

ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

Second novel in the Times series by Indiana writers
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"T HANKS, Mr. Russell," she interrupted. "Let's don't say any more."

He looked at her flushed face and enlarged eyes, and he liked her all the better for her indignation: this was how good good sisters ought to feel, he thought, failing to understand that most of what she felt was not about Walter. He ventured only a word more. "Try not to mind it so much; it really doesn't amount to anything."

She shook her head, and they went on in silence; she did not look at him again until they stopped before her own house. Then she gave him only one glimpse of her eyes before she looked down. "It's spoiled, isn't it?" she said, in a low voice.

"What's 'spoiled'?"

"Our walk—well, everything. Some how it always—is."

"Always is what?" he asked.

"Spoiled," she said.

He laughed at that; but without looking at him she suddenly offered him her hand, as, as he took it, he felt a hurried, violent pressure upon his fingers, as if she meant to thank him almost passionately for being kind. She was gone before he could speak to her again.

In her room, with the door locked, she did not go to her mirror, but to her bed, flinging herself face down, not caring how far the pillows put her hat awry. Sheep grief had followed her anger; grief for the calamitous end of her bright afternoon, grief for the "end of everything," as she thought then. Nevertheless, she gradually grew more composed, and, when her mother tapped on the door presently, let her in. Mrs. Adams looked at her with quick apprehension.

"Oh, poor child! Wasn't he?" Alice told her. "You see how it—how it made me look, mama," she quavered, having concluded her narrative. "I'd tried to cover up Walter's awfulness at the dance with that story about his being 'literary,' but no story was big enough to cover this up—and oh! it must make him think I tell stories about other things!"

"No, no, no!" Mrs. Adams protested. "Don't you see? At the worst, all he could think is that Walter told stories to you about why he likes to be with such dreadful people, and you believed them. That's all he'd think; don't you see?"

Alice's wet eyes began to show a little hopefulness. "You honestly think it might be that, may, mama?"

"Why, from what you've told me, I said, I know it's that way. Didn't he say he wanted to come again?"

"No-no," Alice said, uncertainly. "But I think he will. At least I begin to think so now. He—" She stopped.

"From all you tell me, he seems to be a very desirable young man," Mrs. Adams said, primly.

Her daughter was silent for several moments; then new tears gathered upon her downcast lashes. "He'd just—dear!" she faltered.

Mrs. Adams nodded. "He's told you he isn't engaged, hasn't he?"

"No. But I know he isn't. Maybe when he first came here he was near it, but I know he's not."

"I guess Mildred Palmer would like him to be, all right!" Mrs. Adams was frank enough to say, rather triumphantly; and Alice, with a lowered head, murmured:

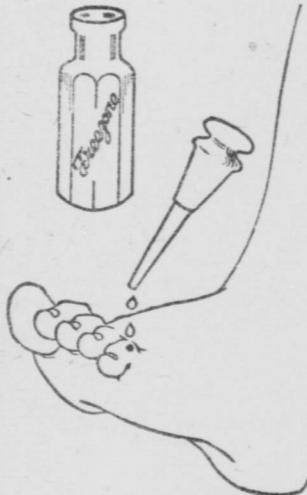
"Anybody—would."

The words were all but inaudible.

"Don't you worry," her mother said and patted her on the shoulder. "Everything will come out all right; don't you fear, Alice. Can't you see that

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bit of energy in your body, and all the energy I got left in mine, and every cent of the little I've saved, besides something I'll have to raise on this house. I'm going right at it, now I've got to; and you'll have to quit Lamb's by the end of next week."

"Oh, I will?" Walter's voice grew louder, and there was a shrewdness in it. "I got to quit Lamb's the end of next week, have I?" He stepped for-

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NEA SERVICE

ward, angrily. "Listen!" he said. "I'm not walkin' out o' Lamb's see?" I'm not quittin' down there; I stay with 'em, see?"

Adams looked up at him, astonished. "You'll leave there next Saturday," he said. "I've got to have you."

"You don't anything o' the kind," Walter told him, sharply. "Do you expect to pay me anything?"

"I'd pay you about what you been

getting down there."

"Then pay somebody else; I don't know anything about glue. You get somebody else."

"No, You've got to—"

Walter cut him off with the utmost vehemence. "Don't tell me what I got to do! I know what I got to do better'n you, I guess! I stay at Lamb's, see?"

Adams rose angrily. "You'll do

what I tell you. You can't stay down there."

"Why can't I?"

"Because I won't let you."

"Listen! Keep on not lettin' me."

"I'll be there just the same."

At this his father broke into a sour laughter. "They won't let you, Walter. They won't have you down there after they find out I'm going."

"They'll do it!"

"Look here, then; show me why."

"They'll care enough to fire you, my boy!"

"They'll do it!"

"Yes," Walter jeered; "you keep sayin' they will, but when I ask you to show me why, you keep sayin'

they will! That makes little headway with me. I can tell you!"

Adams groaned, and, rubbing his head, began to pace the floor. Walter's refusal was something he had not anticipated; and he felt the weakness of his own attempt to meet it; he seemed powerless to do anything but utter angry words, which, as Walter said, made little headway. "Oh, my, my!" he muttered. "Oh, my, my!"

(To Be Continued)