He opens the
bedroom door. Rose and Cory are there.
No one knows what to say. Troy passes
his wife and son. They hear him
descending the stairs, then the front
door opens and slams shut.*

FENCES

EXT. THE BACKYARD—1 WEEK LATER—
AFTERNOON

*In the kitchen, the radio's on:
Opening Day for the Pirates. The
broadcast plays throughout the scene.*

*Rose is on her knees, weeding the
garden.*

*She hears the back door open and looks
toward the porch. Troy is there,
holding a small, fair-skinned INFANT IN
HIS ARMS.*

TROY: Rose . . . I'm standing here with my daughter in my arms. She ain't but a wee bitty little old thing. She don't know nothing about grownups' business. She innocent . . . and she ain't got no mama.

ROSE (CLIMBING THE STEPS): What you telling me for, Troy?

*She passes Troy and goes into the
kitchen. Troy stands still. The radio
blares the baseball game.*

*From inside, the sound of running
water, then kitchen clattering, then
the sound of a knife chopping
something, **hard**. The baby starts to
fret. Troy jounces her a little,
talking to her, sitting on the bottom
steps.*

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: Well . . . I guess we'll just sit out here on the porch.

(calling back into the house, to Rose)

A man's got to do what's right for him. I ain't sorry for nothing I done. It felt right in my heart.

Troy waits for a response. The chopping continues. The baby cries. Troy wipes his finger on his shirt and holds a knuckle to her mouth. She fastens on his knuckle. Something that looks like a smile passes across her face.

TROY: What you smiling at? Your daddy's a big man. Got these great big old hands. But sometimes he's scared. And right now your daddy's scared 'cause we sitting out here and ain't got no home. Oh, I been homeless before. I ain't had no little baby with me. But I been homeless.

The chopping has stopped.

INT. THE KITCHEN—AFTERNOON

Rose has chopped a large pile of okra. She holds the knife, listening.

FENCES

EXT. THE BACK PORCH—AFTERNOON

TROY: You just be out on the road by your lonesome and you see one of them trains coming and you just kinda go like this . . .

(singing, as a lullaby)

Please, Mr. Engineer, let a man ride the line . . .

Please, Mr. Engineer, let a man ride the line . . .

I ain't got no ticket please let me ride the blinds.

Rose comes out. Troy stands.

TROY: She's my daughter, Rose. My own flesh and blood. I can't deny her no more than I can deny them boys.

(pause)

You and them boys is my family. You and them and this child is all I got in the world. So I guess what I'm saying is . . . I'd appreciate it if you'd help me take care of her.

ROSE: Okay, Troy . . . you're right. I'll take care of your baby for you . . . 'cause . . . like you say . . . she's innocent . . . and you can't visit the sins of the father upon the child. A motherless child has got a hard time.

She takes the baby.

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE: From right now . . . this child got a mother.
But you a womanless man.

*Rose goes back into the house with the
baby. Troy remains, frozen.*

Over this, the sound of a truck idling.

EXT. A STREET IN A WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD—
1 MONTH LATER—EARLY
MORNING

*The lawns and trees along the street
are bright spring green. A garbage
truck idles as two young african-
american collectors lift and empty
cans. Troy's in the driver's seat,
bored, lonely. Through his rearview
mirrors he watches the collectors
talking, laughing.*

*A group of white high school students
come out of one of the houses,
clowning, chatting, several boys in
varsity jackets. Troy watches them.
Then he's startled by a loud thump from
the back: in his rearview mirror, the
collectors step on board. He shifts
into first gear and the truck rolls
through the wealthy neighborhood.*

FENCES

EXT. THE BACKYARD—AFTERNOON

Troy comes in through the side yard to the sound of a bat hitting a baseball. Cory, in his A&P uniform, fake bow-tie dangling from his open collar, is hitting the ball. The moment Cory sees Troy, he stops. Troy looks ready to say something. Cory tosses the bat away, carelessly. Making a show of it he buttons his collar, clips the tie into place, and walks out the right side alley, all without giving his father a glance. Troy goes to the bat, picks it up and puts it into its proper place against the tree. He turns and heads into the house.

INT. KITCHEN/FRONT ENTRANCE—
AFTERNOON

Troy comes into the kitchen, which looks different: it's cluttered with baby bottles, nipples, a high chair. Two steaming pots and one cold covered pot are on the stove, the heat turned off. Rose, dressed up, holds the baby in one arm, from which a purse hangs, stuffed with diapers and two warm bottles. With her free hand Rose picks up the cake.

AUGUST WILSON

TROY: I'm coming in and everybody's going out.

ROSE: I'm taking this cake down to the church for the bake sale. Lyons was by to see you. He stopped by to pay you your twenty dollars. It's laying in there on the table.

Troy takes his pay from his pocket.

TROY: Well . . . here go this money.

As Rose leaves the kitchen with the baby and the cake:

ROSE: Put it in there on the table, Troy. I'll get it.

His money still in his hand, Troy follows her to the front door, which he opens for her.

TROY: What time you coming back?

ROSE: Ain't no use in you studying me. It don't matter what time I come back.

TROY: I just asked you a question, woman. What's the matter . . . can't I ask you a question?

ROSE: Troy, I don't want to go into it.

She steps out onto the front porch. He starts to follow, but she stops in the doorway. She puts the cake down on one of the porch chairs, turns to him:

ROSE: Your dinner's in there on the stove. All you got to do is heat it up. And don't you be eating the rest of them cakes in there. I'm coming back for

FENCES

them. We having a bake sale at the church tomorrow.

Rose shuts the door firmly. Troy stands there, listening to her going down the steps.

He stands alone in the empty house, unsure of what to do. He flaps the money he's holding. He goes to the dining room table and puts his cash next to Lyons' twenty. He pockets the twenty and starts for the door.

INT. TAYLORS' BAR—LATE AFTERNOON

Troy sits alone at the bar, a generous glass of gin before him. He takes a sip.

Someone pulls out the stool next to him and starts to sit. Troy looks. It's Bono.

BONO: Hey, Troy.

TROY: Hey, what's happening, Bono?

BONO: I just thought I'd stop by to see you. Wasn't no one at the house, so I figured -

TROY: What you stop by and see me for? You ain't stopped by the house in a month of Sundays. Hell, I must owe you money or something.

BONO: Since you got your promotion I can't keep up

AUGUST WILSON

with you. Used to see you every day. Now I don't even know what route you working.

TROY: They keep switching me around. Got me out in Greentree now . . . hauling white folks' garbage.

BONO: Greentree, huh? You lucky, at least you ain't got to be lifting them barrels. Damn if they ain't getting heavier. I'm gonna put in my two years and call it quits.

TROY: I'm thinking about retiring myself.

BONO: You got it easy. You can drive for another five years.

TROY: It ain't the same, Bono. It ain't like working the back of the truck. Ain't got nobody to talk to . . . feel like you working by yourself. Naw, I'm thinking about retiring.

Bono nods. An awkward silence.

TROY: How's Lucille?

BONO: She all right. Her arthritis get to acting up on her sometime. Saw Rose on my way here. She going down to the church, huh?

TROY: Yeah, she took up going down there. All them preachers looking for somebody to fatten their pockets.

(beat)

Got some gin here.

BONO: Naw, thanks. I just stopped in to say hello.

FENCES

TROY: Hell, nigger . . . you can take a drink. I ain't never known you to say no to a drink. You ain't got to work tomorrow.

BONO: I just stopped by. I'm fixing to go over to Skinner's. We got us a domino game going over his house every Friday.

TROY: Nigger, you can't play no dominoes. I used to whup you four games out of five.

BONO: Well, that learned me. I'm getting better.

TROY: Yeah? Well, that's all right.

BONO: Look here . . . I got to be getting on.

Troy nods as Bono slides down off the bar stool.

BONO: Stop by sometime, huh?

TROY: Yeah, I'll do that, Bono.

Bono slaps Troy on the back and starts to go.

TROY (NOT WANTING TO BE ALONE): Lucille told Rose you bought her a new refrigerator.

BONO: Yeah, Rose told Lucille you had finally built your fence . . . so I figured we'd call it even.

TROY: I knew you would.

BONO: Yeah . . . okay. I'll be talking to you.

TROY: Yeah, take care, Bono. Good to see you. I'm gonna stop over.

AUGUST WILSON

BONO: Yeah. Okay, Troy.

Bono leaves. Troy downs the rest of his drink in one swallow. Under his breath, he starts to sing:

TROY (SLOWLY): *Hear it ring! Hear it ring!*
Had an old dog his name was Blue.

EXT. WYLIE AVENUE—RECRUITMENT OFFICE—
TWILIGHT

Troy's singing continues over this:

TROY (v.o.): *You know Blue was mighty true . . .*
You know Blue was a good old dog . . .

Cory walks home from work in his A&P uniform. He passes an armed forces recruiting office. In the window, a poster: a big, handsome white Marine, above him: WE AREN'T LOOKING FOR JUST ANYONE.

TROY (v.o.): *Blue treed a possum in a hollow log . . .*
You know from that he was a good old dog . . .

And below: we might be looking for you. Cory stares at it for a long time, as Troy's singing continues:

EXT. BACK YARD—TWILIGHT

Cory approaches the house. He stops when he hears his father singing.

FENCES

TROY: *Old Blue died and I dug his grave
Let him down with a golden chain . . .*

*Cory heads into the yard. Troy sits in
the middle of the back steps, blocking
them. The pint bottle in his hand is
nearly empty.*

TROY: *Every night when I hear old Blue bark!*

(pause)

Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark!

*Cory looks to the right, considering
going around to the front. Then he
decides not to. He walks up to the
steps.*

CORY: I got to get by.

TROY: Say what? What's you say?

CORY: You in my way. I got to get by.

TROY: You got to get by where? This is my house.
Bought and paid for. In full. Took me fifteen
years. And if you wanna go in my house and I'm
sitting on the steps . . . you say excuse me.
Like your mama taught you.

CORY: Come on, Pop . . . I got to get by.

*Cory starts to maneuver his way past
Troy. Troy grabs his leg and shoves
him back.*

TROY: You just gonna walk over top of me?

AUGUST WILSON

CORY: I live here too!

TROY: You just gonna walk over top of me in my own house?

Troy stands, advancing on Cory, who backs away, then stops.

CORY: I ain't scared of you.

TROY: I ain't asked if you was scared of me. I asked you if you was fixing to walk over top of me in my own house? That's the question. You ain't gonna say excuse me? You just gonna walk over top of me?

CORY: If you wanna put it like that.

TROY: How else am I gonna put it?

CORY: I was walking by you to go into the house 'cause you sitting on the steps drunk, singing to yourself. You can put it like that.

TROY: Without saying excuse me???

Cory doesn't respond.

TROY: I asked you a question. Without saying excuse me???

CORY: I ain't got to say excuse me to you. You don't count around here no more.

TROY: Oh, I see . . . I don't count around here no more. You ain't got to say excuse me to your daddy. All of a sudden you done got so grown that your daddy don't count around here no more . . . Around here in his own house and yard that he done

FENCES

paid for with the sweat of his brow. You done got so grown to where you gonna take over. You gonna take over my house. Is that right? You gonna wear my pants. You gonna go in there and stretch out on my bed. You ain't got to say excuse me 'cause I don't count around here no more. Is that right?

CORY (HE'S HAD ENOUGH): That's right. You always talking this dumb stuff. Now, why don't you just get out my way.

TROY: I guess you got someplace to sleep and something to put in your belly. You got that, huh? You got that? That's what you need. You got that, huh?

CORY: You don't know what I got. You ain't got to worry about what I got.

TROY: You right! You one hundred percent right! I done spent the last seventeen years worrying about what you got. Now it's your turn, see? I'll tell you what to do. You grown . . . we done established that. You a man. Now, let's see you act like one. Turn your behind around and walk out this yard. And when you get out there in the alley . . . you can forget about this house. See? 'Cause this is my house. You go on and be a man and get your own house. You can forget about this. 'Cause this is mine. You go on and get yours 'cause I'm through with doing for you.

CORY: You talking about what you did for me . . . what'd you ever give me?

TROY: Them feet and bones! That pumping heart, nigger!

AUGUST WILSON

I give you more than anybody else is ever gonna give you.

CORY: You ain't never gave me nothing! You ain't never done nothing but hold me back. Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try and make me scared of you. I used to tremble every time you called my name. Every time I heard your foot-steps in the house. Wondering all the time . . . what's Papa gonna say if I do this? . . . What's he gonna say if I do that? . . . What's Papa gonna say if I turn on the radio? And Mama, too . . . she tries . . . but she's scared of you.

TROY: You leave your mama out of this. She ain't got nothing to do with this.

CORY: I don't know how she stand you . . . after what you did to her.

TROY: I told you to leave your mama out of this!

Troy advances toward Cory.

CORY: What you gonna do . . . give me a whupping? You can't whup me no more. You're too old. You just an old man.

Troy grabs Cory's shirt and pulls Cory to him.

TROY: Nigger! That's what you are! You just another nigger on the street to me!

Troy throws Cory backward in the dirt.

CORY: You crazy! You know that?

FENCES

TROY: Go on now! You got the devil in you. Get on away from me!

CORY: You just a crazy old man . . . talking about I got the devil in me.

Troy advances on Cory.

TROY: Yeah, I'm crazy! If you don't get on the other side of that yard . . . I'm gonna show you how crazy I am! Go on . . . get the hell out of my yard.

CORY: It ain't your yard. You took Uncle Gabe's money he got from the Army to buy this house and then you put him out.

TROY: Get your black ass out of my yard!

Troy's advance backs Cory up against the tree. Cory grabs up the bat.

CORY: I ain't going nowhere! Come on . . . put me out! I ain't scared of you.

TROY: That's my bat!

CORY: Come on!
Troy walks toward Cory.

TROY: Put my bat down!

CORY: Come on, put me out!

Cory swings at Troy, who backs across the yard.

CORY: What's the matter? You so bad . . . Put me out!

Troy advances toward Cory.

AUGUST WILSON

CORY (BACKING UP): Come on! Come on!

TROY: You're gonna have to use it! You wanna draw that bat back on me . . . you're gonna have to use it.

CORY: Come on! . . . Come on!

Cory swings that bat at Troy a second time. He misses. Troy continues to advance toward him.

TROY: You're gonna have to kill me! You wanna draw that bat back on me. You're gonna have to kill me.

Cory, backed up against the tree, can go no farther. Troy taunts him. He sticks out his head and offers him a target.

TROY: Come on! Come on!

Cory is unable to swing the bat. Troy grabs it.

TROY: Then I'll show you.

Cory and Troy struggle over the bat. The struggle is fierce and fully engaged. Troy ultimately is the stronger, and takes the bat from Cory and stands over him ready to swing. He stops himself.

TROY: Go on and get away from around my house.

Cory, stung by his defeat, picks

FENCES

himself up, walks slowly out of the yard and up the alley.

CORY: Tell Mama I'll be back for my things.

TROY (CALLING AFTER HIM): They'll be on the other side of that fence!

Troy starts toward the tree with the bat, staggering, sick exhausted, his mouth horribly dry. He tries to moisten it with this tongue: no use.

TROY: I can't taste nothing. Hallelujah!
I can't taste nothing no more.

He assumes a batting posture and begins to taunt Death, the fastball in the outside corner.

TROY: Come on! It's between you and me now!

A static-y growl starts, building into a roar. Troy taunts the pitcher as the light gives way to complete darkness:

TROY: Come on! Anytime you want! Come on! I be ready for you . . . but I ain't gonna be easy.

BLACK SCREEN

In the blackness, Rose's voice:

ROSE (v.o.): Raynell!

RAYNELL (v.o.): Ma'am?

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE (v.o.): What you doing out there?

RAYNELL (v.o.): Nothing.

TITLE: 1965

ROSE (v.o.): Girl, get in here and get dressed. What you doing?

EXT. THE BACKYARD—MORNING

The sky is gray, dark clouds roll in. Raynell, 7, in her nightgown, kneels in rose's garden, which is now much larger. She looks up at the bedroom window.

RAYNELL: Seeing if my garden grewed.

Rose leans out of the window, her hair up, wearing black.

ROSE: I told you it ain't gonna grow overnight. You got to wait.

RAYNELL: It don't look like it never gonna grow. Dag!

ROSE: I told you a watched pot never boils.

RAYNELL: This ain't even no pot, Mama.

ROSE: Get in here and get dressed. This ain't no morn-
ing to be playing around. You hear me?

RAYNELL: Yes, ma'am.

FENCES

INT. THE KITCHEN AND FRONT ROOMS—
MORNING

Raynell dawdles past Bono and Lyons in dark suits, drinking coffee. She starts upstairs. There's a knock at the door. She looks up to see if her mother is coming to answer it. She decides to answer it herself, but it opens. Cory comes in.

He's 25 now, a Marine Corporal. He carries a duffel bag. Raynell stares at him in his dress uniform, agog.

CORY: Hi.

(pause)

I bet your name is Raynell.

RAYNELL: Uh-huh.

CORY: Is your mama home?

RAYNELL: Mama . . . there's some man down here. Mama?

Raynell flies up the stairs. Cory puts down his bag and looks around.

ROSE: Cory? Cory! Lord have mercy!

Rose runs down, then stops, looking at her son. She calls back into the kitchen:

ROSE: Look here, you all!

AUGUST WILSON

*She runs to Cory, and they embrace.
Bono and Lyons come in from the
kitchen. Raynell watches from midway
on the stairs.*

BONO: Aw, looka here . . .

*Rose steps back, looking at him,
wiping tears away.*

ROSE: Done got all grown up!

CORY: Don't cry, Mama. What you crying about?

ROSE: I'm just so glad you made it.

CORY: Hey, Lyons. How you doing, Mr. Bono.

LYONS: Look at you, man. Look at you. Don't he look
good, Rose. Got them corporal stripes.

ROSE: What took you so long?

CORY: You know how the Marines are, Mama. They got to
get all their paperwork straight before they let
you do anything.

ROSE: Well, I'm sure glad you made it. They let Lyons
come. Your Uncle Gabe's still in the hospital.
They don't know if they gonna let him out or not.
I just talked to them a little while ago.

LYONS: A corporal in the United States Marines.

BONO: Your daddy knew you had it in you. He used to
tell me all the time.

LYONS: Don't he look good, Mr. Bono?

FENCES

BONO: Yeah, he remind me of Troy when I first met him.

(pause)

Say, Rose, Lucille's down at the church with the choir. I'm gonna go down and get the pallbearers lined up. I'll be back to get you all.

ROSE: Thanks, Jim.

CORY: See you, Mr. Bono.

Bono goes out the front door.

No one speaks. Then Lyons points to Raynell on the stairs.

LYONS: Cory, look at Raynell. Ain't she precious? She gonna break a whole lot of hearts.

Raynell hides behind the banisters.

ROSE: Raynell, come and say hello to your brother. This is your brother, Cory. You remember Cory.

RAYNELL: No, ma'am.

CORY: She don't remember me, Mama.

ROSE: Well, we talk about you. She heard us talk about you. This is your brother, Cory.

(to Raynell)

Come on and say hello.

RAYNELL: Hi.

CORY: Hi. So you're Raynell. Mama told me a lot about you.

AUGUST WILSON

ROSE (STARTING FOR THE KITCHEN): You all c'mon and let me fix you some breakfast. Keep up your strength.

CORY: I ain't hungry, Mama.

LYONS: You can fix me something, Rose. I'll be there in a minute.

ROSE (TO CORY): Cory, You sure you don't want nothing. I know they ain't feeding you right.

CORY: No, Mama . . . thanks. I don't feel like eating. I'll get something later.

ROSE: Raynell . . . get on upstairs and get that dress on like I told you.

Raynell scrambles upstairs as Rose goes into the kitchen.

LYONS (PAUSE): I always knew you was gonna make something out yourself. Your head was always in the right direction. So . . . you gonna stay in . . . make it a career . . . put in your twenty years?

CORY: I don't know. I got six already, I think that's enough.

LYONS: Stick with Uncle Sam and retire early. Ain't nothing out here. I guess Rose told you what happened with me. They got me down the workhouse. I thought I was being slick cashing other people's checks.

CORY: How much time you doing?

LYONS: They give me three years. I got that beat now. I ain't got but nine more months. It ain't so bad.

FENCES

You learn to deal with it like anything else. You got to take the crooked with the straights. That's what Papa used to say. He used to say that when he struck out. I seen him strike out three times in a row . . . and the next time up he hit the ball over the grandstand. Right out there in Homestead Field. He wasn't satisfied hitting in the seats . . . he wanted to hit it over everything! After the game he had two hundred people standing around waiting to shake his hand. You got to take the crooked with the straights. Yeah, Papa was something else.

CORY: You still playing?

LYONS: Cory . . . you know I'm gonna do that. There's some fellows down there we got us a band . . . we gonna try and stay together when we get out . . . but yeah, I'm still playing.

Rose calls from the kitchen:

ROSE: Lyons, I got these eggs in the pan.

LYONS: Let me go on and get these eggs, man. Get ready to go bury Papa.

(a beat, then)

How you doing? You doing all right?

Cory nods. Lyons touches him on the shoulder and they share a moment of silent grief. Lyons goes into the kitchen. Cory looks up to the top of the stairs and sees Raynell, in her

AUGUST WILSON

dress, studying him with excited curiosity.

RAYNELL: Hi.

CORY: Hi.

She comes down a couple of steps, curious.

RAYNELL: Did you used to sleep in my room?

CORY: Yeah . . . that used to be my room.

RAYNELL: That's what Papa call it. "Cory's room." It got your football in the closet.

Rose calling from the kitchen . . .

ROSE: Raynell, get in there and get them good shoes on!

RAYNELL: Mama, can't I wear these? Them other one hurt my feet.

ROSE: Well, they just gonna have to hurt your feet for a while. You ain't said they hurt your feet when you went down to the store and got them.

RAYNELL: They didn't hurt then. My feet done got bigger.

ROSE: Don't you give me no back talk now. You get in there and get them shoes on.

Raynell looks at her brand-new brother . . . reluctantly, she obeys her mother. Cory makes his way to the

FENCES

kitchen, passing his brother who is wiping his plate clean.

INT. KITCHEN—MORNING

Cory enters the kitchen. He looks at the photos on the wall noticing that JFK and Martin Luther King have been added next to the photo of Jesus. He looks at his mother, then heads out into the yard.

EXT. BACKYARD—MORNING

Cory comes down the steps into the yard, taking it all in. He sees Troy's bat leaning against the tree. He walks toward it as he hears . . .

ROSE (AS SHE COMES DOWN BACK STEPS): Ain't too much changed. He still got that piece of rag tied to that tree. He was out here swinging that bat. I was just ready to go back in the house. He swung that bat and then he just fell over. Seem like he swung it and stood there with this grin on his face . . . and then he just fell over. They carried him on down to the hospital but I knew there wasn't no need . . . why don't you come on in the house.

CORY: Mama . . . I got something to tell you. I don't

AUGUST WILSON

know how to tell you this . . . but I've got to tell you . . . I'm not going to Papa's funeral.

ROSE: Boy, hush your mouth. That's your daddy you talking about. I don't want hear that kind of talk this morning. I done raised you to come to this? You standing there all healthy and grown talking about you ain't going to your daddy's funeral?

CORY: Mama . . . listen . . .

ROSE: I don't want to hear it, Cory. You just get that thought out of your head.

CORY: I've got to say no to him. One time in my life I've got to say no.

ROSE: Don't nobody have to listen to nothing like that. I know you and your daddy ain't seen eye to eye, but I ain't gotta listen to that kind of talk this morning. Disrespecting your daddy ain't gonna make you a man, Cory. You got to find a way to come to that on your own. Not going to your daddy's funeral ain't gonna make you a man.

Cory looks around, trying to find what to say. Then:

CORY: The whole time I was growing up . . . living in his house . . . Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere. It weighed on you and sunk into your flesh. It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn't tell which one was you anymore. That shadow digging in your flesh. Trying to crawl in. Trying to live through you. I'm just

FENCES

saying I've got to find a way to get rid of that shadow, Mama.

ROSE: You just like him. You got him in you good.

CORY: Don't tell me that, Mama.

ROSE: You Troy Maxson all over again.

CORY: I don't want to be Troy Maxson. I want to be me.

ROSE: You can't be nobody but who you are, Cory. That shadow wasn't nothing but you growing into yourself. You either got to grow into it or cut it down to fit you. But that's all you got to make life with. That's all you got to measure yourself against that world out there. Your daddy wanted you to be everything he wasn't . . . and at the same time he tried to make you into everything he was. I don't know if he was right or wrong . . . but I do know he meant to do more good than he meant to do harm.

She stops, overwhelmed. Cory puts his hand on her hand. She takes his hand, squeezes it, turns it over, holding on.

ROSE: Sometimes when he touched he bruised. And sometimes when he took me in his arms he cut.

(beat)

When I first met your daddy I thought, "Here is a man I can lay down with and make a baby." That's the first thing I thought when I seen him . . . "Rose Lee, here is a man that you can open your-

AUGUST WILSON

self up to and be filled to bursting. Here is a man that can fill all them empty spaces you been tipping around the edges of."

(beat)

When your daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room for me. But I wanted a house that I could sing in, and that's what your daddy gave me. I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine. I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that. But that's what life offered me in the way of being a woman and I took it. I grabbed hold of it with both hands. By the time Raynell came into the house . . . I didn't want to make my blessing off of nobody's misfortune, but I took on to Raynell like she was all them babies I had wanted and never had.

The phone rings.

ROSE: Like I'd been blessed to relive a part of my life. And if the Lord see fit to keep up my strength . . . I'm gonna do her just like your daddy did you . . . I'm gonna give her the best of what's in me.

Raynell comes out with her old shoes on.

RAYNELL: Mama . . . Reverend Tolliver on the phone.

FENCES

Rose goes into the house.

RAYNELL: Hi.

CORY: Hi.

RAYNELL: You in the Army or the Marines?

CORY: Marines.

RAYNELL: Papa said it was the Army. Did you know Blue?

CORY: Blue? Who's Blue?

RAYNELL: Papa's dog what he sing about all the time.

CORY (SINGING): *Hear it ring! Hear it ring!*

*I had a dog his name was Blue
You know Blue was mighty true
You know Blue was a good old dog
Blue treed a possum in a hollow log
You know from that he was a good old dog.
Hear it ring!*

Raynell, embarrassed, delighted, joins in.

CORY AND RAYNELL: *Blue treed a possum out on a limb
Blue looked at me and I looked at him
Grabbed that possum and put him in a sack
Blue stayed there till I came back
Old Blue's feets was big and round
Never allowed a possum to touch the ground.
Old Blue died and I dug his grave
I dug his grave with a silver spade
Let him down with a golden chain*

AUGUST WILSON

*And every night I call his name
Go on Blue, you good dog you
Go on Blue, you good dog you*

RAYNELL: *Blue laid down and died like a man
Blue laid down and died . . .*

CORY (STRUGGLING): *Blue laid down and died like a man
Now he's treeing possums in the Promised Land.*

CORY AND RAYNELL: *I'm gonna tell you this to let you
know . . .*

Blue's gone where the good dogs go.

Rose comes to the door.

ROSE: Cory, we gonna be ready to go in a minute.

CORY (TO RAYNELL): You go on in the house and change them shoes like Mama told you so we can go to Pa-pa's funeral.

RAYNELL: Okay, I'll be back.

Raynell hurries into the house. Cory gets up, crosses over to the tree. Rose stands at the screen door watching him. She takes a look at the threatening sky, about to return to the house, when she sees Gabriel. He's older but healthier, more vital, in a new suit and a hat. One arm is behind his back. Rose is speechless with surprise.

GABRIEL: Hey, Rose!

ROSE: Gabe?

GABRIEL: I'm here, Rose. Hey Rose, I'm here.

FENCES

ROSE: Lord . . .

(calling back to the house)

Look here, Lyons!

Lyons, then Bono come out from the house.

LYONS: See, I told you, Rose . . . I told you they'd let him come.

CORY: How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

LYONS: How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

Gabriel looks at each of them, then back to Rose. He takes his hand from behind him and holds his trumpet aloft.

GABRIEL: Hey, Rose. It's time. It's time to tell Saint Peter to open the Gates.

Not knowing what she's agreeing to, Rose nods.

GABRIEL: Troy, you ready?

Gabriel waits for an answer. Raynell comes out on the porch and hides behind Rose, shy. Gabe smiles at her, and she returns his smile.

GABRIEL: You ready, Troy. I'm gonna tell Saint Peter to open the Gates. You get ready now.

Gabriel puts the trumpet to his lips, two decades of waiting for this moment

AUGUST WILSON

finally over. He inhales and blows into the horn. No sound. Gabriel blows again, a huge effort: Nothing.

Then Gabe begins to dance, slow and strange, eerie, skeletal and life-giving, a dance of atavistic signature and ritual. Lyons goes to Gabe, embracing him, trying to stop him. Gabriel pushes Lyons away.

He points the trumpet at the ground and inhales as he arcs the horn upwards till he's on his toes, closing his eyes, putting the mouthpiece to his lips; Gabriel blows once more, and:

From the tarnished, battered bell of the broken trumpet comes an ear-splitting note, growing higher and louder till it's almost like a woman's scream.

In the clouds directly above Gabe, a small aperture opens up and a pillar of brilliant light descends, bathing Gabriel and his horn in gold. The trumpet's blast stops; the silence is huge and abrupt.

CLOSE-UP: Gabriel, his face raised up, bathed in light. He lowers his trumpet. He says to God:

GABRIEL: That's the way that go!

FENCES

The camera begins to pull away, up and up. Rose goes to Gabriel, Raynell following behind her. Then Raynell runs ahead of her mother.

CLOSE-UP: Raynell's small hand taking hold of Gabe's hand. The camera is high above the yard; the men have gone inside, and Rose is behind them. Raynell leads Gabriel behind Rose.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Bono leaves the house first, followed by Cory and Lyons.

Twenty black cars wait at the curb, a flower car behind them, and then the hearse. Neighbors have begun gathering on both sides of the street.

Bono goes to the first car as Lyons gets into the second.

Cory waits outside by the open car door. Raynell comes out of the house, leading Gabe; Bono motions for her to come to the first car, and she does. He opens the rear door for them, and Raynell and Gabe get in.

Rose comes out of the house, Bono watches. She walks up to Cory, grabs

AUGUST WILSON

him and holds him tight. She gets in the car and Cory climbs in after her.

Bono gives the roof of the car a loud slap, then climbs in and shuts the door. The first car pulls out; the others follow.

People line the street. Men take off their hats as the funeral cortege goes down the hill. Beyond the Hill, the towers of Pittsburgh rising.