FENCES
1957
CHARACTERS

TROY MAXSON
JIM BONO, Troy's friend
ROSE, Troy's wife
LYONS, Troy's oldest son by a previous marriage
GABRIEL, Troy's brother
CORY, Troy and Rose's son
RAYNELL, Troy's daughter

SETTING

The setting is the yard which fronts the only entrance to the Maxson household, an ancient two-story brick house set back off a small alley in a big-city neighborhood. The entrance to the house is gained by two or three steps leading to a wooden porch badly in need of paint.

A relatively recent addition to the house and running its full width, the porch lacks congruence. It is a sturdy porch with a flat roof. One or two chairs of dubious value sit at one end where the kitchen window opens onto the porch. An old-fashioned icebox stands silent guard at the opposite end.

The yard is a small dirt yard, partially fenced (except during the last scene), with a wooden sawhorse, a pile of lumber, and other fence-building equipment off to the side. Opposite is a tree from which hangs a ball made of rags. A baseball bat leans against the tree. Two oil drums serve as garbage receptacles and sit near the house at right to complete the setting.

Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprang on the city with tenacious claws and an honest and solid dream. The city devoured them. They swelled its belly until it burst into a thousand furnaces and sewing machines, a thousand butcher shops and bakers' ovens, a thousand churches and hospitals and funeral parlors and moneylenders. The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true.

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They came from places called the Carolinas and the Virginias, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. They came strong, eager, searching. The city rejected them and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar paper. They collected rags and wood. They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes, and in quieter desperation and vengeful pride, they stole, and lived in pursuit of their own dream. That they could breathe free, finally, and stand to meet life with the force of dignity and whatever eloquence the heart could call upon.

By 1957, the hard-won victories of the European immigrants had solidified the industrial might of America. War had
been confronted and won with new energies that used loyalty and patriotism as its fuel. Life was rich, full and flourishing. The Milwaukee Braves won the World Series, and the hot winds of change that would make the sixties a turbulent, racing, dangerous and provocative decade had not yet begun to blow full.

When the sins of our fathers visit us
We do not have to play host.
We can banish them with forgiveness
As God, in His Largeness and Laws.

—August Wilson
TROY: I ain't lying! The nigger had a watermelon this big. *(Indicates with his hands)* Talking about... "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" I like 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 from the union talking to Mr. Rand?

BONO: He come talking to me 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 colored 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 as much as we is. Which is to say nothing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

BONO: It's all right to buy her one drink. That's what you call being polite. But when you wanna be 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: All right 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.
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. 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 be raising all kind of hell.
AUGUST WILSON

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

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

ROSE: Selkirk?

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

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

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

(Troy takes a long drink from the bottle.)

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

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

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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 good-bye. Now, am I lying?

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

TROY: If I'm lying . . . that 450 feet worth of lying! (Pause)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TROY: I say . . . What you want, Mr. Death? You be wanting me? You done brought your army to be getting me? I looked him dead in the eye. I wasn't fearing nothing. I was ready to tangle. Just like I'm ready to tangle now. The Bible say be ever vigilant. That's why I don't get but so drunk. I got to keep watch.
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 are you gonna get the money from? You done spent it for a TV. You gonna sit up and watch the water run all over your brand-new TV.
CORY: Aw, Pop. You got money. I know you do.
TROY: Where I got it at, huh?
CORY: You got it in the bank.
TROY: You wanna see my bankbook? You wanna see that seventy-three dollars and twenty-two cents I got sitting up in there.
CORY: You ain't got to pay for it all at one time. You can put a down payment on it and carry it home with you.
TROY: Not me. I ain't gonna owe nobody nothing if I can help it. Miss a payment and they come and snatch it right out your house. Then what you got? Now, soon as I get two hundred dollars clear, then I'll buy a TV. Right now, as soon as I get two hundred and sixty-four dollars, I'm gonna have this roof tarred.
CORY: Aw ... Pop!
TROY: You go on and get you two hundred dollars and buy one if ya want it. I got better things to do with my money.
CORY: I can't get no two hundred dollars. I ain't never seen two hundred dollars.
TROY: I'll tell you what ... you get you a hundred dollars and I'll put the other hundred with it.
CORY: All right, I'm gonna show you.
TROY: You gonna show me how you can cut them boards right now.

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

CORY: The Pirates won today. That makes five in a row.
TROY: I ain't thinking about the Pirates. Got an all-white team. Got that boy ... that Puerto Rican boy ... Clemente. Don't even half-play him. That boy could be something if they give him a chance. Play him one day and sit him on the bench the next.
CORY: He gets a lot of chances to play.
TROY: I'm talking about playing regular. Playing every day so you can get your timing. That's what I'm talking about.
CORY: They got some white guys on the team that don't play every day. You can't play everybody at the same time.
TROY: If they got a white fellow sitting on the bench ... you can bet your last dollar he can't play! The colored guy got to be twice as good before he get on the team. That's why
I don’t want you to get all tied up in them sports. Man on the team and what it get him? They got colored on the team and don’t use them. Same as not having them. All them teams the same.

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

CORY: I’m gonna be working weekends.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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: 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.

(Rose has been standing behind the screen door for much of the scene. She enters as Cory exits.)

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
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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 embarras­
sed. 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 mat­
ter 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 reins that he had used on me. I picked up them reins and
commenced to whupping on him. The gal jumped up and
run off . . . and when my daddy turned to face me, I could
see why the devil had never come to get him . . . '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 laid there and cried. I didn't know what
I was gonna do. The only thing I knew was the matter 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 sand­
wich.

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 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.
BONO: That's the only way you got anywhere back in them days.
LYONS: Shhhh. 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 sup­
posed 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.
Shhhh. 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 got—

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.

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 know you?

BONO: It's been a long time.

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

BONO: You sure right about that.

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