

IN THE GROOVE FOR LOVE

'If Beale Street Could Talk', Barry Jenkins's follow-up to 'Moonlight', is the first English-language feature adaptation of a James Baldwin novel, telling the tale of a young black woman trying to clear the name of her partner, who has been falsely accused of rape

By Kelli Weston

When James Baldwin sat down to write what would become *If Beale Street Could Talk*—some time in 1968—he had long ago left the streets of Harlem. But Harlem had never left him: from his adopted home in Paris and later Provence, and during occasional visits to Switzerland, he returned frequently, on the page, to America—kept a shrewd eye on her over the years—for the country of his youth was to become the great project of his life. His early experiences in Harlem became the prism through which he viewed, and tried to comprehend, what haunted his nation and plagued its citizens, at home and abroad.

Beale Street, finally published in 1974, was born of a despair tinged, sensibly, with optimism. The story concerns 'Tish'—born Clementine Rivers—who, with the support of her family, tries to prove the innocence of her incarcerated fiancé Alonzo 'Fonny' Hunt, falsely accused of rape just as she discovers she is pregnant with their first child. "I hope that nobody has ever had to look at anybody they love through glass," Tish narrates in the book's opening pages, and almost half a century later, her words reverberate on the big screen, as Baldwin hoped they one day might. Barry Jenkins's film is the first English-language feature adaptation of a Baldwin novel (Robert Guédiguian's 1998 film *A la place du coeur* was also based on *Beale Street*) 

