



Rev. Insert 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 in her company. 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 bread was fresh 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. It could have been a premonition when Joe Trace knocked on the door. Could have been the newspapers stacked neatly along the baseboard in her bedroom. Everybody needs a pile of newspapers : to peel potatoes on, serve bathroom needs, wrap garbage. But not like Alice. 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. [tk]

Something, anyway, troubled Alice Manfred. 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, so did everybody else. Only by then they knew.

What's true is that Alice was vague. Later on, after Dorcus died, she visited nobody and hardly spoke. The lifelessness I remember from that luncheon got deeper, and I was as relieved as I was surprised when she finally welcomed Violet as a visitor.

Seeded in childhood, watered every day since, fear had sprouted through her veins all ^{her} life. Now it gathered, blossomed into fury.

Some^{where} in Springfield only the teeth were left. Maybe the skull, maybe not. If she dug down ^{deep} enough and tore off the top, she could be sure that the teeth would certainly be there. No lips to share with the ~~other~~ women ^{she} had shared them with. No fingers to lift her hips as he had lifted others. Just the teeth exposed now, nothing like the smile that had made her say, "Choose. " And he did. Seven months later she was the one choosing. The suit, the tie, the shirt he liked best. They suggested she not waste the shoes. No one would see them. "But socks? Surely he has to have socks?" Of course, said the mortician. Socks, of course. And what difference did it make that one of the mourners was her sworn and hated enemy laying white roses on the coffin, taking a red one away. For thirty years he was turning into teeth in Springfield.

"Fight?" Alice slammed the pressing iron down and listened as closely ^{before her} to what she was saying as did the woman sitting in a slip and a hat in the morning. ^{"You don't know what loss is," she said}

And neither she nor the mourner in
the inappropriate dress could do a thing
about it.