



JChap 3A

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If I remember right, that luncheon in Alice Manfred's house, something was off. Alice was vague and anybody in her company for thirty minutes knew that wasn't her style. She was the one who with a look could cut good gossip down to a titter when it got out of hand. And maybe it was her head-of-a-seamstress that made what you thought was a cheerful dress turn loud and tatty next to hers. But she could lay a table. Food might be a tad skimpy in the portions, and I believe she had a prejudice against butter, she used so little of it in her cakes. But the biscuits were light and the plates, the flatware--sparkling and arranged just so. Open her napkins wide as you please and not a catface anywhere. She was polite at the lunch of course; not too haughty either, but not paying close attention to things. Distracted she was. about Dorcus, probably. I always believed that girl was a pack of lies. I could tell by her walk her underclothes were beyond her years, even if her dress wasn't. Maybe back in October, Alice was beginning to think so too. By the time January came, nobody had to speculate. Everybody knew. I wonder if she had a premonition of Joe Trace knocking on her door? Or it could have been somethig she read in all those newspapers stacked neatly along the baseboard in her bedroom.

Notes: Jchap 3 or ?; Dec. 3

Everybody needs a pile of newspapers: to peel potatoes on, serve bathroom needs, wrap garbage. But not like Alice Manfred. She must have read them over and over else why would she keep them? And if she read anything in the newspaper twice she knew too little about too much. If you have secrets you want kept or want to figure out those other people have, a newspaper can turn your mind. The best thing to find out what's going on is to watch how people maneuver themselves in the streets. What sidewalk preachers stop them in their tracks. do they walk right through the boys kicking cans along the sidewalk or holler at them to quit. Ignore the men sitting on car fenders or stop to exchange a word? If a fight breaks out between a man and a woman do they cross in the middle of the block to watch or run to the corner in case it gets messy? One thing for sure, the streets will confuse you, teach you or break your head. But Alice Manfred wasn't the kind to give herself reasons to be in the streets. She got through them quick as she could to get back to her house. If she had come out more often, sat on the stoop or gossiped in front of the beauty parlor she would have known more than what the paper said. Peculiar, though, that the woman who avoided the streets let into her living room the woman who sat down in the middle of one.