



Joe Turner's Come and Gone

AUGUST WILSON

CHARACTERS

- SETH HOLLY, owner of the boardinghouse
- BERTHA HOLLY, his wife
- BYNUM WALKER, a rootworker
- RUTHERFORD SELIG, a peddler
- JEREMY FURLLOW, a resident
- HERALD LOOMIS, a resident
- ZONIA LOOMIS, his daughter
- MATTIE CAMPBELL, a resident
- REUBEN SCOTT, a boy who lives next door
- MOLLY CUNNINGHAM, a resident
- MARTHA LOOMIS, Herald Loomis's wife

SETTING

August, 1911. A boardinghouse in Pittsburgh. At right is a kitchen. Two doors open off the

kitchen. One leads to the outhouse and SETH's workshop. The other to SETH's and BERTHA's bedroom. At left is a parlor. The front door opens into the parlor, which gives access to the stairs leading to the upstairs rooms. There is a small outside playing area.

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 the 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 heart 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 dispersment 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.

ACT ONE

Scene One

The lights come up on the kitchen. BERTHA busies herself with breakfast preparations. SETH stands looking out the window at BYNUM in

the yard. SETH
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BERTHA: I do
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