

ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

Second novel in the Times series by Indiana writers

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WALTER cleared his throat, and replied in a tone as quiet as that he had used before, though with a slight huskiness, "I got to have \$350. You better get him to give it to me if you can."

Adams found his voice. "Yes," he said, bitterly. "That's all he asks! He won't do anything I ask him to, and in return he asks me for \$350! That's all!"

"What in the world?" Mrs. Adams exclaimed. "What for, Walter?"

"I got to have it," Walter said. "But what for?"

"His quiet huskiness did not alter. 'I got to have it.'"

"But can't you tell us—"

"I got to have it."

"That's all you can get out of him," Adams said. "He seems to think it'll bring him in three hundred and fifty dollars!"

A faint tremulousness became evident in the husky voice. "Haven't you got it?"

"No, I haven't got it," his father answered. "And I've got to go to a bank for more than my payroll next week. Do you think I'm a mint?"

"I don't understand what you mean, Walter," Mrs. Adams interposed, perplexed and distressed. "If you father had the money, of course he'd need every cent of it, especially just now, and anyhow, you could scarcely expect him to give it to you, unless you told us what you want with it. But he hasn't got it."

"All right," Walter said; and after standing a moment more, in silence, he added, impersonally, "I don't see as you ever did anything much for me, anyhow—either of you."

Then, as if this were his valedictory, he turned his back upon them, walked away quickly, and was at once lost to their sight in the darkness.

"There's a fine boy to've had the trouble of raising!" Adams grumbled. "Just crazy, that's all."

"What in the world you suppose he wants all that money for?" his wife said, wondering. "I can't imagine what he could do with it. I wonder—"

She paused. "I wonder if he—"

"If he what?" Adams prompted her irritably.

"If he could have—associates."

"God knows!" said Adams. "I don't! It just looks to me like he had something in him I don't understand. You can't keep your eye on a boy all the time in a city this size, not a boy Walter's age. You got a girl pretty much in the house, but a boy'll follow his nature. I don't know what to do with him!"

Mrs. Adams brightened a little. He'll come out all right," she said. "I'm sure he will. I'm sure he'd never be anything really bad; and he'll come around all right about the glue-works, too; you'll see. Of course every young man wants money—it doesn't prove he's doing anything wrong; just because he asks you for it."

"No. All it proves to me is that he hasn't got good sense—asking me for \$350, when he knows as well as you do the position I'm in! If I wanted to, I couldn't hardly let him have \$50 cents, let alone dollars!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to let me

have that much—and maybe a little more," she ventured, timidly; and she told him of her plans for the morrow. He objected vehemently.

"Oh, but Alice has probably asked him by this time," Mrs. Adams said. "It really must be done, Virgil; you don't want him to think she's ashamed of us, do you?"

"Well, go ahead, but just let me stay away," he begged. "Of course I expect to undergo a kind of talk with him, when he gets ready to say something to us about Alice, but I do hate to have to sit through a fashionable dinner."

"Why, it isn't going to bother you," she said; "just one young man as a guest."

"Yes, I know; but you want to have all this fancy cookin'; and I see well enough you're going to get that old dress suit out of the cedar chest in the attic, and try to make me put it on me."

"I do think you better, Virgil," she said. "Last time I wore it was to the banquet, and it was pretty old then. Of course I didn't mind wearing it to the banquet so much, because that was what you might call quite an occasion." He spoke with some reminiscent complacency; "the banquet," an affair now five years past, having provided the one time in his life when he had been so distinguished among his fellow-citizens as to receive an invitation to be present, with some seven hundred others, at the annual eating and speech-making of the city's Chamber of Commerce.

"Anyhow, as you say, I think it would look foolish of me to wear a dress suit for just one young man," he went on protesting, feebly.

"What's the use of all so much how-do, anyway? You don't expect him to believe we put on all that style every night, do you? Is that what you're after?"

"Well, we want him to think we live nicely," she admitted.

"So that's it?" he said, querulously. "You want him to think that's our regular gait, do you? Well, he'll know better about me, no matter how you fix me up, because he saw me in my regular suit the evening she introduced me to him, and he could tell anyway I'm not one of these moving-picture sporting men that's always got a dress on. Besides, you and Alice certainly have some idea he'll come again, haven't you? If they get things settled between 'em he'll be around the house and to meals most any time, won't he? You don't hardly expect to put on style all the time, I guess. Well, he'll see then that this kind of thing was all show-off and bluff, won't he? What about it?"

"Oh, well, by that time—"

She left the sentence unfinished, as if absent. "You could let us have a little money for tomorrow, couldn't you, honey?"

"Oh, I reckon, I reckon," he murmured. "A girl like Alice is some comfort; she don't come around asking if she'd committed suicide if she didn't get three hundred and fifty dollars in the next five minutes. I expect I can spare five or six dollars for your show-off if I got to."

However, she finally obtained fifteen before his bedtime; and the next morning "went to market" after breakfast, leaving Alice to make the beds. Walter had not yet come downstairs. "You had better call him," Mrs. Adams said, as she departed with a big basket on her arm. "I expect he's pretty sleepy; he was out so late last night I didn't hear him come in, though I kept awake till after midnight, listening for him. Tell him he'll be late to work if he doesn't hurry; and see that he drinks his coffee, even if he hasn't time for anything else. And when Malena comes, get her started in the kitchen; show her where everything is." She waved her hand, as she set out for a corner where the ears stopped. "Everything'll be lovely. Don't forget about Walter."

Nevertheless, Alice forgot about Walter for a few minutes. She closed the door, went into the "living-room," and stared vaguely at one of the old brown-plush rocking-chairs there. Upon her forehead were the little shadows of an apprehensive reverie, and her thoughts overlapped one another in a fretful jumble.

"What will be think? These old chairs—they're hideous. I'll scrub those soot-streaks on the columns; it won't do any good, though. That long crack in the column—nothing can help it. What will be think of papa? I hope mama won't talk too much. When he thinks of Mildred's house, or of Hendietta's, or any of 'em, beside this—"

She said she'd buy plenty of roses; that ought to help some. Nothing could be done about these horrible chairs; can't take 'em up in the attic—a room's got to have chairs! Might have rented some. No; if he ever comes again he'd see they weren't here. "If he ever comes again—oh, oh, it won't be that bad! But it won't be what he expects. I'm responsible for what he expects; he expects just what the airs I've put on have made him expect. What did I want to pose so to him for—as if papa were a wealthy man and all that? What will he think? The photograph of the Colosseum's a rather good thing, though it helps some—as if we'd bought it in Rome perhaps. I hope he'll think so; he believes I've been abroad, of course. The other night he said, 'You remember the feeling you got in the Sainte-Chapelle'—There's another lie of mine, no; saying I didn't remember because I'd never been there. What makes me do it? Papa must wear his evening clothes. But Walter—"

With that she recalled her mother's advice, and went upstairs to Walter's door. She tapped upon it with her fingers.

"Time to get up, Walter. The rest of us land breakfast over half an hour ago, and it's nearly eight o'clock. You'll be late. Hurry down and I'll have some coffee and toast ready for you."

There came no sound from within the room, so she rapped louder. "Wake up, Walter!"

She called and rapped again, without getting any response, and then, finding that the door yielded to her, opened it and went in. Walter was not there.

He had been there, however; had slept upon the bed, though not inside its natural color and looks glossy soft and beautiful.—Advertisement.

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had been too sleepy to take off his clothes. Near the foot of the bed was a shallow closet where he kept his "other suit," and his evening clothes; and the door stood open, showing a bare wall. Nothing whatever was in the closet, and Alice was rather surprised at this for a moment. "That's queer," she murmured; and then she decided that when he woke he found the clothes he had slept in "so mussy" he had put on his "other suit," and the mused clothes to have them pressed, taking his evening things with them. Satisfied with this explanation, and failing to observe that it did not account for the absence of shoes from the closet floor, she nodded absently. "Yes, that must be queer," she murmured; and then she decided that when he woke he found the clothes he had slept in "so mussy" he had put on his "other suit," and the mused clothes to have them pressed, taking his evening things with them. 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