

(Crosses slowly to his chair in the parlor, turns it out to face LOOMIS, and sits.)

GOT MY MAN AND GONE

LOOMIS. Had a whole mess of men he caught. Just go out hunting regular like you go out hunting possum. He catch you and go home to his wife and family. Ain't thought about you going home to yours. Joe Turner caught me when my little girl was just born. Wasn't nothing but a little baby sucking on her mama's titty when he caught me. Joe Turner caught me in nineteen hundred and one. Kept me seven years until nineteen hundred and eight, kept everybody seven years. He'd go out hunting and bring back forty men a a time. And keep them seven years. I was walking down this road in this little town outside of Memphis. Come up on these fellows gambling. I was a deacon in the Abundant Life Church. I stopped to preach to these fellows to see if I could turn some of them from their sinning when Joe Turner – brother of the Governor of the Great Sovereign State of Tennessee – swooped down and grabbed everybody there. Kept us all seven years.

(MATTIE enters from upstairs, in her nightgown. She slowly crosses downstairs to the landing.)

LOOMIS. My wife Martha gone from me after Joe Turner caught me. Got out from under Joe Turner on his birthday. Me and forty other men put in our seven years and he let us go on his birthday. I made it back to Henry Thompson's place where me and Martha was sharecropping and Martha's gone. She taken my little girl and left her with her mama and took off North. We been looking for her ever since.

(MATTIE slowly crosses through the hall to the kitchen archway, watches LOOMIS.)

LOOMIS. That's been going on four years now we been looking. That's the only thing I know how to do I just wanna see her face so I can get me a starting place in the world. The world got to start somewhere. That's what I been looking for. I been wandering a long time in somebody else's world. When I find my wife that be the making of my own.

BYNUM. Joe Turner tell why he caught you? You ever asked him that?

LOOMIS. I ain't never seen Joe Turner. Seen him to where I could touch him. I asked one of them fellows one time why he catch niggers. Asked him what I got he want? Why don't he keep on to himself? Why he got to catch me going down the road by my lonesome. He told me I was worthless. Worthless is something you throw away. Something you don't bother with. I ain't seen him throw me away. Wouldn't even let me stay away when I was by my lonesome. I ain't tried to catch him when he going down the road. So I must got something he want. What I got?

SETH. *(Simply.)* He just want you to do his work for him. That's all.

LOOMIS. I can look at him and see where he big and strong enough to do his own work. So it can't be that. He must want something he ain't got.

BYNUM. That ain't hard to figure out. What he wanted was your song. He wanted to have that song to be his. He thought by catching you he could learn that song. Every nigger he catch he's looking for the one he can learn