

Vernon  
2 pages

ALMA. If you prefer to run around in a circle—

ROGER. Rosemary means what are we waiting for?

ALMA. For the rest to arrive, we're not fully assembled.

MRS. BASSETT. It's almost half an hour after eight when we usually start.

ALMA. We've never had such a small attendance as this. I—I wonder why? (*She knows, of course, that the Rectory is considered a disaster area.*)

MRS. BASSETT. (*Winking at Vernon.*) It's just the weather, Miss Alma, that's all it is, but since it's unlikely to get warmer, I suggest we discuss the manifesto which is hot off the press.

ALMA. I hope I'm not alone in opposing the manifesto.

MRS. BASSETT. I'd like to know why you oppose it.

VERNON. I think it's a question of whether or not we have a serious purpose. I was under the impression that we *had* a serious purpose, but of course, if we *don't* have a serious purpose—

ALMA. Of course we *do* have a serious purpose, but I don't see why that means we have to publish a—manifesto about it!

ROGER. What's wrong with a manifesto?

VERNON. Even if nobody reads the manifesto, it—*crystallizes!*—our purpose, in our own minds.

ALMA. Oh, but to say that we—have such lofty ambitions.

ROGER. But, Miss Alma, *you* are the one who said we were going to make Glorious Hill the *Athens of the Delta!*

ALMA. Yes, but in the manifesto it says the Athens of the whole South, and besides an ambition, a hope of that kind, doesn't have to be—published! In a way to publish it—destroys it! —a little . . .

MRS. BASSETT. The manifesto is beautiful, *perfectly* beautiful, it made me cry!

VERNON. (*Who composed it.*) Thank you, Nancy.

ROGER. Boys and girls, the meeting is called to order. Miss Alma will read us the minutes of the last meeting.

MRS. BASSETT. Oh, let's skip the minutes! Who cares what happened last time? Let's concentrate on the present and the future! That's a widow's philosophy! (*The doorbell rings. Alma drops her papers.*) *Butter fingers!*

ALMA. (*Breathlessly.*) Did I—hear the bell—ring? (*The bell rings again.*) *Yes!* —it did! (*She starts to pick up the papers, they slip again.*)

Start

MRS. BASSETT. Miss Alma, I don't think I've ever seen you quite so nervous!

ALMA. I forgot to mention it! —I . . . invited a . . . guest! —someone just home for the holidays—young Doctor Buchanan, the old doctor's son, you know! —he—lives next door! —and he . . .

VERNON. I thought we had all agreed not to have outsiders unless we took a vote on them beforehand!

ALMA. It was presumptuous of me, but I'm sure you'll forgive me when you meet him! *(She flies out. They all exchange excited looks and whispers as she is heard offstage admitting John to the ball.)*

ROSEMARY. I don't care who he is, if a group is a group there must be something a little exclusive about it! —otherwise it . . .

MRS. BASSETT. *Listen! Why, she is hysterical about him! (Miss Alma's excited voice is heard and her breathless laughter offstage racing.)*

ALMA. Well, well, well, our guest of honor has finally made his appearance!

JOHN. Sorry I'm late.

ALMA. Oh, you're not very late.

JOHN. Dad's laid up. I have to call on his patients.

ALMA. Oh, is your father not well?

JOHN. Just a slight touch of grippe.

ALMA. There's so much going around.

JOHN. These Delta houses aren't built for cold weather.

ALMA. Indeed they aren't! The Rectory's made out of paper, I believe. *(All of this is said offstage, in the ball.)*

ROSEMARY. Her voice has gone up two octaves!

MRS. BASSETT. Obviously infatuated with him!

ROSEMARY. Oh, my stars!

MRS. BASSETT. The last time I was here—the lunatic mother made a sudden entrance!

VERNON. *Shhhh! —girls! (Alma enters with John. He is embarrassed by the curious intensity of her manner and the greedily curious glances of the group.)*

ALMA. Everybody! —this is Doctor John Buchanan, Junior!

JOHN. Hello, everybody. I'm sorry if I interrupted the meeting.

MRS. BASSETT. Nothing was interrupted. We'd decided to skip the minutes.