

[ROMAN: Look, you're very nice and all that but I really don't want to see you strip.]

(*He follows his own stage directions.*) Oh come on, I'm so good. You just sit there very still and I'll show you my routine. I don't have my music here but you can imagine it. Don't talk, just watch. Okay, first—you know, when the music just starts—I jump out and circle around like I'm looking at this really big car that needs a lot of work. You get it? Then I take my hat off and I wipe my brow, all the time a little bit swaying like this—subtle, you know, nothing faggy. Then I lift the imaginary hood and take out my wrench and start tightening things, like this. By this time it's as if I'm getting a little sweaty so I unbutton my shirt a little bit, take my hat off again and wipe my brow, real sexy. Then I take out my imaginary pump and start pumping up the car—this pumping really gets them in the audience—they go crazy—pumping my hips like this. Then suddenly, instead of doing it real slow—I whip off my shirt and throw it over my head—throwing it over my head prevents the really horny ones in the audience from ripping it to pieces—keeps my overhead down if I don't have to replace my costume. Then I dance around a bit—this part doesn't relate to the car very much but the bold ones all start running up to stick tips in my pocket around now. They love me—I guess they're all pent up and lonely or something, I don't know, someone should do a study. Anyway, then, as if I'm on one of those thing-ees on wheels, I get on the floor and act as if I'm sliding under the car to play with the carburetor or something.

[ROMAN: The carburetor's on top, under the hood.

THE MECHANIC: What? Oh yeah, well then the muffler, whatever.]

I'm down there and I'm undoing my belt and yanking off my trousers, meanwhile they're all screaming like the house is on fire. I leap up—I'm wearing my jock strap, my undershirt and athletic socks and work boots—and I start shadow boxing fast and then slow. Now I'm building up a

real sweat and the girls and the gays are throwing tens and twenties like nobody's business and I'm really going strong—the music's really loud here and I walk it around for a second so everyone can get a load of me. Then I turn around real sudden like I heard someone call my name and real slow peel off my undershirt which is good and wet: this I throw into the audience—(*The undershirt should be thrown on stage not into the actual audience.*)—everyone screams, glasses fall and I do some more of this sort of shadow boxing, get more bills stuffed this time into my jock, quickly tighten up the screws on the tires, take the ignition key, stick the key in, gas it, accelerate and Pow! Lights out. (*He collapses into a chair, using a linen napkin to wipe his sweat.*) Well, how did you like it?

Fences

August Wilson

Premiere: Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven, 1985

Setting: The yard and porch of the Maxson household in Pittsburgh, 1957–1965.

Troy Maxson 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. Troy works as a garbage collector in Pittsburgh. An ex-con with a talent for baseball, he firmly believes that he could have played in the big league if he wasn't black. Troy's younger son Cory plays high school football. He has been recruited for an athletic scholarship, but Troy will hear none of it. He refuses to believe that times might have changed for black athletes—or that his son might get something he didn't. He makes Cory quit the team for a job at the A & P. Ultimately, Troy's hardness

and pride drives a permanent wedge between father and son.

Monologue One: Troy and his work buddy Bono are sharing their payday ritual of drinking and talk on the porch. They've been talking about baseball, and Troy vents his feelings of frustration and powerlessness between slugs of alcohol. His wife Rose warns him, "You gonna drink yourself to death," and Troy starts in about Death.

Monologue Two: Troy describes his sharecropper father. "Man would sit down and eat two chickens and give you the wing." Bono says he never even knew his father: "He 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." Troy responds.

Monologue Three: Troy and Rose have been married for eighteen years, and Rose is devoted to him. Not long ago, Troy started seeing an outside woman, a "Florida gal" named Alberta. He has not confided to anyone, not even Bono—though Bono has guessed it and disapproves. Now Troy tells Rose, "I'm gonna be somebody's daddy."

Monologue Four: It is now 1965. Troy has died, and Cory comes home to visit his mother—but not to go to his father's funeral. "One time in my life I've got to say no to him. . . . Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere." (Note: Raynell is Troy's illegitimate daughter.)

1

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 marching straight at me. The middle of July, 1941. It got real cold just like to 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.]

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.]

Death, he ain't said nothing. He just stared at me. He had a thousand men to do his bidding and he wasn't going to get a thousand and one. Not then! Hell, I wasn't but thirty-seven years old. (Pause.)

Death standing there staring at me . . . carrying that sickle in his hand. Finally he say, "You want bound over for another year?" See, just like that . . . "You want bound over for another year?" I told him, "Bound over hell! Let's settle this now!" It seem like he kinda fell back when I said that, and all the cold went out of me. I reached out 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.] 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.)

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All right. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where both of us could 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, "You gonna have to find me!" I wasn't no fool. I wasn't going looking for him. Death ain't nothing to play with. And I know he's gonna get me. I know I got to join his army . . . his camp followers. But as long as I keep my strength and see him coming, as long as I keep up my vigilance, he's gonna have to fight to get me. I ain't going easy.

2

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 I tied up Greyboy and went to fooling around with Joe Canewell's daughter. We done found us a nice little spot, got real cozy with each other. She about thirteen and we done figured we was grown anyway, so we down there enjoying ourselves . . . ain't thinking about nothing. We didn't know Greyboy had got loose and wandered back to the house and my daddy was looking for me. We down there by the creek enjoying ourselves when my daddy come up on us, surprised us. He had them leather straps off the mule and commenced to whupping me like there as no tomorrow. I

by August Wilson⁸¹

jumped up, mad and embarrassed. I was scared of my daddy. When he commenced to whupping on me, quite naturally I run to get out of the way. (Pause.)

Now I thought he was mad 'cause I ain't done my work. But I see where he was chasing me off so he could have the gal for himself. When I see what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy. Right there is where I become a man . . . at fourteen years of age. (Pause.)

Now it was my turn to run him off. I picked up the 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 layed there and cried. I didn't know what I was gonna do. The only thing I knew was the time had come for me to leave my daddy's house. And right there the world suddenly got big. And it was a long time before I could cut it down to where I could handle it. Part of that cutting down was when I got to the place where I could feel him kicking in my blood and knew that the only thing that separated us was the matter of a few years.

3

ROSE

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

could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams, and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom. But I held on to you, Troy. I held you tighter. You was my husband. I owed you everything I had. Every part of me I could find to give you. And upstairs in that room, with the darkness falling in on me, I gave everything I had to try and erase the doubt that you wasn't the finest man in the world. And wherever you was going I wanted to be there with you. 'Cause you was my husband, 'cause that's the only way I was gonna survive as your wife. You always talking about what you give and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take and don't even know nobody's giving!

 4

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 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

ee, 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. After a while he didn't seem so big no more. Sometimes I'd catch him just sitting and staring at his hands, just sitting there staring like he was watching the silence eat away at them. By the time Raynell came into the house, me and your daddy had done lost touch with each other. 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. 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.

The First Breeze of Summer

Leslie Lee

Premiere: Negro Ensemble Company, New York City, 1975
 Setting: The Edwards' home in a small northeastern city.