

ALICE ADAMS

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Alice Adams by Booth Tarkington

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BOOTH TARKINGTON (1869–1946), an American novelist and dramatist, was born Newton Booth Tarkington in Indianapolis, Indiana. The son of a lawyer, he was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy, Purdue, and Princeton, where he founded the Triangle Club. As a young man he dreamed of being an artist, but soon found he preferred to paint with words. He was encouraged in this desire by his older sister, who took his first novel to New York publisher S. S. McClure; *The Gentleman from Indiana* was published in 1899. A versatile writer, he would attain fame with a historical romance called *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1900), before penning a political novel, *In the Arena* (1905), which was inspired by a term in the Indiana House of Representatives. His first work focusing on middle-class life in small midwestern cities—the theme with which he is identified as a writer—was *The Conquest of Canaan* (1905). A brilliant observer of American life, he drew on his Indiana boyhood to masterfully portray midwestern families in the two Pulitzer Prize-winning works that followed: *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918), which was filmed by Orson Welles in 1941, and *Alice Adams* (1921). But his best-known works are arguably the *Penrod* books, which have become young people's classics and have been compared with Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. During his prolific career, Tarkington wrote more than forty novels and several plays, which include *Clarence*, *The Man from Home*, and *Cameo Kirby*.

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BY

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To the Reader

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To S.S. McClure

CHAPTER I

The patient, an old-fashioned man, thought the nurse made a mistake in keeping both of the windows open, and her sprightly disregard of his protests added something to his hatred of her. Every evening he told her that anybody with ordinary gumption ought to realize that night air was bad for the human frame. "The human frame won't stand everything, Miss Perry," he warned her, resentfully. "Even a child, if it had just ordinary gumption, ought to know enough not to let the night air blow on sick people—yes, nor well people, either! 'Keep out of the night air, no matter how well you feel.' That's what my mother used to tell me when I was a boy. 'Keep out of the night air, Virgil,' she'd say. 'Keep out of the night air.'"

"I expect probably her mother told her the same thing," the nurse suggested.

"Of course she did. My grandmother—"

"Oh, I guess your *grandmother* thought so, Mr. Adams! That was when all this flat central country was swampish and hadn't been drained off yet. I guess the truth must have been the swamp mosquitoes bit people and gave 'em malaria, especially before they began to put screens in their windows. Well, we got screens in these windows, and no mosquitoes are goin' to bite us; so just