

# ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

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"YES," Mrs. Palmer said, dryly. "It seems to me I've heard somewhere that other young men have gone there almost every day. She doesn't last, apparently. Arthur's gallant, and he's impulsive—but he's fastidious, and fastidiousness is always the check on impressionability. A girl belongs to her family, too—and this one does especially, it strikes me! Arthur's very sensible; he sees more than you'd think."

Mildred looked at her hopefully. "Then you don't believe he's likely to imagine we said those things in her in any meaning way?"

At this, Mrs. Palmer laughed again. "There's one thing you seem not to have noticed, Mildred."

"What's that?" "It seems to have escaped your attention that he never said a word."

"Mightn't that mean—?" Mildred began, but she stopped.

"No, I mightn't," her mother replied, comprehending easily. "On the contrary, it might mean that instead of his feeling it too deeply to speak, he was getting a little illumination."

Mildred rose and came to her. "Why do you suppose he never told us he went there? Do you think he's—do you think he's pleased with her, and yet ashamed of it? Why do you suppose he's never spoken of it?"

"Ah, that," Mrs. Palmer said—"that might possibly be her own doing. If it is, she's well paid by what your father and I said, because we wouldn't have said it if we'd known that Arthur—"

She checked herself quickly. Looking over her daughter's shoulder, she saw the two gentlemen coming from the corridor toward the wide doorway of the room; and she greeted them cheerfully. "If you've finished with each other for a while," she added, "Arthur may find it a relief to put his thoughts on something prettier than a trust company—and more fragrant."

Arthur came to Mildred.

"Your mother said at lunch that perhaps you'd—"

"I didn't say 'perhaps,'" Arthur, Mrs. Palmer interrupted, to correct him. "I said she would. If you care to see and smell those lovely things out yonder, she'll show them to you. Run along, children!"

Half an hour later, glancing from a window, she saw them come from the hothouses and slowly cross the lawn. Arthur had a fine rose in his buttonhole and looked profoundly thoughtful.

## CHAPTER XXI

THAT morning and noon had been warm, though the stir rings of a feeble breeze made weather not flagrantly intertemperate; but at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon there came out of the Southwest a heat like an affliction sent upon an accursed people, and the air was soon dead of it. Dripping negro ditch diggers whooped with satires praising hell and hot weather, as the tossing shovels flickered up to the street level, where sluggish male pedestrians carried coats upon hot arms and fanned themselves with straw hats, or, remaining covered, wore soaked handkerchiefs between scalp and straw. Clerks drooped in silent, big department stores; stenographers in offices kept as close to electric fans as the intervening bulk of their employers would let them; guests in hotels left the lobbies and went to lie undisturbed upon their beds; while in hospitals the patients murmured querulously against the heat, and perhaps against some noisy motorists who strove to feel the air by splitting it, not troubled by any foreboding that he, too, that hour next week, might need quiet near a hospital. The "hot spell" was a true spell, one upon men's spirits; for it was so hot that, in suburban outskirts, golfers crept slowly back over the low undulations of their club lands, abandoning their matches and returning to shelter.

Even on such a day, sizzling work had to be done, as in winter. There were glowing furnaces to be stoked, liquid metal to be poured; but such tasks found seasoned men standing to them; and in all the city probably no brave soul challenged the heat more gamely than Mrs. Adams did, when, in a corner of her small and fiery kitchen, where all day long her hired African slave cooked fiercely, she pressed her husband's evening clothes with a hot iron. No doubt she risked her life, but she risked it cheerfully in so good and necessary a service for him. She would have given her life for him at any time, and both his and her own for her children.

Unconscious of her own heroism, she was surprised to find herself

Waiting there, in a languid attitude, was a young colored woman, with a small bundle under her arm and something malleable in her mouth. "Listen," she said. "You folks expectin' a colored lady?"

"No," said Alice. "Especially not at the front door."

"Listen," the colored woman said again. "Listen. Say, listen. Ain't they another colored lady already here by the day? Listen. Ain't Miz Malena Burns here by the day this evenin'? Say, listen. This the number her house she give me."

"Are you the waitress?" Alice asked dismissively.

"Yes'm, if Malena her."

"Malena is here," Alice said, and hesitated; but she decided not to send the waitress to the back door; it might be a risk. She let her in. "What's your name?"

"My, I'm name' Gertrude, Miss Gertrude Collumus."

"Did you bring a cap and apron?"

Gertrude took the little bundle from under her arm. "Yes'm, I'm all fix."

"I've already set the table," Alice said. "I'll show you what we want done."

She led the way to the dining-room and, after offering some instruction there, received by Gertrude with languor and a slowly moving jaw, she took her into the kitchen, where the cap and apron were put on. The effect was not fortunate; Gertrude's eyes were noticeably bloodshot, an affliction made more apparent by the white cap, and Alice drew her mother apart, whispering anxiously:

"Do you suppose it's too late to get some else?"

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Correct your digestion for a few cents. Millions keep it handy. Drugists recommend it.—Advertisement.

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