



The Way Widows Walk

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TONI MORRISON

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Laney Merrill

Radford Merrill

Dorcus Atkinson

Rad Merrill Jr.

Christina Merrill

Laney's Mother

Andrew Lourde

First woman prisoner

Second woman prisoner

Time: Now

Place: Southwestern or Southern California coast town of some size (like San Diego). The kitchen of a bright, airy, lived in house--rather too lived in at the moment. Portable TV going, a child's truck on a table--that kind of thing. But the disarray is not dirt; it's a recent disorderliness. Laney is trying to make space if not order, but can't concentrate. Too much light, too many interruptions, TV (or radio-whatever) is killing. But her son Radford is "watching" it while he fixes himself a snack. One feels Laney will endure it rather than silence, or worse, her son's full attention. He is nine. His snack-making, however, becomes impossibly nerve-wracking. Laney answers it while the murmur of children lightly quarreling surrounds her.

LANEY: Will you get the hell out of that peanut butter?

RAD: It's not peanut butter. It's mallo mash.

LANEY: Put it up, will you?

RAD: You said you wouldn't go crazy, Ma.

LANEY: Get away from that jar.

RAD: But you promised.

LANEY: I'm not going crazy; I'm just asking you to get the hell out of that jar.

RAD: And you never cursed before either.

LANEY: I didn't have to before.

Christina enters. She is about twelve.

RAD: Why do we have to go to Delaware? Absolutely proof positive.

LANEY: It's only a month. You'll love it.

CHRIS: He'll wet the bed. You better tell Gramma he wets the bed.

LANEY: Chris, please.

RAD: I don't. sh towel at her with one arm while she holds Rad

CHRIS: Stop lying, you liar.

LANEY: Don't use that word. We don't use that word in this house.

CHRIS: But he is, isn't he? the room. LANEY continues to hold

LANEY: But it's not the same thing. The ringer doesn't wait--

RAD: When you go to sleep tonight I'm coming in there and kill
you. 's everybody:

CHRIS: Ma, did you hear him? He says he's going to kill me.

LANEY: Nobody's going to kill anybody.

RAD: Somebody killed Daddy.

LANEY: Radford! Nobody killed Daddy. He, he died. That's all.
He died.

RAD: How can you die if nobody kills you? Hide your bike or

LANEY: Oh, honey, you get sick. You can get sick and die.

RAD: He grabbed his throat. urns back and picks four cookies from

LANEY: That's because, because he was trying to get his breath
and . . .

LANEY: Coffee?
RAD: It hurt him, didn't it? It hurt him to die.

LANEY: Oh baby. You mustn't think that. It didn't hurt him at
all.

RAD: Are you proof positive?

ANDREW: Crazy. What'd you expect?

LANEY: Did I thank you for the flowers?

LANEY: I'm proof positive, sweetheart. Absolutely proof positive.

ANDREW: That's what I came by for. To make sure you thanked the

CHRIS: Now you're lying.

LANEY: You watch your mouth, young lady.

LANEY: Well,

ANDREW: Come on, LANEY, you thanked us a million times. You

Flings dish towel at her with one arm while she holds Rad

thanked me, you thanked Crocker, you thanked the receptionists,

with the other.

the janitor

CHRIS: Daddy never lied. Never.

Christina swings out of the room. LANEY continues to hold

and soothe Rad. The doorbell rings. The ringer doesn't wait--

ANDREW: Hey, I know. It's okay.

he enters and shouts

LANEY: I'm not doing so well. In fact, I'm not doing at all.

Where's everybody:

ANDREW: You'll be fine. Besides I've got news. The money's okay.

LANEY: Andrew?

I checked.

ANDREW: Yeah. How you?

LANEY: What money?

ANDREW: Gives her a loud smack of a kiss on her forehead.

ANDREW: Hey Rad. Everything okay?

LANEY: He's all right now. Go on out, honey. Ride your bike or

something. And stay away from your sister.

LANEY looks as though she might cry.

Rad starts to leave, turns back and picks four cookies from

ANDREW: Hup hup hup. None of that. Here, let me put some raw meat

a package.

in that coffee.

LANEY: Coffee?

Looks in cupboard for liquor, pours and talks

ANDREW: No. I can't drink real coffee anymore. If it's not in a

styrofoam cup, I break out. Atta girl. Look, I came over for

LANEY: How is it down there?

ANDREW: Crazy. What'd you expect?

LANEY: Did I thank you for the flowers?

ANDREW: That's what I came by for. To make sure you thanked the firm for a hundred bucks worth of flowers.

LANEY: Well, not up to me, but I sure won't turn it down. Dad was

ANDREW: Come on, Laney, you thanked us a million times. You ~~is's~~ thanked me, you thanked Crocker, you thanked the receptionists, ~~gay and~~ the janitor. ~~He a living besides. I met and loved the old man that~~

LANEY: He was more than a criminal lawyer. He was the best civil liberties lawyer this town ever saw. The best.
Laney lowers her head.

ANDREW: Hey, I know. It's okay.

LANEY: I'm not doing so well. ~~in law school, he was always the~~

ANDREW: You'll be fine. Besides I've got news. The money's okay. I checked. ~~how come you got out, Laney? at the heart~~

LANEY: What money? ~~for parents doesn't make sense. When Chris was~~

ANDREW: The insurance, Radford had a good policy with the firm. You're in pretty good shape, actually. Lawyers know how to do these things and Radford was the best. We're gonna miss him.

ANDREW: I heard you passed the bar the first time. ~~that's great~~
Laney looks as though she might cry.

LANEY: So did Radford. ~~and he got it. That's great~~

ANDREW: Hup hup hup. None of that. Here, let me put some raw meat in that coffee. ~~it's~~

ANDREW: So we need you. The firm does.
Looks in cupboard for liquor, pours and talks.

LANEY: You're not serious?

ANDREW: Try this on for size. Atta girl. Look, I came over for another reason. Not just the insurance. We need your help. ~~of stuff~~

LANEY: We?

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ANDREW: Yeah, we. Crocker and Merrill and, one of these days, me.

LANEY: You're going to be a partner now?

ANDREW: It's not up to me, but I sure won't turn it down. Rad was my best friend. He brought me in. I was headed for taxes. He's the one who showed me that criminal law didn't have to be scrungey and you could make a living besides.

LANEY: He was more than a criminal lawyer. He was the best civil liberties lawyer this town ever saw. The best.

ANDREW: You're telling me?

LANEY: Even when when we were in law school, he was always the best. The most honest.

ANDREW: How come you got out, Laney?

LANEY: Two lawyers for parents doesn't make sense. When Chris was born, I thought I'd stay home for just a while, and then little Rad came and. I know what you're thinking, and it's not true. I made up my own mind.

ANDREW: I heard you passed the bar the first time.

LANEY: So did Radford.

ANDREW: But your score was higher.

LANEY: So what?

ANDREW: So we need you. The firm does.

LANEY: You're not serious?

ANDREW: Not to come back in. I mean, what we need is a one shot thing. A legal researcher, footwork and--you know, the kind of stuff.

that.

LANEY: Oh I see.

LANEY: No way. I can't get through lunch without breaking a cup or dropping a spoon down the garbage disposal.

ANDREW: Just listen. You remember that case Rad was working on? The Bat women?

LANEY: Of course I remember. Mexicans. One was raped and she got her friends together and they went out and found the guy and beat him up.

ANDREW: With baseball bats.

LANEY: Right, baseball bats.

ANDREW: He died.

LANEY: I know.

ANDREW: So they are up for murder two, at the least.

LANEY: I know that Andrew.

ANDREW: And they weren't Mexicans. They were Columbians. They work crops out in St. Pedro. Pickers.

LANEY: Okay, okay. So what do you want from me?

ANDREW: They want out. When Radford died, they decided to get

sombody else. They don't want our guys. They liked your husband, it seems. A lot.

LANEY: Everybody did.

ANDREW: We want to keep the case.

LANEY: Why? Who's paying?

ANDREW: It's not that. You know there's no dough with those people. It's well, it's a good case. National press, national TV. All of that.

LANEY: Oh I see.

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ANDREW: No, you don't. It's partly the publicity, but only partly. The case is important to us because we might be the ones to get rape law changed in this state. I mean really turn it around. Make what they did self defense. I know it sounds funny coming from me, but it's a good cause, Laney. A woman is raped, in front of her kid. She tells her girlfriends about it and tells them that she knows the guy, knows where he works. They wap him. Self defense, right? No. The state says pre-meditated murder. Okay, with a little passion, it's second degree Still. Talk to them. Explain to them how important it is to have

LANEY: And you want somebody to research witnesses and neighbors? That's junior clerk stuff. Or get a private detective. I'm not up to that. Just because they like Radford, doesn't mean they'll like

ANDREW: No, no. You're missing my point. They want out. They want the public defender now. Some wetnose that's going to get them life. At least that's what I hear. But they liked Radford, they really trusted him, and they might like you.

LANEY: I can't handle a case, you know that.

ANDREW: Not handle. We'll handle it. Crocker, me, somebody. We just want them to stay, and we thought you could persuade them. They liked your husband, maybe they'll like you even better. You're a woman too. That's all? Just persuade them to stay?

LANEY: I'm sorry, Andy. My life is in shreds now. It's all I can do to keep Rad from killing Chris and Chris from killing me. The last thing I need is six Mexicans with bats.

ANDREW: Laney. Listen. You do need it. It's not the last thing you need. It's the first thing. Nothing works like work, believe me. Look. You're sending the kids back with your mom. What are you going to do for a month? Vacuum? You passed the bar the first time. You've got a brain. Use it.

LANEY: Andy.

ANDREW: No, I mean it. What would Radford think? Wouldn't he want you to do this? The case was important to him. You know that. Do it for him. You won't have to go in court. Just talk to the women. Talk to them. Explain to them how important it is to have the back-up of a firm like ours. Tell them about all our civil liberties stuff. Come on Laney, do it.

LANEY: Just because they like Radford, doesn't mean they'll like me. He was a very handsome, magical man.

ANDREW: He spoke Spanish. That's what they liked. And they've got a couple of public defenders who speak Spanish too. That's why they want to switch.

LANEY: I don't speak Spanish.

ANDREW: But you're a woman. They'll listen to you.

LANEY: Do they speak English?

ANDREW: Some. Take an interpreter. But talk to 'em.

LANEY: And that's all? Just persuade them to stay?

ANDREW: That's all, I swear. You'll be doing them a favor. You want to see some punk mess up their lives? We can get them off. Radford would like that, Laney. He'd be sore as hell if after all

the work he'd done, those women got screwed by a public defender because you wouldn't help out. If it doesn't work--okay. But at least try.

LANEY: Does Crocker want it?

ANDREW: Of course he wants it. Come in the office. I'll give you all the notes.

LANEY: How soon?

ANDREW: Tomorrow. First thing. There's no time to lose.

LANEY: He would like it, wouldn't he?

She looks at her wedding ring.

ANDREW: You kidding? He's tap dancing. I bet you right now he's tap dancing.

LANEY'S MOTHER: There's plenty of time. Plenty.

LANEY: Mother, no.

LANEY'S MOTHER: Don't sit like that honey. You'll get that awful roundness in your shoulders. And believe me, it's very hard to get rid of.

LANEY: Mother.

LANEY'S MOTHER: I know what I'm talking about. After your father died it was all I could do to keep my back straight. But I was determined not to walk around this world like a widow.

LANEY: What do you mean, walk around like a widow.

LANEY'S MOTHER: You know. Round shouldered. Like this.

Demonstrates

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LANEY'S MOTHER: That's the way widows walk. Like the weight

Laney nicely dressed is sitting on the edge of the desk in her husband's study. She is drinking coffee and rummaging through papers in his briefcase. Her children are heard through the door and so is an adult female voice. It is her mother.

LANEY'S MOTHER: You sure about the omelet?

LANEY: I'm sure, mother.

LANEY'S MOTHER: You really should eat something before ten o'clock. The body needs nourishment before ten o'clock in the morning. Otherwise it cranks down.

LANEY: I'll pick up something downtown.

LANEY'S MOTHER: It's just as easy for me to whip up an omelet, dear.

LANEY: But you've called the taxi already. You'll miss your plane.

LANEY'S MOTHER: There's plenty of time. Plenty.

LANEY: Mother, no.

LANEY'S MOTHER: Don't sit like that honey. You'll get that awful roundness in your shoulders. And believe me, it's very hard to get rid of.

LANEY: Mother.

LANEY'S MOTHER: I know what I'm talking about. After your father died it was all I could do to keep my back straight. But I was determined not to walk around this world like a widow.

LANEY: What do you mean, walk around like a widow.

LANEY'S MOTHER: You know. Round shouldered. Like this.

LANEY: Oh. Red! Let me send that to you home. That again is wrapped and

Demonstrates

LANEY'S MOTHER: That's the way widows walk. Like the weight of the world is on their back now that their men are gone. It's an awful thing to happen to a woman, especially if they're older. But you, your young, you can avoid it. That's right. That's right. Use your spine, not your stomach muscles. See? Look at me. You'd never know in a million years that I was a widow, now would you?

LANEY: No, mother, I wouldn't.

LANEY'S MOTHER: Now let me whip up that omelet.

LANEY: I'm going in to the office as soon as you leave, Mother, and I want to look at Radford's notes before I go. I promise I'll get something before ten o'clock.

LANEY'S MOTHER: Are you sure you ought to be doing legal stuff so soon? I mean . . .

LANEY: Mother, it will be good for me.

LANEY'S MOTHER: If you say so, but please, Elaine, sit straight, will you?

Mother leaves room. Laney rummages through briefcase again. Picks up several papers one by one. Picks up a small white piece of paper and looks at it carefully and with surprise. Chris comes in.

CHRIS: Mother. Tell him he can't take his skiis. Mother. Mother.

LANEY: What?

CHRIS: His skiis. Tell Rad he can't take skiis on the plane.

LANEY: Oh. Rad! Let me send them to you honey. They have to be wrapped and

RAD: I want my skiis.

Laney's mother enters

LANEY'S MOTHER: Leave them here, darling. If it snows in August we'll send for them. Oh there's the taxi.

LANEY: Is everything out there?

LANEY'S MOTHER: Yes.

LANEY: Chris, where's your travel case?

CHRIS: Right here.

LANEY: Now you two be as good as you can. Don't worry your grandmother. I'll call every night.

LANEY'S MOTHER: Come on. Come on. That's a sweetheart.

LANEY: Have you got everything, Mother?

LANEY'S MOTHER: I think so.

LANEY: Call me as soon as you get there.

LANEY'S MOTHER: Well, there's a time difference you know . . .

General goodbye confusion. Mother still chirping,

Rad a little pouty, Chris determined. Laney closes the door and notices that the little paper is still in her hand. She slips it into her suit pocket and goes to collect her things. Outside in the car, she turns on the ignition, then quite suddenly turns it off again and goes back into the house. There she picks up the telephone, and dials a number from the paper. When voice answers identifying a doctor's office, she hangs up. Then she looks through the telephone directory, finds another number and dials.

LANEY: Hello. This is Mrs. Merrill. Laney Merrill. I'm fine, thanks. Thank you. Yes, it was quite unexpected. No, not at all.

He never even had a cold. Yes, I know. No, but is the doctor in? No, I just wanted to ask him something. Well I won't be here, I'm . . . Maybe you can help me. Can you read prescriptions? No, no, it's not from Dr. Daniels. It's one my husband had and I can't make it out. Well, yes, I could call the doctor, but if, I mean since he's not, I mean he won't be needing it, I was just curious. Yes it says

She reads out the prescription

LANEY: What's so funny? What? Birth control? Are you sure? I guess I made a mistake. No. I must have read the wrong--Thank you, Miss Newburgh. Thank you. Yes. Goodbye.

Laney goes back to her car. Stuffs prescription back in her pocket and drives off. Drives along toward the county jail. While driving she is remembering her husband. Good times, intimate gestures, when they were lawyers together, when he won a case and she congratulated him, etc. and etc. When she gets to the county jail parking lot, she pauses for a minute and takes out the paper, reading the doctor's name and the patient's name as well. Abruptly she backs out and drives to a local pharmacy. Inside the pharmacy she hands pharmacist prescription.

PHARMACIST: It will be a minute, miss.

Laney waits.

PHARMACIST: What's the address, ma'am?

LANEY: It's not for me. They're for a client of mine. I'm a lawyer. Could you call the doctor, Dr. Macenroe. She's in jail now and I have to get these for her.

PHARMACIST: She won't be needing these in jail now.

He laughs and calls the doctor. Gets the address and types it onto the label. Laney takes the package and pays. Outside she reads the address. She gets into her car and drives to the neighborhood. It is a very well established neighborhood, nice newish luxury apartments. Laney parks in front of the address and watches people as they come out. Then she drives off to the jail to see the Bat Women. Has a conversation with two of them.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: You are Mrs. Merrill?

LANEY: Yes.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: I am sorry for your husband.

LANEY: Yes. Thank you. I came to ask you-- My husband did a lot of work for you. A lot. And I want to help. Help you. I want to ask you to stay with his firm. They are better for you. They will help you better than anybody else. My husband would want it that way, and I . . .

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Why?

LANEY: What?

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Why do you want to help?

LANEY: Because, because I am alone now. And there is no man in my house now. And I have a daughter. And because I am a very, very

smart woman and a very smart lawyer and I am feeling very vulnerable now . . .

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Vulnerable. What is it?

LANEY: Soft.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: You are soft?

LANEY: Please. I want to help. And it would help me to help you.

One of the women translates for the other. Then

asks: Yes, I say the same thing. Don't think about money.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: You are not from the television?

LANEY: No, no. I'm Mrs. Merrill. Radford Merrill's wife. I'm a lawyer too. A good one. I passed the bar the first time.

The bat women don't understand. They exchange words in Spanish.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Television people, newspaper people. We don't want to see them.

LANEY: Oh but you must. You should.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Why?

LANEY: Some, I mean. Let them take pictures of you. So people will know what you are like. That you are women, mothers. Ordinary mothers who wouldn't hurt a fly, except when they are--raped. Or hurt. Or lied to.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Lie. Someone lies to us?

LANEY: Well they could, you know. But not my husband. And not me.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: You want to be our lawyer?

LANEY: I want to work with the lawyers at my husband's firm.
Make sure the case goes right. Make sure you are all right.
That he doesn't get away with it.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: He don't get away signora. He never do
that again. Es Muerto.

LANEY: What do you say? Will you stay with us?

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: We have no money. Mr. Merrill said for us
not to think about money. Do you say the same thing?

LANEY: Yes, I say the same thing. Don't think about money.
Just tell me everything you know about the man, how it happened,
everything.

FIRST WOMAN PRISONER: Are you strong, Signora?

LANEY: Oh, god. I hope so.

Outside, following her conversation with the Bat
women, she telephones Andy to tell him of her success. Through
the windows of the booth she can see reporters, clerks, TV crew
and a striking black woman walking on the arm of a young black
man.

WOMAN: Yes?

LANEY: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm looking for 65.

WOMAN: This is 65.

LANEY: Is Miss Robinson here?

WOMAN: Yes.

LANEY: May I speak to her?

Laney is in bed. Papers strewn about on covers.
Glasses on, she is talking on the telephone to her son.

LANEY: No, I'm not getting married, honey. What makes you ask me that? But I've been working, that's why I wasn't at home. I did call. Gramma said you were sleeping. All right. Next time I'll make her wake you. I miss you too. I'll try. Maybe next weekend. Goodnight dear. Be nice to your sister. Love you.

Hangs up telephone. Gets back to work but cannot concentrate. Gets up and goes into her closet. Reaches in coat pocket and takes out round box of tablets from the prescription she has had filled. She looks in the mirror. Hurriedly, she gets dressed and leaves the house. She drives back to the neighborhood she prowled earlier. Parks. After checking the mailbox, goes to an apartment door and rings the bell. A black woman opens the door. Laney is startled. The woman is in a robe, the inside of the apartment is dimly lit, but the furnishings are lovely.

DORCUS: Yes?

LANEY: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm looking for 6F.

DORCUS: This is 6F.

LANEY: Is Miss Atkinson here?

DORCUS: Yes.

LANEY: May I speak to her?

DORCUS: You are.

LANEY: Oh.

DORCUS: Do I know you?

LANEY: I don't think so. I'm from the law firm Crocker and Merrill. We're handling the Bat women case.

DORCUS: Oh, come in. Sorry about the mess. It's been awful these last few weeks. What's up?

LANEY: You're Miss Atkinson? Dorcus Atkinson?

DORCUS: Uh huh. What did you want to see me about?

LANEY: I found something that belongs to you.

DORCUS: To me?

LANEY: Well it has your name on it.

Reaches in her pocket and brings out the box.

Dorcus stretches out her hand, tentatively, but not too far.

Laney slaps the box into the outstretched palm. Dorcus jumps a little at the touch. Closes her fingers around the box, lowers her head, and opens it. Runs her long fingers over the capsules inside. All stacked in a row.

DORCUS: Where did you get these?

LANEY: At home.

DORCUS: I thought you said you said you were from Crocker and--who are you?

LANEY: Laney. Laney Merrill.

Dorcus doesn't say anything. Laney goes on. Talking rapidly, trying not to see the obvious and, of course, not seeing it.

LANEY: Maybe you knew my husband, Radford. Are you a client of his? He's dead, you know. Three weeks now. Twenty-two days, actually. And I was going through his briefcase. What case was yours? I mean he used to tell me all his cases. I don't remember which one you were. Anyway I found the prescription and I got it filled for you. It's not the kind of thing you want to run out of. *Friendship, legal advice.*

LANEY: *I don't believe you. I don't believe you know him for seven years.*
Laney is walking, pacing looking around.

LANEY: Has it come up? Your case, I mean. Or is Andy handling it? He's taking most of them now. Except the Bat Women, of course. They didn't want him. Radford spoke Spanish and they liked him, but then everybody did. Anyway I went down there to try and get them to stay with Crocker and--So what about you? Have you been turned over to Andy, or . . . what's your case again? *Things together. We did everything together.*

DORCUS: Divorce. Mr. Merrill was handling my divorce.

LANEY: Oh? How long has he been working with you on it? *you.*

DORCUS: A long time. It got . . . very involved.

LANEY: How long is long? *There's nothing to say and I don't*

DORCUS: Seven years. *Share with me. I have my own. I can't share it with you.*

Laney stops and stares

LANEY: *(outraged)* Share it with me? It's my grief. Mine.

LANEY: Seven? But that was 1974. My little boy was only two years old then. *He loved me.*

DORCUS: *slight*

DORCUS: Sometimes it takes a very long time. Divorce can be messy.

LANEY: Did you know he was married? That your lawyer was married and had two kids?

DORCUS: And now I knew.

LANEY: Nobody at Crocker handles divorce cases. Nobody.

DORCUS: It was advice, really. Friendly, legal advice.

LANEY: I don't believe you. I don't believe you knew him for seven years.

DORCUS: Have it your way.

LANEY: We were in Mexico in 74.

DORCUS: 73.

LANEY: Liar.

DORCUS: Look. This is not fruitful. We have nothing to say to each other. Like you said, he's dead.

LANEY: We did things together. We did everything together.

DORCUS: Sure.

LANEY: I don't believe it. I don't believe he slept with you. He couldn't have. He would never sleep with a a a

DORCUS: Why don't you go? There's nothing to say and I don't want your grief in here with me. I have my own. I can't share it with you.

LANEY: (outraged) Share it with me? It's my grief. Mine.

Mine and my children's. Not yours. Don't you say that. Don't you ever say that. He loved me.

DORCUS: sighs

LANEY: You think he didn't?

DORCUS: I think, I think he's dead.

Laney suddenly wants details

LANEY: How often did you see him?

DORCUS: (smiling) Often.

LANEY: How often?

DORCUS: Once, twice a week. Sometimes more.

LANEY: He talked to you about me.

DORCUS: We never talked about you.

LANEY: Oh? What did you talk about, civil rights? James Brown, Sammy Davis.

LANEY: (backing away) Don't you grieve over my husband. Don't you dare. Her voice breaks.

DORCUS: Stop that. You can't come in here and cry. You stop that.

LANEY: That's not what I came for.

DORCUS: Then what did you come for?

LANEY: To see.

DORCUS: So, see.

LANEY: But I don't see. I don't see at all.

DORCUS: You see all right. What's bothering you? Because I was the other woman, or because I'm a black woman? (Stands)

LANEY: Both. Both.

DORCUS: You want an apology. Well you won't get it. Not here.

At the cemetery maybe, but not here and you can't come in here and cry. You think you're the only widow he left? Is that what you

think? We had a good life together.

LANEY: Life? You bitch! You are the worse, the worse thing I know of.

DORCUS: Maybe. But I am the best thing he knew of.

LANEY: She's black.
Laney slaps her

DORCUS swings and slaps her back

LANEY: He was always with a black woman. A tramp. Some
Laney slaps her again

DORCUS falls back into her chair and gropes around for something to strike her with, finds it and raises her arm then

DORCUS: Oh, Jesus. You get out of here. You get out of here.

LANEY: (Backing away) Don't you grieve over my husband. Don't you dare, you ~~tramp~~ ^{tramp}, you black slut, you.

LANEY: I've met her. That is all.
Runs out of the door

DORCUS throws the object down, but holds herself in.
Will not cry.

Here an unwritten scene flashing to when Dorcus and Radford met, knew each other, listened to whispers from blacks and whites alike: "Isn't that Miss Exclusively Black? Well I'll be. I'd say all her news was white. They kill me. Black people get their faces, white folks get their behinds. Makes you sick." etc.

LANEY: For--He took her to parties?

ANDREW: Laney, it's over.

Place: Andrew's office

LANEY: You knew about it, didn't you? Oh God.

ANDREW: Knew what? I didn't. It was a different crowd, Laney.

LANEY: She's Black. Oh, did it? We never let it interfere with

ANDREW: Laney.

LANEY: He was sleeping with a black woman. A tramp. Some slut he kept in an apartment. You know how men are.

ANDREW: She's not a tramp, Laney. I only know how the man is.

LANEY: You know her? I didn't know him at all. I thought he

ANDREW: Everybody knows her. She's on the tube. Exclusively Black or something. A local show--Sunday afternoon.

LANEY: You know her personally? From the beginning. The

ANDREW: I've met her. That is all. Lawyer. How can you be that

LANEY: With him? With Radford?

ANDREW: Laney. Just his little white wife. All around and

LANEY: Answer me. As a week he had this bit black show stuck up

ANDREW: Twice maybe. When she wasn't doing Black news she was

LANEY: Where?

ANDREW: I don't know. Just Radford.

LANEY: Cut it out. You level with me, damn it. And I mean level. Nobody knows what those women are like. You're contradicting me?

ANDREW: Some party. Friend and you are separating me. What about

LANEY: Par--He took her to parties?

ANDREW: Laney, it's over.

LANEY: What?

LANEY: In public? He dated a black woman in public?

ANDREW: Well I wouldn't call it dating. I'm sorry.

LANEY: Then everybody knew. Everybody. Oh God.

ANDREW: No everybody didn't. It was a different crowd, Laney.

It didn't hurt anything, did it? He never let it interfere with what you two had.

LANEY: What we had must not have been enough.

ANDREW: Don't talk like that. You know how men are.

LANEY: No I don't know how men are. I only know how one man is. Was. And not even him. I didn't know him at all. I thought he took all those black cases because he was concerned. But it was because of her.

ANDREW: He always took black cases. From the beginning. You know that. He was a civil liberties lawyer. How can you be that and not take minoritys' cases.

LANEY: And I was just his little white wife. All aprons and diapers. While twice a week he had this hot black whore stuck up in a fancy apartment. When she wasn't doing Black news she was doing white men.

ANDREW: Not white men. Just Radford.

LANEY: Don't give me that. I know what those women are like. Everybody knows what those women are like. You're defending her? You pretend to be my friend and you are defending her. What about you? She make a pass at you?

ANDREW: Laney. She's blind.

LANEY: What?

ANDREW: Blind. You know. White stick?

LANEY: She's not.

ANDREW: Yes she is. But everybody misses it at first.

LANEY: You said she was on TV.

ANDREW: She is. Good at it too. Better than most. Does braille right on the screen.

Violent reaction from her

LANEY: I don't care. I'm not going to feel guilty about that.

ANDREW: Laney, don't fall apart now. You have work to do remember? Forget it.

LANEY: Seven years. Oh God seven years. Andrew, is that true? Seven years? When Rad was just two?

ANDREW: I didn't know him for seven years, Laney. I've only been here two.

LANEY: I don't think I can get through this.

ANDREW: Of course you can. Come on. Let's get out of here. I'll treat you to lunch.

LANEY: No.

ANDREW: Okay. Okay. A ride then. Let's go for a ride and you can cry all you want.

Arriving at waterfront. Laney is calmer now, bewildered, bitter, emotionally naked.

ANDREW: Sure you can.

ANDREW: Tell me something. Would you be feeling any different if she were white?

LANEY: No.

ANDREW: Sure?

LANEY: I'm not sure of anything. And being blind doesn't make it better. All I know is she should be dead and he alive. The fact that she's black, first it surprised me, then it offended me.

ANDREW: Why?

LANEY: Because it means that he wanted a different kind of woman from me. He didn't want just another woman, an additional woman, he wanted someone entirely different. Entirely.

ANDREW: Right. Her skin is entirely different from yours.

LANEY: Since when did you get to be such a nigger lover?

ANDREW: That's not like you, Laney. You're an intelligent--

LANEY: God damn you. There's nothing intelligent about hurt. I'm hurting.

ANDREW: All right. I know. I'm sorry.

LANEY: It looks like a comforter. A silk comforter.

Andrew turns her about by her shoulders so she can't see the water.

ANDREW: Laney, you need to get back to work. Keep busy. It's over, honey. Over. Put it out of your mind. We need you and you promised to help.

LANEY: I can't.

ANDREW: Sure you can.

Takes her to car

LANEY: I don't feel comfortable with them. Those women. They're rough and only one speaks English.

ANDREW: They liked you. Enough to stay with the firm.

LANEY: That's all I promised.

ANDREW: That's all you promised me, but you promised them more. They think you are going to work on the case. They need somebody like you, Laney. This town is going to kill him. The way the press tells it five Spic hookers killed a sweet white teenager. They're not hookers. They're just women, mothers. And this punk raped one of em. Broke her nose in front of her kid too.

LANEY: Andrew, they've got the whole firm. You'll get them off.

ANDREW: It's not that easy. We need a white woman, like you, classy, educated, running interference, talking to newsmen. Somebody like you on their side would have an impact.

LANEY: They've got a whole committee.

ANDREW: Women's lib types. Politicos. Hispanics. Lesbians. Predictable. We need Anita Bryant for this act. A mother, from Edgewood. In a nice Dior suit. He raped her, Laney. Each one of them can get twenty years to life.

LANEY: Let me think about it.

ANDREW: Don't think. Do it. Look. Go to the rally. The Hispanic Women's Council is holding a rally in St. Pedro . . . Be there. Sit on the stage. Say a few words in their defense. Nothing loud. Just let the press know you are there and sympathetic. Then visit them, tell them about it, keep their spirits up.

Time: Night

Place: Fund raising rally in Hispanic neighborhood of Mt. Pedro. Small town square. One of those raggedy towns where poor people live amidst commerce fashioned for the landowners who live on ranches and farms some distance away. Medium to small sized crowd, several people on podium. One or two television cameras near stage. Laney is walking through the crowd. Speaks to a man. Where is the press? He shrugs, points to camera. Dorcus is there on the arm of a young woman. Laney turns to go. Suddenly the sound of hooves is heard. Some forty or so young, cleancut, white ranch hands--friends of the dead teenager--drive into the crowd brandishing whips. They break it up. In the melee, Laney tries to run to her car, is prevented. Runs in another direction. Gets out of the crowd and begins to run around the strange streets avoiding the crowd and horsemen. Finally she is in a quiet part of the neighborhood. Some houses are lit, but she is afraid to go in. Arrives at a car repair place cum parking lot. It is very quiet there. She backs into the lot, near some tires and oil cans. Hears breathing. Jumps. Knocks over something. Dorcus leaps up terrified. Laney stares at her, starts to leave when they hear hooves. Laney stands still. Dorcus grabs her hand.

DORCUS: It's me, Laney.

They run away from the horses. The horsemen stop. Listen. Hear running heels and pursue the direction of the sound. The

women are running, Laney leading Dorcus. She turns into a street. The street ends with an oyster shell and cement wall. Brightly painted and decorated in Spanish designs. Two horsemen drive into the cul de sac. The women huddle, then slide along the shell wall. The boys arrive and shine lights in their faces.

BOY: Hey look, Petey. We got two. A spade and a white chick.

The women keep sidling. The boys dismount. The women sidling along the wall rub against a wooden door at the end of the shell wall. They turn and bang and fiddle with latch. While the boys saunter toward them holding reins, Laney kicks one in the groin and barely escapes hands of the other when Dorcus gets door open. They run, end up again in the repair shop, parking lot. They try to get in the garage. It is locked, and they can find no entrance or exit. Run through and around broken and stripped automobiles. Dorcus trips and falls. Laney stops, turns and helps her up. They come to a wire fencing and climb over it, each pulling and pushing the other. They lose their shoes. Run on through back yards, noise of hooves finally fades. They sprint into street, running swiftly but badly without their shoes. Turn toward a lit street. See a gas station and go toward it. It is closed. Opposite is a 7-11 store (one of those open until two places with overpriced Kleenex, bread, beer, etc.) They go in. The store manager says "We are closing up, ladies." There are a few customers in the store.

LANEY: We need help. Call the police. Oh my god. Look at your hands.

Dorcus' hands are bleeding profusely.

DORCUS: I fell on glass.

LANEY: Call an ambulance. You got any money? I lost my purse.

HOSPITAL: Dorcus shakes her head.

DORCUS: So did I. She's bleeding.

LANEY: What the hell is the matter with you? Get on the phone.

This woman is bleeding!

HOSPITAL WORKER: Date of birth?

Laney snatches a box of Kleenex from the shelves. Tears it open and hands wads to Dorcus while she blots blood. Both are whispering curses. Bastards. Sons of bitches.

Pushes box toward Dorcus

HOSPITAL WORKER: Religion?

DORCUS: None. Yes. No. None.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Next of kin?

LANEY: I don't believe this.

DORCUS: My mother.

HOSPITAL WORKER: What is her name?

DORCUS: Stella Bradford.

HOSPITAL WORKER: How do you spell that?

DORCUS: Stella or Bradford?

HOSPITAL WORKER: What is her address?

DORCUS: 1260 Bryant.

Place: In emergency ward of a small municipal hospital. Lots of Hispanic patients around. Dorcus is sitting in a chair, Laney standing in a glass topped admission office.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Name?

DORCUS: Dorcus Atkinson.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Miss or Mrs?

LANEY: For Christ's sake. She's bleeding.

HOSPITAL WORKER: This will just take a minute. Address?

DORCUS: 34 Cordova Drive. Westwood.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Date of birth?

LANEY: You can give her some more Kleenex, can't you?

HOSPITAL WORKER: Sorry.

HOSPITAL WORKER: A doctor will see her, miss. She, what seems to be the

Pushes box toward Dorcus

HOSPITAL WORKER: Religion?

DORCUS: None. Yes. No. None.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Next of kin?

LANEY: I don't believe this.

DORCUS: My mother.

HOSPITAL WORKER: What is her name?

DORCUS: Stella Bradford.

HOSPITAL WORKER: How do you spell that?

DORCUS: Stella or Bradford?

HOSPITAL WORKER: What is her address?

DORCUS: 1260 Bryant.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Is that San Diego?

DORCUS: No, Evanston, Illinois.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Any relatives in San Diego?

DORCUS: No.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Your doctor?

DORCUS: Wycoff. Herbert Wycoff.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Blue Cross or Blue Shield?

DORCUS: Travelers' Group Insurance. At my work.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Where do you work?

DORCUS: WKSE.

HOSPITAL WORKER: Address?

LANEY: Will you call a doctor?

HOSPITAL WORKER: A doctor will see her, miss. Now, what seems to be the problem?

Dorcus and Laney exchange glances. Dorcus holds up her hands.

HOSPITAL WORKER: How'd that happen?

Dorcus is in Emergency Room. Laney, having begged dimes from patients, calls Andrew, her mother. In between she peeps into window of emergency room. Can't see anything but Dorcus' stockinged feet and the legs of a doctor and nurse. She goes in. Dorcus' hands are bandaged.

LANEY: Andrew is coming to get us.

At Dorcus' apartment Andrew gets out of car to take Dorcus up.

LANEY: I'll take her.

Laney gets out of front seat, Dorcus out of back. Gets super to open door. Laney stands at door.

LANEY: Will you be all right?

DORCUS: Sure.

Her boxing glove bandages she adjusts into a fighter's posture.

LANEY: How? You can't even undress yourself.

Laney comes in and takes over. In a way. Goes and gets a robe from bedroom. Over Dorcus' protests. Then unzips Dorcus' dress. There is some awkwardness in the beginning as she touches her.

When they are settled, Dorcus robed, drinking out of a straw on the table. Laney sipping hot tea. Andrews knocks on door.

ANDREW: What's going on?

LANEY: Oh, I forgot you.

ANDREW: Look, I'll take a cab. Take the keys.

LANEY: I'm just leaving.

ANDREW: No, stay. Save me a trip. I have to go by police headquarters anyway. This is good you know. I mean it was terrible, but wait till the word gets out that the friends of the rapist tried to rape you two.

LANEY: What do you mean?

ANDREW: We got it made--

Andrew opens the door, smiling

ANDREW: --in the shade. Night ladies.

LANEY: What do you think? Is he a creep?

DORCUS: (Shrugs) He should be in our business.

LANEY: Sometimes I think he is.

Silence. Awkward for Laney. Thoughtful for Dorcus.

DORCUS: Did you hear what they called us?

LANEY: Yeah. Chicks. A white chick and a black chick.

DORCUS: No. A spade and a white chick.

LANEY: Bastards.

DORCUS: There's a difference.

LANEY: What difference?

DORCUS: You were a white chick. Chick. Girl. Woman. Female.

I was just a spade.

LANEY: I don't get it.

DORCUS: Not a woman. Not a female. A spade. They saw me and they saw my skin. Nothing else. I could have been a man, a boy, a three year old child. All the same to them. They saw your saw, your gender. They didn't see mine.

Silence

LANEY: Is there nobody you want me to call? A friend or something? To stay here with you?

DORCUS: No. I lied in the hospital. My mother doesn't live in Evanston. She used to, but she lives here now.

LANEY: You want me to call her.

DORCUS: No. We don't get along and I don't want to explain anything right now.

LANEY: Well I better go.

DORCUS: Sure.

LANEY: See ya.

DORCUS: Okay.

LANEY: Look. I'm sorry. I mean about your hands and everything.

DORCUS: Sure.

LANEY: Will it affect the show? I mean you use braille on television, don't you?

DORCUS: It'll be okay.

LANEY: Black News or something?

DORCUS: Exclusively Black.

LANEY: Lousy casting.

DORCUS: Think what you like. I'm not going to apologize for that. I'm not going to apologize for anything. I wouldn't apologize to my mother and I won't apologize to you. Colors don't mean a great deal to me. Kindness does; justice does; and good work. All I know is what comes through when I shake hands--what I feel when I sit next to somebody. What I hear in a voice. And that's good

LANEY: You knew they didn't have a chance.

ANDREW: Look, Leney, we tried, we gave it everything.

LANEY: You just wanted the publicity. You made me convince them to stay just so you could handle the rights.

ANDREW: Don't be stupid. We defended them.

LANEY: You didn't care what happened to them.

ANDREW: They killed a kid, Laney, a nice 4-H kid and the jury didn't like it.

LANEY: A kid! You call that a kid? What about his friends? They tried to kill us.

ANDREW: Us?

LANEY: Yes. Us.

ANDREW: Well, well, well. You can't bet on a thing, can you?

Andrew exits.

The two women stand together in the lobby.

Laney looks at her hands, her arms down her front. Makes a shuddering sound.

DORCUS: What's the matter?

LANEY: I feel . . . used.

DORCUS: Same here. He used my TV show like it was his own.

LANEY: Bastard.

A young man comes up saying "Ready, Miss Atkinson?"

He takes her arm.

DORCUS: Gotta go. Take care, Laney.

LANEY: You too.

enough. It has always stood me in good stead. I know what you ate for dinner, how long ago you put your perfume on. And I know that you are not the frightened woman you were when you knocked on my door that day. What your husband did for me was important and good and precious. I will not apologize. We did it right. Right and well. Nobody hurt anybody. I wasn't breaking up a family. And I always felt good about that. You would like to feel sorry for me because I am blind. Don't. It's my being black that bothers you, doesn't it?

LANEY: Yes. Yes, it does. You're black and you're pretty and you were his mistress. Take your pick. I've got enough anger for all of it.

DORCUS: So have I.

LANEY: What have you got to be angry about?

DORCUS: I'm not supposed to get angry? I'm not allowed to grieve right? You get that part too. Who can I talk to about it? My black friends? My mother?

LANEY: You went to parties. Andrew said he saw you at parties. That you had a crowd.

DORCUS: You had a family. I had a crowd. You had children. I had pills. You went to the funeral. I listened to records.

LANEY: I'd like to like you but I don't think I can. When he died I thought well that's the end of the future, I'll just have to hold on to the past. But then I found the prescription and then I found you and all of a sudden there wasn't any past either. I

LANEY: I thought you were Miss Turner. Shaking. Just shaking.

And loud. Very loud and sexy. I thought you were a black bitch.

DORCUS: And I thought you were a white bitch.

hate him for that. For taking away my past. And I hate you too because the past he gave you was real. Mine was a lie.

DORCUS: It's not so simple as that. We all have to find our own truth and sometimes the truth is so precious that it has to be protected by a whole army of lies.

LANEY: But I don't know what to do with it. With what I feel. I miss him and I hate him. And I hate you, blind or not. But I was scared for you back there with those 4-H cowboys. Really scared. When you fell all I could think of was what they'd do to you if I didn't get you out of there. And I don't want to feel any of this. I don't know what to do with it. I want what those women had.

LANEY: What do you want if they want to. Of course they'll want to.
Paces

LANEY: Those women in jail. Baseball bats. That's all I could think of when those guys were chasing us, when we were jammed up against that wall. I could feel it in my hands.

DORCUS: She makes a fist and swings. Swings again. Keeps on swinging. All around the apartment. Comes up to Dorcus with imaginary bat and "holds" it over her. Slowly brings it down and sits in chair. Her head buried in her hands. Dorcus reaches out to touch her, doesn't.

DORCUS: I thought you were Doris Day. I didn't know you could fight.

LANEY: I thought you were Tina Turner. Shaking. Just shaking. And loud. Very loud and sexy. I thought you were a black chick.

DORCUS: And I thought you were a white chick.

Place: The courthouse. Jammed. A lot of press in attendance.
The Batwomen are convicted. Dorcus and Laney meet in the lobby.
Exchange greetings.

DORCUS: Can you believe that?

LANEY: How could they? How could they do it?

Andrew comes up, separating himself from reporters.

LANEY: Andrew. Over here.

DORCUS: Will you appeal?

ANDREW: Absolutely. If they want to, that is.

LANEY: What do you mean if they want to. Of course they'll
want to.

ANDREW: Crocker says wait and see.

LANEY: Aren't you handling it?

DORCUS: He's got other things to do, Laney. Contracts and stuff.

LANEY: What contracts?

DORCUS: Tell her, Andy.

ANDREW: Ladies, some other time.

LANEY: Tell me what?

DORCUS: About the contract he signed. The book rights, movie
rights. He sold them and now that the trial is over, the show
can begin. Conviction makes a much better ending, doesn't it,
Andy?

ANDREW: You don't know what you're talking about Dorcus. So why
don't you keep your pretty mouth shut. Tight.

Dorcus walks away. Laney watches her go then calls

LANEY: Dorcus!

DORCUS: Yes? (turns)

LANEY: Don't do that.

DORCUS: What?

Laney runs up to her and presses her finger along Dorcus' shoulders, straightening her back.

LANEY: Don't stoop. Widows walk that way. Like they can't carry the weight of the world. Straighten up. Now do me.

Straight backed, Dorcus presses Laney's spine. They smile and turn back to back, each pressing the shoulder blades of the other with her own.

DORCUS: No widows walking here.

Back to back, heads up laughing.

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