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Miller Williams

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Lay of the Badde Wyf

by Miller Williams

Part the first

All that she did she did not aim to do.
What she did intentionally was talk.
She had a simple hunger to say something
and see a sign that what she said was heard
by someone else, who might say, "Well" or "Maybe"
or nothing at all, but have the look of someone
to whom some words had recently been directed.

Home was where she watched the heavy hours,
each with its foggy number, grinding by.

She wanted once to work outside the home,
helping someone out somewhere for nothing.
Her husband said he would not hear of that.
She wanted once to have the kids by now.
Before the next promotion, though, and the next,
her husband would not hear of that at all.
She wanted once to join some other women
and take a morning walk around the mall,
but knew that he would never hear of that.
Her husband didn't like her being alone
with people he didn't know. Preacher, doctor,
woman down the street, it didn't matter.

She spent the day reading and running errands,
taking clothes to the cleaners and planning dinner,
paying bills and watching talk shows.
Sometimes, at night, she could imagine words
dying inside of her, empty of all their meanings.



Part the last

He ran the dry cleaners and lived above it.
“You couldn’t say,” he said, “it’s much of a home.”
She couldn’t tell you why she went upstairs,
or when exactly. One day she was there.
She was surprised to see that she was there,
with new furniture and older music,
and pictures of people she never asked about.

They came with coffee first, the few stray words,
then cup by cup she told her whole life,
such as it was. And then he told her his.

She climbed the stairs repeatedly, to find
slower talk and coffee every time.
Then one day she took a glass of wine.
Then when she let his finger trace her lips
she felt something fall that she couldn’t catch,
the way you feel it when you’ve dropped a plate.
Inside a held breath you hear it break.
All you can say is, Well, there goes a plate.

Not watching her body being released to the light,
not talking, either, she thought about her husband,
and what she was doing, and how to carry the fact,
the knowledge of it home, to make it a part
of pancakes and bills and looking for car keys.

Then she smiled, lying back in the light of her thoughts,
suddenly seeing how ascending the stairs
and drinking the wine and being naked there
would surely be among the numberless things
he himself would say he’d never hear of.
So let him never hear, for who was she,
unfaithful wife, to doubt his wisdom now?

