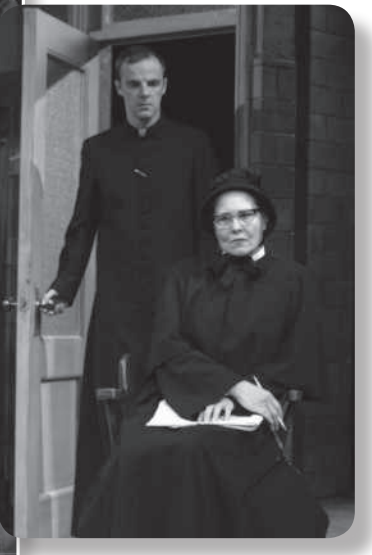
CHAPTER 40

THEME



Scene from a 2004 production of David Henry Hwang's *Trying to Find Chinatown* (p. 1549).

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Scene from a 2004 production of John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt: A Parable* (p. 1517).

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Scene from a 1986 production of August Wilson's *Fences* (p. 1556).

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Like a short story or a novel, a play is open to interpretation. Readers' reactions are influenced by the language of the text, and audiences' reactions are influenced by the performance on stage. Just as in fiction, every element of a play—its title, its conflicts, its dialogue, its characters, and its staging—can shed light on its themes.

Titles

The **title** of a play can provide insight into its themes. The ironic title of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (p. 1125), for example, suggests that women's concerns with "trifles" may get to the truth more effectively than the preoccupations of self-important men do. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), is another title that offers clues to the theme of a play. An allusion to Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem" (p. 762)—which asks, "what happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?"—the title suggests what happens to an African-American family whose dreams are repeatedly crushed. Likewise, the title *Fences* (p. 1556) offers clues to a major theme of August Wilson's play, suggesting that the main character is kept from his goals by barriers that are constructed by himself as well as by society. Finally, the title of Anton Chekhov's *The Brute* (p. 1068) calls attention to the play's ideas about male-female relationships. The title may refer to Smirnov, who says that he has never liked women—whom he characterizes as "creatures of poetry and romance." Or, it may refer to Mrs. Popov's late husband, to whose memory she has dedicated her life despite the fact that he was unfaithful. Either alternative reinforces the play's tongue-in-cheek characterization of men as "brutes."

Conflicts

The unfolding plot of a play—especially the **conflicts** that develop—can reveal the play's themes. In Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* (p. 1138), for example, at least three major conflicts are present: one between Nora and her husband Torvald, one between Nora and Krogstad (an old acquaintance), and one between Nora and society. Each of these conflicts sheds light on the themes of the play.

Through Nora's conflict with Torvald, Ibsen examines the constraints placed on women and men by marriage in the nineteenth century. Both Nora and Torvald are imprisoned within their respective roles: Nora must be passive and childlike, and Torvald must be proper and always in control. Nora, therefore, expects her husband to be noble and generous and, in a crisis, to sacrifice himself for her. When he fails to live up to her expectations, she is profoundly disillusioned.

Nora's conflict with Krogstad underscores Ibsen's criticisms of the class system in nineteenth-century Norway. At the beginning of the play, Nora finds it "immensely amusing: that we—that Torvald has so much power over . . . people." Krogstad, a bank clerk who is in the employ of Torvald, visits Nora in act 1 to enlist her aid in saving his job. It is clear that she sees him as her social inferior. For example, when Krogstad questions her about a woman with whom he has seen her, she replies, "What

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makes you think you can cross-examine me, Mr. Krogstad—you, one of my husband's employees?" Nora does not realize that she and Krogstad are, ironically, very much alike: both occupy subordinate positions and therefore have no power to determine their own destinies.

Finally, through Nora's conflict with society, Ibsen examines the destructive nature of the forces that subjugate women. Nineteenth-century society was male dominated. A married woman had the same legal status as one of her children. She could not borrow money without her husband's signature, own real estate in her own name, or enter into contracts. In addition, all her assets—including inheritances and trust funds—automatically became the property of her husband at the time of marriage. As a result of her sheltered life, Nora at the beginning of the play is completely unaware of the consequences of her actions. Most readers share Dr. Rank's confusion when he asks Nora, "Why do you laugh at that? Do you have any idea of what society is?" It is Nora's disillusionment at finding out that Torvald and the rest of society are not what she has been led to believe they are that ultimately causes her to rebel. By walking out the door at the end of the play, Nora rejects not only her husband and her children (to whom she has no legal right once she leaves), but also society and its laws.

These three conflicts underscore many of the themes that dominate *A Doll House*. First, the conflicts show that marriage in the nineteenth century imprisons both men and women in narrow, constricting roles. They also show that middle-class Norwegian society is narrow, smug, and judgmental. (Krogstad is looked down upon for a crime years after he committed it, and Nora is looked down upon because she borrows money to save her husband's life.) Finally, the conflicts show that society does not offer individuals—especially women—the freedom to lead happy and fulfilling lives. Only when the social and economic conditions that govern society change, Ibsen suggests, can both women and men live together in mutual esteem.

Dialogue

Dialogue can also give insight into a play's themes. Sometimes a character suggests—or even explicitly states—a theme. In act 3 of *A Doll House*, for example, Nora's friend, Mrs. Linde, comes as close as any character to expressing the central concern of the play when she says, "Helmer's got to learn everything; this dreadful secret has to be aired; those two have to come to a full understanding; all these lies can't go on." As the play goes on to demonstrate, the lies that exist both in marriage and in society are obstacles to love and happiness.

One of the main themes of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (p. 1262)—the questionable validity of the American Dream, given the nation's social, political, and economic realities—is suggested by the play's dialogue. As his son Biff points out, Willy Loman's stubborn belief in upward mobility and material success is based more on fantasy than on fact:

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Willy: *(with hatred, threatening)* The door of your life is wide open!

Biff: Pop! I am a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy: *(turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst)* I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

Biff starts for Willy, but is blocked by Happy. In his fury, Biff seems on the verge of attacking his father.

Biff: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!

Although it does not explicitly state the theme of the play, this exchange strongly suggests that Biff rejects the desperate optimism to which Willy clings.

Characters

Because a dramatic work focuses on a central character, or **protagonist,** the development of this character can shed light on a play's themes. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is developed in great detail. At the beginning of the play, he feels trapped, exhausted, and estranged from his surroundings. As Willy gradually sinks from depression into despair, the action of the play shifts from the present to the past, showing the events that shaped his life. His attitudes, beliefs, dreams, and dashed hopes reveal him to be an embodiment of the major theme of the play—that an unquestioning belief in the American Dream of success is both unrealistic and destructive.

Nora in *A Doll House* changes a great deal during the course of the play. At the beginning, she is more her husband's possession than an adult capable of shaping her own destiny. Nora's status becomes apparent in the first act when Torvald gently scolds his "little spendthrift" and refers to her as his "little lark" and his "squirrel." She is reduced to childish deceptions, such as hiding her macaroons when her husband enters the room. After Krogstad accuses her of committing forgery and threatens to expose her, she expects her husband to rise to the occasion and take the blame for her. When Torvald instead accuses her of being a hypocrite, a liar, and a criminal, Nora's neat little world comes crashing down. As a result of this experience, Nora changes; no longer is she the submissive and obedient wife. Instead, she becomes assertive—even rebellious—ultimately telling Torvald that their marriage is a sham and that she can no longer stay with him. This abrupt shift in Nora's personality gives the audience a clear understanding of the major themes of the play.

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Unlike Willy and Nora, Laura in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (p. 1891) is a character who changes very little during the course of the play. Laura suffers from such pathological shyness that she is unable to attend typing class, let alone talk to a potential suitor. Although the "gentleman caller" draws her out of her shell for a short time, she soon withdraws again. Laura's inability to change reinforces the play's theme that contemporary society, with its emphasis on progress, has no place for people like her who live in private worlds "of glass animals and old, worn-out phonograph records."

Staging

Various staging elements, such as props and furnishings, may also convey the themes of a play. In *Death of a Salesman*, Biff's trophy, which is constantly in the audience's view, is a prop that ironically underscores the futility of Willy's efforts to achieve success. Similarly, the miniature animals in *The Glass Menagerie* suggest the fragility of Laura's character and the futility of her efforts to fit into the modern world. And, in *Trifles*, the depressing farm house, the broken birdcage, and the dead canary hint at Mrs. Wright's misery and the reason she murdered her husband.

Special lighting effects and music can also suggest a play's themes. Throughout *The Glass Menagerie*, for example, words and pictures are projected onto a section of the set between the front room and dining room walls. In scene 1, as Tom's mother, Amanda, tells him about her experiences with her "gentlemen callers," an image of her as a girl greeting callers appears on the screen. As Amanda continues, the words *"Où sont Les Neiges"*—"Where are the snows [of yesteryear]?"—appear on the screen. Later in the play, when Laura and her mother discuss a boy Laura knew, his picture is projected on the screen, showing him as a high school hero carrying a silver cup. In addition to the slides, Williams uses music—a recurring tune, dance music, and "Ave Maria"—to increase the emotional impact of certain scenes. He also uses shafts of light focused on selected areas or characters to create a dreamlike atmosphere for the play. Collectively, the slides, music, and lighting reinforce the theme that those who retreat into the past inevitably become estranged from the present.

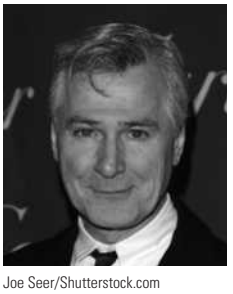
A Final Note

As you read, your own values and beliefs influence your interpretation of a play's themes. For instance, your interest in the changing status of women could lead you to focus on the submissive, almost passive, role of Willy's wife, Linda, in *Death of a Salesman*. As a result, you could conclude that the play shows how, in the post–World War II United States, women like Linda often sacrificed their own happiness for that of their husbands. Remember, however, that the play itself, not just your own feelings or assumptions about it, must support your interpretation.

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✔ CHECKLIST Writing about Theme

- ☐ What is the central theme of the play?
- ☐ What other themes can you identify?
- ☐ Does the title of the play suggest a theme?
- ☐ What conflicts exist in the play? How do they shed light on the themes of the play?
- ☐ Do any characters' statements express or imply a theme of the play?
- ☐ Do any characters change during the play? How do these changes suggest the play's themes?
- ☐ Do certain characters resist change? How does their failure to change suggest a theme of the play?
- ☐ Do scenery and props help to communicate the play's themes?
- ☐ Does music reinforce certain ideas in the play?
- ☐ Does lighting underscore the themes of the play?



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JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY (1950–) is a playwright, screenwriter, and director. He has written numerous plays and screenplays, including the recent plays *Romantic Poetry* (2007) and *Pirate* (2010) as well as the Academy Award-winning film *Moonstruck* (1987) and the Emmy Award-nominated film *Alive* (1993). The recipient of numerous honors, Shanley adapted his Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Doubt: A Parable* into the critically acclaimed 2008 feature film *Doubt*. Describing the play, Shanley explained, "I am interested in hierarchies. I think they reveal societies . . . . I'm interested very much in where authority comes from, which is always a central element of hierarchy."

Cultural Context: The early 1960s. marked a seismic shift in the history of Catholicism. With Pope John XXIII at the helm, Catholic leaders convened in Rome to discuss the state of the Catholic Church. These meetings, called the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), brought about a series of changes in church policy and culture, including the shift from delivering Mass in Latin to delivering it in English. According to Reverend Mark Massa, dean of Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, "Starting with Vatican II, Catholics became aware that the church, its worship, and its beliefs change—that the church develops over history. The current battles between the left and the right are really between those who want to press a historical awareness of change and those who want to view the church as timeless."

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Doubt: A Parable (2004)

CHARACTERS

Father Brendan Flynn, late thirties
Sister Aloysius Beauvier, fifties / sixties
Sister James, twenties
Mrs. Muller, around thirty-eight

PLACE

St. Nicholas, a Catholic church
and school in the Bronx, New York.

TIME

1964.

"The bad sleep well "

—Title of Kurosawa film

"In much wisdom is much grief: and be that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

—Ecclesiastes

"Everything that is hard to attain is easily assailed by the mob."

—Ptolemy

ONE

A priest. Father Flynn, in his late thirties, in green and gold vestments, gives a sermon. He is working class, from the Northeast.

Flynn. What do you do when you're not sure? That's the topic of my sermon today. You look for God's direction and can't find it. Last year when President Kennedy was assassinated, who among us did not experience the most profound disorientation. Despair. "What now?" Which way? What do I say to my kids? What do I tell myself?" It was a time of people sitting together, bound together by a common feeling of hopelessness. But think of that! Your *bond* with your fellow beings was your *despair*. It was a public experience, shared by everyone in our society. It was awful, but we were in it together! How much worse is it then for the lone man, the lone woman, stricken by a private calamity? "No one knows I'm sick. No one knows I've lost my last real friend. No one knows I've done something wrong." Imagine the isolation. You see the world as through a window. On the one side of the glass: happy, untroubled people. On the other side: you. Something has happened, you have to carry it, and its incommunicable. For those so afflicted, only God knows their pain. Their secret. The secret of their alienating sorrow. And when such a person, as they must, howls to the sky, to God: "Help me!" What if no answer comes? Silence. I want to tell you a story. A cargo ship sank, and all her crew was drowned. Only this one sailor survived. He made a raft of some spars and, being of a nautical discipline, turned his eyes to the Heavens and read the stars. He set a course for his home and, exhausted, fell asleep. Clouds rolled in and blanketed the sky. For the next twenty nights, as he floated on the vast ocean, he could, no longer see the

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Bran F. O'Byrne as Father Flynn and Cherry Jones as Sister Aloysius at the Manhattan Theatre Club, 2004.

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stars. He thought he was on course, bur there was no way to be certain. As the days rolled on, and he wasted away with fevers, thirst and starvation, he began to have doubts. Had he set his course right? Was he still going on towards his home? Or was he horribly lost and doomed to a terrible death? No way to know. The message of the constellations—had he imagined it because of his desperate circumstance? Or had he seen Truth once and now had to hold on to it without further reassurance? That was his dilemma on a voyage without apparent end. There are those of you in church today who know exactly the crisis of faith I describe. I want to say to you. Doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty. When you are lost, you are not alone. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. (*He exits.*)

TWO

The lights crossfade to a corner office in a Catholic school in the Bronx. The principal, Sister Aloysius Beauvier, sits at her desk, writing in a ledger with a fountain pen. She is in her fifties or sixties. She is watchful, reserved, unsentimental. She is of the order of the Sisters of Charity. She wears a black bonnet and floor-length black habit,[1] *rimless glasses. A knock at the door.*

[1] *habit:* A garment.

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Sister Aloysius: Come in. (*Sister James, also of the Sisters Charity, pokes her head in. She is in her twenties, There's a bit of sunshine in her heart, though she's reserved as well.*)
Sister James: Have you a moment. Sister Aloysius?
Sister Aloysius: Come in. Sister James. (*She enters.*) Who's watching your class?
Sister James: They're having Art,
Sister Aloysius: Art, Waste of time.
Sister James: It's only an hour a week.
Sister Aloysius, Much can be accomplished in sixty minutes.
Sister James: Yes, Sister Aloysius. I wondered if I might know what you did about William London?
Sister Aloysius: I sent him home.
Sister James: Oh dear. So he's still bleeding?
Sister Aloysius: Oh yes.
Sister James: His nose just let loose and started gushing during the Pledge of Allegiance.
Sister Aloysius: Was it spontaneous?
Sister James: What else would it be?
Sister Aloysius: Self-induced.
Sister James: You mean, you think be might've intentionally given himself a nosebleed?
Sister Aloysius: Exactly.
Sister James: No!
Sister Aloysius: You are a very innocent person. Sister James. William London is a fidgety boy and if you do not keep right on him, he will do anything to escape his chair. He would set his foot on fire for half a day out of school.
Sister James: But why?
Sister Aloysius: He has a restless mind.
Sister James: But that's good.
Sister Aloysius: No, it's not. His father's a policeman, and the last thing he wants is a rowdy boy. William London is headed for trouble. Puberty has got hold of him. He will be imagining all the wrong things, and I strongly suspect he will not graduate high school. But that's beyond our jurisdiction. We simply have to get him through, out the door, and then he's somebody else's project. Ordinarily, I assign my most experienced sisters to eighth grade, but I'm working within constraints. Are you in control of your class?
Sister James: I think so.
Sister Aloysius: Usually more children are sent down to me.
Sister James: I try to take care of things/myself.
Sister Aloysius: That can be an error. You are answerable to me, I to the monsignor, he to the bishop, and so on up to the Holy Father, There's a chain of discipline. Make use of it.
Sister James: Yes, Sister.
Sister Aloysius: How's Donald Muller doing?
Sister James: Steady.

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Sister Aloysius: Good. Has anyone hit him?
Sister James: No.
Sister Aloysius: Good. That girl, Linda Conte, have you seated her away from the boys?
Sister James: As far as space permits. It doesn't do much good.
Sister Aloysius: Just get her through. Intact (*Pause. Sister Aloysius is staring absently at Sister James. A silence. Falls.*)
Sister James: So. Should I go? (*No answer.*) Is something the matter?
Sister Aloysius: No. Why? Is something the matter?
Sister James: I don't think so.
Sister Aloysius: Then nothings the matter then.
Sister James: Well. Thank you, Sister. I just wanted to check on William's nose. (*She starts to go.*)
Sister Aloysius: He had a ballpoint pen.
Sister James: Excuse me, Sister?
Sister Aloysius: William London had a ballpoint pen. He was fiddling with it while he waited for his mother. He's not using it for assignments, I hope.
Sister James: No, of course not.
Sister Aloysius: I'm sorry I allowed even cartridge pens into the school. The students really should only be learning script with true fountain pens. Always the easy way out these days. What does that teach? Every easy choice today will have its consequence tomorrow. Mark my words.
Sister James: Yes, Sister.
Sister Aloysius: Ballpoints make them press down, and when they press down, they write like monkeys.
Sister James. I don't allow them ballpoint pens.
Sister Aloysius: Good. Penmanship is dying all across the country. You have some time. Sit down. (*Sister James hesitates and sits down.*) We might as well have a talk. I've been meaning to talk to you. I observed your lesson on the New Deal at the beginning of the term. Not bad. But I caution you. Do not idealize Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He was a good president, but he did attempt to pack the Supreme Court. I do not approve of making heroes of lay historical figures. If you want to talk about saints, do it in Religion.
Sister James: Yes, Sister,
Sister Aloysius: Also. I question your enthusiasm for History.
Sister James: But I love History!
Sister Aloysius: That is exactly my meaning. You favor History and risk swaying the children to value it over their other subjects. I think this is a mistake.
Sister James: I never thought of that. I'll try to treat my other lessons with more enthusiasm.
Sister Aloysius: No, Give them their History without putting sugar all over it. That's the point. Now. Tell me about your class. How would you characterize the condition of 8-B?
Sister James: I don't know where to begin. What do you want to know?
Sister Aloysius: Let's begin with Stephen Inzio.

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Sister James: Stephen Inzio has the highest marks in the class.
Sister Aloysius: Noreen Horan?
Sister James: Second highest marks.
Sister Aloysius: Brenda McNulty?
Sister James: Third highest.
Sister Aloysius: You see I am making a point, Sister James. I know that Stephen Inzio, Noreen Horan, and Brenda McNulty are one, two, and three in your class. School-wide, there are forty-eight such students each grade period, I make it my business to know all forty-eight of their names. I do not say this to aggrandize myself, but to illustrate the importance of paying attention. You must pay attention as well.
Sister James: Yes Sister Aloysius.
Sister Aloysius: I cannot be everywhere.
Sister James: Am I falling short, Sister?
Sister Aloysius: These three students with the highest marks. Are they the most intelligent children in your class?
Sister James: No, I wouldn't say they are. But they work the hardest.
Sister Aloysius: Very good! That's right! That's the ethic. What good's a gift if it's left in the box? What good is a high IQ if you're staring out the window with your mouth agape? Be hard on the bright ones, Sister James. Don't be charmed by cleverness. Not theirs. And not yours. I think you are a competent teacher, Sister James, but maybe not our best teacher. The best teachers do not perform, they cause the students to perform.
Sister James: Do I perform?
Sister Aloysius: As if on a Broadway stage.
Sister James: Oh dear. I had no conception.
Sister Aloysius: You're showing off. You like to see yourself ten feet tall in their eyes. Another thing occurs to me. Where were you before?
Sister James: Mount St. Margaret's.
Sister Aloysius: All girls.
Sister. James: Yes.
Sister Aloysius: I feel I must remind you. Boys are made of gravel, soot, and tar paper. Boys are a different breed.
Sister James. I feel I know how to handle them.
Sister Aloysius: But perhaps you are wrong. And perhaps you are not working hard enough.
Sister James: Oh. (*Sister James cries a little*.)
Sister Aloysius. No tears.
Sister James: I thought you were satisfied with me.
Sister Aloysius. Satisfaction is a vice. Do you have a handkerchief?
Sister James: Yes.
Sister Aloysius: Use it. Do you think that Socrates was satisfied? Good teachers are never content. We have some three hundred and seventy-two students in this school. It is a society which requires constant educational, spiritual and human vigilance. I can not afford an excessively innocent instructor in my eighth grade

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class. It's self-indulgent. Innocence is a form of laziness. Innocent teachers are easily duped. You must be canny, Sister James.

Sister James: Yes, Sister.

Sister Aloysius: When William London gets a nosebleed, be skeptical. Don't let a little blood fuddle your judgment. God gave you a brain and a heart. The heart is warm, but your wits must be cold. Liars should be frightened to lie to you. They should be uncomfortable in your presence. I doubt they are.

Sister James: I don't know. I've never thought about it.

Sister Aloysius: The children should think you see right through them.

Sister James: Wouldn't that be a little frightening?

Sister Aloysius: Only to the ones that are up to no good.

Sister James: But I want my students to feel they can talk to me.

Sisteer Aloysius: They're children. They can talk to each other. It's more important they have a fierce moral guardian. You stand at the door, Sister. You are the gatekeeper. If you are vigilant, they will not need to be.

Sister James: I'm not sure what you want me to do.

Sister Aloysius: And if things occur in your classroom which you sense require understanding, but you don't understand, come to me.

Sister James: Yes, Sister.

Sister Aloysius: That's why I'm here. That's why I'm the principal of this school. Do you stay when the specialty instructors come in?

Sister James: Yes.

Sister Aloysius: But you're here now while the Art class is going on.

Sister James: I was a little concerned about William's nose.

Sister Aloysius: Right. So you have Art in class.

Sister James: She comes in, Mrs. Bell. Yes.

Sister Aloysius: And you take them down to the basement for Dance with Mrs. Shields.

Sister James: On Thursdays.

Sister Aloysius: Another waste of time.

Sister James: Oh, but everyone loves the Christmas pageant.

Sister Aloysius: I don't love it. Frankly it offends me. Last year the girl playing Our Lady was wearing lipstick. I was waiting in the wings for that little jade.

Sister James: Then there's Music.

Sister Aloysius: That strange woman with the portable piano. What's wrong with her neck?

Sister James: Some kind of goiter. Poor woman.

Sister Aloysius: Yes. Mrs. Carolyn.

Sister James: That's right.

Sister Aloysius: We used to have a Sister teaching that. Not enough Sisters. What else?

Sister James: Physical Education and Religion.

Sister Aloysius: And for that we have Father Flynn. Two hours a week. And you stay for those?

Sister James: Mostly. Unless I have reports to fill out or . . .

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Sister Aloysius: What do you think of Father Flynn?
Sister James: Oh, he's a brilliant man. What a speaker!
Sister Aloysius: Yes. His sermon this past Sunday was poetic.
Sister James: He's actually very good, too, at teaching basketball. I was surprised. I wouldn't think a man of the cloth the personality type for basketball, but he has a way he has, very natural with dribbling and shooting.
Sister Aloysius: What do you think that sermon was about?
Sister James: What?
Sister Aloysius: This past Sunday. What was he talking about?
Sister James: Well, Doubt. He was talking about Doubt.
Sister Aloysius: Why?
Sister James: Excuse me, Sister?
Sister Aloysius: Well, sermons come from somewhere, don't they? Is Father Flynn in Doubt, is he concerned that someone else is in Doubt?
Sister James: I suppose you'd have to ask him.
Sister Aloysius: No. That would not be appropriate. He is my superior. And if he were troubled, he should confess it to a fellow priest, or the monsignor. We do not share intimate information with priests. (*A pause.*)
Sister James: I'm a little concerned. (*Sister Aloysius leans forward.*)
Sister Aloysius. About what?
Sister James: The time, Art class will be over in a few minutes. I should go up.
Sister Aloysius: Have you noticed anything, Sister James?
Sister James: About what?
Sister Aloysius: I want you to be alert.
Sister James: I don't believe I'm following you, Sister.
Sister Aloysius: I'm sorry I'm not more forthright, but I must be careful not to create something by saying it. I can only say I am concerned, perhaps needlessly, about matters in St. Nicholas School.
Sister James: Academically?
Sister Aloysius: I wasn't inviting a guessing game. I want you to pay attention to your class.
Sister James: Well, of course I'll pay attention to my class, Sister. And I'll try not to perform. And I'll try to be less innocent. I'm sorry you're disappointed in me. Please know that I will try my best. Honestly.
Sister Aloysius: Look at you. You'd trade anything for a warm look. I'm telling you here and now, I want to see the starch in your character cultivated. If you are looking for reassurance, you can be fooled. If you forget yourself and study others, you will not be fooled. It's important. One final matter and then you really must get back. Sister Veronica is going blind.
Sister James: Oh how horrible!
Sister Aloysius: This is not generally known, and I don't want it known. If they find out in the rectory, she'll be gone. I cannot afford to lose her. But now if you see her making her way down those stone stairs into the courtyard, for the love of Heaven, lightly take her hand as if in fellowship and see that she doesn't destroy herself. All right, go.

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THREE

The lights crossfade to Father Flynn, whistle around his neck, in a sweatshirt and pants, holding a basketball.

Flynn: All right, settle down, boys. Now the thing about shooting from the foul line: It's psychological. The rest of the game you're cooperating with your teammates, you're competing against the other team. But at the foul line, it's you against yourself. And the danger is: You start to think. When you think, you stop breathing. Your body locks up. So you have to remember to relax. Take a breath, unlock your knees—this is something for you to watch, Jimmy. You stand like a parking meter. Come up with a routine of what you do. Shift your weight, move your hips . . . You think that's funny, Ralph? What's funny is you never getting a foul shot. Don't worry if you look silly. They won't think you're silly if you get the basket. Come up with a routine, concentrate on the routine, and you'll forget to get tensed up. Now on another matter, I've noticed several of you guys have dirty nails. I don't want to see that. I'm not talking about the length of your nails. I'm talking about cleanliness. See? Look at my nails. They're long, I like them a little long, but look at how clean they are. That makes it okay. There was a kid I grew up with, Timmy Mathisson, never had clean nails, and he'd stick his fingers up his nose, in his mouth.—This is a true story, learn to listen! He got spinal meningitis and died a horrible death. Sometimes it's the little things that get you. You try to talk to a girl with those filthy paws, Mr. Conroy, she's gonna take off like she's being chased by the Red Chinese! (*Reacting generally to laughter*) All right, all right. You guys, what am I gonna do with you? Get dressed, come on over to the rectory, have some Kool-Aid and cookies, we'll have a bull session. (*Blows his whistle.*) Go!

FOUR

Crossfade to a bit of garden, a bench, brick wall. Sister Aloysius, in full habit and a black shawl, is wrapping a pruned rosebush in burlap. Sister James enters.

Sister James: Good afternoon, Sister.

Sister Aloysius: Good afternoon, Sister James. Mr. McGinn pruned this bush, which was the right thing to do, but he neglected to protect it from the frost.

Sister James: Have we had a frost?

Sister Aloysius: When it comes, its too late.

Sister James: You know about gardening?

Sister Aloysius: A little. Where is your class?

Sister James: The girls are having Music.

Sister Aloysius: And the boys?

Sister James: They're in the rectory. (*Sister James indicates the rectory, which is out of view, just on the other side of the garden.*)

Sister Aloysius: With Father Flynn.

Sister James: Yes. He's giving them a talk.

Sister Aloysius: On what subject?

Sister James: How to be a man.

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Sister Aloysius: Well, if Sisters were permitted in the rectory, I would be interested to hear that talk. I don't know how to be a man. I would like to know what's involved. Have you ever given the girls a talk on how to be a woman?

Sister James: No. I wouldn't be competent.

Sister Aloysius: Why not?

Sister James: I just don't think I would. I took my vows at the beginning . . . Before . . . At the beginning.

Sister Aloysius: The founder of our order, the Blessed Mother Seton, was married and had five children before embarking on her vows.

Sister James: I've often wondered how she managed so much in one life.

Sister Aloysius: Life perhaps is longer than you think and the dictates of the soul more numerous. I was married.

Sister James: You were! (*Sister Aloysius smiles for the first time.*)

Sister Aloysius. You could at least hide your astonishment.

Sister James: I . . . didn't know.

Sister Aloysius: When one takes on the habit, one must close the door on secular things. My husband died in the war against Adolph Hitler.

Sister James: Really! Excuse me, Sister.

Sister Aloysius: But I'm like you. I'm not sure I would feel competent to lecture tittering girls on the subject of womanhood. I don't come into this garden often. What is it, forty feet across? The convent here, the rectory there. We might as well be separated by the Atlantic Ocean. I used to potter around out here, but Monsignor Benedict does his reverie at quixotic times, and we are rightly discouraged from crossing paths with priests unattended. He is seventy-nine, but nevertheless.

Sister James: The monsignor is very good, isn't he?

Sister Aloysius: Yes. But he is oblivious.

Sister James: To what?

Sister Aloysius: I don't believe he knows who's President of the United States. I mean him no disrespect of course. It's just that he's otherworldly in the extreme.

Sister James: Is it that he's innocent, Sister Aloysius?

Sister Aloysius: You have a slyness at work, Sister James. Be careful of it. How is your class? How is Donald Muller?

Sister James: He is thirteenth in class.

Sister Aloysius: I know. That's sufficient. Is he being accepted?

Sister James: He has no friends.

Sister Aloysius: That would be a lot to expect after only two months. Has anyone hit him?

Sister James: No.

Sister Aloysius: Someone will. And when it happens, send them right down to me.

Sister James: I'm not so sure anyone will.

Sister Aloysius: There is a statue of St. Patrick on one side of the church altar and a statue of St. Anthony on the other. This parish serves Irish and Italian families. Someone will hit Donald Muller.

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Sister James: He has a protector.
Sister Aloysius: Who?
Sister James: Father Flynn. (*Sister Aloysius, who has been fussing with mulch, is suddenly rigid. She rises.*)
Sister Aloysius: What?
Sister James: He's taken an interest. Since Donald went on the altar boys. (*Pause.*) I thought I should tell you.
Sister Aloysius: I told you to come to me, but I hoped you never would,
Sister James: Maybe I shouldn't have.
Sister Aloysius. I knew once you did, something would be set in motion. So it's happened.
Sister James: What?! I'm not telling you that! I'm not even certain what you mean.
Sister Aloysius: Yes, you are.
Sister James: I've been trying to become more cold in my thinking as you suggested . . . I feel as if I've lost my way a little, Sister Aloysius. I had the most terrible dream last night. I want to be guided by you and responsible to the children, but I want my peace of mind. I must tell you I have been longing for the return of my peace of mind.
Sister Aloysius: You may not have it. It is not your place to be complacent. That's for the children. That's what we give them.
Sister James: I think I'm starting to understand you a little. But it's so unsettling to look at things and people with suspicion. It feels as if I'm less close to God.
Sister Aloysius: When you take a step to address wrongdoing, you are taking a step away from God, but in his service. Dealing with such matters is hard and thankless work.
Sister James: I've become more reserved in class. I feel separated from the children.
Sister Aloysius: That's as it should be.
Sister James: But I feel, Wrong. And about this other matter, I don't have any evidence. I'm not at all certain that anything's happened.
Sister Aloysius: We can't wait for that.
Sister James: But what if it's nothing?
Sister Aloysius: Then it's nothing. I wouldn't mind being wrong. But I doubt I am.
Sister James: Then what's to be done?
Sister Aloysius: I don't know.
Sister James: You'll know what to do.
Sister Aloysius: I don't know what to do. There are parameters which protect him and hinder me.
Sister James: But he can't be safe if it's established. I doubt he could recover from the shame.
Sister Aloysius: What have you seen?
Sister James: I don't know.
Sister Aloysius: What have you seen?
Sister James: He took Donald to the rectory.
Sister Aloysius: What for?

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Sister James: A talk.
Sister Aloysius: Alone?
Sister James: Yes.
Sister Aloysius: When?
Sister James: A week ago.
Sister Aloysius: Why didn't you tell me?
Sister James: I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. It never came into my mind that he . . . that there could be anything wrong.
Sister Aloysius: Of all the children. Donald Muller. I suppose it makes sense.
Sister James: How does it make sense?
Sister Aloysius: He's isolated. The little sheep lagging behind is the one the wolf goes for.
Sister James: I don't know that anything's wrong!
Sister Aloysius. Our first Negro student. I thought there'd be fighting, a parent or two to deal with . . . should've foreseen this possibility.
Sister James: How could you imagine it?
Sister Aloysius: It is my job to outshine the fox in cleverness! That's my job!
Sister James: But maybe it's nothing!
Sister Aloysius: Then why do you look like you've seen the Devil?
Sister James: It's just the way the boy acted when he came back to class.
Sister Aloysius: He said something?
Sister James: No. It was his expression. He looked frightened and . . . he put his head on the desk in the most peculiar way (*Struggles.*) And one other thing. I think there was alcohol on his breath. There was alcohol on his breath. (*Sister Aloysius looks toward the rectory*)
Sister Aloysius: Eight years ago at St. Boniface we had a priest who had to be stopped. But I had Monsignor Scully then . . . whom I could rely on. Here, there's no man I can go to, and men run everything. We are going to have to stop him ourselves.
Sister James: Can't you just . . . report your suspicions?
Sister Aloysius: To Monsignor Benedict? The man's guileless! He would just ask Father Flynn!
Sister James: Well, would that be such a bad idea?
Sister Aloysius: And he would believe whatever Father Flynn told him. He would think the matter settled.
Sister James: But maybe that is all that needs to be done. If it's true. If I had done something awful, and I was confronted with it, I'd be so repentant.
Sister Aloysius: Sister James, my dear, you must try to imagine a very different kind of person than yourself. A man who would do this has already denied a great deal. If I tell the monsignor and he is satisfied with Father Flynn's rebuttal, the matter is suppressed.
Sister James: Well then, tell the bishop.
Sister Aloysius: The hierarchy of the Church does not permit my going to the bishop. No. Once I tell the monsignor, it's out of my hands, I'm helpless. I'm going to have to come up with a pretext, get Father Flynn into my office. Try to force it. You'll have to be there.

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Sister James: Me? No! Why? Oh no, Sister! I couldn't!

Sister Aloysius: I can't be closeted alone with a priest. Another Sister must be in attendance, and it has to be you. The circle of confidence mustn't be made any wider. Think of the boy if this gets out.

Sister James: I can't do it!

Sister Aloysius: Why not? You're squeamish?

Sister James: I'm not equipped! It's . . . I would be embarrassed. I couldn't possibly be present if the topic were spoken of!

Sister Aloysius: Please, Sister, do not indulge yourself in witless adolescent scruples. I assure you I would prefer a more seasoned confederate. But you are the one who came to me.

Sister James: You told me to!

Sister Aloysius: Would you rather leave the boy to be exploited? And don't think this will be the only story. If you close your eyes, you will be a party to all that comes after.

Sister James: You're supposed to tell the monsignor!

Sister Aloysius: That you saw a look in a boy's eye? That perhaps you smelled something on his breath? Monsignor Benedict thinks the sun rises and sets on Father Flynn. You'd be branded an hysteric and transferred.

Sister James: We can ask him.

Sister Aloysius. Who?

Sister James: The boy, Donald Muller.

Sister Aloysius: He'll deny it.

Sister James: Why?

Sister Aloysius: Shame.

Sister James: You can't know that.

Sister Aloysius: And if he does point the finger, how do you think that will be received in this community? A black child. (*No answer.*) I am going to think this through. Then I'm going to invite Father Flynn to my office on an unrelated matter. You will be there.

Sister James: But what good can I do?

Sister Aloysius: Aside from the unacceptability of a priest and nun being alone, I need a witness.

Sister James: To what?

Sister Aloysius: He may tell the truth and lie afterwards. (*Sister James looks toward the rectory.*)

Sister James: The boys are coming out of the rectory. They look happy enough.

Sister Aloysius: They look smug. Like they have a secret.

Sister James: There he is.

Sister Aloysius: If I could, Sister James, I would certainly choose to live in innocence. But innocence can only be wisdom in a world without evil. Situations arise, and we are confronted with wrongdoing and the need to act.

Sister James: I have to take the boys up to class.

Sister Aloysius: Go on, then. Take them, I will be talking to you. (*The sound of wind, Sister Aloysius pulls her shawl tightly about her and goes. After a moment, Sister James goes as well.*)

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FIVE

The principal's office. A phone rings, Sister Aloysius enters with a pot of tea, walking quickly to answer the phone.

Sister Aloysius: Hello, St. Nicholas School? Oh yes, Mr. McGinn. Thank you for calling back. That was quite a windstorm we had last night. No, I didn't know there was a Great Wind in Ireland and you were there for it. That's fascinating. Yes. I was wondering if you would be so kind as to remove a free limb that's fallen in the courtyard of the church. Sister Veronica tripped on it this morning and fell on her face. I think she's all right. She doesn't look any worse, Mr. McGinn. Thank you, Mr. McGinn. (*She hangs up the phone and looks at her watch, a bit anxious. A knock at the door.*) Come in. (*The door opens. Father Flynn is standing there in his black cassock*[2]*. He doesn't come in.*)

Flynn: Good morning, Sister Aloysius! How are you today?

Sister Aloysius: Good morning, Father Flynn. Very well. Good of you to come by. (*Father Flynn takes a step into the office.*)

Flynn: Are we ready for the meeting?

Sister Aloysius: We're just short Sister James. (*Father Flynn steps back into the doorway.*) Did you hear that wind last night?

Flynn: I certainly did. Imagine what it must've been like in the frontier days when a man alone in the woods sat by a fire in his buckskins and listened to a sound like that. Imagine the loneliness! The immense darkness pressing in! How frightening if must've been!

Sister Aloysius: If one lacked faith in God's protection, I suppose it would be frightening.

Flynn: Did I hear Sister Veronica had an accident?

Sister Aloysius: Yes, Sister Veronica fell on a piece of wood this morning and practically killed herself.

Flynn: Is she all right?

Sister Aloysius: Oh, she's fine.

Flynn: Her sight isn't good, is it?

Sister Aloysius: Her sight is fine. Nuns fall, you know.

Flynn: No, I didn't know that.

Sister Aloysius: It's the habit. It catches us up more often than not. What with our being in black and white, and so prone to falling, we're more like dominos than anything else. (*Sister James appears at the door, breathless.*)

Sister James: Am I past the time? (*Father Flynn takes a step into the office.*)

Flynn: Not at all. Sister Aloysius and I were just having a nice chat.

Sister James: Good morning. Father Flynn. Good morning Sister. I'm sorry I was delayed. Mr. McGinn has closed the courtyard to fix something so I had to go back through the convent and out the side door, and then I ran into Sister Veronica.

Flynn: How is she?

Sister James: She has a bit of a bloody nose.

[2] *cassock: A full length garment.*

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Sister Aloysius: I'm beginning to think you're punching people.
Sister James: Sister?
Sister Aloysius: Well, after the incident with . . . Never mind. Well, come in, please. Sit down. (*They come in and sit down. Father Flynn takes Sister Aloysius chair. His sitting at her desk. She reacts but says nothing.*) I actually have a hot pot of tea. (*Closes the door but for an inch.*) And close this but not quite, for form's sake. Would you have a cup of tea, Father?
Flynn: I would love a cup of tea.
Sister Aloysius: Perhaps you could serve him, Sister?
Sister James: Of course.
Sister Aloysius: And yourself, of course.
Sister James: Would you like tea, Sister Aloysius?
Sister Aloysius: I've already had my cup.
Flynn: Is there sugar?
Sister Aloysius: Sugar? Yes! (*Rummages in her desk.*) It's here somewhere. I put it in the drawer for Lent last year and never remembered to take it out.
Flynn: It mustn't have been much to give up then.
Sister Aloysius: No, I'm sure you're right. Here it is. I'll serve you, though for want of practice, I'm . . . [clumsy] (*She's got the sugar bowl and is poised to serve him a lump of sugar with a small pair of tongs when she sees his nails.*) Your fingernails.
Flynn: I wear them a little long. The sugar?
Sister Aloysius: Oh yes. One?
Flynn: Three.
Sister Aloysius: Three. (*She's appalled but tries to hide it.*)
Flynn: Sweet tooth.
Sister Aloysius: One, two, three. Sister, do you take sugar? (*Sister Aloysius looks at Sister James.*)
Sister James: (*To Sister Aloysius.*) Never! (*To Father Flynn.*) Not that there's anything wrong with sugar. (*To Sister Aloysius again.*) Thank you. (*Sister Aloysius puts the sugar away in her desk.*)
Sister Aloysius: Well, thank you, Father, for making the time for us. We're at our wit's end.
Flynn: I think it's an excellent idea to rethink the Christmas pageant. Last year's effort was a little woebegone.
Sister James: No! I loved it! (*Becomes self-conscious*) But I love all Christmas pageants. I just love the Nativity. The birth of the Savior. And the hymns of course. "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" . . .
Sister Aloysius: Thank you, Sister James. Sister James will be co-directing the pageant with Mrs. Shields, this year. So what do you think, Father Flynn? Is there something new we could do?
Flynn: Well, we all love the Christmas hymns, but it might be jolly to include a secular song.
Sister Aloysius: Secular.
Flynn: Yes. "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas." Something like that.
Sister Aloysius: What would be the point of performing a secular song?
Flynn: Fun.

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Sister James: Or "Frosty the Snowman."
Flynn: That's a good one. We could have one of the boys dress as a snowman and dance around.
Sister Aloysius: Which boy?
Flynn: We'd do tryouts.
Sister Aloysius: "Frosty the Snowman" espouses a pagan belief in magic. The snowman comes to life when an enchanted hat is put on his head. If the music were more somber, people would realize the images are disturbing and the song heretical. (*Sister James and Father Flynn exchange a look.*)
Sister James: I've never thought about "Frosty the Snowman" like that.
Sister Aloysius: It should be banned from the airwaves.
Flynn: So. Not "Frosty the Snowman." (*Father Flynn writes something in a small notebook.*)
Sister Aloysius: I don't think so. "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas" would be fine, I suppose. The parents would like it. May I ask what you wrote down? With that ballpoint pen.
Flynn: Oh. Nothing. An idea for a sermon.
Sister Aloysius: You had one just now?
Flynn: I get them all the time.
Sister Aloysius: How fortunate.
Flynn: I forget them, so I write them down.
Sister Aloysius: What is the idea?
Flynn: Intolerance. (*Sister James tries to break a bit of tension.*)
Sister James: Would you like a little more tea, Father?
Flynn: Not yet. I think a message of the Second Ecumenical Council was that the Church needs to take on a more familiar face. Reflect the local community. We should sing a song from the radio now and then. Take the kids out for ice cream.
Sister Aloysius: Ice cream.
Flynn: Maybe take the boys on a camping trip. We should be friendlier. The children and the parents should see us as members of their family rather than emissaries from Rome. I think the pageant should be charming, like a community theatre doing a show.
Sister Aloysius: But we are not members of their family. We're different.
Flynn: Why? Because of our vows?
Sister Aloysius: Precisely.
Flynn: I don't think we're so different. (*To Sister James.*) You know, I would take some more tea. Sister. Thank you.
Sister Aloysius: And they think we're different. The working-class people of this parish trust us to be different.
Flynn: I think we're getting off the subject.
Sister Aloysius: Yes, you're right, back to it. The Christmas pageant. We must be careful how Donald Muller is used in the pageant. (*Sister James shakes as she pours the tea.*)
Flynn: Easy there, Sister, you don't spill.
Sister James: Oh, uh, yes, Father.

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Flynn: What about Donald Muller?
Sister Aloysius: We must be careful, in the pageant, that we neither hide Donald Muller nor put him forward.
Flynn: Because of the color of his skin.
Sister Aloysius: That's right.
Flynn: Why?
Sister Aloysius: Come, Father. You're being disingenuous.
Flynn: I think he should be treated like every other boy.
Sister Aloysius: You yourself singled the boy out for special attention. You held a private meeting with him at the rectory. (*Turning to Sister James.*) A week ago?
Sister James: Yes. (*He realizes something's up*)
Flynn: What are we talking about?
Sister James: Donald Muller?
Sister Aloysius: The boy acted strangely when he returned to class. (*Father Flynn turns to Sister James.*)
Flynn: He did?
Sister James: When he returned from the rectory. A little odd, yes.
Sister Aloysius: Can you tell us why?
Flynn: How did he act strangely?
Sister James: I'm not sure how to explain it. He laid his head on desk . . .
Flynn: You mean you had some impression?
Sister James: Yes.
Flynn: And he'd come from the rectory so you're asking me if I know anything about it?
Sister James: That's it.
Flynn: Hmmm. Did you want to discuss the pageant. Is that why I'm here, or is this what you wanted to discuss?
Sister Aloysius: This.
Flynn: Well. I feel a hide uncomfortable.
Sister Aloysius: Why?
Flynn: Why do you think? Something about your tone.
Sister Aloysius: I would prefer a discussion of fact rather than tone.
Flynn: Well. If I had judged my conversation with Donald Muller to be of concern to you, Sister, I would have sat you down and talked to you about it. But I did not judge it to be of concern to you.
Sister Aloysius: Perhaps you are mistaken in your understanding of what concerns me. The boy is in my school, and his well-being is my responsibility.
Flynn: His well-being is not at issue.
Sister Aloysius: I am not satisfied that that is true. He was upset when he returned to class.
Flynn: Did he say something?
Sister James: No.
Sister Aloysius: What happened in the rectory?
Flynn: Happened? Nothing happened. I had a talk with a boy.
Sister Aloysius: What about?
Flynn: It was a private matter.

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Sister Aloysius: He is twelve years old. What could be private?
Flynn: I'll say it again. Sister, I object to your tone.
Sister Aloysius: This is not about my tone or your tone, Father Flynn. It's about arriving at the truth.
Flynn: Of what?
Sister Aloysius: You know what I'm talking about. Don't you? You're controlling the expression on your face right now. Aren't you?
Flynn: My face? You said you wanted to talk about the pageant, Sister. That's why I'm here. Am I to understand that you brought me into your office to confront me in some way? It's outrageous. I'm not answerable to you. What exactly are you accusing me of?
Sister Aloysius: I am not accusing you of anything, Father Flynn. I am asking you to tell me what happened in the rectory. (*Father Flynn stands.*)
Flynn: I don't wish to continue this conversation at all further. And if you are dissatisfied with that, I suggest you speak to Monsignor Benedict. I can only imagine that your unfortunate behavior this morning is the result of overwork. Perhaps you need a leave of absence. I may suggest it. Have a good morning. (*To sister James*) Sister?
Sister James: Good morning, Father. (*Sister Aloysius next words stop him.*)
Sister Aloysius: There was alcohol on his breath. (*He turns.*) When he returned from his meeting with you. (*He comes back and sits down. He rubs his eyes.*)
Flynn: Alcohol.
Sister James: I did smell it on his breath.
Sister Aloysius: Well?
Flynn: Can't you let this alone?
Sister Aloysius: No.
Flynn: I see there's no way out of this.
Sister James: Take your time, Father. Would you like some more tea?
Flynn: You should've let it alone.
Sister Aloysius: Not possible.
Flynn: Donald Muller served as altar boy last Tuesday morning. After Mass, Mr. McGinn caught him in the sacristy drinking altar wine. When I found out, I sent for him. There were tears. He begged not to be removed from the altar boys. And I took pity on him, I told him it no one else found out, I would let him stay on. (*Sister James is overjoyed, Sister Alousius is unmoved*)
Sister James: Oh, what a relief! That explains everything! Thanks be to God! Oh, Sister, look, it's all a mistake!
Sister Aloysius: And if I talk to Mr. McGinn?
Flynn: Talk to Mr. McGinn by all means. But now that the boy's secret's out, I'm going to have to remove him from the altar boys. Which I think is too bad. That's what I was trying to avoid.
Sister James: You were trying to protect the boy!
Flynn: That's right.
Sister James: I might've done the same thing! (*To Sister Aloysius.*) Is there a way Donald could stay on the altar boys?

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Sister Aloysius: No. If the boy drank altar wine, he cannot continue as an altar boy.

Flynn: Of course you're right. I'm just not the disciplinarian you are, Sister. And he is the only Negro in the school. That did affect my thinking on the matter. It will be commented on that he's no longer serving at Mass. It's a public thing. A certain ignorant element in the parish will be confirmed in their beliefs.

Sister Aloysius: He must be held to the same standard as the others.

Flynn: Of course. Do we need to discuss the pageant or was that just….

Sister Aloysius: No, this was the issue.

Flynn: Are you satisfied?

Sister Aloysius: Yes.

Flynn: Then I'll be going. I have some writing to do.

Sister Aloysius: Intolerance.

Flynn: That's right. *(He goes, then stops at the door).* I'm not pleased with how you handled this, Sister. Next time you are troubled by dark ideas, I suggest you speak to the monsignor. *(He goes. After a moment, Sister James weakly launches into optimism.)*

Sister James: Well. What a relief. He cleared it all up.

Sister Aloysius: You believe him?

Sister James: Of course.

Sister Aloysius: Isn't it more that it's easier to believe him?

Sister James: But we can corroborate his story with Mr. McGinn!

Sister Aloysius: Yes. These types of people are clever. They're not so easily undone.

Sister James: Well, I'm convinced!

Sister Aloysius: You're not. You just want things to be resolved so you can have simplicity back.

Sister James: I want no further part of this.

Sister Aloysius: I'll bring him down. With or without your help.

Sister James: How can you be so sure he's lying?

Sister Aloysius: Experience.

Sister James: You just don't like him! You don't like it that he uses a ballpoint pen. You don't like it that he takes three lumps of sugar in his tea. You don't like it that he likes "Frosty the Snowman." And you're letting that convince you of something terrible, just terrible! Well, I like "Frosty the Snowman"! And it would be nice if this school weren't run like a prison! And I think it's a good thing that I love to teach History and that I might inspire my students to love it, too! And if you judge that to mean I'm not fit to be a teacher, then so be it!

Sister Aloysius: Sit down. *(Sister James does,)* In ancient Sparta, important matters were decided by who showed loudest, Fortunately, we are not in ancient Sparta. Now, Do you honestly find the students in this school to be treated like inmates in a prison?

Sister James: *(Relating.)* No, I don't. Actually, by and large, they seem to be fairly happy. Bur they're all uniformly terrified of you!

Sister Aloysius: Yes. That's how it works. Sit there. *(Sister Aloysius looks in a notebook, picks up the phones dials.)* Hello, this is Sister Aloysius Beauvier, the prin-

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cipal of St. Nicholas. Is this Mrs. Muller? I'm calling about your son, Donald. I would like you and your husband to come down here for a talk. When would be convenient? *(Lights fade.)*

SIX

Father Flynn, in blue and white vestments, is at the pulpit.

Flynn: A woman was gossiping with a friend about a man she hardly knew—I know none of you have ever done this—and that night she had a dream. A great hand appeared over her and pointed down at her. She was immediately seized with an overwhelming sense of guilt. The next day she went to confession. She got the old parish priest, Father O'Rourke, and she told him the whole thing. "Is gossiping a sin?" she asked the old man, "Was that the Hand of God Almighty pointing a finger at me? Should I be asking your absolution? Father, tell me, have I done something wrong?" *(Irish brogue.)* "Yes!" Father O'Rourke answered her, "Yes, you ignorant, badly brought-up female! You have borne false witness against your neighbor, you have played fast and loose with his reputation, and you should be heartily ashamed!" So the woman said she was sorry and asked forgiveness. "Not so fast!" says O'Rourke, "I want you to go home, take a pillow up on your roof, cut it open with a knife, and return here to me!" So she went home, took the pillow off her bed, a knife from the drawer, went up the fire escape to the roof, and stabbed the pillow. Then she went back to the old priest as instructed. "Did you gut the pillow with the knife?" he says. "Yes, Father," "And what was the result?" "Feathers," she said. "Feathers?" he repeated. "Feathers everywhere, Father!" "Now I want you to go back and gather up every last feather that flew out on the wind!" "Well," she says, "it can't be done. I don't know where they went. The wind took them all over." "And that," said Father O'Rourke, "is gossip!" In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.

SEVEN

The lights crossfade to the garden. A crow caws. Sister James sits on the bench, deep in thought. Father Flynn enters.

Flynn: Good afternoon, Sister James.
Sister James: Good afternoon, Father.
Flynn: What is that bird complaining about? What kind of bird is that? A starling? A grackle?
Sister James: A crow?
Flynn: Of course it is. Are you praying? I didn't mean to interrupt.
Sister James: I'm not praying, no.
Flynn: You seem subdued.
Sister James: Oh, I can't sleep.
Flynn: Why not?
Sister James: Bad dreams. Actually one bad dream, and then I haven't slept right since.

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Flynn: What about?
Sister James: I looked in a mirror and there was a darkness where my face should be. It frightened me.
Flynn: I can't sleep on occasion.
Sister James: No? Do you see that big hand pointing a finger at you?
Flynn: Yes, Sometimes.
Sister James: Was your sermon directed at anyone in particular?
Flynn: What do you think?
Sister James: Did you make up that story about the pillow?
Flynn: Yes. You make up little stories to illustrate. In the tradition of the parable.
Sister James: Aren't the things that actually happen in life more worthy of interpretation than a make-up story?
Flynn: No. What actually happens in life is beyond interpretation. The truth makes for a bad sermon. It tends to be confusing and have no clear conclusion.
Sister James: I received a letter from my brother in Maryland yesterday. He's very sick.
Flynn: Maybe you should go and see him.
Sister James: I can't leave my class.
Flynn: How's Donald Muller doing?
Sister James: I don't know.
Flynn: You don't see him?
Sister James: I see him every day, but I don't know how he's doing. I don't know how to judge these things. Now.
Flynn: I stopped speaking to him for fear of it being misunderstood. Isn't that a shame? I actually avoided him the other day when I might've passed him in the hall. He doesn't understand why. I noticed you didn't come to me for confession.
Sister James: No. I went to Monsignor Benedict. He's very kind.
Flynn: I wasn't?
Sister James: It wasn't that. As you know. You know why.
Flynn: You're against me?
Sister James: No.
Flynn: You're not convinced?
Sister James: It's not for me to be convinced, one way or the other. It's Sister Aloysius.
Flynn: Are you just an extension of her?
Sister James: She's my superior.
Flynn: But what about you?
Sister James: I wish I knew nothing whatever about it. I wish the idea had never entered my mind.
Flynn: How did it enter your mind?
Sister James: Sister Aloysius.
Flynn: I feel as if my reputation has been damaged through no fault of my own. But I'm reluctant to take the steps necessary to repair it for fear of doing further harm. It's frustrating, I can tell you that.
Sister James: Is it true?
Flynn: What?

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Sister James: You know what I'm asking.
Flynn: No, it's not true.
Sister James: Oh, I don't know what to believe.
Flynn: How can you take sides against me?
Sister James: It doesn't matter.
Flynn: It does matter! I've done nothing. There's no substance to any of this. The most innocent actions can appear sinister to the poisoned mind. I had to throw that poor boy off the altar. He's devastated. The only reason I haven't gone to the monsignor is I don't want to tear apart the school. Sister Aloysius would most certainly lose her position as principal if I made her accusations known. Since they're baseless. You might lose your place as well.
Sister James: Are you threatening me?
Flynn: What do you take me for? No.
Sister James: I want to believe you.
Flynn: Then do. It's as simple as that.
Sister James: It's not me that has to be convinced.
Flynn: I don't have to prove anything to her.
Sister James: She's determined.
Flynn: To what?
Sister James: Protect the boy.
Flynn: It's me that cares about that boy, not her. Has she ever reached out a hand to that child or any child in this school? She's like a block of ice! Children need warmth, kindness, understanding! What does she give them? Rules. That black boy needs a helping hand or he's not going to make it here! But if she has her way, he'll be left to his own undoing. Why do you think he was in the sacristy drinking wine that day? He's in trouble! She sees me talk in a human way to these children and she immediately assumes there must be something wrong with it. Something dirty. Well, I'm not going to let her keep this parish in the Dark Ages! And I'm not going to let her destroy my spirit or compassion!
Sister James: I'm sure that's not her intent.
Flynn: I care about this congregation!
Sister James: I know you do.
Flynn: Like you care about your class! You love them, don't you?
Sister James: Yes.
Flynn: That's natural. How else would you relate to children? I can look at your face and know your philosophy: kindness.
Sister James: I don't know. I mean, of course.
Flynn: What is Sister Aloysius' philosophy do you suppose? *(A pause.)*
Sister James: I don't have to suppose. She's told me. She discourages . . . warmth. She's suggested I be more . . . formal.
Flynn: There are people who go after your humanity, Sister James, who tell you the light in your heart is a weakness. That your soft feelings betray you. I don't believe that. It's an old tactic of cruel people to kill kindness to the name of virtue. Don't believe it. There's nothing wrong with love.
Sister James: Of course not, but . . . .

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Flynn: Have you forgotten that was the message of the Savior to us all. Love. Not suspicion, disapproval and judgment. Love of people. Have you found Sister Aloysius a positive inspiration?

Sister James: I don't want to misspeak, but no. She's taken away my joy of teaching. And I loved teaching more than anything. *(She cries a little. He pats her uneasily, looking around.)*

Flynn: It's all right, You're going to be all right.

Sister James: I feel as if everything is upside down.

Flynn: It isn't though. There are just times in life when we feel lost. You're not alone with it. It happens to many of us.

Sister James: A bond. (*Becomes self-conscious.*) I'd better go in.

Flynn: I'm sorry your brother is ill.

Sister James: Thank you, Father, *(Starts to go, stops.)* I don't believe it!

Flynn: You don't?

Sister James: No.

Flynn: Thank you, Sister. That's a great relief to me, Thank you very much. *(She goes. He takes out his little black book and writes in it. The crow caws. He yells at it:)* Oh, be quiet. *(Then he opens a prayer book and walks away.)*

EIGHT

Crossfade to the principal's office. Sister Aloysius is sitting looking out the window, very still. A knock at the door. She doesn't react. A second knock, louder. She pulls a small earplug out of her ear and scurries to the door. She opens it. There stands Mrs. Muller, a black woman of about thirty-eight, in her Sunday best, dressed for church. She's on red alert.

Sister Aloysius: Mrs. Muller?

Mrs. Muller: Yes.

Sister Aloysius: Come in. *(Sister Aloysius closes the door.)* Please have a seat.

Mrs. Muller: I thought I might a had the wrong day when you didn't answer the door.

Sister Aloysius: Oh, Yes. Well, just between us, I was listening to a transistor radio with an earpiece. *(She shows Mrs. Muller a very small transistor radio.)* Look at how tiny they're making them now. I confiscated it from one of the students, and now I can't stop using it.

Mrs. Muller: You like music?

Sister Aloysius. Not really. News reports. Years ago I used to listen to all the news reports because my husband was in Italy in the war. When I came into possession of this little radio, I found myself doing it again. Though there is no war and the voices have changed.

Mrs. Muller: You were a married woman?

Sister Aloysius: Yes, But then he was killed. Is your husband coming?

Mrs. Muller: Couldn't get off work.

Sister Aloysius: I see. Of course. It was a lot to ask.

Mrs. Muller: How's Donald doing?

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Sister Aloysius: He's passing his subjects. He has average grades.
Mrs. Muller: Oh. Good. He was upset about getting taken off the altar boys.
Sister Aloysius: Did he explain why?
Mrs. Muller: He said he was caught drinking wine.
Sister Aloysius: That is the reason.
Mrs. Muller: Well, that seems fair. But he's a good boy, Sister. He fell down there, but he's a good boy pretty much down the line. And he knows what an opportunity he has here. I think the whole thing was just a bit much for him.
Sister Aloysius: What do you mean, the whole thing?
Mrs. Muller: He's the only colored here. He's the first in this school. That'd be a lot for a boy.
Sister Aloysius: I suppose it is. But he has to do the work of course.
Mrs. Muller: He is doing it though, right?
Sister Aloysius: Yes. He's getting by. He's getting through. How is he at home?
Mrs. Muller: His father beat the hell out of him over that wine.
Sister Aloysius: He shouldn't do that.
Mrs. Muller: You don't tell my husband what to do. You just stand back. He didn't want Donald to come here.
Sister Aloysius: Why not?
Mrs. Muller: Thought he'd have a lot of trouble with the other boys. But that hasn't really happened as far as I can make out.
Sister Aloysius: Good.
Mrs. Muller: That priest, Father Flynn, been watching out for him.
Sister Aloysius: Yes. Have you met Father Flynn?
Mrs. Muller: Not exactly, no. I seen him on the altar, but I haven't met him face to face. No. Just, you know, heard from Donald.
Sister Aloysius: What does he say?
Mrs. Muller: You know, Father Flynn, Father Flynn. He looks up to him. The man gives him his time, which is what the boy needs. He needs that.
Sister Aloysius: Mrs. Muller, we may have a problem.
Mrs. Muller: Well, I thought you must a had a reason for asking me to come in. Principal's a big job. If you stop your day to talk to me, must be something. I just want to say though, it's just till June.
Sister Aloysius: Excuse me?
Mrs. Muller: Whatever the problem is, Donald just has to make it here till June. Then he's off into high school.
Sister Aloysius: Right.
Mrs. Muller: If Donald can graduate from here, he has a better chance of getting into a good high school. And that would mean an opportunity at college. I believe he has the intelligence. And he wants it, too.
Sister Aloysius: I don't see anything at this time standing in the way of his graduating with his class.
Mrs. Muller: Well, that's all I care about. Anything else is all right with me.
Sister Aloysius: I doubt that.
Mrs. Muller: Try me.

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Sister Aloysius: I'm concerned about the relationship between Father Flynn and your son.

Mrs. Muller: You don't say. Concerned. What do you mean, concerned?

Sister Aloysius: That is may not be right.

Mrs. Muller: Uh-huh. Well, there's something wrong with everybody, isn't that so? Got to be forgiving.

Sister Aloysius: I'm concerned, to be frank, that Father Flynn may have made advances on your son.

Mrs. Muller: *Ma*y have made.

Sister Aloysius: I can't be certain.

Mrs. Muller: No evidence?

Sister Aloysius: No.

Mrs. Muller: Then maybe there's nothing to it?

Sister Aloysius: I think there is something to it.

Mrs. Muller: Well, I would prefer not to see it that way if you don't mind.

Sister Aloysius: I can understand that this is hard to hear. I think Father Flynn gave Donald that altar wine.

Mrs. Muller: Why would he do that?

Sister Aloysius: Has Donald been acting strangely?

Mrs. Muller: No.

Sister Aloysius: Nothing out of the ordinary?

Mrs. Muller: He's been himself.

Sister Aloysius: All right.

Mrs. Muller: Look, Sister. I don't want any trouble, and I feel like you're on the match somehow.

Sister Aloysius: I'm not sure you completely understand.

Mrs. Muller: I think I understand the kind of thing you're talking about. But I don't want to get into it.

Sister Aloysius: What's that?

Mrs. Muller: Not to be disagreeing with you, but if we're talking about something floating around between this priest and my son, that ain't my son's fault.

Sister Aloysius: I'm not suggesting it is.

Mrs. Muller: He's just a boy.

Sister Aloysius: I know.

Mrs. Muller: Twelve years old. If somebody should be taking blame for anything, it should be the man, not the boy.

Sister Aloysius: I agree with you completely.

Mrs. Muller: You're agreeing with me but I'm sitting in the principal's office talking about my son. Why isn't the priest in the principal's office, if you know what I'm saying and you'll excuse my bringing it up.

Sister Aloysius: You're here because I'm concerned about Donald's welfare.

Mrs. Muller: You think I'm not?

Sister Aloysius: Of course you are.

Mrs. Muller: Let me ask you something. You honestly think that priest gave Donald that wine to drink?

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Sister Aloysius: Yes, I do.
Mrs. Muller: Then how come my son got kicked off the altar boys if it was the man that gave it to him?
Sister Aloysius: The boy got caught, the man didn't.
Mrs. Muller: How come the priest didn't get kicked off the priesthood?
Sister Aloysius: He's a grown man, educated. And he knows what's at stake. It's not so easy to pin someone like that down.
Mrs. Muller: So you give my son the whole blame. No problem my son getting blamed and punished. That's easy. You know why that is?
Sister Aloysius: Perhaps you should let me talk. I think you're getting upset.
Mrs. Muller: That's because that's the way it is. You're just finding out about it, but that's the way it is and the way it's been, Sister. You're not going against no *man* in a *robe* and win. Sister. He's got the position.
Sister Aloysius: And he's got your son.
Mrs. Muller: Let him have 'im then.
Sister Aloysius: What?
Mrs. Muller: It's just till June.
Sister Aloysius: Do you know what you're saying?
Mrs. Muller: Know more about it than you.
Sister Aloysius: I believe this man is creating or has already brought about an improper relationship with your son.
Mrs. Muller: I don't know.
Sister Aloysius: I know I'm right.
Mrs. Muller: Why you need to know something like that for sure when you don't? Please, Sister. You got some kind a righteous cause going with this priest, and now you want to drag my boy into it. My son doesn't need additional difficulties. Let him take the good and leave the rest when he leaves this place in June. He knows how to do that, I taught him how to do that.
Sister Aloysius: What kind of mother are you?
Mrs. Muller: Excuse me, but you don't know enough about life to say a thing like that, Sister.
Sister Aloysius: I know enough.
Mrs. Muller: You know the rules maybe, but that don't cover it.
Sister Aloysius: I know what I won't accept!
Mrs. Muller: You accept what you gotta accept and you work with it. That's the truth I know. Sorry to be so sharp, but you're in here in this room . . .
Sister Aloysius: This man is in my school.
Mrs. Muller: Well, he's gotta be somewhere, and maybe he's doing some good too. You ever think of that?
Sister Aloysius: He's after the boys.
Mrs. Muller: Well, maybe some of them boys want to get caught. Maybe what you don't know maybe is my son is . . . that way. That's why his father beat him up. Not the wine. He beat Donald for being what he is.
Sister Aloysius: What are you telling me?
Mrs. Muller: I'm his mother. I'm talking about his nature now, not anything he's done. But you can't hold a child responsible for what God gave him to be.

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Sister Aloysius: Listen to me with care, Mrs. Muller. I'm only interested in actions. It's hopeless to discuss a child's possible inclination. I'm finding it difficult enough to address a man's deeds. This isn't about what the boy may be, but what the man is. It's about the man.

Mrs. Muller: But there's the boys nature.

Sister Aloysius: Let's leave that out of it.

Mrs. Muller: Forget it then. You're the one forcing people to say these things out loud. Things are in the air and you leave them alone if you can. That's what I know. My boy came to this school cause they were gonna kill him at the public school. So we were lucky enough to get him in here for his last year. Good. His father don't like him. He comes here, the kids don't like him. One man is good to him. This priest. Puts out a hand to the boy. Does the man have his reasons? Yes. Everybody has their reasons. *You* have your reasons. But do I ask the man why he's good to my son? No, I don't care why. My son needs some man to care about him and see him through to where he wants to go. And thank God, this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that.

Sister Aloysius: This will not do.

Mrs. Muller: It's just till June. Sometimes things aren't black and white.

Sister Aloysius: And sometimes they are. I'll throw your son out of this school. Make no mistake.

Mrs. Muller: But why would you do that? If nothing started with him?

Sister Aloysius: Because I will stop this whatever way I must.

Mrs. Muller: You'd hurt my son to get your way?

Sister Aloysius: It won't end with your son. There will be others, if there aren't already.

Mrs. Muller: Throw the priest out then.

Sister Aloysius: I'm trying to do just that.

Mrs. Muller: Well, what do you want from me? *(A pause.)*

Sister Aloysius: Nothing. As it turns out. I was hoping you might know something that would help me, but it seems you don't.

Mrs. Muller: Please leave my son out of this. My husband would kill that child over a thing like this.

Sister Aloysius: I'll try. *(Mrs. Muller stands up.)*

Mrs. Muller: I don't know, Sister. You may think you're doing good, but the world's a hard place. I don't know that you and me are on the same side. I'll be standing with my son and those who are good with my son. It'd be nice to see you there. Nice talking with you, Sister. Good morning. *(She goes leaving the door open behind her. Sister Aloysius is shaken. After a moment, Father Flynn appears at the door. He's in a controlled fury.)*

Flynn: May I come in?

Sister Aloysius: We would require a third party.

Flynn: What was Donald's mother doing here?

Sister Aloysius: We were having a chat.

Flynn: About what?

Sister Aloysius: A third party is truly required, Father.

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Flynn: No, Sister. No third party. You and me are due for a talk. *(He comes in and slams the door behind him. They face each other.)* You have to stop this campaign against me!
Sister Aloysius: You can stop it at any time.
Flynn: How?
Sister Aloysius: Confess and resign.
Flynn: You are attempting to destroy my reputation! But the result of all this is going to be your removal, not mine!
Sister Aloysius: What are you doing in this school?
Flynn: I am trying to do good!
Sister Aloysius: Or even more to the point, what are you doing in the priesthood?
Flynn: You are single-handedly holding this school and this parish back!
Sister Aloysius: From what?
Flynn: Progressive education and a welcoming church.
Sister Aloysius: You can't distract me, Father Flynn. This isn't about my behavior, it's about yours.
Flynn: It's about your unfounded suspicions.
Sister Aloysius: That's right. I have suspicions.
Flynn: You know what I haven't understood through all this? Why do you suspect me? What have I done?
Sister Aloysius: You gave that boy wine to drink. And you let him take the blame.
Flynn: That's completely untrue! Did you talk to Mr. McGinn?
Sister Aloysius: All McGinn knows is the boy drank wine. He doesn't how he came to drink it.
Flynn: Did his mother have something to add to that?
Sister Aloysius: No.
Flynn: So that's it. There's nothing there.
Sister Aloysius: I'm not satisfied.
Flynn: Well, if you're not satisfied, ask the boy then!
Sister Aloysius: No, he'd protect you. That's what he's been doing.
Flynn: Oh, and why would he do that?
Sister Aloysius: Because you have seduced him.
Flynn: You're insane! You've got it in your head that I've corrupted this child after giving him wine, and nothing I say will change that.
Sister Aloysius: That's right.
Flynn: But correct me if I'm wrong. This has nothing to do with the wine, not really. You had a fundamental mistrust of me before this incident! It was you that warned Sister James to be on the lookout, wasn't it?
Sister Aloysius: That's true.
Flynn: So you admit it
Sister Aloysius: Certainly.
Flynn: Why?
Sister Aloysius: I know people.
Flynn: That's not good enough!
Sister Aloysius: It won't have to be.

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Flynn: How's that?
Sister Aloysius: You will tell me what you've done.
Flynn: Oh I will?
Sister Aloysius: Yes.
Flynn: I'm not one of your truant boys, you know. Sister James is convinced I'm innocent.
Sister Aloysius: So you talked to Sister James? Well, of course you talked to Sister James.
Flynn: Did you know that Donald's father beats him?
Sister Aloysius: Yes.
Flynn: And might that not account for the odd behavior Sister James noticed in the boy?
Sister Aloysius: It might.
Flynn: Then what is it? What? What did you hear, what did you see that convinced you so thoroughly?
Sister Aloysius: What does it matter?
Flynn: I want to know.
Sister Aloysius: On the first day of the school year, I saw you touch William London's wrist. And I saw him pull away.
Flynn: That's all?
Sister Aloysius: That was all.
Flynn: But that's nothing. *(He writes in his book.)*
Sister Aloysius: What are you writing now?
Flynn. You leave me no choice. I'm writing down what you say. I tend to get too flustered to remember the details of an upsetting conversation, and this may be important. When I talk to the monsignor and explain why you have to be removed as the principal of this school.
Sister Aloysius: This morning, before I spoke with Mrs. Muller, I took the precaution of calling the last parish to which you were assigned.
Flynn: What did he say?
Sister Aloysius: Who?
Flynn. The pastor?
Sister Aloysius: I did not speak to the pastor. I spoke to one of the nuns.
Flynn. You should've spoken to the pastor.
Sister Aloysius: I spoke to a nun.
Flynn: That's not the proper route for you to have taken, Sister! The Church is very clear. You're supposed to go through the pastor.
Sister Aloysius: Why? Do you have an understanding, you and he? Father Flynn, you have a history.
Flynn: You have no right to go rummaging through my past!
Sister Aloysius: This is your third parish in five years.
Flynn: Call the pastor and ask him why I left! It was perfectly innocent.
Sister Aloysius: I'm not calling the pastor.
Flynn: I am a good priest! And there is nothing in my record to suggest otherwise.
Sister Aloysius: You will go after another child and another, until you are stopped.
Flynn: What nun did you speak to?

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Sister Aloysius: I won't say.
Flynn: I've not touched a child.
Sister Aloysius: You have.
Flynn: You have not the slightest proof of anything.
Sister Aloysius: But I have my certainty, and armed with that, I will go to your last parish, and the one before that if necessary. I will find a parent, Father Flynn! Trust me I will. A parent who probably doesn't know that you are still working with children! And once I do that, you will be exposed. You may even be attacked, metaphorically or otherwise.
Flynn: You have no right to act on your own! You are a member of a religious order. You have taken vows, obedience being one! You answer to us! You have no right to step outside the Church!
Sister Aloysius: I will step outside the Church if that's what needs to be done, though the door should shut behind me! I will do what needs to be done, Father, if it means I'm damned to Hell! You should understand that, or you will mistake me. Now, did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?
Flynn: Have you never done anything wrong?
Sister Aloysius: I have.
Flynn: Mortal sin?
Sister Aloysius: Yes.
Flynn: And?
Sister Aloysius: I confessed it! Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?
Flynn: Whatever I have done. I have left in the healing hands of my confessor. As have you! We are the same!
Sister Aloysius: We are not the same! A dog that bites is a dog that bites! I do not justify what I do wrong and go on. I admit it, desist, and take my medicine. Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?
Flynn: No.
Sister Aloysius: Mental reservation?
Flynn: No.
Sister Aloysius: You lie. Very well then. If you won't leave my office, I will. And once I go, I will not stop. *(She goes to the door. Suddenly, a new tone comes into his voice.)*
Flynn: Wait!
Sister Aloysius: You will request a transfer from this parish. You will take a leave of absence until it is granted.
Flynn: And do what for the love of God? My life is here.
Sister Aloysius: Don't.
Flynn: Please! Are we people? Am I a person flesh and blood like you? Or are we just ideas and convictions. I can't say everything. Do you understand? There are things I can't say. Even if you can't imagine the explanation, Sister, remember that there are circumstances beyond your knowledge. Even if you feel certainty, it is an emotion and not a fact. In the spirit of charity, I appeal to you. On behalf of my life's work. You have to behave responsibly. I put myself in your hands.
Sister Aloysius: I don't want you.
Flynn: My reputation is at stake.
Sister Aloysius: You can preserve your reputation.

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Flynn: If you say these things, I won't be able to do my work in the community.
Sister Aloysius: Your work in the community should be discontinued.
Flynn: You'd leave me with nothing.
Sister Aloysius: That's not true. It's Donald Muller who has nothing, and you took full advantage of that.
Flynn: I have not done anything wrong. I care about that boy, very much.
Sister Aloysius: Because you smile at him and sympathize with him, and talk to him as if you were the same?
Flynn: That child needed a friend!
Sister Aloysius: You are a cheat. The warm feeling you experienced when that boy looked at you with trust was not the sensation of virtue. It can be got by a drunkard from his tot of rum. You're a disgrace to the collar. The only reason you haven't been thrown out of the Church is the decline in vocations.
Flynn: I can fight you.
Sister Aloysius: You will lose.
Flynn: You can't know that.
Sister Aloysius: I know.
Flynn: Where's your compassion?
Sister Aloysius: Nowhere you can get at it. Stay here. Compose yourself. Use the phone if you like. Good day, Father. I have no sympathy for you. I know you're invulnerable to true regret. (*Starts to go. Pause.*) And cut your nails. (*She goes, closing the door behind her. After a moment, he goes to the phone and dials.*)
Flynn: Yes. This is Father Brendan Flynn of St. Nicholas parish. I need to make an appointment to see the bishop. (*Lights. fade.*)

NINE

The lights crossfade to Sister Aloysius walking into garden. It's a sunny day. She sits on the bench. Sister James enters.

Sister Aloysius: How's your brother?
Sister James: Better. Much better.
Sister Aloysius: I'm very glad. I prayed for him.
Sister James: It was good to get away. I needed to see my family. It had been too long.
Sister Aloysius: Then I'm glad you did it.
Sister James: And Father Flynn is gone.
Sister Aloysius: Yes.
Sister James: Where?
Sister Aloysius: St. Jerome's.
Sister James: So you did it. You got him out.
Sister Aloysius: Yes.
Sister James: Donald Muller is heartbroken that he's gone.
Sister Aloysius: Can't be helped. It's just till June.
Sister James: I don't think Father Flynn did anything wrong.
Sister Aloysius: No? He convinced you?
Sister James: Yes, he did.

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Sister Aloysius: Hmmm.
Sister James: Did you ever prove it?
Sister Aloysius: What?
Sister James: That he interfered with Donald Muller?
Sister Aloysius: Did I ever prove it to whom?
Sister James: Anyone but yourself?
Sister Aloysius: No.
Sister James: But you were sure.
Sister Aloysius: Yes.
Sister James: I wish I could be like you.
Sister Aloysius: Why?
Sister James: Because I can't sleep at night anymore. Everything seems uncertain to me.
Sister Aloysius: Maybe we're not supposed to sleep so well. They've made Father Flynn the pastor of St. Jerome.
Sister James: Who?
Sister Aloysius: The bishop appointed Father Flynn the pastor of St. Jerome Church and School. It's a promotion.
Sister James: You didn't tell them?
Sister Aloysius: I told our good Monsignor Benedict. I crossed the garden and told him. He did not believe it to be true.
Sister James: Then why did Father Flynn leave? What did you say to him to make him go?
Sister Aloysius: That I had called a nun in his previous parish. That I had found out his prior history of infringements.
Sister James: So you did prove it!
Sister Aloysius: I was lying. I made no such call.
Sister James: You lied?
Sister Aloysius: Yes. But if he had no such history, the lie wouldn't have worked. His resignation was his confession. He was what I thought he was. And he's gone.
Sister James: I can't believe you lied.
Sister Aloysius: In the pursuit of wrongdoing, one steps away from God. Of course there's a price.
Sister James: I see. So now he's in another school.
Sister Aloysius: Yes. Oh, Sister James!
Sister James: What is it, Sister?
Sister Aloysius: I have doubts! I have such doubts! *(Sister Aloysius is bent with emotion. Sister James comfort her. Lights fade.)*

Reading and Reacting

1. In what year is the play set? How do you know?
2. What key themes are introduced in the sermon Father Flynn delivers at the beginning of the play? How are these themes developed throughout the play?
3. How, according to Father Flynn, did the assassination of President Kennedy bring people together?

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4. In his sermon at the beginning of the play, Father Flynn says, "Doubt can be a bond as powerful and as sustaining as certainty." What does he mean? How does this view of doubt differ from the view of doubt (and its consequences) developed in the play?
5. A **parable** is a brief story—often seen in the Bible or in religious sermons—intended to teach a moral or religious lesson. What parables do Father Flynn's sermons contain? What lessons do these parables teach?
6. What evidence does Sister Aloysius have to support her accusations against Father Flynn? Do you think her accusations are justified?
7. How does Father Flynn's view of the church differ from that of Sister Aloysius? How do their respective views reflect the changes that in the Catholic Church was undergoing at the time the play takes place?
8. Sister James and Mrs. Muller are minor characters in the play. How do they change as the play progresses?
9. Early in the play, Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius have the following exchange:

> Sister A.: Sister Veronica fell on a piece of wood this morning and practically killed herself.
> Flynn: Is she all right?
> Sister A.: Oh, she's fine.
> Flynn: Her sight isn't good, is it?
> Sister A.: Her sight is fine. Nuns fall, you know.
> Flynn: No, I didn't know that.
> Sister A.: It's the habit. It catches us more often than not. What with our being in black and white, and so prone to falling, we are more like dominoes than anything else.

How do Sister Aloysius's comments foreshadow events that occur later in the play?

10. **Journal Entry** In what sense is *Doubt* a parable? What lesson does the play teach?
11. **Critical Perspective** In a *New York Times* review of *Doubt*, theater critic John Simon made the following observation:

> *Doubt* may well be Shanley's best play to date. It goes back to his days in a Catholic school in the Bronx run by Sisters of Charity, and while it does not seem patently autobiographical, eight years at that school surely left their mark on the playwright. Another influence must be the recent revelations of pederasty in the priesthood. But what makes the play particularly absorbing is its enlightened objectivity.

Do you agree with Simon that the play is objective? Or, do you think that Shanley favors the position of one of the characters over that of another? Explain.

Related Works "Gryphon" (p. 245), "Cathedral" (p. 432), "The Value of Education" (p. 728), "Theme for English B" (p. 928), *Proof* (p. 1208)


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DAVID HENRY HWANG (1957–) was born in Los Angeles. The son of Chinese-American immigrants, Hwang wrote his first play before he graduated from Stanford. *FOB* (Fresh Off the Boat), which was first performed in 1979, won the 1981 Obie as Best New Play of the Season. Hwang attended the Yale School of Drama from 1980 to 1981, and his next two plays, *The Dance and the Railroad* (1981) and *Family Devotions* (1981), were based on the problems of immigrants trying at the same time to assimilate and to avoid assimilation into a new culture. In 1988, his Broadway hit, *M. Butterfly*, won the Tony Award for best play and established

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him as a major modern American playwright. The play was adapted into the 1993 feature film *M. Butterfly*. Hwang's latest play, *Chinglish* (2011), is a comedy based on linguistic and social misunderstandings that occur when an American businessman tries to deal with Chinese government officials.

Cultural Context: With the advent of the Gold Rush and the burgeoning development of the railroad in the early nineteenth century, a large number of Chinese immigrants came to work in the United States. Many of these immigrants viewed their residency as temporary and did not wish to assimilate into American culture. Others wanted to stay but longed for a neighborhood of their own, and as a result, Chinatowns were created, with the largest in San Francisco and New York. Chinatowns, such as the one referred to in this play, are distinguished by bilingual signs, as well as by numerous restaurants, stores, and businesses that serve the Asian population.

Trying to Find Chinatown (1996)

CHARACTERS

Benjamin
Ronnie

SETTING

A street corner on the Lower East Side, New York City. The present.

NOTE ON MUSIC

Obviously, it would be foolish to require that the actor portraying Ronnie perform the specified violin music live. The score of this play can be played on tape over the house speakers, and the actor can feign playing the violin using a bow treated with soap. However, to effect a convincing illusion, it is desirable that the actor possess some familiarity with the violin, or at least another stringed instrument.

Darkness. Over the house speakers, fade in Hendrix-like virtuoso rock 'n' roll riffs—heavy feedback, distortion, phase shifting, wah-wah—amplified over a tiny Fender pug-nose.

Lights fade up to reveal that the music's being played over a solid-body electric violin by Ronnie, a Chinese American male in his mid-twenties, dressed in retro sixties clothing, with a few requisite nineties body mutilations. He's playing on a sidewalk for money, his violin case open before him, change and a few stray bills having been left by previous passers-by.

Enter Benjamin, early twenties, blond, blue-eyed, looking like a midwestern tourist in the big city. He holds a scrap of paper in his hands, scanning street signs for an address. He pauses before Ronnie, listens for a while. With a truly bravura run, Ronnie concludes the number, falls on his knees, gasping. Benjamin applauds.

Benjamin: Good. That was really great. (*Pause.*) I didn't . . . I mean, a fiddle . . . I mean, I'd heard them at square dances, on country stations and all, but I never . . . wow, this must really be New York City!

He applauds, starts to walk on. Still on his knees Ronnie clears his throat loudly.

Benjamin: Oh, I . . . you're not just doing this for your health, right?

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Ross Gibby as Benjamin and Joel de la Fuente as Ronnie, Tribeca Theater Festival, 2004.

© Joan Marcus

He reaches in his pocket, pulls out a couple of coins. Ronnie clears his throat again.

BENJAMIN: Look, I'm not a millionaire, I'm just . . .

Benjamin pulls out his wallet, removes a dollar bill. Ronnie nods his head, gestures toward the violin case, as he sits on the sidewalk, takes out a pack of cigarettes, lights one.

RONNIE: And don't call it a "fiddle," OK?

BENJAMIN: Oh, well. I didn't mean to—

RONNIE: You sound like a wuss. A hick. A dipshit.

BENJAMIN: It just slipped out. I didn't really—

RONNIE: If this was a fiddle, I'd be sitting here with a cob pipe, stomping my cowboy boots and kicking up hay. Then I'd go home and fuck my cousin.

BENJAMIN: Oh! Well, I don't really think—

RONNIE: Do you see a cob pipe? Am I fucking my cousin?

BENJAMIN: Well, no, not at the moment, but—

RONNIE: All right. Then this is a violin, you hand over the money, and I ignore the insult, herein endeth the lesson. (*Pause.*)

BENJAMIN: Listen, a dollar's more than I've ever given to a . . . to someone asking for money.

RONNIE: Yeah, well, this is New York. Welcome to the cost of living.

BENJAMIN: What I mean is, maybe in exchange, you could help me—?

RONNIE: Jesus Christ! Do you see a sign around my neck reading "Big Apple Fucking Tourist Bureau?"

BENJAMIN: I'm just looking for an address, I don't think it's far from here, maybe you could . . . ?

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Ronnie snatches the scrap of paper from Benjamin.

RONNIE: You're lucky I'm such a goddamn softie. (*He looks at the paper.*) Oh, fuck you. Just suck my dick, you and the cousin you rode in on.
BENJAMIN: I don't get it! What are you—?
RONNIE: Eat me. You know exactly what I— 20
BENJAMIN: I'm just asking for a little—
RONNIE: 13 Doyers St.? Like you don't know where that is?
BENJAMIN: Of course I don't know! That's why I'm asking—
RONNIE: C'mon, you trailer-park refugee. You don't know that's Chinatown?
BENJAMIN: Sure I know that's Chinatown. 25
RONNIE: I know you know that's Chinatown.
BENJAMIN: So? That doesn't mean I know where Chinatown—
RONNIE: So why is it that you picked me, of all the street musicians in the city—to point you in the direction of Chinatown? Lemme guess—is it the earring? No, I don't think so. The Hendrix riffs? Guess again, you fucking moron.
BENJAMIN: Now, wait a minute. I see what you're—
RONNIE: What are you gonna ask me next? Where you can find the best dim sum 30 in the city? Whether I can direct you to a genuine opium den? Or do I know how you can meet Miss Saigon for a night of nookie-nookie followed by a good old-fashioned ritual suicide? (*He picks up his violin.*) Now, get your white ass off my sidewalk. One dollar doesn't even begin to make up for all this aggravation. Why don't you go back home and race bullfrogs, or whatever it is you do for—?
BENJAMIN: Brother, I can absolutely relate to your anger. Righteous rage, I suppose would be a more appropriate term. To be marginalized, as we are, by a white racist patriarchy, to the point where the accomplishments of our people are obliterated from the history books, this is cultural genocide of the first order, leading to the fact that you must do battle with all Euro-America's emasculating and brutal stereotypes of Asians—the opium den, the sexual objectification of the Asian female, the exoticized image of a tourist's Chinatown which ignores the exploitation of workers, the failure to unionize, the high rate of mental illness and tuberculosis—against these, each day, you rage, no, not as a victim, but as a survivor, yes, brother, a glorious warrior survivor!

Silence.

RONNIE: Say what?
BENJAMIN: So, I hope you can see that my request is not—
RONNIE: Wait, wait.
BENJAMIN: —motivated by sorts of racist assumptions— 35
RONNIE: But, but where . . . how did you learn all that?
BENJAMIN: All what?
RONNIE: All that—you know—oppression stuff—tuberculosis . . .
BENJAMIN: It's statistically irrefutable. TB occurs in the community at a rate—
RONNIE: Where did *you* learn it? 40
BENJAMIN: Well . . . I took Asian-American studies. In college.

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Ronnie: Where did you go to college?
Benjamin: University of Wisconsin. Madison.
Ronnie: Madison, Wisconsin?
Benjamin: That's not where the bridges are, by the way.
Ronnie: Huh? Oh, right . . .
Benjamin: You wouldn't believe the number of people who—
Ronnie: They have Asian-American studies in Madison, Wisconsin? Since when?
Benjamin: Since the last Third World Unity sit-in and hunger strike. (*Pause.*) Why do you look so surprised? We're down.
Ronnie: I dunno. It just never occurred to me, the idea of Asian students in the Midwest going on a hunger strike.
Benjamin: Well, a lot of them had midterms that week, so they fasted in shifts. (*Pause.*) The administration never figured it out. The Asian students put that "they all look alike" stereotype to good use.
Ronnie: OK, so they got Asian-American studies. That still doesn't explain—
Benjamin: What?
Ronnie: What *you* were doing taking it?
Benjamin: Just like everyone else. I wanted to explore my roots. After a lifetime of assimilation, I wanted to find out who I really am. (*Pause.*)
Ronnie: And did you?
Benjamin: Sure. I learned to take pride in my ancestors who built the railroads, my Popo who would make me a hot bowl of jok with thousand-day-old eggs when the white kids chased me home yelling. "Gook! Chink! Slant-eyes!"
Ronnie: OK, OK, that's enough!
Benjamin: Painful to listen to, isn't it?
Ronnie: I don't know what kind of bullshit ethnic studies program they're running over in Wisconsin, but did they teach you that in order to find your Asian "roots," it's a good idea first to be Asian? (*Pause.*)
Benjamin: Are you speaking metaphorically?
Ronnie: No! Literally! Look at your skin!

Ronnie grabs Benjamin's hands, holds them up before his face.

Benjamin: You know, it's very stereotypical to think that all Asian skin tones conform to a single hue.
Ronnie: You're white! Is this some kind of redneck joke or something? Am I the first person in the world to tell you this?
Benjamin: Oh! Oh! Oh!
Ronnie: I know real Asians are scarce in the Midwest, but . . . Jesus!
Benjamin: No, of course, I . . . I see where your misunderstanding arises.
Ronnie: Yeah. It's called "You white."
Benjamin: It's just that—in my hometown of Tribune, Kansas, and then at school—see, everyone knows me—so this sort of thing never comes up. (*He offers his hand.*) Benjamin Wong. I forget that a society wedded to racial constructs constantly forces me to explain my very existence.
Ronnie: Ronnie Chang. Otherwise known as "The Bowman."

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BENJAMIN: You see, I was adopted by Chinese-American parents at birth. So clearly, I'm an Asian American—

RONNIE: Even though they could put a picture of you in the dictionary next to the definition of "WASP."

BENJAMIN: Well, you can't judge my race by my genetic heritage.

RONNIE: If genes don't determine race, what does?

BENJAMIN: Maybe you'd prefer that I continue in denial, masquerading as a white man? 75

RONNIE: Listen, you can't just wake up and say, "Gee, I *feel* Black today."

BENJAMIN: Brother, I'm just trying to find what you've already got.

RONNIE: What do I got?

BENJAMIN: A home. With your people. Picketing with the laundry workers. Taking refuge from the daily slights against your masculinity in the noble image of Gwan Gung.

RONNIE: Gwan *who*? 80

BENJAMIN: C'mon—the Chinese God of warriors and—what do you take me for? There're altars to him up all over the community.

RONNIE: I dunno what community you're talking about, but it's sure as hell not mine. (*Pause.*)

BENJAMIN: What do you mean?

RONNIE: I mean, if you wanna call Chinatown *your* community, OK, knock yourself out, learn to use chopsticks. Go ahead, try and find your roots in some dim sum parlor with headless ducks hanging in the window. Those places don't tell you a thing about who *I* am.

BENJAMIN: Oh, I get it. 85

RONNIE: You get what?

BENJAMIN: You're one of those self-hating, *assimilated* Chinese Americans, aren't you?

RONNIE: Oh, Jesus.

BENJAMIN: You probably call yourself, "Oriental," right? Look, maybe I can help you. I have some books I can—

RONNIE: Hey, I read all those Asian identity books when you were still slathering 90 on industrial-strength sunblock. (*Pause.*) Sure, I'm Chinese. But folks like you act like that means something. Like all of a sudden, you know who I am. You think identity's that simple? That you can wrap it all up in a neat package and say, "I have ethnicity, therefore I am?" All you fucking ethnic fundamentalists. Always looking for easy answers. You say you're looking for identity, but you can't begin to face the real mysteries of the search. So instead you go skin-deep, and call it a day.

Pause. Ronnie turns away from Benjamin, starts to play his violin—slow and bluesy.

BENJAMIN: So what are you? "Just a human being?" That's like saying you *have* no identity. If you asked me to describe my dog, I'd say more than "He's just a dog."

RONNIE: What—you think if I deny the importance of my race, I'm nobody? There're worlds out there, worlds you haven't even begun to understand. Open your eyes. Hear with your ears.

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He holds his violin at chest level, does not attempt to play during the following monologue. As he speaks, a montage of rock and jazz tracks fades in and out over the house speakers, bringing to life the styles of music he describes.

I concede—it was called a fiddle long ago—but that was even before the birth of jazz. When the hollering in the fields, the rank injustice of human bondage, the struggle of God's children against the plagues of the devil's white man, when all these boiled up into that bittersweet brew, called by later generations, the blues. That's when fiddlers like Son Sims held their chin rests at their chests and sawed away like the hillbillies still do today. And with the coming of ragtime appeared the pioneer Stuff Smith, who sang as he stroked the catgut, with his raspy Louis Armstrong voice—gruff and sweet like the timbre of horsehair riding south below the fingerboard, and who finally sailed for Europe to find ears that would hear. Europe—where Stephane Grapelli initialed a magical French violin, to be passed from generation to generation—first he, to Jean-Luc Ponty, then Ponty to Didier Lockwood. Listening to Grapelli play "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square" is to understand not only the song of birds, but also how they learn to fly, fall in love on the wing, and finally falter one day, to wait for darkness beneath a London street lamp. And Ponty, he showed us how the modern violin man can accompany the shadow of his own lead lines, which cascade, one over another, into some netherworld beyond the range of human hearing. Joe Venuti, Noel Pointer, Svend Asmussen. Even the Kronos Quartet with their arrangement of "Purple Haze." Now, tell me, could any legacy be more rich, more crowded with mythology and heroes to inspire pride? What can I say if the banging of a gong or the clinking of a pickax on the Transcontinental Railroad fails to move me even as much as one note, played through the violin MIDI controller of Michal Urbaniak?

Ronnie puts his violin to his chin, begins to play a jazz composition of his own invention.

Does it have to sound like Chinese opera before people like you decide that I know who I am? (*Benjamin stands for a long moment, listening to Ronnie play. Then, he drops his dollar into the case, turns, and exits. Ronnie continues to play a long moment. Then Benjamin enters, illuminated in his own special. He sits on the floor of the stage, his feet dangling off the lip. As he speaks, Ronnie continues playing his tune, which becomes underscoring for Benjamin's monologue. As the music continues, does it slowly begin to reflect the influence of Chinese music?*)

Benjamin: When I finally found Doyers St., I scanned the buildings for Number 13. Walking down an alley where the scent of freshly steamed char siu bao lingered in the air, I felt immediately that I had entered a world where all things were finally familiar. (*Pause.*) An old woman bumped me with her shopping bag—screaming to her friend in Cantonese, though they walked no more than a few inches apart. Another man—shouting to a vendor in Sze-Yup. A youth, in a white undershirt, perhaps a recent newcomer, bargaining with a grocer in Hokkien. I walked through this ocean of dialects, breathing in the richness with deep gulps, exhilarated by the energy this symphony brought to my

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step. And when I finally saw the number 13, I nearly wept at my good fortune. An old tenement, paint peeling, inside walls no doubt thick with a century of grease and broken dreams—and yet, to me, a temple—the house where my father was born. I suddenly saw it all: Gung Gung, coming home from his 16-hour days pressing shirts he could never afford to own, bringing with him candies for my father, each sweet wrapped in the hope of a better life. When my father left the ghetto, he swore he would never return. But he had, this day, in the thoughts and memories of his son, just six months after his death. And as I sat on the stoop, I pulled a hua-moi from my pocket, sucked on it, and felt his spirit returning. To the place where his ghost, and the dutiful hearts of all his descendants, would always call home. (*He listens for a long moment.*) And I felt an ache in my heart for all those lost souls, denied this most important of revelations: to know who they truly are. (*Benjamin sits on the stage, sucking his salted plum and listening to the sounds around him. Ronnie continues to play. The two remain oblivious of one another. Lights fade slowly to black.*)

Reading and Reacting

1. What does Benjamin hope to find in Chinatown? Do you think he is successful?
2. During the first half of the play, Benjamin dominates the action. At what point does this situation change? What do you think causes this change?
3. What is the main theme of this play? What other themes are developed?
4. What is the significance of the play's title? How does it express the play's main theme? For example, is Benjamin really trying to find Chinatown, or is he looking for something else?
5. What is the central conflict of the play? Is it ever resolved? Explain.
6. Both Ronnie and Benjamin deliver long monologues. What do these characters reveal about themselves in their monologues?
7. How does Hwang use music in the play? How does music help him to convey his ideas?
8. What can you tell about the social class of the two characters? For example, which character do you think has a better education? Which one seems to come from a more privileged background? Is this difference in social class essential to the play?
9. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Is Ronnie correct when he says that Benjamin is white? Is it possible for Benjamin to be both white and Chinese? Explain.
10. **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** In an introduction to a collection of Hwang's plays, novelist Maxine Hong Kingston discusses his contributions to Chinese-American theater:

> Chinese American actors are given too few dignified parts to play. If no playwrights like David Hwang came along, a generation of actors who speak our accents would be lost. A novelist can only invent an approximate orthography. For voices, the play's the thing. Chinese American theater, which started out with a bang—firecrackers, drums—keeps dying out. David Henry Hwang gives it life once again.

Do you think that these comments apply to *Trying to Find Chinatown?* For example, does the play convey the authentic voices and accents of its characters? Do you agree that this kind of authenticity is not possible in a novel or short story?

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Related Works: "Deportation at Breakfast" (p. 208), "Hangzhou 1925" (p. 239), "The Disappearance" (p. 584), "Girl Powdering Her Neck" (p. PS5), "Suicide Note" (p. 686), "Harlem" (p. 762), *The Cuban Swimmer* (p. 1454)



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AUGUST WILSON (1945–2005) was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to a German immigrant father and a black mother and lived in the African American neighborhood known as the Hill District. After leaving school at fifteen when he was accused of plagiarizing a paper, he participated in the Black Arts movement in Pittsburgh, submitting poems to local African American publications. In 1969, Wilson and his friend Rob Penny founded the Black Horizons Theatre Company, for which Wilson produced and directed plays. Although Wilson wrote plays while living in Pittsburgh, his work began to gain recognition only after 1978, when he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. There, in 1982, Lloyd Richards, dean of the Yale School of Drama and artistic director of the Yale Repertory Company, staged a performance of Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom.*

Wilson's achievement was epic. Beginning with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in 1984, he wrote a ten-play cycle that chronicled the African American experience in the United States decade by decade. In addition to *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* a Tony Award winner, the plays in this cycle include *Fences* (1985), which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1987; *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986); *Two Trains Running* (1989), which won Wilson his fifth New York Drama Critics Circle Award; *The Piano Lesson* (1987), which won a second Pulitzer Prize for Wilson in 1990; *Seven Guitars* (1996); and *Radio Golf*, the last play in the cycle, which opened in 2005, the year of Wilson's death. To honor his achievements, Broadway's Virginia Theater was renamed the August Wilson Theater.

Fences explores how the long-upheld color barrier in professional baseball affected the main character, Troy, who struggles with the pain of never realizing his dream of becoming a big-league player. Throughout the play, Troy retreats behind literal and figurative barriers that impair his relationships with his family.

Cultural Context The history of African Americans in baseball began in the period between emancipation and the civil rights movement. Banned from professional baseball, African American players formed the Negro Leagues, with stars such as Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson emerging in the 1930s. Then, in 1946, Branch Rickey, the club president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, changed everything when he set out to sign the Negro Leagues' top players to his team. The first player he chose was Jackie Robinson, who broke the racial barrier and debuted at first base for the Dodgers on April 15, 1947, at the age of 28. Robinson's performance earned him the Rookie of the Year award. In 1957, the year in which *Fences* is set, Robinson announced his retirement from baseball after he was traded to the New York Giants. In 1962, he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Fences (1985)

CHARACTERS

Troy Maxson
Jim Bono, *Troy's friend*
Rose, *Troy's wife*
Lyons, *Troy's oldest son by previous marriage*
Gabriel, *Troy's brother*
Cory, *Troy and Rose's son*
Raynell, *Troy's daughter*

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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 for the last scene, with a wooden sawhorse, a pile of lumber, and other fence-building equipment set 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.

THE PLAY

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 money-lenders. 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 tarpaper. 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 quiet 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.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

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.

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Scene from the 1987 Broadway production of *Fences* starring James Earl Jones as Troy

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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.

5 **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 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 trouble-maker. 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.

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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 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 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 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.

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.

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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, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration. She recognizes Troy's spirit as a fine and illuminating one and she either ignores or forgives his faults, only some of which she recognizes. Though she doesn't drink, her presence is an integral part of the Friday night rituals. 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.[1]

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

[1] *collard greens:* A leafy green vegetable.

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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.

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Bono: If he be like you in the sports . . . he's gonna be all right. Ain't but two men ever played baseball as good as you. That's Babe Ruth[2] and Josh Gibson.[3] Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than you.

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

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

Troy: How in hell they done changed?

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

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

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

Rose: Selkirk?

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

Rose: They got a lot of colored baseball players now. Jackie Robinson[4] 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 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?

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[2] *Babe Ruth:* George Herman Ruth (1895–1948), American baseball player. He played for the New York Yankees during the 1910s and 1920s and is remembered for his home-run hitting and flamboyant lifestyle.

[3] *Josh Gibson:* (1911–1947), American baseball player. He played between the Negro Leagues between the 1920s and 1940s and was known as "the Negro Babe Ruth." An unwritten rule against hiring black players kept him out of the major leagues.

[4] *Jackie Robinson:* John Roosevelt Robinson (1919–1972). He became the first African American to play major-league baseball when he was hired by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

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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. 85

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.

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. 90 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.)* All right. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where we can't hardly move. Death stood up, throwed on his robe . . . had him a white robe with a hood on it. 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 wan't going looking for him. Death ain't nothing to play with. And I

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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[5] 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 all right. I ain't seen him around here last week.

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

Troy: I ain't bothering Lyons. *(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 all right, nigger. You telling the truth there. You was in the neighborhood cause it's my payday.

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

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

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

Lyons: What . . . Pop done seen the devil? You too much, Pops.

[5] *Uncle Remus:* The fictional narrator of *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880) and a number of sequels by Joel Chandler Harris. Uncle Remus tells tales about characters such as Brer Rabbit and the Tarbaby in exaggerated dialect, now widely considered to be a derogatory representation of African Americans.

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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 . . . white fellow . . . got on good clothes and everything. Standing there with a clipboard in his hand. I ain't had to say nothing. First words come out of his mouth was . . . "I understand you need some furniture and can't get no credit." I liked to fell over. He say, "I'll give you all the credit you want, but you got to pay the interest on it." I told him, "Give me three rooms worth and charge whatever you want." Next day a truck pulled up here and two men unloaded them three rooms. Man what drove the truck give me a book. Say send ten dollars, first of every month to the address in the book and everything will be all right. Say if I miss a payment the devil was coming back and it'll be hell to pay. That was fifteen years ago. To this day . . . the first of the month I send my ten dollars, Rose'll tell you.

Rose: Troy lying.

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: Ah 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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 that ten dollars you talking about come from? I'm just supposed to haul people's rubbish and give my money to you 'cause you too lazy to work. You too lazy to work and wanna know why you ain't got what I got.

Rose: What hospital Bonnie working at? Mercy?

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

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

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

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

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

Troy: 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 the 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

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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.

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

Troy: The *boy* is thirty-four years old.

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

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

Troy: *(puts 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.

scene 2

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

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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.

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 all right. 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.

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. All right. Got lucky there and hit the numbers . . .

ROSE: Troy, I know all about it.

TROY: Had good sense, I'll say that for him. He ain't throwing his money away. I seen niggers hit the numbers and go through two thousand dollars in four days. Man bought 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.

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

TROY: I ain't worried. Just told me to be down there at the Commissioner's office on Friday. Everybody think they gonna fire me. I ain't worried about them firing me. You ain't got to worry about that. *(Pause.)* Where's Cory? Cory in the house? *(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.[1] *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!

[1] *Archangel Gabriel:* A messenger of God.

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Rose: How you doing, Gabe?
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 reenters 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!
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[2] 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.

Gabriel: Troy . . . St. Peter got your name in the book. I seen it. It say . . . Troy Maxson. I say . . . I know him! He got the same name like what I got. That's my brother!
Troy: How many times you gonna tell me that, Gabe?
Gabriel: Ain't got my name in the book. Don't have to have my name. I done died and went to heaven. He got your name though. One morning 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

[2] *St. Peter:* Disciple of Christ, believed to be the guard at the gates of heaven.

NOT FOR SALE

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 Jemima. She come by and cooked me up a whole mess of flapjacks. Remember how we used to eat them flapjacks?

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

Gabriel: I got to 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's 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.

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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.

SCENE 3

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.

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?

NOT FOR SALE

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.

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 comes 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 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.

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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 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 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.[1] 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[2] and Wes Covington.[3] Hank Aaron hit two home runs today. That makes forty-three.

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[1] *Roberto Clemente:* (1934–1972), Major League baseball player for the Pittsburg Pirates, known as much for his humanitarianism as his unique batting style and ability. Clemente received the Most Valuable Player Award in 1966 and died in a plane crash in 1972 while shuttling supplies to Nicaraguan earthquake victims.

[2] *Hank Aaron:* Henry Aaron (1934–), American baseball player who broke Babe Ruth's career home run record with a lifetime total of 755 home runs. The holder of 12 other Major League records, Aaron spent his Major League career with the Braves, first in Milwaukee and later in their hometown of Atlanta.

[3] *Wes Covington:* John Wesley Covington (1932–), American baseball player known for his ability to frustrate pitchers by wasting time at the plate. In an eleven-year career, Covington played for six Major League teams, beginning with the Milwaukee Braves and retiring with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1966.

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Troy: Hank Aaron ain't nobody. That 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.[4] You can't get no better than that!

Cory: Sandy Koufax.[5] He's leading the league in strikeouts.

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

Cory: You got Warren Spahn[6] and Lew Burdette.[7] I bet you couldn't hit no home runs off of Warren Spahn.

Troy: I'm through with it now. You go on and cut them boards. (Pause.) Your mama tell me you done got recruited by a college football team? Is that right?

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

Troy: I thought you supposed to be working down there at the A&P. Ain't you suppose 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 going to 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 . . .

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[4] *Satchel Page:* Leroy Robert Paige (1906–1982), American baseball player. He played in the Negro Leagues from the 1920s until 1948, when he joined the Cleveland Indians; he reportedly pitched 55 no-hit games during his career. Joe DiMaggio called him "the best pitcher I have ever faced."

[5] *Sandy Koufax:* Sanford Koufax (1935–), left-handed pitcher who won 129 games and lost only 47 for the Los Angeles Dodgers in the six seasons between 1961 and 1966; he won three Cy Young Awards and pitched four no-hit games, the last of which (1965) was a perfect game.

[6] *Warren Spahn:* (1921–2003), left-handed pitcher who at the time of his retirement in 1966 held the National League record of 363 wins; he won 20 or more games in four consecutive seasons (1947–1950) and in several other seasons during the 1950s.

[7] *Lew Burdette:* Selva Lewis Burdette (1926–2007), American baseball player who pitched and won three games for the Milwaukee Braves against the New York Yankees in the 1957 World Series; for that Series, his ERA was an amazingly low .067.

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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: 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 crookeds with the straights.
Cory: Yessir. (*Pause.*) Can I ask you a question?
Troy: What the hell you wanna ask me? Mr. Stawicki the one you got the questions for.
Cory: How come you ain't never liked me?
Troy: Liked you? Who the hell say I got to like you? What law is there say I got to like you? Wanna stand up in my face and ask a damn fool-ass question like that. Talking about liking somebody. Come here, boy, when I talk to 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, all right 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!
Troy: Got clothes on your back.

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Cory: Yessir.
Troy: Why you think that is?
Cory: 'Cause of you.
Troy: Ah, hell I know it's 'cause of me . . . but why do you think that is? 105
Cory: *(hesitant)* 'Cause you like me.
Troy: Like you? I go out of here every morning . . . bust my butt . . . putting up with them crackers[8] every day . . . 'cause I like you? You are 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 give 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 110
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 go no sense out of you.
Troy: I got good sense, woman. I got sense enough not to let my boy get hurt over 115
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.

[8] *crackers:* Derogatory term for white people, generally poor southern whites.

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

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

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

SCENE 4

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[1] 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.)* 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.

[1] *spikes:* Athletic shoes with sharp metal grips set into the soles.

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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.
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.

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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.

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's 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 all right.
Bono: Naw . . . naw . . . you mean if the nigger knew how to *drive* he'd be all right. Been fighting with them people about driving and ain't even got a license. Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license?
Troy: Driving ain't nothing. All you do is point the truck where you want it to go. Driving ain't nothing.
Bono: Do 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 sometimes, 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.

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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.

Gabriel: Better get ready for the Judgment! Better get ready for . . . Hey! . . . Hey! . . . There's Troy's boy!
Lyons: How are 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 all right!
Gabriel: *(laughing with Lyons)* Lyons! King of the Jungle.
Rose: You gonna stay for supper, Gabe? Want me to fix you a plate?
Gabriel: I'll take a sandwich, Rose. Don't want no plate. Just wanna eat with my hands. I'll take a sandwich.
Rose: How about you, Lyons? You staying? Got some short ribs cooking.
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.

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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!

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

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

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

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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. 105

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 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 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 that 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 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

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

Troy: Who you gonna hitch it with? They ain't got 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

[2] *Mobile:* City and seaport in southwestern Alabama.

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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. I 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.

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 know this nigger since Skippy was a pup. Me and him done been through some times.

Bono: You sure right about that.

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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.

BONO: Hell, I love you too . . . 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.

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

CORY: I didn't even do nothing!

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

SCENE 1

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.

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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.

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 Goldblum's.
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.

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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.[1] 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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[1] *Joe Louis:* Joseph Louis Barrow (1914–1981), American boxer known as the "Brown Bomber." In 1937, he became the youngest boxer ever to win the Heavyweight Championship, which he defended twenty-five times; he retired undefeated in 1949.

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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.

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

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

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

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

Hey, nigger . . . where you going?

BONO: I'm going home. I know you don't expect me to help you now. I'm protecting my money. I wanna see you put that fence up by yourself. That's what I want to see. You'll be here another six months without me.

TROY: Nigger, you ain't right.

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

TROY: All right, we gonna see now. You better get out your bankbook.

Bono exits, and Troy continues to work. Rose enters from the house.

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

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

ROSE: What was he doing that cause them to arrest him?

TROY: Some kids were 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.

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

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

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ROSE: Where's he at now? Where'd he go off to?
TROY: He's gone about his business. He don't need nobody to hold his hand.
ROSE: Well, I don't know. Seem like that would be the best place for him if they did put him into the hospital. I know what you're gonna say. But that's what I think would be best.
TROY: The man done had his life ruined fighting for what? And they wanna take and lock him up. Let him be free. He don't bother nobody.
ROSE: Well, everybody got their own way of looking at it I guess. Come on and get your lunch. I got a bowl of lima beans and some cornbread in the oven. Come and get something to eat. Ain't no sense you fretting over Gabe.

Rose turns to go into the house.

TROY: Rose . . . got something to tell you.
ROSE: 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 thing you know it's a whole forest.

ROSE: Troy . . . what is you talking about?
TROY: I'm talking, woman, let me talk. I'm trying to find a way to tell you . . . I'm gonna be a daddy. I'm gonna be somebody's daddy.
ROSE: Troy . . . you're not telling me this? You're gonna be . . . what?
TROY: Rose . . . now . . . see . . .
ROSE: You telling me you gonna be somebody's daddy? You telling your *wife* this?

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.
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.

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GABRIEL: Say, Rose . . . you know I was chasing hellhounds 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.

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ROSE: Maybe you ought to go on and stay down there with her . . . if she's 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 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

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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.

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)* All right. That's strike two. You stay away from around me, boy. Don't you strike out. You living with a full count. Don't you strike out.

Troy exits out the yard as the lights go down.

SCENE 2

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.

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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 Friday. 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.

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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 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 all right, 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)* All right . . . Mr. Death. See now . . . I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. 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 the

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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.

SCENE 3

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 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.

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SCENE 4

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: All right, 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 there. 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 . . . all right, 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 bake sale. Lyons was by to see you. He stopped by to pay you your twenty dollars. It's laying in there on the table.
Troy: *(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 bake sale at the church tomorrow.

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Rose exits the yard. Troy sits down on the steps, takes a 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 was a good old dog
Blue treed 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 every day. Now I don't even know what route you working.

TROY: They keep switching me around. Got me out in Greentree now . . . hauling white folks' garbage.

BONO: Greentree, huh? You lucky, at least you ain't got to be lifting them barrels. Damn if they ain't getting heavier. I'm gonna put in my two years and call it quits.

TROY: I'm thinking about retiring myself.

BONO: You got it easy. You can *drive* for another five years.

TROY: It ain't the same, Bono. It ain't like working the back of the truck. Ain't got nobody to talk to . . . feel like you working by yourself. Naw, I'm thinking about retiring. How's Lucille?

BONO: She all right. 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 all right.

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.

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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.
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

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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 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: *(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.

Cory: I ain't going nowhere! Come on . . . put me out! I ain't scared of you.

Troy: That's my bat!

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Cory: Come on!
Troy: Put my bat down!
Cory: Come on, put me out. 90

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. 95

Cory and Troy struggle over the bat. The struggle is fierce and fully engaged. Troy ultimately is the stronger and takes the bat away from Cory and stands over him ready to swing. He stops himself.

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 on 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.

SCENE 5

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, Gabriel, and Bono have gathered. The door

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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!
Raynell: Mam?
Rose: What you doing out there?
Raynell: Nothing.

Rose comes to the door.

Rose: Girl, get in here and get dressed. What you doing?
Raynell: Seeing if my garden growed.
Rose: I told you it ain't gonna grow overnight. You got to wait.
Raynell: It don't look like it never gonna grow. Dag!
Rose: I told you a watched pot never boils. Get in here and get dressed.
Raynell: 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?
Raynell: 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.
Raynell: Uh huh.
Cory: Is your mama home?

Raynell runs up on the porch and calls through the screen door.

Raynell: 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!
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?

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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.

Raynell: 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.

Raynell: 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.

Rose and Raynell exit into the house.

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 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?

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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 crookeds 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 crookeds 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.

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 all right?

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.

Raynell: Hi.

Cory: Hi.

Raynell: Did you used to sleep in my room?

Cory: Yeah . . . that used to be my room.

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

Rose comes to the door.

Rose: Raynell, get in there and get them good shoes on.

Raynell: Mama, can't I wear these? Them other ones hurt my feet.

Rose: Well, they just gonna have to hurt your feet for a while. You ain't said they hurt your feet when you went down to the store and got them.

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

Rose: Don't you give me no 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 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?

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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.

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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.

RAYNELL: *(entering, still with her old shoes)* Mama . . . Reverend Tollivier on the phone.

Rose exits into the house.

RAYNELL: Hi.
CORY: Hi.
RAYNELL: You in the Army or the Marines?
CORY: Marines.
RAYNELL: Papa said it was the Army. Did you know Blue?
CORY: Blue? Who's Blue?
RAYNELL: Papa's dog what he sing about all the time.
CORY: *(singing)*

Hear it ring! Hear it ring!
I had a dog his name was Blue
You know Blue was mighty true
You know Blue was a good old dog
Blue treed a possum in a hollow log
You know from that he was a good old dog.
Hear it ring! 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

RAYNELL:

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

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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
When I hear old Blue bark
Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark[1]
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.
RAYNELL: 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.

Gabriel, 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 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 songturning 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!

[1] *Noah's Ark:* See Genesis 6.14–20.

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Reading and Reacting

1. Obviously, fences are a central metaphor in this play. To what different kinds of fences does the play's title refer?
2. How are the fathers and sons in this play alike? How are they different? Does the play imply that sons must inevitably follow in their fathers' footsteps?
3. This play is set in 1957. Given the racial climate of the country at that time, how realistic are Cory's ambitions? How reasonable are his father's criticisms?
4. In what ways has Troy's character been shaped by his contact with the white world?
5. Is Troy a tragic hero? If so, what is his flaw?
6. Which of the play's characters, if any, do you consider to be stereotypes? What comment do you think the play makes about stereotypes?
7. How does the conflict between Troy and Cory reflect conflicts within the African-American community? Does the play suggest any possibilities for compromise?
8. Do you consider the message of this play to be optimistic or pessimistic? Explain.
9. **Journal Entry** Which characters do you like? Which do you dislike? Why?
10. **Critical Perspective** Robert Brustein, theater critic and artistic director of Harvard's American Repertory Theater, has criticized Wilson on the ground that "his recurrent theme is the familiar American charge of victimization"; in *Fences,* he argues, "Wilson's larger purpose depends on his conviction that Troy's potential was stunted not [by] 'his own behavior' but by centuries of racist oppression."

    Do you see the central theme of *Fences* as "the familiar American charge of victimization," or do you think another theme is more important?

Related Works: "Big Black Good Man" (p. 315), "Ex-Basketball Player" (p. 769), "Yet Do I Marvel"(p. 875), *Death of a Salesman* (p. 1262)

WRITING SUGGESTIONS: Theme

1. In an interview, writer Lorrie Moore calls *Fences* "an African American *Death of a Salesman*." What do you think she means? Do you agree? Write an essay in which you examine the two plays in light of Moore's comment.
2. Write an essay in which you analyze the baseball images in *Fences*. How do the references to baseball help to develop the play's themes?
3. One of the themes of *Fences* is the dream parents have for their children. Compare the development of this theme in *Fences* and in another play in this book—for example, *The Cuban Swimmer* (p. 1454) or *The Glass Menagerie* (p. 1891).
4. Doubt explores the grey area that exists between right and wrong, between truth and lies: Sister Aloysius questions Father Flynn's interactions with his charges; meanwhile Sister James (as well as the audience) has doubts. Do you think Sister Aloysius was right to act as she did, or do you think she should have given Father Flynn the benefit of the doubt?
5. Like *Trying to Find Chinatown*, *The Cuban Swimmer* (p. 1454) also explores elements of the characters' ethnic heritage. Compare and contrast the characters' attitudes toward their ethnicity in these two plays.

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