

yourself. You're a day late and a dollar short when it comes to an understanding with me.

TROY. It's just ... She gives me a different idea ... a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems ... be a different man. I ain't got to wonder how I'm gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain't never been.

ROSE. What I want to know ... is do you plan to continue seeing her? That's all you can say to me.

TROY. I can sit up in her house and laugh. Do you understand what I'm saying. I can laugh out loud ... and it feels good. It reaches all the way down to the bottom of my shoes. *(Pause.)* Rose, I can't give that up.

ROSE. Maybe you ought to go on and stay down there with her ... if she a better woman than me.

TROY. It ain't about nobody being a better woman or nothing. Rose, you ain't the blame. A man couldn't ask for no woman to be a better wife than you've been. I'm responsible for it. I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself.

ROSE. What the hell was I there for? That was my job, not somebody else's.

TROY. Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent ... to live a clean ... hard ... useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But ... you born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely ... always looking for the curve-ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. If you going down ... you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a 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 waited and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom, and it

Start |

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!

TEND

(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.)* 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.)

ROSE. 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.)*

ACT II

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.

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.