

MRS. FELL. [*Flipping the tip of her fan in his face*] Oh, did you, Smarty! [*Ritter raises his right hand, as though to ward off the blow.*] Well, listen, Frederick. [*He attends, and she becomes confidential.*] He left quite a bit of insurance, didn't he?

RITTER. Yes—about three hundred thousand, I believe.

MRS. FELL. [*Becoming generally stoney*] Is there a will, do you know?

RITTER. I don't know; I suppose there is.

MRS. FELL. Well, I hope she was sharp enough to see that there is. Because if there isn't, you know, she's only entitled to a third in this state. That's all the widow's entitled to. And, you know, Frederick, Clara Sheppard could never in this world get along on a bare hundred thousand dollars; you know that as well as I do.

RITTER. Well, she has quite a bit of money of her own, hasn't she? [54]

MRS. FELL. Oh, tons of it, yes; but there's no sense in using her own if she can use his. [*Ritter glances at her, but she has turned away slightly to cough, behind her fan. Jenny goes out at the left hallway.*] Was sudden, wasn't it?

RITTER. Yes, it was.

MRS. FELL. We were terribly inconvenienced. Because I'd simply *deluged* my friends with tickets. [*Mrs. Ritter is up at the punch-bowl, sampling the punch and nibbling at the cakes.*]

RITTER. I can't understand why you didn't postpone the show.

MRS. FELL. That's what *I* wanted to do; but Mrs. P. here was superstitious.

MRS. PAMPINELLI. [*Catching her name, and straightening up from the manuscript, imperiously*] What are you saying about Mrs. P., Nelly Fell?

MRS. FELL. Why, Frederick was wondering why we didn't postpone the performance when Jimmy Sheppard died,—and *I* told him you were superstitious about a postponement.

MRS. PAMPINELLI. No, Nelly, I was not superstitious, so please don't say that I was; I shouldn't care to have such an impression get abroad.

MRS. FELL. [*Touching her hair*] Well, you were something, Betty.

MRS. PAMPINELLI. Yes, Nelly, I admit that I was something,—but it was not superstitious. I was,—[*She looks out and away off, and feels for the word.*] intuitive. [*She turns her head and looks directly at Ritter, who drops his eyes to the tip of his cigar. Nelly Fell, following Mrs. Pampinelli's eyes, looks at Ritter also. Then everyone's eyes shift to Mrs. Pampinelli. Florence turns languidly and looks; and Mrs. Ritter, with a glass of punch in one hand, and a small cake in the other, moves forward, in the middle of the room, and stands looking and listening—and chewing. Hossefrosse steps over to the table behind which Mrs. Pampinelli is standing, and takes the manuscript,—returning with it to the arm-chair, and becoming absorbed in a comparison of a certain page of it with his individual part.*] I have struggled so long to inaugurate a Little Theatre Movement in this community, that I had intuitively anticipated the occurrence of some obstacle to thwart me; so that, when the telephone-bell rang, on the night of Mr. Sheppard's death, I said to myself, before I even took down the receiver, [*She plants her lead-pencil on the table and assumes something of the aspect of a crusader.*] “This is my event. Something has happened—that is going to put my sincerity in this movement to the test. And I must remember, as Mr. Lincoln said at Gettysburg, ‘It is better that we should perish, than that those ideals for which we struggle should perish.’” [*She turns her gaze in the direction of Ritter, but Mrs. Ritter is first in the line of vision, with her eyes full of the coast of Greenland, and her mouth full of cake. As she becomes suddenly conscious that Mrs. Pampinelli has stopped talking and is looking directly at her, she meets the look and breaks into an utterly irrelevant little laugh.*] [55] [56]