

# ALICE ADAMS

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

Second novel in The Times series by Indiana writers.

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**M**RS. ADAMS brightened. "I'm sure it'll be pleasant having that young married couple in the house—and especially this Mr. Will Dickson. He seemed very much of a gentleman, and anxious to get settled in good surroundings. I was very favorably impressed with him in every way; and he explained to me about his name; it seems it isn't William, it's just 'Will'; his parents had him christened that way. It's curious." She paused, and then, with an effort to seem casual, which failed nothing from her daughter: "It's quite curious," she said again. "But it's rather attractive and different, don't you think?"

"Poor mama!" Alice laughed passionately. "Poor mama!"

"He is, though," Mrs. Adams maintained. "He's very much of a gentleman, unless I'm no judge of appearances; and it'll really be nice to have him in the house."

"No doubt," Alice said, as she opened her door to depart. "I don't suppose we'll mind having any of 'em as much as we thought we would. Good-bye."

But her mother detained her, catching her by the arm. "Alice, you do hate it, don't you?"

"No," the girl said, quickly. "There wasn't anything else to do."

Mrs. Adams became emotional at once; her face cried tragedy, and her voice misfortune. "There might have been something else to do! Oh, Alice, you gave your father bad advice when you upheld him in taking a miserable little ninety-three hundred and fifty from that old wretch! If your father'd just had the gumption to hold out, they'd have had to pay him anything he asked. If he'd just had the gumption and a little manly courage—"

"Hush!" Alice whispered, for her mother's voice grew louder. "Hush! He'll hear you, mama."

"Could he hear me too often?" the ~~habit~~ lady asked. "If he'd listened to me at the right time, would we have to be taking in boarders and sinking down in the scale at the end of our lives, instead of going up? You were both wrong; we didn't need to be so panicky—that was just what that old man wanted: to scare us and buy us out for nothing! If your father'd just listened to me then, or if for once in his life he'd just been half a man—"

Alice put her hand over her mother's mouth. "You mustn't! He will hear you!"

But from the other side of Adams' closed door his voice came querulously. "Oh, I hear her, all right."

"You see, mama?" Alice said, and, as Mrs. Adams turned away, weeping, the daughter sighed; then went in to speak to her father.

He was in his old chair by the table, with a pillow behind his head, but the crocheted scarf and Mrs. Adams' wrapper swathed him no more; he wore a dressing-gown his wife had bought for him, and was smoking his pipe. "The old story, is it?" he said, as Alice came in. "The same, said old story! Well, well! Has she gone?"

"Yes, papa."

"Got your hat on," he said. "Where you going?"

"I'm going downtown on an errand of my own. Is there anything you want, papa?"

"Yes, there is." He smiled at her. "I wish you'd sit down a while and talk to me—unless your errand—"

"No," she said, taking a chair near him. "I was just going down to see about some arrangements I was making for myself. There's no hurry."

"What arrangements for yourself, weaver?"

"I'll tell you afterwards—after I find out something about 'em myself."

"All right," he said, indulgently. "Keep your secrets; keep your secrets."

He paused, drew musingly upon his pipe, and shook his head. "Funny—the way your mother looks at things! For the matter o' that, everything's pretty funny, I expect, if you stop to think about it. For instance, let her say all she likes, but we were pushed right spans to the wall, if J. A. Lamb hadn't taken it into his head to make that offer for the works; and there's one of the things I been thinking about lately, Alice; thinking about how funny they work out."

"What did you think about it, papa?"

"Well, I've seen it happen in other people's lives, time and time again; and now it's happened in ours. You think you're going to be pushed right spans to the wall, and can't see any way out of an hope at all; you think you're gone—and then something you never counted on turns up, and while maybe you never do get back to where you used to be, yet somehow you kind of squirm out of being right spans against the wall. You keep on going—maybe you can't go much, but you do go a little. See what I mean?"

"Yes, I understand, dear."

"Yes, I'm afraid you do," he said. "Too bad!" You oughtn't to understand at your age. It seems to me a good deal as if the Lord really meant for the young people to have the good times, and for the old to have the troubles; and when any body as young as you has trouble, there's a big mistake somewhere."

"Oh, no!" she protested.

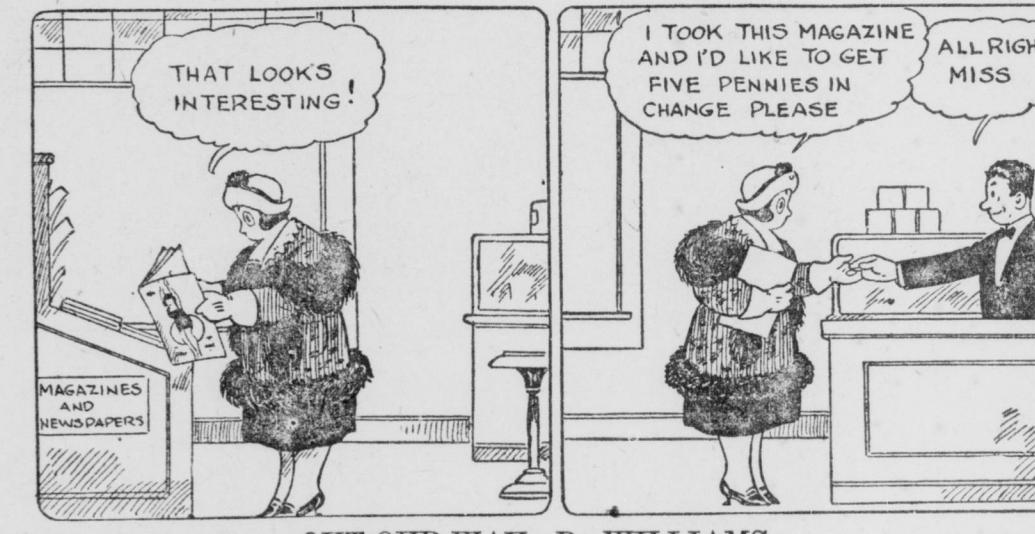
But he persisted whimsically in this view of divine error. "Yes, it does look a good deal that way. But of course we can't tell; we're never certain about anything—not about anything at all. Sometimes I look at it another way, though. Sometimes it looks to me as if a body's troubles come on him mainly because he hadn't been enough to know how not

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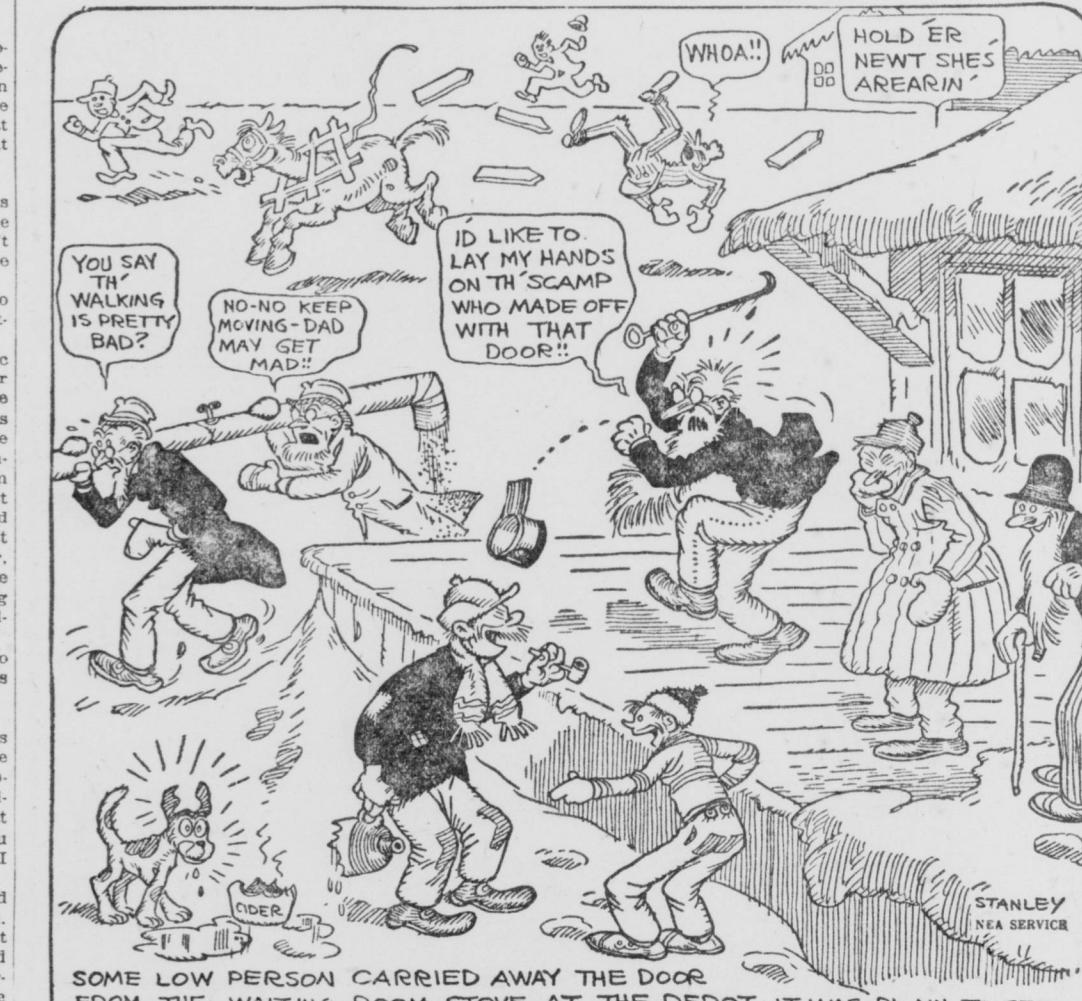
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