

ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

Second novel in the Times series by Indiana writers
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THE sketching was spontaneous and dramatic. Mathematics had no part in it; nor was there accurate direction of Mr. Adams' relation to the institution of Lamb & Co. The point was clouded, in fact, though that might easily be set down to the general laziness of young ladies confronted with the mysteries of trade or commerce. Mr. Adams either had been a vague sort of junior member of the firm, it appeared, or else he should have been made some such thing; at all events, he was an old mainstay of the business; and he, as much as any, had helped to build up the prosperity of the company. But at last, tired of providing so much intelligence and energy for which other people took profit greater than his own, he had decided to leave the company and found a business entirely for himself. The Lambs were going to be enraged when they learned what was afoot.

Such was the impression, a little misty, wrought by Alice's quick narrative. But there was a delicious fact behind it: Adams had succumbed.

His wife, grave and nervous, rather than triumphant, in success, had told their daughter that the great J. A. would be furious and possibly vindictive. Adams was afraid of him, she said.

"But what for, mamma?" Alice asked, since this seemed a turn of affairs out of reason. "What in the world has Mr. Lamb to do with papa's leaving the company to set up for himself? What right has he to be angry about it? If he's such a friend as he claims to be, I should think he'd be glad—that is, if the glue factory turns out well. What will he be angry for?"

Mrs. Adams gave Alice an uneasy glance, hesitated, and then explained that a resignation from Lamb's had always been looked upon, especially by "that old man," as treachery. You were supposed to die in the service, she said bitterly, and her daughter, a little mystified, accepted this explanation. Adams had not spoken to her of his surrender; he seemed not inclined to speak to her at all, or to any one.

Alice was not serious too long, and she began to laugh as she came to the end of her decorative sketch. After all, the whole thing is perfectly ridiculous," she said. "In fact, it's funny! That's on account of what papa's going to throw over the Lamb business for! To save your life you couldn't imagine what he's going to do!"

"I won't try, then," Russell assented.

"It takes all the romance out of me," she laughed. "You'll never go for a Parisian walk with me again, after I tell you what I'll be heless to!" They had come to the entrance of the little park; and, as Alice had said, it was a pretty place, especially on a day so radiant. Trees of the oldest forest stood there, hale and serene over the trim, bright grass; and the proletarians had not come from their factories at this hour; only a few mothers and their babies were to be seen, here and there, in the shade. "I think I'll postpone telling you about it till we get nearly home again," Alice said, as they began to saunter down one of the gravelled paths. "There's a bench beside a spring farther on we can sit there and talk about a lot of things—things not so sticky as my dowry's going to be."

"Sticky?" he echoed. "What in the world—"

"A glue factory?"

Then he laughed, too, as much from friendliness as from amusement; and she remembered to tell him that the project of a glue factory was still "an Adams secret." It would be known soon, however, she added; and the whole Lamb connection would probably begin saying all sorts of things. Heaven knew what!

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Thus Alice built her walls of flimsy, working always gaily, or with at least the air of gaiety; and even as she rattled on, there was somewhere in her mind a constant little wonder. Everything she said seemed to be necessary to support something else she had said. How had it happened? She found herself telling him that since her father had decided on making so great a change in his ways, she and her mother hoped at last to persuade him to give up that "foolish little house" he had been so obstinate about; and she checked herself abruptly on this delicacy just as she was about to slide into a remark concerning her own preference for a "country place." Discretion caught her in time; and something else, in company with discretion, caught her, for she stopped short in her talk and blushed.

They had taken possession of the bench beside the spring, by this time; and Russell, his elbow on the back of the bench and his chin on his hand, the better to look at her, had no guess at the cause of the blush, but was content to find it lovely. At his first sight of Alice she had seemed pretty in the particular way of being pretty that he happened to like best; and, with every moment he spent with her, this prettiness appeared to increase. He felt that he could not look at her enough; his gaze followed the fluttering of the graceful hands in almost continued gesture as she talked; then lifted happily to the vivacious face again. She charmed him.

After her abrupt pause, she sighed, then looked at him with a frown, and then lifted in a comedy appeal. "You haven't said you wouldn't give Hendetta the chance," she said, in the softest voice that can still have a little laugh running in it.

He was puzzled. "Give Hendetta the chance?"

"You know! You'll let me keep on being unfair, won't you? Not give the other girls a chance to get even?" He promised, heartily.

CHAPTER XV

Alice had said that no one who either Russell or herself would be likely to see them in the park or upon the dingy street; but although they returned by that same ungentle thoroughfare, they were seen by a person who knew them both. Also, with some surprise on the part of Russell, and something more poignant than surprise for Alice, they saw this person.

All of the dingy street was ugly, but the greater part of it appeared to be honest. The two pedestrians came upon a block or two, however, where it offered suggestions of a less upright character, like a steady enough workman with a naughty book sticking out of his pocket. Three or four dim shops, a single story in height, exhibited foul signboards, yet fair enough so far as the wording went; one proclaiming a tobacconist, one a junk dealer, one a dispenser of "soft drinks and cigars." The most credulous would have doubted these signboards, for the craft of the modern tradesman is exerted to lure indoors the passing glance, since if the glance is pleased the feet may follow; but this alleged tobacconist and his neighbors had long been fond of dust on their windows, evidently, and shades were pulled far down on the glass of their doors. Thus the public eye, small of pupil in the light of the open street, was intentionally not invited to the dusky interiors. Something different from mere lack of enterprise was apparent; and the signboards might have been omitted; they were pains thrown away, since it was plain to the world that the business parts of these shops were the brighter back rooms implied by the dark front rooms; and that the commerce was in perilous new liquors and in dice and rough girls.

Nothing could have been more innocent than the serenity with which these wicked little places revealed themselves for what they were; and, bound by this final tie of guilelessness, they stood together in a row which ended with a companionable barber shop, much like them. Beyond was a series of soot-harried frame two-story houses, once part of a cheerful neighborhood when the town was middle-aged and settled, and not old and growing. These houses, all carrying the label, "Ten Rooms," had the worried look of vacancy that houses have when they are too full of everybody without being anybody's home; and there was, too, a surreptitious air about them, as if, like the false little shops, they advertised something by concealing it.

One of the one next to the barber shop—had across its front an ample, fig-sawed veranda, where, of course, the father of a family had fanned himself with a palm-leaf fan on Sunday afternoons, watching the surrises go by, and where his daughter listened to mandolins and staidness on staid evenings; but although youth still held the veranda, both the youth and the veranda were in decay. The four or five young men who lounged there this afternoon were of a type known to shady pool-parlors. Hats found no favor with them; all of them wore caps; and their tight clothes, apparently from a common source, showed a vivacious fancy for oblique pockets, false belts and Easter-egg colorings. Another thing common to the group was the expression of eye and mouth; and Alice, in the midst of her other thoughts, had a distasteful thought about this.

DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



THE DIVIDING LINE

JR WILLIAMS

NEA SERVICE

THEM DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—



THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY



fingers like a drum major's baton, and whistled loudly.

Moreover, he was indeed accompanied. With him was a thin girl who had made a violent black-and-white poster of herself: black dress, black limbo, black stockings, white slippers, great black hat down upon the black eyes; and beneath the hat a curve of cheek and chin made white as whitewash, and in strong bilateral motion with gum.

The loungers on the veranda were familiar of the pair; hailed them with cacklings; and one began to sing, in a voice all tin:

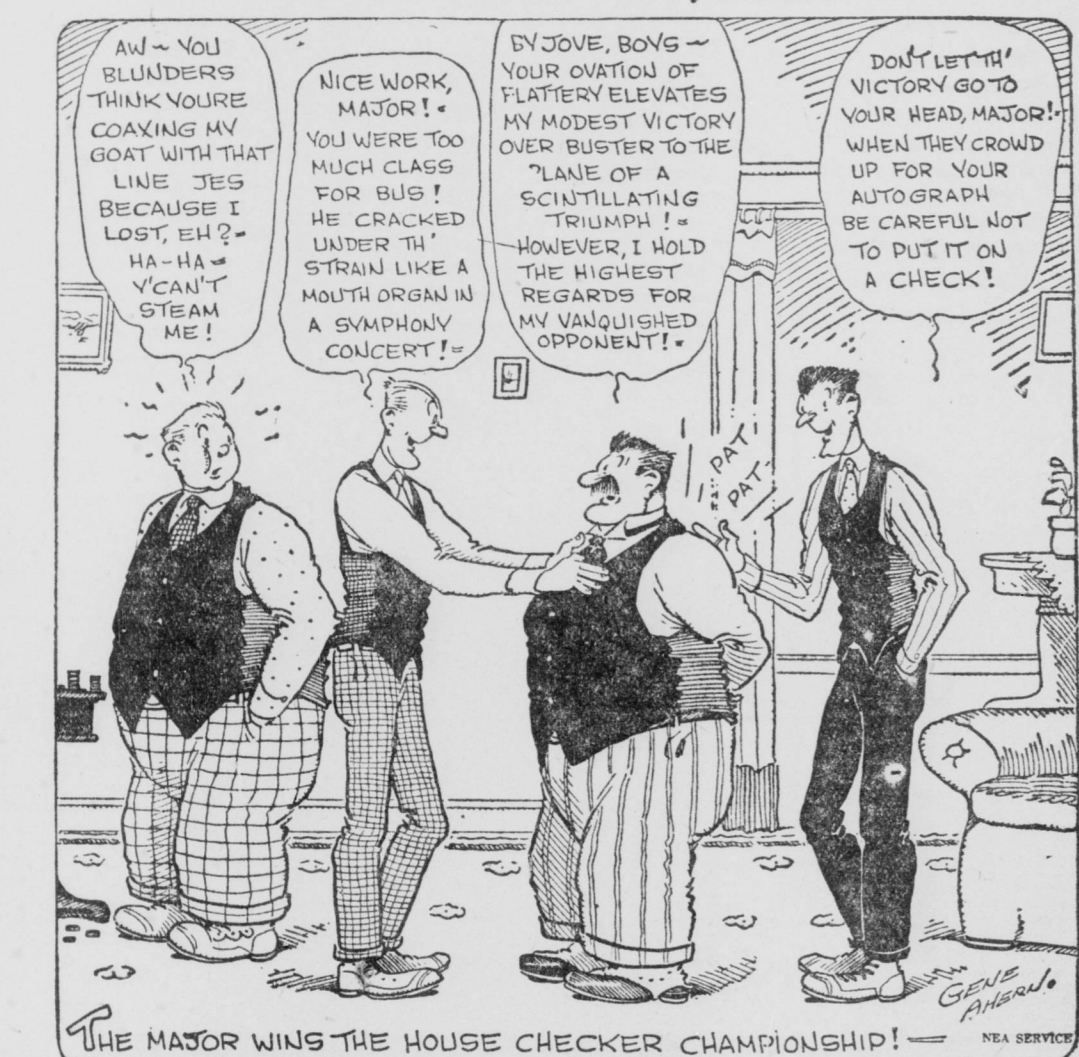
"Then my skirt, Sal, and me did go Right straight to the moving-pitcher show. Oh, you bashful vamp!"

The girl laughed airily. "God, but you guys are wise!" she said. "Come on, Wallie."

brother certainly seems to have found the place for "color" today," he said. "That girl's talk must be full of it." But Alice had forgotten the color she herself had used in accounting for Walter's peculiarities, and she did not understand. "What?" she said huskily.

"Don't you remember telling me about him? How he was going to write, probably, and would go anywhere to pick up types and get them to talk?"

She kept her eyes ahead, and said sharply. "I think his literary tastes scarcely cover this case." "Don't be too sure," he didn't look at all disconcerted. He didn't seem to mind your seeing him."



"That's all the worse, isn't it?" "Why, no," her friend said, genially. "It means he didn't consider

that he was engaged in anything out of the way. You can't expect to understand everything boys do at his age; they do all sorts of queer things, and outgrow them. Your brother evidently has a taste for queer people, and very likely he's been at least half sincere when he's made you believe he had a literary motive behind it. We all go through—

(To Be Continued.)

Crush This On Your Concertina

—By AL POSEN



OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN

