

# ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

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"IT'S better to have too much than too little," her mother said cheerfully. "We don't want to think we're the kind that skimp. Lord knows we have to enough, though, most of the time! Get the flowers in water, child. I bought 'em at market because they are so much cheaper there, but they'll keep fresh and nice. You fix 'em any way you want. Hurry! It's got to be a busy day."

She had bought three dozen little roses. Alice took them and began to arrange them in vases, keeping the stems separated as far as possible so that the clumps would look larger. She put half a dozen in each of three vases in the "living-room," placing one at each end of the mantelpiece. Then she took the rest of the roses to the dining-room, but she postponed the arrangement of them until the table should be set, just before dinner. She was thoughtful, planning to dry the stems and lay them on the tablecloth like a vine of roses running in a delicate design, if she found that the dozen and a half she had left were enough. If they weren't she would arrange them in a vase.

She looked a long time at the little roses in the basin of water, where she had put them; then she sighed, and went away to her other tasks, while her mother worked in the kitchen with Malena. Alice dusted the "living room" and the dining room vigorously, though all the time with a look that grew more and more pensive; and having dusted everything, she wiped the furniture, rubbed it hard. After that, she washed the floors and the woodwork.

Emerging from the kitchen at noon, Mrs. Adams found her daughter on hands and knees, scrubbing the bases of the columns between the hall and the "living room."

"Now, dearie," she said, "you mustn't tire yourself out, and you'd better come and eat something. Your father said he'd get a bite downtown today—he was going down to the bank—and Walter eats downtown all the time lately, so I thought we would have a table set for lunch. Come on, and we'll have something in the kitchen."

"No," Alice said, dully, as she went on with her work. "I don't want anything."

Her mother came closer to her. "Why, what's the matter?" she asked, briskly. "You seem kind of pale, to me, and you don't look—don't look happy."

"Well—" Alice began, uncertainly, but said no more.

"See here!" Mrs. Adams exclaimed. "This is all just for you! You ought to be enjoying it. Why, it's the first time we've—well, entertained in I don't know how long! I guess it's almost since we had that little party when you were eighteen. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I don't know."

"But, dearie, aren't you looking forward to this evening?"

The girl looked up, showing a pallid and solemn face. "Oh, yes, of course," she said, and tried to smile. "Of course we had to do it—I do think it'll be nice. Of course I'm looking forward to it."

CHAPTER XX

SHE was indeed "looking forward" to that evening, but in cloud of apprehension; and, although she could never have guessed it, this was the simultaneous condition of another person—none other than the guest for whose pleasure so much cooking and scrubbing seemed to be necessary. Moreover, Mr. Arthur Russell's premonitions were no product of mere coincidence; neither had any magical sympathy produced them. His state of mind was rather the result of rougher undercurrents which had all the time been running beneath the surface of a romantic friendship.

Never shrewder than when she analyzed the gentlemen, Alice did not libel him when she said he was one of those quiet men who are a bit flirtatious, by which she meant that he was

a bit "susceptible," the same thing—and he had proved himself susceptible to Alice upon his first sight of her. "There!" he said to himself. "Who's that?" And in the crowd of girls at his cousin's dance, all strangers to him, she was the one he wanted to know.

Since then, his summer evenings with her had been as secluded as if, for three hours after the falling of dusk, they two had drawn apart from the world to some dear bower of their own. The little veranda was that glorious nook, with a faint golden light falling through the glass of the closed door upon Alice, and darkness elsewhere, except for the one round globe of the street lamp at the corner. The people who passed along the sidewalk, now and then, were only shadows with voices, moving vaguely under the maple trees that loomed in obscure contours against the sky. So, as the two sat together, the back of the world was the wall and closed door behind them; and Russell, when he was away from Alice, always thought of her as sitting there before the closed door. A glamour was about her thus, and a spell upon him; but he had a formless anxiety never put into words: all the pictures of her in his mind stopped at the closed door.

He had another anxiety; and, for the greater part, this was of her own creating. She had too often asked him (no matter how gaily) what he heard about her; too often begged him not to hear anything. Then, hoping to forestall whatever he might hear, she had been at too great pains to account for it, to discredit and mock it; and, though he laughed at her for this, telling her truthfully he did not even hear her mentioned, the everlasting irony that deals with all such human forebodings prevailed.

Lately, he had half confessed to her what a nervousness she had produced. "You make me dread the day when I'll hear somebody speaking of you. You're getting me so upset about it that if I ever hear anybody so much as say the name 'Alice Adams,' I'll run!" The confession was but half of one because he laughed; and she took it for an assurance of loyalty in the form of burlesque. She misunderstood; he laughed, but his nervousness was genuine.

After any stroke of events, whether a happy one or a catastrophe, we see that the "mystical" for her was a long time gathering, and the only marvel is that the stars have never yet failed to be law-abiding, perhaps it were well for us to deduce that they will continue to be so until further notice.

On the day that was to open the closed door in the background of his picture of Alice, Russell lunched with his relatives. There were but the four people, Russell and Mildred and her mother and father, in the great, cool dining-room. Arched French windows, shaded by awnings, admitted a mellow light and looked out upon a green lawn ending in a long conservatory, which revealed through its glass panes a carnival of plants in luxuriant blossom. From his seat at the table, Russell glanced out at this pretty display, and informed his cousins that he was surprised. "You have such a glorious spread of flowers all over the house," he said, "I didn't suppose you'd have any left out yonder. In fact, I didn't know there were so many splendid flowers in the world."

Mrs. Palmer, large, calm, fair, like her daughter, responded with a mild reproach: "That's because you haven't been closely enough to get used to them, Arthur. You've almost taught us to forget what you look like."

In defense Russell waved a hand toward her husband. "You see, he's begun to keep me so hard at work—"

But Mr. Palmer declined the responsibility. "Up to four or five in the afternoon, perhaps," he said. "After that, the young gentleman is as much a stranger to me as he is to my family. I've been wondering who she could be."

"When a man's preoccupied there must be a lady then?" Russell inquired.

"That seems to be the view of your sex," Mrs. Palmer suggested. "It was my husband who said it, not Mildred or I."

Mildred smiled faintly. "Papa may be singular in his ideas; they may come entirely from his own experience, and have nothing to do with Arthur."

"Thank you, Mildred," her cousin said, bowing to her gratefully. "You seem to understand my character—and your father's quite as well."

However, Mildred remained grave in the face of this customary pleasant-ty, not because the old jest, worn round, like what preceded it, rolled in an old groove, but because of some preoccupation of her own. Her faint smile had disappeared, and as her cousin's glance met hers, she looked down; yet not before he had seen in her eyes the flicker of something like a question—a question both poignant and dismayed. He may have understood it; for his own smile vanished at once in favor of a reciprocal solemnity.

"You see, Arthur," Mrs. Palmer said, "Mildred is always a good cousin. She and I stand by you, even if you do stay away from us for weeks and weeks." Then, observing that he appeared to be so occupied with a bunch of ice grapes upon his plate that he had not heard her, she began to talk to her husband, asking him what was "going on downtown."

Arthur continued to eat his grapes, but he ventured to look again at Mildred after a few moments. She, also, appeared to be occupied with a bunch of grapes though she ate none, and only pulled them from their stems. She sat straight, her features as composed and pure as those of a new marble saint in a cathedral niche; yet her downcast eyes seemed to conceal many thoughts; and her cousin, against his will, was more aware of what these thoughts might be than of the leisurely conversation between her father and mother. All at once, however, he heard something that startled him, and he listened—and here was the effect of all Alice's forebodings; he listened from the first with a sinking heart.

## DOINGS OF THE DUTIES



## Tom Gets Out the Old Model



## OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



## THEM DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—



## THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY



A CUTTER UPSET ON MAIN STREET TODAY, BREAKING A STORE WINDOW. TWO SLEIGH BELLS WERE FOUND IN ORAN POTTER'S BEARD, SOME TIME LATER.

Mr. Palmer, mildly amused by what he was telling his wife, had just spoken the words, "This Virgil Adams—that's the man's name. Queer case."

"Who told you?" Mrs. Palmer inquired, not much interested.

"Alfred Lamb," her husband answered. "He was laughing about his father, at the club. You see the old gentleman takes a great pride in his judgment of men, and always boasted to his sons that he'd never in his life made a mistake in trusting the wrong man. Now Alfred and James Albert Juniors, think they have a great joke on him; and they've twitted him so much about it he'll scarcely speak to them. From the first, Alfred says, the old chap's only reprieve was, 'You wait and you'll see.' And they've asked him so often to show them what they're going to see that he won't say anything at all!"

"He's a funny old fellow," Mrs. Palmer observed. "But he's so shrewd I can't imagine his being deceived for such a long time. Twenty years, you said?"

"Yes, longer than that, I understand. It appears when this man—this Adams—was a young clerk, the old gentleman trusted him with one of his business secrets, a glue process that Mr. Lamb had spent some money

to get hold of. The old chap thought this Adams was going to have quite a feature with the Lamb concern, and of course never dreamed he was dishonest. Alfred says this Adams hasn't been of any real use for years, and they should have let him go as dead wood, but the old gentleman wouldn't hear of it, and insisted on his being kept on the payroll; so they just decided to look on it as a sort of pension. Well, one morning last March

the man had an attack of some sort down there, and Mr. Lamb got his own car out and went home with him, himself, and worried about him and went to see him no end, all the time he was ill."

"He would," Mrs. Palmer said, approvingly. "He's a kind-hearted creature, that old man."

Her husband laughed. "Alfred says he thinks his kind-heartedness is about cured! It seems that as soon as the

man got well again he deliberately walked off with the old gentleman's glue secret. Just calmly stole it! Alfred says he believes that if he had a stroke in the office now, himself, his father wouldn't lift a finger to help him!"

Mrs. Palmer repeated the name to herself thoughtfully. "Adams—'Virgil Adams.' You said his name was Virgil Adams?"

"Yes." (To Be Continued.)

## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER

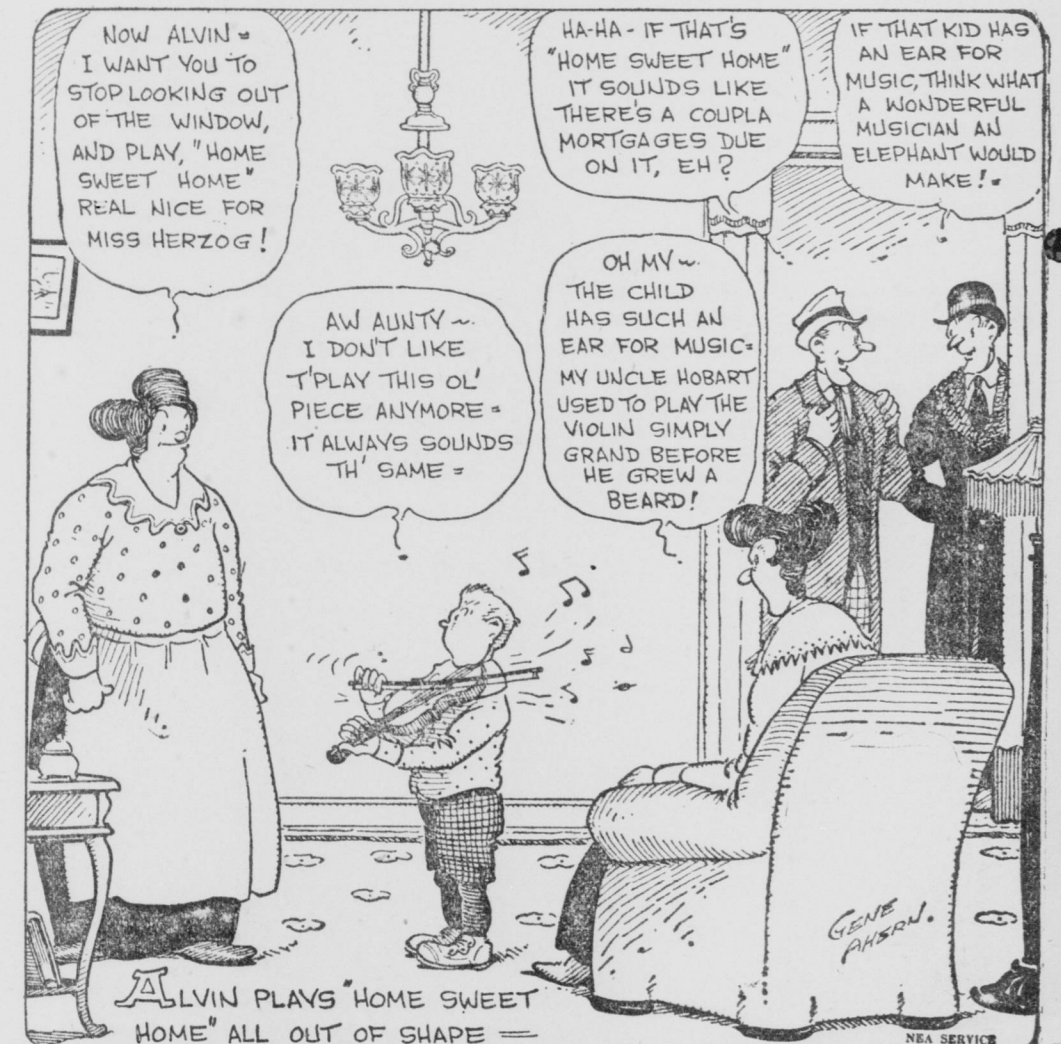


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## —By AL POSEN



## OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN



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