Act One
Scene One

It is 1957. TROY and BONO enter the yard, engaged in conversation. 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.

It is Friday night, payday, and the one night of the week the two men engage in a ritual of talk and drink. TROY is usually the most talkative and at times he can be crude and almost vulgar, though he is capable of rising to profound heights of expression. The men carry lunch buckets and wear or carry burlap aprons and are dressed in clothes suitable to their jobs as garbage collectors.

BONO  Troy, you ought to stop that lying!

TROY  I ain't lying! The nigger had a watermelon this big.

(He indicates with his hands.)

Talking about . . . "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" I liked to fell out! "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" . . . And it sitting there big as life.

BONO  What did Mr. Rand say?

TROY  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.

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 fromt he union talking to Mr. Rand?

BONO  He come to me talking about . . . "Maxson gonna get us fired." I told him to get away from me with that. He walked away from me calling you a troublemaker. What Mr. Rand say?

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

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? 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 whites driving and the colore[5]
d lifting? 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.

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

TROY  Same as you and me. Getting just 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 got had 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.

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BONO  It's alright to buy her one drink. That's what you call being polite. But when you wanna be buying two or three . . . that's what you call eyeing 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 forgetting I knew you when.

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  Alright then! Case closed.

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 cause you see me walking around there.

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

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 wear 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!

(ROSE enters from the house. She is ten years younger than TROY, her devotion to him stems from her 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, oraloneness 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. She alternates between the porch and the kitchen, where supper preparations are under way.)

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 all 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. You 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.

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.

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 going 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.

TROY (Hands him the bottle.) 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. 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.
If he be like you in the sports . . . he's gonna be alright. Ain't but two men ever played baseball as good as you. That's Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson. Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than you.

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

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

How in hell they done changed?

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

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

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.

Selkirk?

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!

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

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

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? 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 . . . and good god! You can kiss it goodbye. Now, am I lying?

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

If I'm lying . . . that 450 feet worth of lying!

That's all death is to me. A fastball on the outside corner.

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. Look here, Bono . . . I looked up one day 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 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 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.

(Pause.) Alright. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where we can't hardly move. Death stood up, threwed on his robe . . . had him a white robe with a hood on it. 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. 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.

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 wanna be hearing all that stuff.

(LYONS enters the yard from the street. Thirty-four years old, TROY's son by a previous marriage, he sports a neatly trimmed goatee, sport coat, white shirt, tieless and buttoned at the collar. Though he fancies himself a musician, he is more caught up in the rituals and "idea" of being a musician than in the actual practice of the music. He has come to borrow money from TROY, and while he knows he will be successful, he is uncertain as to what extent his lifestyle will be held up to scrutiny and ridicule.)

LYONS  Hey, Pop.

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

LYONS  How you doing, Rose?

(He kisses her.) Mr. Bono. How you doing?

BONO  Hey, Lyons . . . how you been?

TROY  He must have been doing alright. 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.

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TROY  I ain't bothering Lyons.

(Offers him the bottle.) 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.

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

TROY  You was in the neighborhood alright, 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.

BONO  That's what I wanna know about . . . that devil you done seen.

LYONS  What . . . 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 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 alright. 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.

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. 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.

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.

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
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.

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

TROY  What's the matter, you too good to carry people's rubbish? Where you think 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  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 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  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 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

(Handing ROSE the money.) 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  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.

BONO  Take care, Lyons!

LYONS  Thanks, Pop. I’ll see you again.

(LYONS exits the yard.)

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

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BONO  He’ll be alright, 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

(Places his arm around ROSE.) 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.

TROY Don't you come by my house, nigger! I done told you what I'm gonna be doing.

(The lights go down to black.)

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Act 1, Scene 2

Act One Scene Two

The lights come up on ROSE hanging up clothes. She hums and sings softly to herself. It is the following morning.

ROSE

(Sings) Jesus, be a fence all around me every day Jesus, I want you to protect me as I travel on my way. Jesus, be a fence all around me every day.

(Troy enters from the house)

ROSE

(continued) Jesus, I want you to protect me As I travel on my way.

(To TROY) 'Morning. You ready for breakfast? I can fix it soon as I finish hanging up these clothes?

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

ROSE 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.

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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 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 comes in handy when I do hit. I don't hear you complaining then.
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.

ROSE 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 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. Alright. 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 threwed his money away. 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

... 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 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 firin' me. You ain't got to worry about that.

(Pause.) Where's Cory? Cory in the house?

(Calls.) 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.

(GABRIEL enters. He comes halfway down the alley and, hearing Troy's voice, stops.)

TROY (continues): He ain't done a lick of work in his life.

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? 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. Go on in there and get you some coffee . . . see if that straighten you up. 'Cause you ain't right this morning.

(TROY starts into the house and sees GABRIEL. GABRIEL starts singing. TROY'S brother, 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 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.) 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 'Cause I'm here today And tomorrow I'll be gone

(GABRIEL enters.) Hey, Rose!

ROSE  How you doing, Gabe?

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

TROY  Hey, Gabe.

(Exit into kitchen.)

ROSE  (To GABRIEL.) What you got there?

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

ROSE  (Looking in basket.) Where's all these plums you talking about?

GABRIEL  I ain't got no plums today, Rose. I was just singing that. Have some tomorrow. Put me in a big order for plums. Have enough plums tomorrow for St. Peter and everybody.

(TROY re-enters from kitchen, crosses to steps.)

(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 holds up a key.) That's my own key! Ain't nobody else got a key like that. That's my key! My two rooms!

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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.

GABRIEL  I'll take some biscuits. You got some biscuits? Did you know when I was in heaven . . . every morning me and St. Peter would sit down by the gate and eat some big fat biscuits? Oh, yeah! We had us a good time. We'd sit there and eat us them biscuits and then St. 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.

(ROSE exits into the house.)


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 St. 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 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?

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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 TROY his quarters.) I'm gonna save them and buy me a new horn so St. Peter can hear me when it's time to open the gates.

(GABRIEL stops suddenly. Listens.) Hear that? That's the hellhounds. I got to chase them out of here. Go on get out of here! Get out!

(GABRIEL exits singing.) Better get ready for the judgment Better get ready for the judgment My Lord is coming down

(ROSE enters from the house.)

TROY  He gone off somewhere.

GABRIEL  (Offstage) Better get ready for the judgment Better get ready for the judgment morning Better get ready for the judgment My God is coming down
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?

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.

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!

(TROY gets up from the porch and starts to exit the yard.)

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?

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 exits the yard. The lights go to black.)

Act 1, Scene 3

Act One Scene Three

The lights come up on the yard. It is four hours later. ROSE is taking down the clothes from the line. CORY enters carrying his football equipment.

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 this 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?

ROSE Yeah, I told him.

CORY What he say?

ROSE He ain't said nothing too much. You get in 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.

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CORY I'm hungry. What you got to eat, Mama?

ROSE Go on and get started on your chores. I got some meat loaf in there. Go on and make you a sandwich . . . and don't leave no mess in there.

(CORY exits into the house. ROSE continues to take down the clothes. TROY enters the yard and sneaks up and grabs her from behind.) Troy! 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 this fence.

TROY (Attempting to kiss her again.) I'll put it up when I finish with what is at hand.

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

TROY (Chasing after her.) I'm studying you . . . fixing to do my homework!

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.

TROY (Calling.) Cory! Get your butt out here, boy!

(ROSE exits into the house with the laundry. TROY goes over to the pile of wood, picks up a board, and starts sawing. CORY enters from the house.)

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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 . . .

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. 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 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 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.

TROY Where 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 seventy-three dollars and twenty-two cents I got sitting up in there.

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CORY  You ain't got to pay for it all at one time. You can put a down payment on it and carry it on 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  Alright, 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. 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

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

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!

Not off no major-league pitching, you couldn’t.

We had better pitching in the Negro leagues. I hit seven home runs off of Satchel Paige. You can’t get no better than that!

Sandy Koufax. He’s leading the league in strikeouts.

I ain’t thinking of no Sandy Koufax.


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?

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

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

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

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.

I’m gonna be working weekends.

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

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

I don’t care where he coming from. The white man ain’t gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway. 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.

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 . . .

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

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?

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  I asked you . . . did you understand?

CORY  Yeah . . .

TROY  What?!

CORY  Yessir.

TROY  You go on down there to that A&P and see if you can get your job back. If you can't do both . . . then you quit the football team. You've got to take the crooked with the straights.

CORY  Yessir.

(Troy comes over to where Cory is working. He stands slouched over and Troy shoves him on his shoulder.) Straighten up, goddammit! I asked you a question . . . what law is there say I got to like you?

CORY  None.

TROY  Well, alright then! Don't you eat every day?

(Cory comes over to where Troy is working. He stands slouched over and Troy shoves him on his shoulder.) Straighten up, goddammit! I asked you a question . . . what law is there say I got to like you?

(Cory comes over to where Troy is working. He stands slouched over and Troy shoves him on his shoulder.) Straighten up, goddammit! I asked you a question . . . what law is there say I got to like you?

CORY  None.

TROY  Well, alright then! Don't you eat every day?

(Pause.) 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!

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TROY  Got clothes on your back.

CORY  Yessir.

TROY  Why you think that is?

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.

(Pause.) 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 you behind on my bedclothes . . . fill you belly up with my food . . . cause you my son. 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.

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

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(ROSE has been standing behind the screen door for much of the scene. She enters as CORY exists.)

ROSE  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. 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 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.

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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.

(Pause.) That's all I got, Rose. That's all I got to give. I can't give nothing else.

(TROY exits into the house. The lights go down to black.)

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Act 1, Scene 4

Act One Scene Four

It is Friday. Two weeks later. CORY starts out of the house with his football equipment. The phone rings.

CORY  (Calling.) I got it!

(He answers the phone and stands in the screen door talking.) Hello? Hey, Jesse. Naw . . . I was just getting ready to leave now.

ROSE  (Calling.) Cory!

CORY  I told you, man, them spikes is all tore up. You can use them if you want, but they ain't no good. Earl got some spikes.

ROSE  (Calling.) Cory!
CORY

(*Calling to ROSE.*) Mam? I'm talking to Jesse.

(*Into phone.*) When she say that?

(*Pause.*) Aw, you lying, man. I'm gonna tell her you said that.

ROSE

(*Calling.*) Cory, don't you go nowhere!

CORY I got to go to the game, Ma!

(*Into the phone.*)

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Yeah, hey, look, I'll talk to you later. Yeah, I'll meet you over Earl's house. Later. Bye, Ma.

(*CORY exits the house and starts out the yard.*)

ROSE Cory, where you going off to? You got that stuff all pulled out and thrown all over your room.

CORY (In the yard.) I was looking for my spikes. Jesse wanted to borrow my spikes.

ROSE Get up there and get that cleaned up before your daddy get back in here.

CORY I got to go to the game! I'll clean it up when I get back.

(*CORY exits.*)

ROSE That's all he need to do is see that room all messed up.

(*ROSE exits into the house. TROY and BONO enter the yard. TROY is dressed in clothes other than his work clothes.*)

BONO He told him the same thing he told you. Take it to the union.

TROY 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.*) Hey, Rose!

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.

TROY  Hey, Rose!

(To BONO.) Yeah, Mr. Rand like to bit his tongue.

(TROY breaks the seal on the bottle, takes a drink, and hands it to BONO.)

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! I went down there to cash my check.

ROSE  (Entering from the house.) Hush all that hollering, man! I know you out here. What they say down there at the Commissioner's office?

TROY  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."

TROY  (Puts his arm around ROSE.) 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. 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.

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TROY  (He sings.) Hear it ring! Hear it ring! I had a dog his name was Blue.

ROSE  Don't nobody wanna hear you sing that old song.

TROY  (Sings.) 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  (Sings.) 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 ain't fired you. What they say down there at the Commissioner's office?

TROY 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 enters from the street.)

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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 Sefus' 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.

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 Hey, Pop . . . if you knew how to read you'd be alright.

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 Mr. Rand 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 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  See, Pop . . . if you 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.

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 offstage. He enters.)


LYONS  How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL  Lyons . . . The King of the Jungle! Rose . . . hey, Rose. Got a flower for you.

(He takes a rose from his pocket.) Picked it myself. That's the same rose like you is!
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 St. 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 arm around GABRIEL.) You hear this, Pop. Uncle Gabe, you alright!

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


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 exits.) 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.

ROSE It ain't the same thing, Troy. And you know it. (GABRIEL comes to the door.) 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 . . .

GABRIEL 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 exits into the house.) 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!

ROSE 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 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.

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. 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 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.

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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.

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

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. 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. When my turn come to head out, I was fourteen and got

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to sniffing around Joe Canewell's daughter. 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 little 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. 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. 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. When he commenced to whupping on me . . . quite naturally I run to get out of the way.

(Pause.) 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.

(Pause.) 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 ran off . . . and when my daddy turned to face me, I could see why the devil had never come to get him . . . cause he was the devil himself. 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 layed there and cried. I didn't know what I was gonna do. 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. Part of that cutting down was when I got to the place where I could feel him kicking in my blood and knew that the only thing that separated us was the matter of a few years.

(GABRIEL enters from the house with a sandwich.)

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.

TROY  And didn't know nothing. The only part of the world I knew was the forty-two acres of Mr. Lubin's land. That's all I knew about life.

LYONS  Fourteen's kinda young to be out on your own.

(Phone rings.) I don't even think I was ready to be out on my own at fourteen. 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. Figured I could do better in the city. So I walked the two hundred miles to Mobile.

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.

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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. We talking about 1918.

ROSE   (Entering.) 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 themselves. Right down there under the Brady Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper. 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? 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 life without me. Fifteen years was a long time for her to wait. But that fifteen years cured me of that robbing stuff. 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  Lyons, you better get on up and get Bonnie. She waiting on you.

LYONS  

(Gets up to go.) 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.

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

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LYONS  Come on, Pop . . .

TROY  I got to get up in the morning.

LYONS  You ain't got to stay long.

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

LYONS  Well, I got to go. I'll see you again.

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

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.

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

GABRIEL  Lyons! King of the Jungle!

(LYONS exits.)

TROY  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.) Aw hell, woman . . . this is Bono. Bono like family. I done known this nigger since . . . how long I done known 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 know you. And we still standing shoulder to shoulder. Hey, look here, Bono . . . a man can't ask for no more than that.

( Drinks to him.) I love you, nigger.

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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.

(BONO starts to exit as CORY enters the yard, dressed in his football uniform. He gives TROY a hard, uncompromising look.)

CORY  What you do that for, Pop?

( He throws his helmet down in the direction of TROY.)

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!

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

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

TROY  Come here.

ROSE  Troy . . .

(CORY reluctantly crosses over to TROY.)

TROY  Alright! See. You done made a mistake.
CORY  I didn't even do nothing!

TROY  I'm gonna tell you what your mistake was. 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. Don't you strike out!

(Lights fade to black.)

Act 2

Act 2, Scene 1

Act Two Scene One

The following morning. CORY is at the tree hitting the ball with the bat. He tries to mimic TROY, but his swing is awkward, less sure. ROSE enters from the house.

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 exits into the house. ROSE sees TROY and BONO coming down the alley.) 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.

(TROY and BONO go over to the pile of wood. BONO picks up the saw and begins sawing.)

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TROY  (To BONO.) 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 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 Goldblums.

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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 enters from the house.)

CORY  How you doing, Mr. Bono?

TROY  Cory? Get that saw from Bono and cut some wood. He talking about the wood's too hard to cut. Stand back there, Jim, and let that young boy show you how it's done.

BONO  He's sure welcome to it.

(CORY takes the saw and begins to cut the wood.)  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 noways.

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 the house and see if you can find that other saw.

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CORY  Where's it at?

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

(CORY exits into the house.) What's that supposed to mean? Wanna keep us in?
BONO  Troy . . . I done 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 baseball 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?

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BONO  She loves you, Troy. Rose loves you.

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  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 onto 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 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.

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BONO  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.
You done stuck your foot in your mouth now!

(TROY grabs up a board and begins to saw. BONO starts to walk out the yard.) Hey, nigger . . . where you going?

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 that fence up by yourself. That's what I want to see. You'll be here another six months without me.

Nigger, you ain't right.

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

Alright, we gonna see now. You better get out your bankbook.

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

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 re-committed.

What was he doing that cause them to arrest him?

Some kids was teasing him and he run them off home. Say he was howling and carrying on. Some folks seen him and called the police. That's all it was.

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

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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.

(ROSE turns to go into the house.)

Rose . . . got something to tell you.

Well, come on . . . wait till I get this food on the table.
TROY  Rose!

(She stops and turns around.) 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 think 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?

(GABRIEL enters from the street. He carries a rose in his hand.)

GABRIEL  Hey, Troy! Hey, Rose!

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

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.

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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 in the house there. I got some watermelon in the frigidaire. Go on and 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 told them they better let me go before he beat them up. Yeah, he did!

ROSE  You go on and get you a piece of watermelon, Gabe. Them bad mens is gone now.

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

(GABRIEL exits into the house.)

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.

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

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

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 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 the 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.

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 curve-ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. 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

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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.

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? 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. 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 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 turns to exit into 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 enters from the house.)

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CORY  Mama!

ROSE  Troy. You're hurting me.

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

(CORY comes up behind TROY and grabs him. TROY, surprised, is thrown off balance just as CORY throws a glancing blow that catches 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.) Troy . . . no. Please! Troy!

(ROSE pulls on TROY to hold him back. TROY stops himself.)

TROY  (To CORY.) Alright. 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.

(TROY exits out the yard as the lights go down.)

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Act 2, Scene 2

Act Two Scene Two

It is six months later, early afternoon. TROY enters from the house and starts to exit the yard. ROSE enters from the house.

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 night. You ain't wanted no part of me then. What you wanna talk to me about now?
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 here every night. Every night of the year. That's 365 days.

ROSE  I want you to come home tomorrow after work.

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 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.

ROSE  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.

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.

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.

(The telephone is heard ringing inside the house.)

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.

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 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! You ain't

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seen nothing I signed. Say . . . you ain't seen nothing I signed.

(ROSE exits into the house to answer the telephone. Presently she returns).

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

TROY  What she have? What is it?

ROSE  It's a girl.

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

ROSE  Troy . . .

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

ROSE  Alberta died having the baby.

TROY  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 The baby? How's the baby?

ROSE They say it's healthy. 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.

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

TROY I ain't pushing nobody away. Just give me some space. That's all. Just give me some room to breathe.

(ROSE exits into the house. TROY walks about the yard.)

TROY (With a quiet rage that threatens to consume him.) Alright . . . 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. See? I'm gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the other side. See? You stay over there until you're ready for me. 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. When you ready for me . . . when the top of your list say Troy Maxson . . . that's when you come around here. You come up and knock on the front door. Ain't nobody else got nothing to do with this. This is between you and me. Man to man. You stay on the other side of that fence until you ready for me. Then you come up and knock on the front door. Anytime you want. I'll be ready for you.

(The lights go down to black.)

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"Who's gonna bury her?"

Act 2, Scene 3

Act Two Scene Three

The lights come up on the porch. It is late evening three days later. ROSE sits listening to the ball game waiting for TROY. The final out of the game is made and ROSE switches off the radio. TROY enters the yard carrying an infant wrapped in blankets. He stands back from the house and calls.

(ROSE enters and stands on the porch. There is a long, awkward silence, the weight of which grows heavier with each passing second.)

TROY Rose . . . I'm standing here with my daughter in my arms. She ain't but a wee bittie little old thing. She don't know nothing about grownups' business. She innocent . . . and she ain't got no mama.

ROSE What you telling me for, Troy?

(She turns and exits into the house.)

TROY Well . . . I guess we'll just sit out here on the porch.
He sits down on the porch. There is an awkward indelicateness about the way he handles the baby. His largeness engulfs and seems to swallow it. He speaks loud enough for ROSE to hear.) 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.

(To the baby.) 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. 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 . . .

(He sings 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 enters from the house. TROY hearing her steps behind him, stands and faces her.) 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 from him.) From right now . . . this child got a mother. But you a womanless man.

(ROSE turns and exits into the house with the baby. Lights go down to black.)

Act 2, Scene 4

Act Two Scene Four

It is two months later. LYONS enters from the street. He knocks on the door and calls

LYONS Hey, Rose!

(Pause.) Rose!

ROSE

(From inside the house.) Stop that yelling. You gonna wake up Raynell. I just got her to sleep.

LYONS I just stopped by to pay Papa this twenty dollars I owe him. Where's Papa at?

ROSE He should be here in a minute. I'm getting ready to go down to the church. Sit down and wait on him.

LYONS I got to go pick up Bonnie over her mother's house.

ROSE Well, sit it down there on the table. He'll get it.

LYONS

(Enters the house and sets the money on the table.) Tell Papa I said thanks. I'll see you again.

ROSE Alright, Lyons. We'll see you.

(LYONS starts to exit as CORY enters)
CORY Hey, Lyons.

LYONS What's happening, Cory. Say man, I'm sorry I missed your graduation. You know I had a gig and couldn't get away. Otherwise, I would have been there, man. So what you doing?

CORY I'm trying to find a job.

LYONS Yeah I know how that go, man. It's rough out here. Jobs are scarce.

CORY Yeah, I know.

LYONS Look here, I got to run. Talk to Papa . . . he know some people. He'll be able to help get you a job. Talk to him . . . see what he say.

CORY Yeah . . . alright, Lyons.

LYONS You take care. I'll talk to you soon. We'll find some time to talk.

(LYONS exits the yard. CORY wanders over to the tree, picks up the bat and assumes a batting stance. He studies an imaginary pitcher and swings. Dissatisfied with the result, he tries again. TROY enters. They eye each other for a beat. CORY puts the bat down and exits the yard. TROY starts into the house as ROSE exits with RAYNELL. She is carrying a cake.)

TROY I'm coming in and everybody's going out.

ROSE I'm taking this cake down to the church for the bakesale. Lyons was by to see you. He stopped by to pay you your twenty dollars. It's laying in there on the table.

TROY (Going into his pocket.) Well . . . here go this money.

ROSE Put it in there on the table, Troy. I'll get it.

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. 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 them. We having a bakesale at the church tomorrow.

(ROSE exits the yard. TROY sits down on the steps, take sa pint bottle from his pocket, opens it and drinks. He begins to sing.)

TROY Hear it ring! Hear it ring! Had an old dog his name was Blue You know Blue was mighty true You know Blue as a good old dog Blue trees a possum in a hollow log You know from that he was a good old dog

(BONO enters the yard.)
BONO  Hey, Troy.

TROY  Hey, what's happening, Bono?

BONO  I just thought I'd stop by to see you.

TROY  What you stop by and see me for? You ain't stopped by in a month of Sundays. Hell, I must owe you money or something.

BONO  Since you got your promotion I can't keep up with you. Used to see you everyday. 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. How's Lucille?

BONO  She alright. Her arthritis get to acting up on her sometime. Saw Rose on my way in. 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.

(Pause.) Got some gin here.

BONO  Naw, thanks. I just stopped by to say hello.

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 alright.

BONO  Look here . . . I got to be getting on. Stop by sometime, huh?

TROY  Yeah, I'll do that, Bono. 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.

BONO  Yeah. Okay, Troy.

(BONO exits. TROY drinks from the bottle.)

TROY  Old Blue died and I dig his grave Let him down with a golden chain Every night when I hear old Blue bark I know Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark. Hear it ring! Hear it ring!

(CORY enters the yard. They eye each other for a beat. TROY is sitting in the middle of the steps. CORY walks over.)

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.

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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?

CORY  I live here too!

TROY  (Advancing toward him.) You just gonna walk over top of me in my own house?

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.) 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 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 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! 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 footsteps in the

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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!

(He 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
(Shoves him on his shoulder.) Nigger! That's what you are. You just another nigger on the street to me!

CORY  You crazy! You know that?

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  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  (TROY advances on CORY.) Get your black ass out of my yard!

(TROY's advance backs CORY up against the tree. CORY grabs up the bat.)

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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  Put my bat down!

CORY  Come on, put me out.

(CORY swings at TROY, who backs across the yard.) What's the matter? You so bad . . . put me out!

(TROY advances toward CORY.)

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 the 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.) 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.)

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Go on and get away from around my house.

(CORY, stung by his defeat, picks himself up, walks slowly out of the yard and up the alley.)

CORY Tell Mama I'll be back for my things.

TROY They'll be on the other side of that fence.

(CORY exits.)

TROY I can't taste nothing. Helluljah! I can't taste nothing no more.

(TROY assumes a batting posture and begins to taunt Death, the fastball in the outside corner.) Come on! It's between you and me now! Come on! Anytime you want! Come on! I be ready for you . . . but I ain't gonna be easy.

(The lights go down on the scene.)

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Act 2, Scene 5

Act Two Scene Five

The time is 1965. The lights come up in the yard. It is the morning of TROY's funeral. A funeral plaque with a light hangs beside the door. There is a small garden plot off to the side. There is noise and activity in the house as ROSE, LYONS and BONO have gathered. The door opens and RAYNELL, seven years old, enters dressed in a flannel nightgown. She crosses to the garden and pokes around with a stick. ROSE calls from the house.

ROSE Raynell!

MAXSON Mam?

ROSE What you doing out there?

MAXSON Nothing.

(ROSE comes to the door.)

ROSE Girl, get in here and get dressed. What you doing?

MAXSON Seeing if my garden growed.

ROSE I told you it ain't gonna grow overnight. You got to wait.

MAXSON It don't look like it never gonna grow. Dag!

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ROSE I told you a watched pot never boils. Get in here and get dressed.
MAXSON  This ain't even no pot, Mama.

ROSE  You just have to give it a chance. It'll grow. Now you come on and do what I told you. We got to be getting ready. This ain't no morning to be playing around. You hear me?

MAXSON  Yes, mam.

(ROSE exits into the house. RAYNELL continues to poke at her garden with a stick. CORY enters. He is dressed in a Marine corporal's uniform, and carries a duffel bag. His posture is that of a military man, and his speech has a clipped sternness.)

CORY

(To RAYNELL.) Hi.

(Pause.) I bet your name is Raynell.

MAXSON  Uh huh.

CORY  Is your mama home?

(RAYNELL runs up on the porch and calls through the screendoor.)

MAXSON  Mama . . . there's some man out here. Mama?

(ROSE comes to the door.)

ROSE  Cory? Lord have mercy! Look here, you all!

(ROSE and CORY embrace in a tearful reunion as BONO and LYONS enter from the house dressed in funeral clothes.)

BONO  Aw, looka here . . .

ROSE  Done got all grown up!

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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 goes to embrace CORY.)

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?

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.

LYONS  (With his arm around RAYNELL.) Cory . . . look at Raynell. Ain't she precious? She gonna break a whole lot of hearts.

ROSE  Raynell, come and say hello to your brother. This is your brother, Cory. You remember Cory.

MAXSON  No, Mam.

CORY  She don't remember me, Mama.

ROSE  Well, we talk about you. She heard us talk about you.

(To RAYNELL.) This is your brother, Cory. Come on and say hello.

MAXSON  Hi.

CORY  Hi. So you're Raynell. Mama told me a lot about you.

ROSE  You all come on into the house 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 in there in a minute.

ROSE  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.
LYONS So . . . I hear you thinking about getting married.

CORY Yeah, I done found the right one, Lyons. It's about time.

LYONS Me and Bonnie been split up about four years now. About the time Papa retired. I guess she just got

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tired of all them changes I was putting her through.

(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. 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 want 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. It still helps me to get out of bed in the morning. As long as it do that I'm gonna be right there playing and trying to make some sense out of it.

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ROSE

(Calling.) Lyons, I got these eggs in the pan.

LYONS Let me go on and get these eggs, man. Get ready to go bury Papa.

(Pause.) How you doing? You doing alright?

(CORY nods. LYONS touches him on the shoulder and they share a moment of silent grief. LYONS exits into the house. CORY wanders about the yard. RAYNELL enters.)

MAXSON Hi.

CORY Hi.

MAXSON Did you used to sleep in my room?
CORY  Yeah . . . that used to be my room.

MAXSON  That's what Papa call it "Cory's room." It got your football in the closet.

(ROSE comes to the door.)

ROSE  Raynell, get in there and get them good shoes on.

MAXSON  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.

MAXSON  They didn't hurt then. My feet done got bigger.

ROSE  Don't you give me no backtalk now. You get in there and get them shoes on.

(RAYNELL exits into the house.) 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

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 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 can't drag Papa with me everywhere I go. 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 got to listen to that kind of talk this morning. Whatever was between you and your daddy . . . the time has come to put it aside. Just take it and set it over there on the shelf and forget about it. 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  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. Everywhere I looked, Troy Maxson was staring back at me . . . hiding under the bed . . . in the closet. I'm just 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. He wasn't always right. Sometimes when he touched he bruised. And sometimes when he took me in his arms he cut. 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. I was thirty years old and had done seen my share of men. But when he walked up to me and said, "I can dance a waltz that'll make you dizzy," I thought, Rose Lee, here is a man that you can open yourself 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. One of them empty spaces was being somebody's mother.

I married your daddy and settled down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed. 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. For my part in the matter. But at that time I wanted that. 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 did that. 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, me and your daddy had done lost touch with one another. 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.) 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.

MAXSON

(Entering, still with her old shoes.) Mama . . . Reverend Tolliver on the phone.

(ROSE exits into the house.)

MAXSON  Hi.

CORY  Hi.

MAXSON  You in the Army or the Marines?

CORY  Marines.

MAXSON  Papa said it was the Army. Did you know Blue?

CORY  Blue? Who's Blue?

MAXSON  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! Hear it ring!

(RAYNELL joins in singing.)

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 And every night I call his name Go on Blue, you good dog you Go on Blue, you good dog you

MAXSON Blue laid down and died like a man Blue laid down and died . . .

BOTH Blue laid down and died like a man Now he's treeing possums in the Promised Land I'm gonna tell you this to let you know Blue's gone where the good dogs go When I hear old Blue bark

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When I hear old Blue bark Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark.

(ROSE comes to the screen 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 Papa's funeral.

MAXSON Okay, I'll be back.

(RAYNELL exits into the house. CORY gets up and crosses over to the tree. ROSE stands in the screen door watching him. GABRIEL enters from the alley.)

GABRIEL

(Calling.) Hey, Rose!

ROSE Gabe?

GABRIEL I'm here, Rose. Hey Rose, I'm here!

(ROSE enters from the house.)

ROSE Lord . . . Look here, Lyons!

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 Hey, Rose. It's time. It's time to tell St. Peter to open the gates. Troy, you ready? You ready, Troy. I'm gonna tell St. Peter to open the gates. You get ready now.

(Game, with great fanfare, braces himself to blow. The trumpet is without a mouthpiece. He puts the end of it into his mouth and blows with great force, like a man

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who has been waiting some twenty-odd years for this single moment. No sound comes out of the trumpet. He braces himself and blows again with the same result. A third time he blows. There is a weight of impossible description that falls away and leaves him bare and exposed to a frightful realization. It is a trauma that a sane and normal mind would be unable to withstand. He begins to dance. A slow, strange dance, eerie and life-
giving. A dance of atavistic signature and ritual. LYONS attempts to embrace him. GABRIEL pushes LYONS away. He begins to howl in what is an attempt at song, or perhaps a song turning back into itself in an attempt at speech. He finishes his dance and the gates of heaven stand open as wide as God's closet.) That's the way that go!

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF PLAY.