

FENCES

August Wilson

CHARACTERS

TROY MAXSON

BOBO, Troy's friend

ROSE, Troy's wife

LYONEL, Troy's oldest son by previous marriage

GABRIEL, Troy's brother

CORY, Troy and Rose's son

MAYNELL, Troy's daughter

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

—AUGUST WILSON

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 built 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 one, 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 old drums serve as garbage receptacles, and sit near the house at right to complete the setting.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

It is 1957. TROY and BOBO 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, BOBO 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 BOBO seeks to emulate.

On Friday nights, Sundays, and the one night of the week the two men engage in a ritual of talk and drink. TROY is usually the man who initiates and at times he can be crude and almost vulgar, though he is capable of rising to profound heights of expression. The men carry their buckets and wear or carry barrels around and are dressed in ways suitable to their jobs as garbage collectors.

BOBO: Troy, you ought to stop that lying!

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

THE PLAY: Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprung on the city with anxious claws and an hunger and solid dream. The city devoured them. They swelled its belly until it burst into a thousand furnaces and crating machines, a thousand butcher shops and habers' rooms, a thousand churches and hospitals and financial parlors and moneylenders. The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his goals, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and soon 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, non-shackles houses made of sticks and tar-paper. They collected rags and wood. They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes, and in quiet desperation and wretched 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.

(He indicates with his hands.)

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

BOBO: 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.

BOBO: 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?

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

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

BOBO: 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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K Morrison



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