



JChap 3: Alice and Dorcus

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Chap 3

Alice and Dorcus

The beautiful men were cold. In typical July weather, sticky and bright, Alice ^{Margie} stood for three hours on Fifth Avenue marveling at the cold black faces and listening to drums saying what the marching men could not. What was possible to say was already in print on a banner that repeated some promises from the Declaration of Independence and waved over the head of its bearer. But what was meant came from the drums. The beautiful men were cold and quiet; moving slowly into the space the drums were building for them. Time altered during the march; it was as though the day passed, the night too, and still she stood there, the hand of the little girl in her own, staring into each cold face that passed. The drums and the freezing men hurt her, but hurt was better than fear and Alice had been frightened for a long time--first she was frightened of Kansas, then of Springfield, Massachusetts, then Eleventh Avenue, Third Avenue, Park Avenue. Recently she had begun to feel safe nowhere south of 110th Street, and Fifth Avenue was for her the most fearful of all. That was where whitemen leaned out of motor cars with dollars folded into their palms, assuming, taking for granted....It was where sales men touched her and only

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her as though she were part of the goods he had condescended to sell her; it was the tissue required if the management was generous enough to let you try on a blouse in a store. It was where she, a woman of fifty and independent means, had no sur name. Where women who spoke English said "Don't sit there honey, you never know what they have." And women who knew no English at all and would never own a pair of silk stockings moved away from her if she sat next to them on the trolley. ~~both cub and were already ready for~~

Now, down Fifth Avenue from curb to curb, came a tide of cold black faces, speechless and unblinking because what they meant to say but did not trust themselves to say the drums said for them, and what they had seen with thier own eyes and ^{through} the eyes of others the drums described to a T. The hurt hurt her, but the fear was gone at last. Fifth Avenue was put into perspective [tk] and so was her protection of the newly orphaned girl in her charge. From then on she hid the girl's hair in braids tucked under, lest whitemen see it raining round her shoulders and push dollar wrapped fingers toward her. ^{She} Instructed her about deafness and blindness-- how valuable and necessary they were in the company of whitewomen who spoke English and those who did not, as well as in the presence of their children. Taught her how to crawl along the walls of buildings, disappear into doorways, cut across corners in choked traffic-- how to do anything, move anywhere to avoid a whiteboy over the age of eleven. Much of this she could effect with her dress, but as the girl grew older, more elaborate specifications

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had to be put in place. High heeled shoes with the graceful straps across the arch, the vampy hats closed on the head with saucy brims framing the face, make-up of any kind--~~nothing but lemon cream at night and oatmeal scrubs in the morning~~-- all of that was outlawed in Alice Manfred's house. Especially the coats slung low in the back and not buttoned, but clutched, like a bathrobe or a towel around the body, forcing the women who wore them to look like they had just stepped out of the bath tub and were already ready for bed. Privately, Alice admired them, the coats and the women who wore them. She sewed linings into these coats, when she felt like working, and she had to look twice over her shoulder when the Gay Northeasters and the [tk tk] strolled down Seventh Avenue, they were so handsome. But this envy-streaked pleasure Alice closeted, and never let the girl see how she admired those ready-for-bed-in-the-streets clothes. And she told the ^{Miller} Millwood sisters who kept a few small children during the day for mothers who worked out of the house, what her feelings were. They did not need persuading, having been looking forward to the Day of Judgment for a dozen years, and expected its sweet relief any minute now. They had lists of every restaurant, diner and club that sold liquor and were not above reporting owners and customers to the police until they discovered that such news, in the Racket Squad Department, was not only annoying, it was redundant. When Alice Manfred collected the little girl from the ^{Miller} Millwood sisters, on those evenings her fine stitching was solicited, the three women occasionally sat down in

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the kitchen to hum and sigh over cups of Bosco at the signs of
Emminent Demise, Such as not just ankles but knees in full view;
lip rouge red as hellfire; burnt matchsticks rubbed on eyebrows;
fingernails tipped with blood--you couldn't tell the street walkers
from the mothers. And the men, you know, the things they thought
nothing of saying out loud to any woman who passed by could not be
repeated before children. They did not know for sure, but they
suspected that the dances were unspeakably nasty because the music
was getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord
waited to make Himself known. Songs that used to start in the head
and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the
sash and the buckled belts. Lower and lower, until the music was
so low down, you had to shut your windows and just suffer the
summer sweat when the men in shirt sleeves propped themselves in
window frames, or clustered on rooftops, in alleyways, on stoops
and in the apartments of relatives playing the low down stuff that
signalled Emmininet Demise. Because you could hear it everywhere.
Even if you lived, as Alice Manfred and the ^{Miller} Millwood sisters did,
on [tk] Place, with a leafy sixty-foot tree every hundred feet,
a quiet street with no less than five motor cars parked at the
curb, you could still hear it, and there was no mistaking what it
did to the children under their care--cocking their heads and
swaying ridiculous, unformed hips.

Alice thought the low down music (and in Kansas it was worse
than New York) had something to do with the silent black men

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marching down Fifth Avenue to advertise ^{their anger over} ~~the~~ outrage of thirty-seven dead in East St. Louis, two of whom were her sister and brother-in-law, killed in the riots. Some said the rioters were disgruntled veterans who fought in all-colored units, were refused the services of the Y.W.C.A., over there and over here, and came home to white violence more intense than when they enlisted and, unlike the battles they fought in Europe, stateside fighting was pitiless and totally without honor. Others said they were whites ^{terrified by} ~~outraged~~ at the wave of southern Negroes flooding the towns, searching for work and places to live. A few thought about it and said how perfect was the control of workers ^{NONE of ~~for~~ whom} ~~when~~, (like crabs in a barrel required ^{ING} no lid, no stick, not even a monitoring observation) ~~for whatever happened, not a one~~ ^{or a worm} would get out of the barrel. Alice, however, believed she knew better than everybody the truth. Her brother-in-law was not a veteran, and he had been living in East St. Louis since before the War. Nor did he need a whiteman's job--he owned a pool hall on [tk] street. As a matter of fact, he wasn't even in the riot; he had no weapons, confronted nobody on the street. He was pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death, and Alice's sister had just got the news and had gone back home to try and forget the color of his entrails, when her house was torched and she burned crispy in its flame. Her only child, a little girl named Dorcus, sleeping across the road with her very best girlfriend, did not hear the fire engine clanging and roaring down the street because when it was called it didn't come. But she

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must have seen the flames, must have, because the whole street was screaming. She never said. Never said anything about it. She went to two funerals in five days, and never said a word.

Alice thought, no. It wasn't the War and the disgruntled veterans; it wasn't the droves and droves of colored people flocking to paychecks and streets full of themselves. It was the music. The dirty, get on down music the women sang and the men played and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild. Alice was convinced and so were the ^{Miller} Millwood sisters as they blew into cups of Bosco in the kitchen. It made you do unwise disorderly things. Just hearing it made you ^{was like violating} illegal, ~~against~~ the law. There had been none of that at the Fifth Avenue march. Just the drums and the Boy Scouts passing out explanatory leaflets to whitemen in straw hats who needed to know what the freezing men already knew. Alice had picked up a leaflet that had floated to the pavement, read the words, and shifted her weight at the curb. She read the words and looked at Dorcus. Looked at Dorcus and read the words again. What she read seemed crazy, out of focus. Some great gap lunged between the print and the child. She glanced between them struggling for the connection, something to close the distance between the silent staring child and the slippery crazy words. Then suddenly, like a rope cast for rescue, the drums spanned the distance, gathering them all up and connected them: Alice, Dorcus, her sister and her brother-in-law, the Boy Scouts and the freezing black faces, the watchers on the pavement and those in the windows

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above. Alice carried that gathering rope with her always after that day on Fifth Avenue, and found it reliably secure and tight--most of the time. Except when the men sat on window sills fingering horns. The rope broke then, disturbing her peace, making her ~~irritatingly~~ ^{decorative} furiously aware of flesh and something so free she could smell its bloodsmell; made her aware of its life below the sash and its red lip rouge. She knew from sermons and editorials that it wasn't real music--just colored folks stuff, harmless, disorderly, simple fun--not real, not serious. But Alice Manfred swore she heard a complicated anger in it; something evil that disguised itself as flourish and laughing seduction. But the part she hated most was its appetite. Its longing for the bash, the slit; a careless longing for a fight or a red ruby stick pin for a tie--either would do. It faked happiness, faked welcome, but it did not make her feel generous, this cafe music. It made her hold her hand in the pocket of her apron to keep from smashing it through the glass pane to snatch the world in her fist and squeeze the life out of it for doing what it did and did and did to her and everybody else she knew or knew about. Better to close the windows and the shutters, sweat in the summer heat of a silent [tk] Place apartment than to risk a broken window or a yelping that might not know where or how to stop. ~~bedspread, tickled and happy knowing that there was no place~~ I have seen her, passing Betty's Cafe or an uncurtained window on [tk] Street when "[tk]" or "[tk]" drifted out, and watched her reach for the safe gathering rope thrown to her eight years ago on

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Fifth Avenue with one hand, and ball the other one into a fist in her coat pocket. I don't know how she did it--balance herself with two different hand ^{ge}postures. But she was not alone in trying, and she was not alone in losing. It was impossible to keep the Fifth Avenue drums separate from the belt buckle tunes spinning on every victrola. Impossible. Some nights are silent; not a motor car turning within earshot; no drunks or restless babies cry through the walls and Alice opens any window she wants to and hears nothing at all. Wondering at this totally silent night, she can go back to bed and as soon as she turns the pillow to its smoother, cooler side, a melody she doesn't remember where from plays by itself, alone and unsolicited, in her head. It is greedy, reckless, the fragment she hears, but underneath it, holding up the looseness like ^{a palm} [tk] are the drums that put Fifth Avenue in perspective.

Dorcus, of course, didn't have the problem. Alice had raised her carefully since she was nine years old, and although her earliest memory when she arrived from East St. Louis was the parade her aunt took her to, a kind of funeral parade for her mother and her father, Dorcus remembered it differently. [tk] ^{while} Her aunt worried about how to keep the heart ignorant of the hips and the head in charge of both, Dorcus, ~~seventeen~~ now, lay on a sheneille bedspread, tickled and happy knowing that there was no place to be where somewhere, close by, somebody was not licking his licorice stick, tickling the ivories, beating his skins, blowing off his horn while a knowing woman sang ain't nobody going to keep

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me down you got the right key baby but the wrong keyhole you got to get it bring it and put it right ^{here}, or else. *

I will never forget her laugh. It sounded ^{secret} sometimes but it was always unchained and ended up being a secret laugh made so public it startled me. Knowing how hard Alice Manfred worked to privatize her neice I almost split open when I found out where Joe Trace met her. Not at the candy counter of Duggie's where he first saw her and wondered if that, the peppermint she bought, was what insulted her skin, ^{Dark} ~~light~~ and creamy everywhere but her cheeks. And not at YPBU meetings either, because Joe left church going to Violet, except for Easter and Woman's Day when it would shame her not to have her husband there. No. Joe met Dorcus right in Alice Manfred's house right up under her nose and right before her very eyes.

He had gone there to deliver an order to Malvonne Edwards's cousin, Sheila, who said if Joe came to 237 [tk] ^{Place} Avenue, apartment 4c, before noon, he could deliver her order, the #2 Nut Brown and the vanishing cream, right there and she wouldn't have to wait til next Saturday or walk all the way down [tk] to [tk] pick it up, unless, of course he wanted to come on her job.... Joe had decided he would wait till next Saturday because not collecting the dollar and thirty-five cents wasn't going to strap him. But after he left Miss [tk's] house and stood for a half hour watching Bud and C.T. ^{abusing} ~~insulting~~ each other at checkers, he decided to check Sheila out right fast and quit for the day. His stomach was a bit sour and his

*
insert new material

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feet hurt. He didn't want to be caught delivering or writing orders in the rain either, rain that had been threatening all during that warm October Saturday. And even though getting home ^{the extended company of a speechless} early meant ^{while he fussed with} ~~arguing with~~ Violet about the sink trap or the wheel that turned the ~~ac~~ clothes line on their side of the building, the Saturday meal would be early too and satisfying: late summer greens cooked with the ham bone left over from last Sunday. Joe looked forward to the lean scrappy end-of-week meals, but hated the Sunday one: a baked ham, a sweet heavy pie to accompany it. Violet's determination to grow an ass she swore she once owned was killing ^yghim. Once upon a time, he bragged about her cooking. ~~couldn't~~ wait to get back to the house and devour it. But he was fifty, now, and appetities change, ^{we} you know. He still liked candy, hard candy--not divinity or caramel--sour balls being his favorite. If ^yviolet would confine herself to soup and boiled vegetables (with a bit of bread to go along) he would have been perfectly satisfied. That's what he was thinking about when he found 237 and climbed to stairs to 4C. The ^{argument} ~~insults~~ between C.T. and Bud had been too good, too funny: he had listened to them longer than ^yhe thought, because it was way past noon when he got to the door marked 4C. Woman noise could be heard through the door. Joe rang anyway. ^ynever rang

The peppermint girl with the bad skin answered the door, and while he was telling her who he was and what he'd come for, Sheila poked her head into the vestibule and shouted, "CPT! ^{Surprise me for once,} ~~I'm~~ surprised at you Joe ^Ttrace." He smiled and stepped in the door. Stood there

smiling and did not put his sample case down until the hostess, Alice Manfred, came and told him to come on in the parlor.

They were thrilled to have him interrupt their social. It was a luncheon meeting of the [tk] to plan for the Thanksgiving fund raiser for [tk] ⁽¹⁾and ^{the} they had settled what they could, tabled what they had to, and begun the lunch over which Alice had taken the greatest pains. ^{Pleased}~~satisfied~~, happy even, with their work and with each other's company, they did not know they missed anything until Alice sent Dorcus to anser ^wthe ring, and ^{sheila}, remembering what she had said to Joe, jumped up when she heard a male voice.

They made him feel like the singing men in spats. The young ones who clustered on the cornes ⁿwearing ties the color of handkerchiefs sticking out of theri ^sbreat pockets. The yong ^uroosters who stood without waiting for the chicks who were waiting-for them. Under the women's flirty appraising eyes, Joe felt the spats cover ^{his}he shoe tops and the pleasure of his own smile. They laughed, tapped the table cloth with their fingertips and began to tease, berate and adore him all at once. They told him how tall men like him made them feel, complained about his lateness and ^ein insolence, asked him what else he had in his case besides whatever it was that made Sheila so excited. They wonderd why he never rang thier doorbells, or climbed fourflights of double flight stairs to deliver anything to them. The ^ysang their compliments, ther ⁱabuse, and only ^{alice} confined herself to a thin smile, a closed look and did not join the comments with one of her own.

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Of course he stayed to lunch. Of course. although he tried not to eat anything much and spoil his appetite for the late summer greens he was sure were ^{2/2}simming in the pot for him. But the women touched his hair, ^{and} looked right at him. Ordered him. "Come on over here man and sit yourself down. Fix you a plate? Let me fix you a plate." He protested; they insisted. He openend his case; they offered to buy him out. "Eat, baby, eat," they said. "You not going out in that weather without something sticking to your bones dont' make no sense with all we got here, ^{for}corcus, girl, bring this man a empty plate so I can fill it for him hear?"

They were women his age mostly, with husbands, children, grandchildren too, ^{and} hard workers for themselves and anyone who needed them. And they thought men were ridiculous and delicious and terrible, ⁽tasking every opportunity to let them know that they were. In a group such as this one, they could do with impunity what they were cautious about alone with any man, stranger or friend, who rang the doorbell with a sample case in his hand no matter how tall he was, how country his smile or however much ^dsaness was in his eyes. Besides, they liked his voice. It had a rough pitch, some note they heard only when they visited stubborn old folks who would not budge from their front yards and overworked fields to come to the ^{city}. It reminded them of men who wore hats to plow and to eat supper in; who blew into saucers of coffee, and { held knives in thier fists when they ate. So they looked rig^{ht} ht at him and told him any way they could how ridiculous he was, and

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how delicious and how terrible.

[delete above passages/ new transfer]

Thursday men are satisfied. I can tell from their look that some illegal love is about to be or already has been satisfied. Weekends and other days of the week are possibilities but can't be counted on. Thursday is a day to be counted on. I used to think it was because domestic workers had Thursday off and could lie abed mornings as was out of the question on weekends when either they slept in the houses they worked in or rose so early to arrive there, they had no time for breakfast or any kind of play. But I noticed it was also true of men whose women were not servants and day workers; but bar maids and restaurant cooks with Sunday-Monday free; school teachers, cafe singers, office typists, and market stall women all looked forward to Saturday night. Still it was on Thursday the men were satisfied. Perhaps it's the artificial rhythm of the week--something so phoney about the seven-day cycle the body paid no attention to it, preferring triplets, duets, quartets, anything but a cycle of seven--that had to be broken into human parts and the break came on Thursday. Irresistable. The city world thinks about and arranges itself for the week end: the day before payday, the day after payday, the pre-Sabbath activity, the closed shop and the quiet school hall; barred bank vaults and offices locked in darkness. The outrageous expectations and inflexible demands of the weekend are null on Thursday, even though

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(found in Jazz note
(pp 3 & 4))

Seems terrible, eighteen; when there is absolutely nothing to do or worth doing except to lie down and hope when you are naked, she won't laugh at you. Or that he, holding your breasts, won't wish they were some other way. Terrible but worth the risk, because there is no other thing to do, although you do it. Study, work, memorize. Bite into food and the reputations of your friends. Laugh at the things that are right side up and those upside down--it doesn't matter because you are not doing the thing worth doing which is lying down somewhere in a dimly lit place enclosed in arms, and supported by the core of the world.

Think how it is. If you can manage it, just manage it.

Nature freaks for you, then. Turns itself into shelter, by ways. Pillows for two. Sends a bastard red rose through a clump of others that are shell pink. And the city, in its own way, gets down for you, cooperates, smoothing its sidewalks, correcting its curbstones, offering you melons and green apples on the corner. Racks of yellow head scarfs; strings of Egyptian beads. Kansas fried chicken and something with raisens calls attention to an open window where the aroma seems to lurk. And if that's not enough, doors to speakeasys stand ajar and in that cool dark place a clarinet coughs and clears its throat waiting for the woman to decide on the key. She makes up her mind and informs your back that she is daddy's little angel child. The city is smart at this: smelling good and looking raunchy, sending secret messages disguised as public signs: this way, open here, danger to let

colored only single men on sale woman wanted private room out to
lunch stop dog on premises absolutely no beer. And good at opening
locks, dimming stairways. Covering your moans with its own.

3 If they had not been in a such a rush, he would have picked
Violet up in his arms like that. He would have liked to and he was
stronger then. He does it now. With Dorcus. Scoops her up at the
door and manages to kick the door shut at the same time. {Is this
the daughter Violet never bore; the one it's all right to fiddle
with?}

4 It was to be named, provided for, and set loose in the world
without fear. There in that room. A sure enough blessing to have
bestowed in case there came a time when she was needed to name, to
provide for, and to set somebody else loose in the world without
fear.

The train trembled so, entering the tunnel, nervous like them,
they thought at having gotten there at last but what would it be?
In the tunnel where the lights went out and maybe there was a wall
ahead, or a cliff hanging over nothing? The train trembled at the
thought but went on and sure enough there was ground up ahead and
the trembling became the dancing under their feet. Joe stood up,
his fingers clutching the handrail above his head. He felt the
dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same. They were
hanging there, tapping back at the tracks, when the porter came

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people made liaisons and connections, disconnections and revisions during the weekends, many of which were accompanied by bruises and even a drop of blood, for excitement ran high on Friday and Saturday. But for satisfaction pure and deep, for balance in pleasure and comfort, Thursday can't be beat as is clear from the capable expression on the faces of the men and their conquering stride in the street. They seem to accomplish some sort of completion on Thursday that makes them steady enough on their feet to appear graceful. They crowd the corners, command the sidewalks and speak softly at unlit doors.

It doesn't last of course, and twenty-four hours later they are frightened again and restoring themselves with any helplessness within reach. So the weekends, destined to disappoint, are strident, sullen, sprinkled with bruises and dots of blood. The regrettable things, the coarse and sour remarks, the words that become active boils in the heart--none of that takes place on Thursday. I suppose Thor would hate it, but his day is a day for love in the city and the company of satisfied men.

Seems terrible, eighteen; when there is absolutely nothing to do or worth doing except to lie down and hope when you are naked, she won't laugh at you. Or that he, holding your breasts, won't wish they were some other way. Terrible but worth the risk, because there is no other thing to do, although you do it. Study, work, memorize. Bite into food and the reputations of your friends. Laugh at the things that are right side up and those upside down--it doesn't matter because you are not doing the thing worth doing which is lying down somewhere in a dimly lit place enclosed in arms, and supported by the core of the world.

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an observer to it, she took it in, swallowed it to keep and hold it--never let it out and never put it out. It was all she had and all she needed. At first she was afraid to talk about it, this sweet, private fire. At first she thought if she spoke of it, it would leave her, or someone would take it away, or she would lose it through her mouth. And when they took her on a train to New York City, and crushed her in a long parade, and she watched the black unblinking men, the drums ^{assured} taught her that ~~the~~ fire would never leave her, that it would be waiting with and for her whenever she wanted to let it loose. It made her bold. Even as a nine year old in PS [tk] she was bold. However tight and tucked in her

What the hell is that number doing in the left hand corner?

Dorcus, resisting her Aunt Alice's protection and restraining hands, is seduced and instructed by the music, the lyrics and the determined urge to experience what Alice is afraid of: [life below the sash makes every other part of her alive and dangerous. Also, the drums she heard were only the first part, the first word of a command sentence that she found in the other instruments when she heard music. Also these drums were not an all-embracing rope of fellowship, restraint and transcendence. She remembers them as a beginning, a start of something she looked to complete. And the remembrance of the flames shooting high in the night consumed her just as they did her mother. The fire burned in her still. Rather than the grief of not dying and burning with her mother, of being an observer to it, she took it in, swallowed it to keep and hold it--never let it out and never put it out. It was all she had and all she needed. At first she was afraid to talk about it, this sweet, private fire. At first she thought if she spoke of it, it would leave her, or someone would take it away, or she would lose it through her mouth. And when they took her on a train to New York City, and crushed her in a long parade, and she watched the black unblinking men, the drums ^{assured} ~~taught~~ her that ~~the~~ fire would never leave her, that it would be waiting with and for her whenever she wanted to let it loose. It made her bold. Even as a nine year old in PS [tk] she was bold. However tight and tucked in her

braids, however clumpy her high topped shoes that covered ankles others girls exposed in low cut oxfords, however black and thick her stockings, nothing hid the boldness swaying under her cast iron skirt, Eye glasses could not obscure it, nor could the pimples on her skin brought on by hard brown soap and nightly lemon cream. So her forays into the fire were not urried because she was confident that it would always be there.] Boys her own age were interesting, and she believed they were feeding her fire until she met someone who recognized it, saw it behind the eye glasses and underneath the cast iron skirt. The one who said "You are what Adam gave up the garden for, and strutted out of it." That association of danger, risk, sin, body and fire was all she needed to want to see him again. That and the treasure in his weekend sample case, not to speak of the gifts he brought her religiously. Mor, he took her to places where the music was, where in darkness one could feel the heat and hear the hiss, look at it, listen to it and enter it, somehow become it. You could not be afraid of or be hurt by anything you yourself became, provided you were bold enough to be it. This man with the weekend sample case knew that right away. And she knew he knew it because he understood what Eve had done and why. And that Adam was unimpressed by the dire consequences of the risk.

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