

ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

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(Continued From Page 1)

in last passengers over distant trolley lines, now and then howled on a curve; far-away metallic stirrings could be heard from factories in the sooty suburbs on the plain outside the city; east, west and south switch engines chugged and snorted on sidings; and everywhere in the air there seemed to be a faint, voluminous hum as of innumerable wires trembling overhead to vibration of machinery underground.

In his youth Adams might have been less resentful of sounds such as these when they interfered with his night's sleep; even during an illness he might have taken some pride in them as proof of his citizenship in a "live town"; but at 55 he merely hated them because they kept him awake. They "pressed on his nerves," as he put it; and so did almost everything else, for that matter.

He heard the milk wagon drive into the cross-street beneath his windows and stop at each house. The milkman carried his jars round to the "back porch," while the horse moved slowly ahead to the gate of the next customer and waited there. "He's gone into Pollocks," Adams thought following this progress. "I hope it'll sour on 'em before breakfast. Delivered the Andersons. Now he's getting out ours. Listen to the darn brute! What's he care who wants to sleep?" His complaint was of the horse, who casually shifted weight with a clink of steel shoes on the worn brick pavement of the street, and then heartily shook himself in his harness, perha to dislodge a fly far ahead of its season. Light had just flimed the windows; and with that the first sparrow woke, chirped instantly, and roused neighbors in the trees of the small yard, including a loud-voiced robin. Vociferations began irregularly, but were soon unanimous.

"Sleep? Dang likely now, ain't it?" Night sounds were becoming day sounds; the far-away hooting of freight-engines seemed brisker than an hour ago in the dark. A cheerful whistler passed the house, even more careless of sleepers than the milkman's horse had been; then a group of colored workmen came by, and although it was impossible to be sure whether they were homeward bound from night-work or on their way to daywork, at least it was certain that they were jocose. Loose, aboriginal laughter preceded them afar, and beat on the air long after they had gone by.

The sick-room night-light, shied from his eyes by a newspaper propped against a water-pitcher, still showed a thin glimmering that had grown off to Adams. In his wandering and enfeebled thoughts, which were much more often imaginings than reasonings, the attempt of the night-light to resist the dawn reminded him of something unpleasant, though he could not discover just what the unpleasant, though he could not discover just what the unpleasant thing was.

Here was a puzzle that irritated him the more because he could not solve it, yet always seemed just on the point of a solution. However, he may have lost nothing cheerful by remaining in the dark upon the matter; for if he had been a little sharper in this introspection he might have concluded that the squalor of the night-light, in its seeming effort to show against the forerunning of the sun itself, had stimulated some half-buried perception within him to sketch the painful little synopsis of an autobiography.

In spite of noises without, he drowsed again, not knowing that he did; and when he opened his eyes the nurse was just rising from her cot. He took no pleasure in the sight, it may be said. She exhibited to him a face maimed by sleep, and set like a clay face left on its cheek in a hot and dry studio. She was still only in part awake, however, and by the time she had extinguished the night-light and given her patient his tonic, she had recovered enough plastiety. "Well, isn't that grand? We've had another good night," she said as she departed to dress in the bathroom.

"Yes, you had another!" he retorted, though not until after she had closed the door.

Presently he heard his daughter moving about in her room across the narrow hall, and so knew that she had risen. He hoped she would come in to see him soon, for she was the one thing that didn't press on his nerves, he felt; though the thought of her hurt him as, indeed, every thought hurt him. But it was his wife who came first.

She wore a lank cotton wrapper, and a crescent of gray hair escaped from one temple from beneath the hand-kerchief she had worn upon her head for the night and still retained; but she did everything possible to make her expression cheering.

"Oh, you're better again! I can see that, as soon as I look at you," she said. "Miss Perry tells me you've had another splendid night."

He made a sound of irony, which seemed to dispose unfavourably of Miss Perry, and then, in order to be more certainly intelligible, he added, "She slept well, as usual!"

But his wife's smile persisted. "It's a good sign to be cross; it means you're practically convalescent right now."

"Oh, I am, am I?"

"No doubt in the world!" she exclaimed. "Why, you're practically a well man, Virgil—all except getting your strength back, of course, and that isn't going to take long. You'll be right on your feet in a couple of weeks from now!"

"Oh, I will!"

"Of course you will!" She laughed briskly, and, going to the table in the corner of the room, moved his glass of medicine an inch or two, turned a book over so that it lay upon its other side, and for a few moments occupied herself with similar futilties, having taken on the air of a person who makes things neat, though she produced no such actual effect upon them. "Of course you will," she repeated, absently. "You'll be as strong as you ever were; maybe stronger." She paused for a moment, not looking at him, then added, cheerfully. "So that you can fly around and find something really good to get into."

Something important between them came near the surface here, for though she spoke with what seemed but a casual cheerfulness, there was a little betraying break in her voice, a trembling just perceptible in the utterance of the final word. And she still kept up the affectation of being helpfully preoccupied with the table, and did not look at her husband—perhaps because they had been married so many years that without looking she knew just what his expression would be, and preferred to avoid the actual sight of it as long as possible. Meanwhile, he stared hard at her, his eyes beginning to move with little distortions not lacking in the pathos of a sick man's agitation.

"So that's it," he said. "That's what you're hinting at."

"Hinting?" Mrs. Adams looked surprised and indulgent. "Why, I'm not doing any hinting, Virgil."

"What did you say about my finding 'something good to get into?'" he asked, sharply. "Don't you call that hinting?"

Mrs. Adams turned toward him now; she came to the bedside and would have taken his hand, but he quickly moved it away from her.

"You mustn't let yourself get nervous," she said. "But of course when you get well there's only one thing to do. You mustn't go back to that old hole again."

"Old hole?" That's what you call it, is it?" In spite of his weakness, anger made his voice strident, and upon this stimulation she spoke more urgently.

"You just mustn't go back to it, Virgil. It's not fair to any of us, and you know it isn't."

"Don't tell me what I know, please!"

She clasped her hands, suddenly carrying her urgency to plaintive entreaty. "Virgil, you won't go back to that hole?"

"That's a nice word to use to me," he said. "Call a man's business a hole!"

"Virgil, if you don't owe it to me to look for something different, don't you owe it to your children? Don't tell me you won't do what we all want you to, and what you know in your heart you ought to!" And if you have got into one of your stubborn fits and are bound to go back there for no other reason except to have your own way, don't tell me so, for I can't bear it!"

He looked up at her fiercely. "You've got a fine way to cure a sick man!" he said; but she had concluded her appeal—for that time—and instead of making any more words in the chatter, let him see that there

were tears in her eyes, shook her head and left the room.

Alone, he lay breathing rapidly, his emaciated chest proving itself equal to the demands his emotion put upon it. "Fine!" he repeated, with husky indignation. "Fine way to cure a sick man! Fine!" Then, after a silence, he gave forth whispering sounds of laughter, his expression the while remaining sore and far from humor.

Her expression was matter-of-course,

"And give us our daily bread!" he added, meaning that his wife's little performance was no novelty.

CHAPTER II

In fact, the agitation of Mrs. Adams was genuine, but so well under her control that its traces vanished during the three short steps she took to cross the narrow hall between her husband's door and the one opposite. Her expression was matter-of-course,

rather than pathetic, as she entered the pretty room where her daughter, half dressed, sat before a dressing-table and played with the reflections of a three-leafed mirror framed in blue enamel. That is, just before the moment of her mother's entrance, Alice had been playing with the mirror's reflections—posturing her arms and her expressions, clasping her hands behind her neck, and tilting

back her head to foreshorten the face in a tableau conceived to represent sauciness, then one of scornful toleration, and all very piquant; but as the door opened she hurriedly resumed the practical, and occupied her hands in the arrangement of her plentiful brownish hair.

They were pretty hands, of a shapeless delicacy and fine. "The best

things she's got!" a cold-blooded girl pose she deserved it, though reposed was anything but her habit, being seldom seen upon her except at home. On exhibition she led a life of gestures, the unkink said to make her lovely hands more memorable, but all of her usually accompanied the gestures of the hands, the shoulders ever giving them their impulses first, and even her feet being called upon, at the same time, for eloquence.

(To Be Continued.)

DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



A Full Day of It



—By ALLMAN

OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



—By BLOSSER

THEM DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—



Collar This On Your Clarinet



—By AL POSEN

RALSTON ATTACKS REPUBLICAN AIM

Senator-Elect Speaks in Springfield, Ill.

By Times Special

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., Jan. 5.—National isolation is a thing of the past, Samuel M. Ralston, United States Senator-elect from Indiana, said in an address at the Jackson day banquet here last night.

"No nation any longer can hold itself out of the reach of the world, if it so desires," the speaker said. "This Nation is fourteen times closer to every point of the world than it was at the breaking out of the World War. Oceans have become but ponds and mountain but ridges."

The idea of isolation must become obsolete, Ralston insisted. Just as individuals owe something to one another in the daily relations of life, so do nations, he said. European nations are prostrated commercially, and it is to the United States they look for assistance in getting on their feet.

In the past thirty-five years practically all important constructive pieces of legislation have been enacted by the Democratic party, Ralston asserted.

"The Republican party's hobby during this time has been the high protective tariff, the basic idea of which is calculated to limit the vision of its advocates and to disassociate them from sympathy with the human element in world affairs," Ralston said. "This is why, in my opinion, the Republican party has ceased to have an international mind."

I Spied Today

A motorman on a Shelby car got off his stool and gave it to a woman who was standing.—G. T. W.

A man on E. Ohio St. peeled a banana and start to eat the fruit in the street. He was quite aggravated when he discovered his mistake.—G. B.

His Number A city fireman walked from headquarters at New York and Alabama Sts. with a "Sold" sign printed on his back, while his fellow fire-fighters laughed uproariously.—J. M.

He Spied His A woman and small boy in the New York Store basement. The woman ordered an ice cream soda and the boy drank a glass of water.—R. A.

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