

# ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

Second novel in the Times series by Indiana writers

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"W HAT can I do?" "I thought I'd write a letter and get you to hand it to him for me."

"My soul!" his friend exclaimed. "Why on earth don't you just go down there and tell him?"

Adams became pitifully embarrassed. He stammered, coughed, stammered again, wrinkling his face so deeply he seemed about to weep; but finally he contrived to utter an apologetic laugh. "I ought to do that, of course, but in some way or other I just don't seem to be able to manage it."

"Why in the world not?" the mystified Lohr inquired.

"I could hardly tell you—less'n it is to say that when you been with one boss all your life it's so—so kind of embarrassing—to quit him, I just can't make up my mind to go and speak to him about it. No; I got it in my head a letter's the only satisfactory way to do it, and I thought I'd ask you to hand it to him."

"Well, of course I don't mind doing that for you," Lohr said, mildly. "But why in the world don't you just mail it to him?"

"Well, I'll tell you," Adams returned. "You know, like that, it'd have to go through a clerk and that secretary of his, and I don't know who all. There's a couple of kind of delicate points I want to put in it; for instance, I want to explain to him how much improvement and so on I'm going to introduce on the old process I helped to work out with Campbell when we were working for him, so he'll understand it's a different article and no infringement at all. Then there's another thing; you see all during while I was sick he had my salary paid to me—it amounts to considerable, I was on my back so long. Under the circumstances, because I'm quitting, I don't feel as if I ought to accept it, and so I'll have a check for him in the letter to cover it, and I want to be sure he knows it, and gets it personally. If it had to go through a lot of other people, the way it would if I put it in the mail, why, you can't tell. So what I thought; if you'd hand it to him for me, and maybe if he happened to read it right then, or anything, it might be you'd notice whatever he'd happen to say about it—and you could tell me afterward."

"All right," Lohr said. "Certainly if you'd rather do it that way, I'll hand it to him and tell you what he says; that is, if he says anything and I hear him. Got it written?"

"No; I'll send it around to you last of the week," Adams moved toward his taxicab. "Don't say anything to anybody about it, Charley, especially till after that."

"And, Charley, I'll be mighty obliged to you," Adams said, and came back to shake hands in farewell. "There's one thing more you ought to do—if you'd ever happen to feel like it." He kept his eyes rather nervously fixed on a point above his friend's head as he spoke, and his voice was not well controlled. "I been—I been down there a good many years and I may not 'a' been so much use lately as I was at first, but I always tried to do my best for the old firm. If anything turned out so's they did kind of take offense with me, down there, why, just say a good word for me—if you'd happen to feel like it, maybe."

Old Charley Lohr assured him that he would speak a good word if opportunity became available; then, after the cab had driven away, he went up to his small apartment on the third floor and muttered ruminatively until his wife inquired what he was talking to himself about.

"Ole Virg Adams," he told her. "He's out again after his long spell of sickness, and the way it looks to me he'd better stay in bed."

"You mean he still looks too bad to be out?"

"Oh, I expect he's gettin' his health back," Lohr said, frowning.

"Then what's the matter with him? You mean he's lost his mind?"

"My goodness, but women do jump at conclusions!" he exclaimed.

"Well," said Mrs. Lohr, "what else conclusion did you leave me to jump at?"

Her husband explained with a little

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Tell your druggist you want only the genuine "California Fig Syrup" which has directions for babies and children of all ages printed on bottle. Mother, you must say "California." Refuse any imitation. — Advertiser.

heat: "People can have a sickness that affects their mind, can't they?" Their mind can get some affected without bein' lost, can't it?"

"Then you mean the poor man's mind does seem affected?"

"Why, no; I'd scarcely go as far as that," Lohr said, inconsistently, and decided to be more definite.

Adams devoted the latter part of that evening to the composition of his letter—a disquieting task not completed when, at eleven o'clock, he heard his daughter coming up the stairs. She was singing to herself in a low, sweet voice, and Adams paused to listen incredulously, with his pen lifted and his mouth open, as if he heard the strangest sound in the world. Then he set down the pen upon a blotter, went to his door, and opened it, looking out at her as she came.

"Well, dearie, you seem to be feeling pretty good," he said. "What you been doing?"

"Just sitting out on the front steps, papa."

"All alone, I suppose."

"No, Mr. Russell called."

"Oh, he did?" Adams pretended to be surprised. "What all could you and he find to talk about till this hour of the night?"

She laughed gaily. "You don't know me, papa!"

"How's that?"

"You've never found out that I always do all the talking."

"Didn't you let him get a word in all evening?"

"Oh, yes; every now and then."

Adams took her hand and petted it. "Well, what did he say?"

Alive gave him a radiant look and kissed him. "Not what you think," she laughed; then slapped his cheek with saucy affection, pirouetted across the narrow hall and into her own room, and courted to him as she closed her door.

Adams went back to his writing with a lighter heart; for since Alice was born she had been to him the apple of his eye, his own phrase in thinking of her, and what he was doing now for her. He smiled as he picked up his pen to begin a new draft of the painful letter; but presently he looked puzzled. After all, she could be happy just as things were, it seemed. Then why had he taken what his wife called "this new step," which he had so long resisted?

He could only sigh and wonder. "Life works out pretty peculiarly," he thought; for he couldn't go back now, though the reason he couldn't was not clearly apparent. He had to go ahead.

CHAPTER XVII

HE WAS out in his taxicab again the next morning, and by noon he had secured what he wanted. It was curiously significant that he worked so quickly. All the years during which his wife had pressed him toward his present shift he had sworn to himself, as well as to her, that he would never yield; and yet when it did yield he had no plans to make because he found them already prepared and worked out in detail in his mind, as if he had long contemplated the "step" he believed himself incapable of taking.

Sometimes he had thought of improving his income by exchanging his little collection of bonds for a "small rental property," if he could find a good buy; and he had spent many of his spare hours rambling over the enormously spreading city and its suburbs, looking for the ideal "buy," but remained unobtainable, so far as he was concerned, but he found other things.

Not twice a crow's mile from his own house there was a dismal and slumlike quarter, a decayed "industrial district" of earlier days. Most of the industries were small; some of them died, perishing of bankruptcy or fire, and a few had moved, leaving their shells. Of the relics, the best was a brick building which had been the largest and most important factory in the quarter; it had been injured by a long vacancy almost as serious as a fire. In effect, and Adams had often guessed at the sum needed to put it in repair.

When he passed it, he would look at it with an interest which he supposed detached an idly speculative. "That's just the thing," he thought. "It's fellow had money enough, and took on a big scale, this would be a pretty good place—to make glue, for instance, if that wasn't out of the question of course. It would take a lot of money, though; a great deal too much for me to expect to handle—even if I'd ever dream of doing such a thing."

Opposite the dismantled factory was a muddy, open lot of two acres or so, and near the middle of the lot, a long brick shed stood in a desolate abandonment, not happily decorated by old coatings of theatrical and medical advertisements. But the brick shed had two wooden ells, and though both shed and ells were of a single story, here was empty space enough for a modest enterprise. "Space enough for almost anything, to start with," Adams thought, as he walked through the low buildings, one day, when he was prospecting in that section. "Yes, I suppose I could swing this," he thought. "If the process belonged to me, say, instead of being out of the question because it isn't my property—or if I was the kind of man to do such a thing anyhow, here would be something I could probably get hold of pretty cheap. They'd want a lot of money for a lease on that big building over the way—but this, why, I should think it'd be practically nothing at all."

Then, by chance, meeting an agent he knew, he made inquiries—merely to satisfy a casual curiosity, he thought—and he found matters much as he had supposed, except that the owners of the big building did not wish to let, but to sell it, and this at a price so exorbitant that Adams

laughed. But the long brick shed, the great muddy lot was for sale or to let, or "pretty near to be given away," he learned, if anybody would take it.

Adams took it now, though without seeing that he had been destined to take it, and that some dreary wizard in the back of his head had foreseen all along that he would take it, and

soon after lunch, he explained that he intended not only to get things done right, but also to "get 'em done quick!" Alice, following him to the front door, looked at him anxiously and asked if she couldn't help. He laughed at her grimly.

"Then let me go along with you in the cab," she begged. "You don't look able to start in so hard, papa, just when you're barely beginning to get your strength back. Do let me

go with you and see if I can't help—or at least take care of you if you should get to feeling badly."

He declined, but upon pressure let her put a tiny bottle of spirits of ammonia in his pocket, and promised to make use of it if he "felt faint or anything." Then he was off again; and the next morning had men at work in his sheds, though the wages he had to pay frightened him.

He directed the workmen in every detail, hurrying them by example and exhortations, and receiving, in consequence, several declarations of independence, as well as one resignation, which took effect immediately. "You capitalists seem to think a man's got nothin' to do but break his back p'posin' wealth for you to squander," the resigning person loudly complained. "You look out; the toiler's day is a-comin', and it ain't so fur off, neither!" But the capitalist was

already out of hearing, gone to find a man to take this officer's place. By the end of the week, Adams felt that he had moved satisfactorily forward in his preparations for the simple equipment he needed; but he hated the pause of Sunday. He didn't want any rest, he told Alice impatiently, when she suggested that the idle day might be good for him.

Late that afternoon he walked over to the apartment house where old

Charley Lohr lived, and gave his friend the letter he wanted the head of Lamb & Co. to receive "personally."

"I'll take it as a mighty great favor in you to hand it to him personally," Charley, he said, in parting. "And you won't forget, in case he says anything about it—and remember if you ever do get a chance to put in a good word for me later, you know—"

(To Be Continued.)

## DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



THE POLICE MADE AN EASY CAPTURE WHEN THAT BANK BANDIT TRIED TO HIDE IN THE WATCHMAN'S SHANTY.

"When It's Normalee-Time In Washington, D. C."



THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY



AUNT SARAH PEABODY CLAIMS CLEM SHURTLEFF'S HOUN'D DOG STOLE A FOUR POUND ROAST OFF HER BACK PORCH LATE YESTERDAY - MARSHAL OTEY WALKER IS CAREFULLY INVESTIGATING THE AFFAIR.

planned to be ready. He drove in his taxicab to look the place over again, then downtown to arrange for a lease; and came home to lunch with his wife and daughter. Things were "movin'," he told them.

He boasted a little of having acted so decisively, and said that since the dang thing had to be done, it was "going to be done right." He was almost cheerful, in a feverish way, and when the cab came for him again, get your strength back. Do let me

go with you and see if I can't help—or at least take care of you if you should get to feeling badly."

He declined, but upon pressure let her put a tiny bottle of spirits of ammonia in his pocket, and promised to make use of it if he "felt faint or anything." Then he was off again; and the next morning had men at work in his sheds, though the wages he had to pay frightened him.

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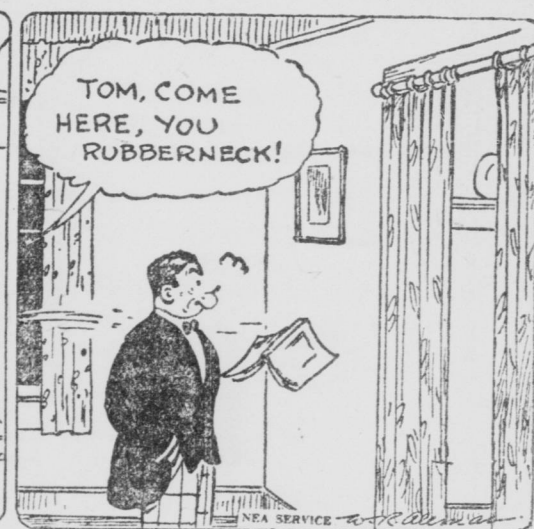
## On the Job



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



—By AL POSEN



—By AL POSEN



OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN



Gene Ahern. "KID" PORTLAND GOES IN FOR THE CINEMA ART -

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