



"Toward the end of February..."

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Toward the end of February, Alice Manfred sat down to think again of what she called the impunity of the man who killed her niece just because he could. It had not been hard to do; it had not even made him think twice about what danger he was putting himself in. He just did it. One man. One defenceless girl. Death. A sample-case man. A nice, neighborly everybody-knows-him man. The kind you let in your house because he was not dangerous, because you had seen him with children, bought his products and never heard a scrap of gossip about him doing wrong. Felt not only safe but kind in his company because he was the sort women ran to when they thought they were being followed, or watched or needed someone to have the extra key just in case you locked yourself out. He was the man who took you to your door if you missed the trolley and had to walk night streets at night. Who warned young girls away from hooch joints and the men who lingered there. Women teased him because they trusted him. He was one of those men who might have marched down Fifth Avenue-- cold and silent and dignified--into the space the drums made. He knew wrong wasn't right, and did it anyway. Alice Manfred had seen and borne much, had been scared all over the country, in every street. Only now was she truly unsafe because the brutalizing men and their brutalizing women were not just out there. They were in her neighborhood, her house. A man had come in her house and destroyed her niece. His wife had come right in the funeral to nasty her. She would have called the police after both of them, if everything she knew about Negro life had made it even possible to consider. To actually volunteer to talk to one, let him in her house, watch him adjust his hips in her chair to accommodate the blue steel that made him a man.

She read her newspapers, tossed them on the floor, picked them up again. She read them differently now. Every week during the whole of January and February a paper laid bare the bones of some broken women. Man kills wife.

Eight accused of rape dismissed. Woman and girl victims of... Woman commits suicide...White attacks indicted...Five women caught...Woman says man beat.... Defenceless as chicks. Or were they? Read carefully the news accounts revealed that most of these women, subdued and broken, had not been defenceless. Or, like Dorcus, easy prey.

Armed black women were all over the country. that, at least they had learned. Didn't everything on God's earth have or acquire protection? speed, some poison in the leaf, the tongue, the tail? A mask, flight, numbers in the millions producing numbers in the millions? a thorn here, a spike there.

Natural prey? easy pickings? "I don't think so." aloud she said it. "I don't think so."

Alice was waiting with less hesitation than before and none of the scary angry feelings she had in January when a woman saying she was Violet Trace had tried to see her, talk or something. Knocked on her door once so early in the morning Alice thought it was the law.

"I don't have a thing to say to you. NOT one thing." She had said it in a loud whisper through the chained opening in the door and slammed it shut. She didn't need the name to be afraid or to know who she was: the star of her niece's funeral. The woman who ruined the service,