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*Samuel French Acting Edition*

# Joe Turner's Come and Gone

*by* August Wilson



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*Joe Turner's Come and Gone* opened on April 29, 1986 at the Yale Repertory Theatre, Lloyd Richards, Artistic Director, Benjamin Mordecai, Managing Director, in New Haven, Connecticut, with the following cast:

SETH HOLLY.....Mel Winkler  
BERTHA HOLLY.....L. Scott Caldwell  
BYNUM WALKER.....Ed Hall  
RUTHERFORD SELIG.....Raynor Scheine  
JEREMY FURLOW.....Bo Rucker  
HERALD LOOMIS.....Charles S. Dutton  
ZONIA LOOMIS.....Cristal Coleman  
and LaJara Henderson at alternate  
performances  
MATTIE CAMPBELL..Kimberleigh Burroughs  
REUBEN MERCER.....Casey Lydell Badger  
and LaMar James Fedrick at alternate  
performances  
MOLLY CUNNINGHAM.....Kimberly Scott  
MARTHA PENTECOST.....Angela Bassett

Director: Lloyd Richards  
Set Design: Scott Bradley  
Costume Design: Pamela Peterson  
Lighting Design: Michael Gianiti  
Musical Direction: Dwight Andrews  
Sound Design: Matthew Wiener  
Production Stage Manager: Margaret Adair  
Stage Manager: Ethan Ruber  
Casting: Meg Simon/Fran Kumin

The Yale Repertory Theatre production of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* opened on October 2, 1987 at the Arena Stage, Zelda Fichandler, Producing Director, William Stewart, Managing Director, Douglas C. Wager, Associate Producing Director, in Washington, D.C., with the following cast:

SETH HOLLY.....Mel Winkler  
BERTHA HOLLY.....L. Scott Caldwell  
BYNUM WALKER.....Ed Hall  
RUTHERFORD SELIG.....Raynor Scheine  
JEREMY FURLOW.....Bo Rucker  
HERALD LOOMIS.....Delroy Lindo  
ZONIA LOOMIS.....Kippen Hay and  
Kellie S. Williams at alternate performances  
MATTIE CAMPBELL.....Kimberleigh Aarn  
REUBEN MERCER.....LaFontaine Oliver  
and Vincent Prevost at alternate  
performances  
MOLLY CUNNINGHAM.....Kimberly Scott  
MARTHA PENTECOST.....Angela Bassett

Director: Lloyd Richards  
Set Design: Scott Bradley  
Costume Design: Pamela Peterson  
Lighting Design: Michael Gianiti  
Musical Direction: Dwight Andrews  
Stage Manager: Karen L. Carpenter  
Casting Consultants: Meg Simon/Fran Kumin

*Joe Turner's Come and Gone* opened on March 27, 1988, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway in New York City, with the following cast:

SETH HOLLY.....Mel Winkler  
BERTHA HOLLY.....L. Scott Caldwell  
BYNUM WALKER.....Ed Hall  
RUTHERFORD SELIG.....Raynor Scheine  
JEREMY FURLOW.....Bo Rucker  
HERALD LOOMIS.....Delroy Lindo  
ZONIA LOOMIS.....Jamilla Perry  
MATTIE CAMPBELL.....Kimberleigh Aarn  
REUBEN MERCER.....Richard Habersham  
MOLLY CUNNINGHAM.....Kimberly Scott  
MARTHA PENTECOST.....Angela Bassett

Producers: Elliot Martin, Vy Higgensen, Ken Wydro

Director: Lloyd Richards

Musical Director: Dwight Andrews

Costume Designer: Pam Peterson

Lighting Designer: Michael Gianiti

Scenic Designer: Scott Bradley

Production Stage Manager: Karen L. Carpenter

Assistant Stage Manager: Elliott Woodruff

General Manager: Steve Goldstein, Joseph Harris Associates

Press Representative: Jeff Richards Associates

Casting: Simon & Kumin

## **CHARACTERS**

(in order of appearance)

SETH HOLLY – owner of the boarding house  
BERTHA HOLLY – his wife  
BYNUM WALKER – a root worker  
RUTHERFORD SELIG – a peddler  
JEREMY FURLOW – a resident  
HERALD LOOMIS – a resident  
ZONIA LOOMIS – his daughter  
MATTIE CAMPBELL – a resident  
REUBEN MERCER – a boy who lives next door  
MOLLY CUNNINGHAM – a resident  
MARTHA LOOMIS – Herald Loomis's wife

## THE PLAY

It is August in Pittsburgh, 1911. The sun falls out of heaven like a stone. The fires of the steel mill rage with a combined sense of industry and progress. Barges loaded with coal and iron ore trudge up the river to the mill towns that dot the Monongahela and return with fresh, hard, gleaming steel. The city flexes its muscles. Men throw countless bridges across the rivers, lay roads and carve tunnels through the hills sprouting with houses.

From the deep and near South the sons and daughters of newly freed African slaves wander into the city. Isolated, cut off from memory, having forgotten the names of the gods and only guessing at their faces, they arrive dazed and stunned, their hearts kicking in their chest with a song worth singing. They arrive carrying Bibles and guitars, their pockets lined with dust and fresh hope, marked men and women seeking to scrape from the narrow crooked cobbles and the fiery blasts of the coke furnace a way of bludgeoning and shaping the malleable parts of themselves into a new identity as free men of definite and sincere worth.

Foreigners in a strange land, they carry as part and parcel of their baggage a long line of

separation and dispersement which informs their sensibilities and marks their conduct as they search for ways to reconnect, to reassemble, to give clear and luminous meaning to the song which is both a wail and a whelp of joy.

## SET

August, 1911. A boarding house in Pittsburgh. At right is a kitchen. On the right side of the kitchen is a sink with running water and a drainboard, and an icebox. A window over the icebox looks out onto the porch. Between the window and the porch door is a hook for hats. The upstage wall of the kitchen is dominated by a large fireplace with a mantle. In the fireplace is a coal stove with an oven and six burners. On the stove is a pot of coffee, a pan of grits, and a saucepan of gravy. In the oven is a pan of biscuits. A shelf over the stove holds hot pads, serving utensils, salt and pepper shakers, butter dish and sugar bowl. To the right of the stove is a small table for preparing biscuits; to the left is a small table (upstage center), which holds all of the dishes, napkins, and utensils for serving food. In the center of the kitchen is a long dining table, surrounded by five pressback wooden chairs on the stage right, left, and upstage sides. A long bench for additional seating is placed downstage of the kitchen table. A long gas fixture with a lamp at either end hangs over the table.

Two doors open off the kitchen. The stage right door leads to a small porch with a railing and steps leading down to the yard. The upstage right door leads to SETH's and BERTHA's bedroom. An archway upstage center leads into the kitchen

pantry directly upstage and the hallway towards stage left; another archway with a sliding door is center stage and connects the kitchen and the parlor. The sliding door is closed.

At left is the parlor. The parlor is furnished with a round table draped with a decorative cloth at center, surrounded by a love seat on the stage left side, an upholstered arm chair upstage, and side chair stage right of it. A gas lamp hangs over the table. There is a large shuttered window in the stage left wall above the love seat, and a rooms-to-let sign hangs in it.

A large archway leads from the upstage of the parlor into the front hall foyer. The front door upstage left opens into the front hall which gives access to the parlor and the stairs leading to the upstairs rooms. In this hallway upstage of the center arch is a mirrored sideboard, with hooks for hats and coats.

There is a stone pathway leading from the porch steps stage right to the cellar door, downstage center. Offstage, down right leads to the outhouse and vegetable garden, and upstage right leads to SETH's workshop. The house is framed by a wooden fence upstage, on either side of the house, and over the house is the skyline of Pittsburgh: factories, smokestacks, and a train trestle bridge.

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*SOUND: musical montage fades up: children singing and clapping in time in the yard, stage right; cross fades to a guitarist and a harmonica player making music in front of the house, stage left; cross fades to BYNUM singing "They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone ..." from both sides of the stage. At end of second verse, LIGHTS: fade to black with SOUND: train whistle sounds from the distance stage left. Train approaches, crosses trestle bridge over stage, and fades into the distance stage right as LIGHTS: fade up on the kitchen. BERTHA enters from the pantry with a stack of plates, crosses to the upstage center table and puts them down. She busies herself with breakfast preparation. SETH enters stage left, looking back over his shoulder toward the yard. He laughs, shakes his head and enters the kitchen through the porch door. SETH is in his early fifties. Born of Northern free parents, a skilled craftsman and owner of the boardinghouse, he has a stability and completeness that none of the other characters have. BERTHA is five years his junior. Married for over twenty-five years, she has learned how to negotiate around SETH's apparent orneries.*

SETH. (At the window, laughing.) If that ain't the damnest thing I seen. Look here, Bertha.

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BERTHA. I done seen Bynum out there with them pigeons before.

SETH. Naw ... naw ... look at this. That pigeon flopped out of Bynum's hand and he about to have a fit.

*(BERTHA crosses over to the window. SETH stands above her and points out to the yard.)*

SETH. He down there on his hands and knees behind that bush looking all over for that pigeon and it on the other side of the yard. See it over there?

*(BERTHA moves away toward the stove. SETH stops her and gives her a kiss on the cheek.)*

BERTHA. Comeon and get your breakfast and leave that man alone. *(Crosses to the stove, stirs the grits and gravy, and picks up the butter dish from the shelf over the stove.)*

SETH. *(Drawn back to the window, looks offstage right.)* Look at him ... he still looking. He ain't seen it yet. *(He hangs his hat on the hook over the icebox, puts his lunch pail and work gloves down on the icebox.)* All that old mumbo jumbo nonsense. I don't know why I put up with it.

BERTHA. *(Sets the butter dish center on the kitchen table.)* You don't say nothing when he bless the house.

*(SETH picks up the salt and pepper shakers from the shelf over the stove, puts them down at the center of the kitchen table.)*

SETH. I just go along with that cause of you. You around here sprinkling salt all over the place ... got pennies lines up across the threshold ... all that heebie-jeebie stuff. I just put up with that cause of you. I don't pay that kind of stuff no mind. But you going down there to the church and wanna come home and sprinkle salt all over the place. *(Goes back to the window, looks out offstage right.)*

BERTHA. *(Picks up the salt shaker, shakes some salt into her left hand.)* It don't hurt none. I can't say if it help ... *(Throws salt over her right shoulder.)* but it don't hurt none.

*(BERTHA picks up hot pads, opens oven door, and tests biscuits with finger.)*

SETH. Look at him. He done found that pigeon and now he's talking to it.

BERTHA. These biscuits be ready in a minute.

*(BERTHA closes oven door, rises, puts hot pads down on stove shelf.)*

SETH. He done drew a big circle with that stick and now he's dancing around. I know he'd better not ...

*(SETH bolts from the window, rushes to the back door, and steps out onto the porch.)*

SETH. Hey Bynum! Don't be hopping around stepping on my vegetables. Hey Bynum ... Watch where you stepping!

BERTHA. *(Turns to him.)* Seth, leave that man alone.

SETH. (*Steps back into kitchen, closes porch door, turns to her.*) I don't care how much he be dancing around ... just don't be stepping in my vegetables. Man got my garden all messed up now ... planting them weeds out there ... burying them pigeons and whatnot.

BERTHA. (*Picks up sugar bowl from shelf over stove, sets at center of kitchen table.*) Bynum don't bother nobody. He ain't even thinking about your vegetables.

SETH. I know he ain't! That's why he out there stepping on them. (*Washes his hands at the kitchen sink.*)

BERTHA. What Mr. Johnson say down there?

SETH. I told him if I had the tools I could go out here and find me four or five fellows and open up my own shop instead of working for Mr. Olowski. Get me four or five fellows and teach them how to make pots and pans. One man making ten pots is five men making fifty. (*Dries hands on towel over sink.*) He told me he'd think about it.

BERTHA. Well maybe he'll come to see it your way.

SETH. (*Stops drying hands, turns to her.*) He wanted me to sign over the house to him. You know what I thought of that idea.

BERTHA. He'll come to see you're right.

(*BERTHA picks up the hot pads, opens the oven and takes out a pan of biscuits. She puts the pan down on the stove burner and dishes up SETH's breakfast.*)

SETH. I'm going up and talk to Sam Green. There's more than one way to skin a cat. I'm going up and talk to him. See if he got more sense than Mr. Johnson. I can't get nowhere working for Mr. Olowski and selling Selig five or six pots on the side. I'm going up and see Sam Green. See if he loan me the money. (*He crosses back to*

*the window.*) Now he got that cup. He done killed that pigeon and now he's putting its blood in that little cup. I believe he drink that blood.

BERTHA. (*Sets his breakfast on the kitchen table at the stage right place.*) Seth Holly, what is wrong with you this morning. Comeon and get your breakfast so you can go to bed. You know Bynum don't be drinking no pigeon blood.

SETH. (*Rises, and turns to her.*) I don't know what he do.

BERTHA. Well watch him then. He's gonna dig a little hole and bury that pigeon. Thern he's gonna pray over that blood ... pour it on top ... mark out his circle and come on into the house.

(*BERTHA goes back to the stove and picks up the coffee pot. SETH turns back, looks out the window.*)

SETH. That's what he doing ... he pouring that blood on top.

BERTHA. (*Pours SETH's coffee at the kitchen table.*) When they gonna put you back working daytime. Told me two months ago he was gonna put you back working daytime.

SETH. (*Sits in the stage right kitchen chair, unrolls his utensils from the napkin.*) That's what Mr. Olowski told me. I got to wait till he say when. He tell me what to do. I don't tell him. Drive me crazy to speculate on the man's wishes when he don't know what he want to do himself.

BERTHA. Well, I wish he go ahead and put you back working daytime. This working all hours of the night don't make no sense. (*Puts the coffee pot back on the stove.*)

SETH. (*Butters biscuit.*) It don't make no sense for that boy to run out of of here and get drunk so they lock him up either.

BERTHA. (*Turns to him.*) Who? Who they got locked up for being drunk?

SETH. That boy that's staying upstairs ... Jeremy. I stopped down there on Logan Street on my way home from work and one of the fellows told me about it. Say he seen it when they arrested him.

BERTHA. I was wondering why I ain't seen him this morning.

SETH. You know I don't put up with that. I told him when he came ...

(*BYNUM enters from the yard through the porch door, carrying his basket of weeds. He puts the basket down at his place on the kitchen table, upstage left, and continues into the hallway. He hangs his hat on the hook at the sideboard. BERTHA picks up a place setting for him. BYNUM is in his early sixties, a conjure man, or rootworker, and gives the impression of always being in control of everything. Nothing ever bothers him. He seems to be lost in a world of his own making and to swallow any adversity or interference with his grand design.*)

SETH. What you doing bringing them weeds in my house? Out there stepping on my vegetables and now wanna carry them weeds in my house.

BYNUM. (*Crosses to the sink and washes his hands.*) Morning, Seth. Morning, Sister Bertha.

*(BERTHA distastefully picks up BYNUM's basket, places it on the floor at the upstage left corner of the kitchen. She picks up a place setting for BYNUM.)*

SETH. Messing up my garden growing them things out there. I ought to go out there and pull up all them weeds.

BERTHA. *(Crosses to the upstage left place, puts down place setting.)* Some gal was by here this morning, Bynum. You was out there in the yard ... I told her to come back later. *(Picks up spatula, dishes up a biscuit for BYNUM.)*

BYNUM. *(To SETH.)* You look sick. What's the matter, you ain't eating right? *(Sits at the upstage left chair.)*

SETH. What if I was sick? You ain't getting near me with none of that stuff.

*(BERTHA sets a plate with a biscuit on the table in front of BYNUM.)*

BYNUM. My ... my ... Bertha, your biscuits getting fatter and fatter.

*(BERTHA smiles, crosses to stove, picks up coffee pot. BYNUM begins to eat the biscuit.)*

BYNUM. Where Jeremy? I don't see him around this morning. He usually be around riffing and raffing on Saturday morning.

*(BERTHA pours BYNUM's coffee at the kitchen table.)*

SETH. I know where he at. I know just where he at. They got him down there in the jail. Getting drunk and acting a fool. He down there where he belong with all that foolishness.

*(BERTHA puts the coffee pot down on the stove, the hot pads on the stove shelf. She cleans up the flour, and biscuit makings from the upstage right table.)*

BYNUM. Mr. Piney's boys got him, huh? They ain't gonna do nothing but hold on to him for a little while. He's gonna be back here hungrier than a mule directly.

SETH. I don't go for all that carrying on and such. This is a respectable house. I don't have no drunkards or fools around here.

BYNUM. That boy got a lot of country in him. He ain't been up here but two weeks. It's gonna take awhile before he can work that country out of him.

*(BERTHA takes the flour cannister and baking powder tin to the pantry cupboard. She puts them away, and then sorts through her mending basket on the pantry shelf.)*

SETH. These niggers coming up here with that old backward country style of living. It's hard enough now without all that ignorant kind of acting. Ever since slavery got over with there ain't been nothing but foolish acting niggers. Word get out they need men to work in the mill and put in these roads ... and niggers drop everything and head North looking for freedom. They don't know the white fellows looking too. White fellows coming from all over the world. White fellow come over and in six months got more that what I got. But these niggers keep on

coming. Walking ... riding ... carrying their Bibles. That boy done carried a guitar all the way from North Carolina. What he gonna find out? What he gonna do with that guitar? This is the city.

*(RUTHERFORD SELIG knocks on the porch door. SETH goes to answer the door.)*

SETH. Niggers coming up from the backwoods ... coming up here from the country carrying Bibles and guitars looking for freedom. They got a rude awakening. *(Opens the door.)* Ho! Forgot you was coming today. Comeon in.

*(RUTHERFORD SELIG enters the kitchen, past SETH. About SETH's age, he is a thin white man with greasy hair. As a peddler, he supplies SETH with the new materials to make pots and pans which he then peddles door to door in the mill towns along the river. He keeps a list of his customers as they move about and is known in the various communities as the People Finder. He carries squares of sheet metal under his arm.)*

BYNUM. If it ain't Rutherford Selig ... the People Finder himself.

SELIG. What say there, Bynum?

BYNUM. I say about my shiny man. You got to tell me something. I done give you my dollar ... I'm looking to get a report.

SELIG. *(Turns to SETH, hands him the sheet metal squares.)* I got eight here, Seth.

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SETH. (*Takes the sheet metal.*) What is this? (*Inspects the metal, flexing it.*) What you giving me here? What I'm gonna do with this?

SELIG. I need some dustpans. Everybody asking me about dustpans.

SETH. Gonna cost you fifteen cents apiece. And ten cents to put a handle on them.

SELIG. I'll give you twenty cents apiece with the handles.

SETH. Alright. But I ain't gonna give you but fifteen cents for the sheet metal.

SELIG. It's twenty-five cents apiece for the metal. That's what we agreed on.

SETH. (*Holds the sheet metal out to SELIG.*) This low grade sheet metal. They ain't worth but a dime. I'm doing you a favor giving you fifteen cents. (*Becoming more argumentative.*) You know this metal ain't worth no twenty-five cents. Don't come talking that twenty-five cents stuff to me over no low grade sheet metal.

SETH. Alright, fifteen cents apiece. Just make me some dustpans out of them.

(*SETH exits with the sheet metal out the porch door, towards his workshop. BERTHA enters the kitchen, crosses to the upstage center table.*)

BERTHA. Sit on down there, Selig. Get you a cup of coffee and a biscuit.

(*SELIG puts his hat down on the kitchen table, sits in the upstage right chair. BERTHA picks up a place setting for SELIG.*)

BYNUM. Where you coming from this time?

*(BERTHA puts down SELIG's setting in front of him on the kitchen table, distastefully picks up his hat and hangs it on the back of the upstage center chair.)*

SELIG. I been upriver. All along the Monongahela. Past Rankin and all up around Little Washington.

*(BERTHA gets the coffee pot from the stove and pours SELIG's coffee at the kitchen table.)*

BYNUM. Did you find anybody?

SELIG. I found Sadie Jackson up in Braddock. Her mother's staying down there in Scotchbottom say she hadn't heard from her and she didn't know where she was at. I found her up in Braddock on Enoch Street. She bought a frying pan from me.

*(BERTHA puts the coffee pot down on the stove, dishes up a biscuit for SELIG.)*

BYNUM. You around here finding everybody how come you ain't found my shiny man.

SELIG. The only shiny man I saw was the nigras working on the road gang with the sweat glistening on them.

BYNUM. Naw, you'd be able to tell this fellow. He shine like new money.

SELIG. Well, I done told you I can't find nobody without a name.

BERTHA. *(Puts the plate with the biscuit down in front of SELIG.)* Here go one of these hot biscuits, Selig.

*(SELIG slices his biscuit, puts a pat of butter inside, folds it up in his handkerchief, and puts it in his pocket.)*

BYNUM. This fellow don't have no name. I call him John cause it was up around Johnstown where I seen him. I ain't even so sure he's one special fellow. That shine could pass on to anybody. He could be anybody shining.

SELIG. Well, what's he look like beside being shiny. There's lots of shiny nigras.

*(SELIG takes his pipe out of his pocket, lights it, and looks around for a place to put the match. BERTHA picks up an ashtray from the stove shelf, and puts it down in front of SELIG. He places the match in it. She picks up the mixing bowl from the upstage right table and takes it to the sink.)*

BYNUM. He's just a man I seen out on the road. He ain't had no special look. Just a man walking toward me on the road. He come up and asked me which way the road went. I told him everything I knew about the road, where it went and all, and he asked me did I have anything to eat 'cause he was hungry. Say he ain't had nothing to eat in three days. Well, I never be out there on the road without a piece of dried meat. Or an orange or an apple. So I give this fellow an orange. He take and eat that orange and told me to come and go along the road a little ways with him, that he had something he wanted to show me. He had a look about him made me wanna go with him, see what he gonna show me.

We walked on a bit and it's getting kind of far from where I met him when it come up on me all of a sudden,

we wasn't going the way he had come from, we was going back my way. Since he said he ain't knew nothing about the road, I asked him about this. He say he had a voice inside him telling him which way to go and if I come and go along with him he was gonna show me the Secret of Life. Quite naturally I followed him. A fellow that's gonna show you the Secret of Life ain't to be taken lightly. We get near this bend in the road...

*(SETH enters with an assortment of pots, crosses to SELIG.)*

SETH. I got six here, Selig.

SELIG. Wait a minute, Seth. Bynum's telling me about the secret of life. Go ahead Bynum, I wanna hear this.

BYNUM. We get near this bend in the road and he told me to hold out my hands. Then he rubbed them together with his and I look down and see they had blood on them ...

*(SETH drops the pots loudly on the kitchen floor and exits out the porch door.)*

BYNUM. I look down and see they had blood on them. Told me to take and rub it all over me, say that was a way of cleaning myself. Then we went around the bend in that road. Got around that bend and it seem like all of a sudden we ain't in the same place. Turn around that bend and everything look like it was twice as big as it was. The trees and everything bigger than life. Sparrows big as eagles. I turned around to look at this fellow and he had this light coming out of him. I had to cover up my eyes to

keep from being blinded. He shining like new money with that light. He shined until all the light seemed like it seeped out of him and then he was gone and I was by myself in this strange place where everything was bigger than life.

I wandered around there looking for that road, trying to find my way back from this big place, and I looked over and seen my daddy standing there. He was the same size he always was, except for his hands and his mouth. He had a great big old mouth that looked like it took up his whole face and his hands were as big as hams. Look like they was too big to carry around. My daddy called me to him. Said he had been thinking about me and it grieved him to see me in the world carrying other people's songs and not having one of my own. Told me he was gonna show me how to find my song. Then he carried me further into this big place until we come to this ocean. Then he showed me something I ain't got words to tell you. If you stand to witness it, you done seen something there. I stayed in that place awhile and my daddy taught me the meaning of this thing that I had seen and showed me how to find my song. I asked him about the shiny man and he tole me he was the One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way. Say there was lots of shiny men and if I ever saw one again before I died that I would know that my song had been accepted and worked its full power in the world and I could lay down and die a happy man. A man who done left his mark on life. On the way people cling to each other out of the truth they find in themselves. Then he showed me how to get back to the road. I came out to where everything was its own size and I had my song. I had the Binding Song. I choose that song because that's what I seen most when I was traveling

... people walking away and leaving one another. So I takes the power of my song and binds them together.

*(SETH enters from the yard carrying a burlap sack full of cabbages and tomatoes.)*

BYNUM. Been binding people ever since. That's why they call me Bynum. Just like glue I sticks people together.

*(BERTHA laughs, turns to the sink, and starts to wash the dishes.)*

SETH. Maybe they ain't supposed to be stuck sometimes. You ever think of that?

BERTHA. Oh, I don't do it lightly. It costs me a piece of myself everytime I do. I'm a Binder of What Clings. You got to find out if they cling first. You can't bind what don't cling.

SELIG. Well, how is that the Secret of Life? I thought you said he was gonna show you the secret of life.

BYNUM. Oh, he showed me alright. But you still got to figure it out. Can't nobody figure it out for you. You got to come to it on your own. That's why I'm looking for the shiny man.

SELIG. *(Rises, turns to SETH.)* Well, I'll keep my eye out for him. What you got there, Seth.

SETH. *(Hands him the burlap bag.)* Here go some cabbage and tomatoes. I got some greenbeans coming in real nice. I'm gonna take and start me a grapevine out there next year. Butera say he gonna give me a piece of his vine and I'm gonna start that out there.

SELIG. (*Takes his money out of his shoulder bag to pay SETH.*) How many of them pots you got?

SETH. (*Picks up pots from floor.*) I got six. (*Rapidly.*) That's six dollars minus eight on top of fifteen for the sheet metal come to a dollar twenty out the six dollars leave me four dollars and eighty cents.

SELIG. (*Unable to keep up with him, counts out the money and hands it to SETH.*) There's four dollars ... and ... eighty cents.

SETH. (*Hands pots to SELIG.*) How many of them dustpans you want?

SELIG. (*Puts leftover bills and coins in shoulder bag.*) As many as you can make out them sheets.

SETH. You can use that many? I get to cutting on them sheets figuring how to make them dustpans ... ain't no telling how many I'm liable to come up with.

SELIG. I can use them and you can make me some more next time.

SETH. (*Pockets money.*) Alright, I'm gonna hold you to that now.

SELIG. (*Crosses to porch door.*) Thanks for the biscuit, Bertha.

BERTHA. You know you welcome anytime, Selig.

SETH. Which way you heading?

SELIG. (*Turns back to SETH.*) Going down to Wheeling. All through West Virginia there. I'll be back Saturday. They putting in new roads down that way. Makes traveling easier.

SETH. That's what I hear. All around here too. Got a fellow staying here working on that road by the Brady Street Bridge.

SELIG. Yeah, it's gonna make traveling real nice. Thanks for the cabbage, Seth. I'll see you on Saturday.

*(Exits with pots and burlap sack, closes porch door as he goes.)*

SETH. *(Turns to BYNUM.)* Why you wanna start all that nonsense talk with that man? All that shiny man nonsense.

BYNUM. You know it ain't no nonsense. Bertha know it ain't no nonsense. I don't know if Selig know or not.

*(SETH crosses to stage right chair, sits fuming. BERTHA dries dishes.)*

BERTHA. *(Turns to SETH.)* Seth, when you get to making them dustpans ... make me a coffee pot.

SETH. What's the matter with your coffee? Ain't nothing wrong with your coffee. Don't she make some good coffee, Bynum?

BYNUM. I ain't worried about the coffee. I know she makes some good biscuits.

SETH. I ain't studying no coffee pot, woman. You heard me tell the man I was gonna cut as many dustpans as them sheets will make ... and all of a sudden you want a coffee pot.

BERTHA. *(Crosses to the pantry to put away the mixing bowl.)* Man, hush up and go on and make me that coffee pot.

*(SETH laughs. JEREMY enters the kitchen through the porch door. About twenty-five, he gives the impression that he has the world in his hand, that he can meet life's challenges head on. He smiles a lot. He is a proficient guitar player, though his spirit has yet to be molded into song.)*

BYNUM. I hear Mr. Piney's boys had you.

JEREMY. Fined me two dollars for nothing! Ain't done nothing.

SETH. (*Angrily.*) I told you when you come on here everybody know my house. Know these is respectable quarters. I don't put up with no foolishness. Everybody know Seth Holly keep a good house. Was my daddy's house. This house been a decent house for a long time.

JEREMY. I ain't done nothing, Mr. Seth. I stopped by the Workmens Club and got me a bottle, me and Roper Lee from Alabama.

(*BERTHA comes in to the kitchen, JEREMY takes his cap off when he sees her.*)

JEREMY. Had us a half pint. We was fixing to cut that half in two when they come up on us. Asked us if we was working. We told them we was putting in the road over yonder and that it was our payday. They snatched hold of us to get that two dollars. Me and Roper Lee ain't even had a chance to take a drink when they grabbed us. (*Goes to the sink and washes his hands.*)

SETH. I don't go for all that kind of carrying on.

BERTHA. Leave the boy alone, Seth. You know the police do that. Figure there's too many people out on the street they take some of them off. You know that.

SETH. I ain't gonna have folks talking.

BERTHA. Ain't nobody talking nothing. That's all in your head. You want some grits and biscuits, Jeremy?

JEREMY. Thank you, Miss Bertha.

(*BERTHA dishes up JEREMY's breakfast.*)

JEREMY. They didn't give us a thing to eat last night. I'll take one of them big bowls if you don't mind.

*(There is a knock at the door. BYNUM sings "They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone ..." SETH goes to answer it. BERTHA sets JEREMY's breakfast downstage right on the kitchen table. He sits down at the stage right end of the bench and begins to eat voraciously. BERTHA pours JEREMY's coffee. As LOOMIS speaks, BYNUM stops singing.)*

LOOMIS. Me and my daughter looking for a place to stay, Mister.

*(HERALD LOOMIS steps over the threshold. He wears a long wool deacon's overcoat and a hat pulled down over his forehead. LOOMIS is thirty-two years old. He is at times possessed. A man driven not by the hell hounds that seemingly bay at his heels, but by his search for a world that speaks to something about himself. He is unable to harmonize the forces that swirl around him, and seeks to recreate the world into one thing that contains his image.)*

LOOMIS. You got a sign say you got rooms.

*(SETH stares at LOOMIS, sizing him up.)*

LOOMIS. Mister if you ain't got no rooms we can go somewhere else.

SETH. *(Suspiciously.)* How long you plan on staying?

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LOOMIS. Don't know. Two weeks or more maybe.

SETH. (*Reluctantly.*) It's two dollars a week for the room. We serve meals twice a day. It's two dollars for room and board. Pay up in advance.

(*LOOMIS brings ZONIA, his eleven-year-old daughter, over the threshold downstage of him. She is dressed neatly although her clothes are too small for her, and wears a battered straw hat. ZONIA carries a bundle. LOOMIS reaches into this pocket.*)

SETH. It's a dollar extra for the girl.

(*BERTHA goes to the sliding door and opens it.*)

LOOMIS. The girl sleep in the same room.

SETH. Well, do she eat off the same plate? We serve meals twice a day. That's a dollar extra for the food.

LOOMIS. Ain't got no extra dollar.

(*LOOMIS sees BERTHA, and brings ZONIA forward to stand in front of him. He puts his hands on her shoulders.*)

LOOMIS. I was planning on asking your Missus if she could help out with the cooking and cleaning and whatnot.

SETH. (*Unrelenting.*) Her helping out don't put no food on the table. I need that dollar to buy some food.

LOOMIS. I'll give you fifty cents more. She don't eat much.

SETH. Okay ... but fifty cents don't buy but half a portion.

BERTHA. (*Admonishes him.*) Seth, she can help me out. Let her help me out. I can use some help.

SETH. (*Unwillingly.*) Well, that's two dollars for the week. Pay up in advance. Saturday to Saturday. You wanna stay on then its two more come Saturday.

(*LOOMIS pays SETH the money. SETH crosses to the kitchen through the hallway. BERTHA backs into the kitchen to below the stove. LOOMIS follows her, leading ZONIA by the hand, and stops at center stage.*)

BERTHA. My name's Bertha.

(*SETH enters the kitchen, stands near the upstage right table.*)

BERTHA. That's my husband, Seth. (*Gestures to BYNUM and JEREMY in turn.*) You got Bynum and Jeremy over there.

LOOMIS. Ain't nobody else live here?

BERTHA. They the only ones live here now. People come and go. They the only ones here now. (*Kindly, to ZONIA.*) You want a cup of coffee and a biscuit?

(*ZONIA smiles.*)

LOOMIS. (*Steps between ZONIA and BERTHA, pulls ZONIA behind him.*) We done ate this morning.

BYNUM. Where you coming from, mister ... I didn't get your name.

LOOMIS. Name's Herald Loomis (*Brings ZONIA forward.*) This is my daughter, Zonia.

BYNUM. (*Insistently.*) Where you coming from?

LOOMIS. Come from all over. Whichever way the road takes us that's the way we go.

JEREMY. If you looking for a job, I'm working putting in that road down there by the bridge. They can't get enough mens. Always looking to take somebody on.

LOOMIS. I'm looking for a woman named Martha Loomis. That's my wife. Got married legal with the papers and all.

SETH. I don't know nobody named Loomis. I know some Marthas but I don't know no Loomis.

BYNUM. You got to see Rutherford Selig if you wanna find somebody. Selig's the People Finder. Rutherford Selig's a First Class People Finder.

JEREMY. (*Unsure.*) I don't know. I might have seen her.

BYNUM. You got to see Rutherford Selig. You give him one dollar to get her name on his list ... and after she get her name on his list Rutherford Selig will go right on out there and find her. I got him looking for somebody for me.

LOOMIS. You say he find people. How you find him?

BYNUM. You just missed him. He's gone down river now. You got to wait till Saturday. He's gone down river with his pots and pans. He come to see Seth on Saturdays. You got to wait till then.

SETH. Comeon, I'll show you to your room.

(*SETH starts down the hallway and goes up the stairs. LOOMIS hesitates and then follows him, leading ZONIA by the hand. BERTHA crosses quickly to the sliding door and waves to ZONIA as she gets to the stair landing. ZONIA shyly waves back. They exit up*

*the stairs as BERTHA closes the sliding door, and laughs.)*

JEREMY. (*Sits in SETH's chair.*) Miss Bertha, I'll take that biscuit you was gonna give that fellow, if you don't mind.

(*BERTHA goes to stove and picks up biscuit with spatula.*)

JEREMY. Say Mr. Bynum, they got somebody like that around here sure enough? Somebody what find people?

(*JEREMY picks up SETH's leftover biscuit. BERTHA brings the fresh biscuit to the table and puts it on JEREMY's plate. She slaps his hand holding SETH's biscuit. He drops it. BERTHA clears SETH's breakfast dishes to the sink. JEREMY moves his plate to him and eats the fresh biscuit.*)

BYNUM. Rutherford Selig. He go around selling his pots and pans and every house he come to he write down the name and address of whoever lives there. So if you looking for somebody, quite naturally you go and see him ... cause he's the only one who know where everybody live at.

JEREMY. I ought to have him look for this old gal I used to know. It be nice to see her again.

BERTHA. (*Stacks SELIG's dishes.*) Jeremy, today's the day for you to pull them sheets off the bed and set them outside your door. I'll set you out some clean ones. (*Clears dishes to the sink and washes them.*)

BYNUM. Mr. Piney's boys done ruined your good time last night, Jeremy ... what you planning for tonight?

JEREMY. They got me scared to go out, Mr. Bynum. They might grab me again.

BYNUM. You ought to take your guitar and go down to Seefus. Seefus got a gambling place down there on Wylie Avenue. You ought to take your guitar and go down there. They got guitar contest down there.

JEREMY. I don't play no contest, Mr. Bynum. Had one of them white fellows cure me of that. I ain't been nowhere near a contest since.

BYNUM. White fellow beat you playing guitar?

JEREMY. Naw, he ain't beat me. I was sitting at home just fixing to sit down and eat when somebody come up to my house and got me. Told me there's a white fellow say he was gonna give a prize to the best guitar player he could find. I take up my guitar and go down there and somebody had gone up and got Bobo Smith and brought him down there. Him and another fellow called Hooter. Old Hooter couldn't play no guitar, he do more hollering than playing, but Bobo could go at it awhile.

This fellow standing there say he the one that was gonna give the prize and me and Bobo started playing for him. Bobo play something and then I'd try to play something better than what he played. Old Hooter, he just hollor and bang at the guitar. Man was the worse guitar player I ever seen. So me and Bobo played and after awhile I seen where he was getting the attention of this white fellow. He'd play something and while he was playing it he be slapping on the side of the guitar, and that made it sound like he was playing more than he was. So I started doing it too. White fellow ain't knew no difference. He ain't knew as much about guitar playing as Hooter did.

After we play while, the white fellow called us to him and said he couldn't make up his mind, say all three of us was the best guitar player and we'd have to split the prize between us. Then he give us twenty-five cents. That's eight cents apiece and a penny on the side. That cured me of playing contest to this day.

BYNUM. Seefus ain't like that. Seefus give a whole dollar and a drink of whiskey.

JEREMY. What night they be down there?

BYNUM. Be down there every night. Music don't know no certain night.

BERTHA. (*Stacks JEREMY's dishes.*) You go down to Seefus with them people and you liable to end up in a raid and go to jail sure enough. I don't know why Bynum tell you that. (*Stacks BYNUM's dishes.*)

BYNUM. That's where the music at. That's where the people at. The people down there making music and enjoying themselves. Somethings is worth taking the chance going to jail about.

BERTHA. (*Clears both sets of dishes to the sink and washes them.*) Jeremy ain't got no business going down there.

JEREMY. They got some women down there, Mr. Bynum?

BYNUM. Oh, they got women down there sure. They got women everywhere. Women be where the man is so they can find each other.

JEREMY. Some them old gals come out there where we be putting in that road. Hanging around there trying to snatch somebody.

BYNUM. How come some of them ain't snatched hold of you?

JEREMY. I don't want them kind. Them desperate kind. Ain't nothing worse than a desperate woman. Tell them you gonna leave them and they get to crying and carrying on. That just make you want to get away quicker. They get to cutting up your clothes and things trying to keep you staying. Desperate women ain't nothing but trouble for a man.

(*SETH enters from the stairs. JEREMY quickly ducks out of his seat and sits back down on the bench.*)

SETH. Something ain't setting right with that fellow.

BERTHA. (*Stops washing dishes and turns to him.*) What's wrong with him? What he say?

SETH. I take him up there and try to talk to him and he ain't for no talking. Say he been traveling ... coming over from Ohio. Say he a deacon in the church. Say he looking for Martha Pentecost. Talking about that's his wife.

BERTHA. How you know it's the same Martha? Could be talking about anybody. Lots of people named Martha.

SETH. You see that little girl? I didn't hook it up till he said it, but that little girl look just like her. Ask Bynum. (*To BYNUM.*) Don't that little girl look just like Martha Pentecost?

BERTHA. (*Picks up dishpan of dishes and crosses to the pantry.*) I still say he could be talking about anybody.

SETH. The way he described her wasn't no doubt about who he was talking about. Described her right down to her toes.

BERTHA. (*Returns to the kitchen, picks up butter and puts away in icebox.*) What did you tell him?

SETH. I ain't told him nothing. The way the fellow look I wasn't gonna tell him nothing. I don't know what he looking for her for.

BERTHA. (*Rises.*) What else he have to say? (*Picks up SETH's work gloves, claps together over trashcan, puts them back down on the icebox.*)

SETH. I told you he wasn't for no talking. I told him where the outhouse was and to keep that gal off the front porch and out of my garden. He asked if you'd mind setting a hot tub for the gal and that was about the gist of it.

BERTHA. Well, I wouldn't let it worry me if I was you. Comeon get your sleep. (*Picks up SETH's lunchbucket, swishes out with water, puts down on drainboard.*)

BYNUM. He say he looking for Martha and he a deacon in the church?

SETH. That's what he say. Do he look like a deacon to you?

BERTHA. (*Turns to SETH.*) He might be, you don't know. Bynum ain't go no special say on whether he a deacon or not.

SETH. Well, if he the deacon I'd sure like to see the preacher.

(*They all laugh.*)

BERTHA. Comeon get your sleep. Jeremy, don't forget to set them sheets outside the door like I told you.

JEREMY. Yes, ma'am.

(*BERTHA exits into the bedroom.*)

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SETH. Something ain't setting right with that fellow, Bynum. He's one of them mean looking niggers look like he done killed somebody gambling over a quarter.

BYNUM. He ain't no gambler. Gamblers wear nice shoes. This fellow got on clodhoppers. He been out there walking up and down them roads.

*(ZONIA enters the kitchen from the stairs and looks around.)*

BYNUM. You looking for the back door, sugar? *(Indicates porch door.)* There it is. You can go out there and play. It's alright.

*(ZONIA crosses hesitantly past SETH.)*

SETH. *(Opens the porch door for her.)* You can go out there and play. Just don't get in my garden. And don't go messing around in my workshed.

*(ZONIA goes out onto the porch and looks out toward the cellar door path. Not finding anyone to play with, she crosses dejectedly to the porch steps and sits. SETH exits into the bedroom. There is a knock on the door. BYNUM sings "They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone. Oh Lordy ...". JEREMY looks toward SETH's bedroom door.)*

JEREMY. *(To BYNUM.)* Somebody at the door.

*(There is another knock on the door. JEREMY goes through the hallway and answers the front door to find MATTIE CAMPBELL. She is a young woman of*

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