

the latest educational craze; its glories were held up to the gaze of the parental eyes, and one day Adelaide Grey found herself dismissed. Alan was sent to an oral school.

But somehow expectation failed. Alan did not only make little of lip-reading, his general progress seemed arrested; he did not grow. He had kept pace with Harold in Latin and Greek; these failed him, his pencil lost its cunning. Nothing of old had delighted him more than Harold's chemical experiments; he had been first in every game. Nothing seemed to interest him now; he grew taciturn, shy, forgetting the low curriculum of the school, and the effect of uncongenial companionship. His people measured his capacity by his attainments, and said Miss Grey had thought too much of him, petted his conceit, galvanised him beyond his scope—lifted him above his level.

When he grew too old for school, and Harold went to college, they sent him to the continent with a tutor—one of the teachers of his school. He travelled a year or two, and returned very much as he had gone, but older in his habits and with a look in his eyes, a nameless something of manner which they half admired, half feared; it was unusual, and they did not like the unusual.

Even Cicely Owen shared this feeling—pretty Cicely, who had come years ago, a yellow-haired little maiden, to the art school, and taken her place at the easel next Alan's. Her lithe fingers had been as clever with his language as her pencil; her bright eyes as quick to interpret as to see the superiority of his talent to hers; her frank nature prompt to own and rejoice in it, as to make friends, and ask help.

She and her mother, a colonel's widow, had been living here at the time of her father's death, and Mrs. Owen had had the sense to remain where she was known and the exact amount of her income not. Of course they were poor, she made no attempt to hide it; but she was a gentlewoman. "The Bungalow" just down the road outside Curzon Park, though small, was comfortable and quaint with outlandish contrivances and curiosities brought from India, Egypt—wherever the colonel had been. These interested Alan. He was allowed to frequent the Bungalow. Cicely was a sad little hoyden, but a nice child. The girls were told by no means to imitate but to be kind to Cicely and allow her to join their games when it was possible for Alan to do so. She honestly preferred his company, for the girls were rather finical young ladies; she never could understand why he should not be as good company as any one else; she never forgot he was her first friend. They were chums in the happy healthy fashion only possible to the young folks of the frankly simple cultured class. Many a game of chess and bezique was lost and won in quiet corners; many an afternoon spent sketching in the glen while the rest were at some society picnic. Often Alan was at the Bungalow when they were at some social function, and though the girls said that that saved Cicely's frocks nicely, they took care not to tell Alan so, and he never thought of it.

Now things were different; a vacuum intervened in some way. They had not corresponded; Cicely was too active to be a good correspondent. She did not seem to care to take things up again or interest herself in Alan or his doings.

"For, after all, it's not our business, mother, what Mr. Alan Bancroft does; and if I am not to go there, he cannot come here."

"My dear, why not? I am sure they were always most kind to you."

"Yes—when Alan had to be amused; but when he left, and Bee left school and made a few fashionable acquaintances, oh, quite another thing!"—with a dramatic imitation

of Mrs. Bancroft which relieved her feelings considerably.

"Now, of course, she must insist on Alan's friends accustoming themselves to the oral system which he knows I hate."

"How can you be so foolish, Cicely?"—in the complaining way Mrs. Owen's friends were wont to attribute to the Indian climate. "After all the trouble and expense to which I have been put to help you on. That is the only social door open to you, and you will deliberately close it against yourself for a fancied slight. Mrs. Bancroft meant nothing personal."

"Did she not? Then what of Beatrice? She uses the alphabet herself when her mother's back is turned. It is my fingers she objects to; she would equally object to Alan's hanging on my lips. He shan't have the chance! I have no time to waste repeating and repeating my sentences—they must find someone with less to do." And to this she adhered.

Alan seemed to acquiesce. He called once or twice and then desisted, and Cicely's visits to Curzon Park were restricted to a very formal call with her mother on some of Mrs. Bancroft's at home days.

But when Harold returned from college he was not so acquiescent. He protested vigorously. Cicely was no end of a girl, and as for Bee Bancroft, we all know what B.B. pencils were. Anyhow, he and Alan were not going to be cheated of their friends. He hooked his arm in his brother's and marched him off forthwith to the Bungalow.

But somehow the visit was not the success it should have been. Cicely was at home and exceedingly gracious to both the young men. She brought her sketches to show Alan, but perhaps the great masters he had seen had spoilt amateur art for him; he did not seem to admire them much, and Cicely, who really painted very well in a small way, was piqued, and drifted into a *tête-à-tête* with Harold. Neither noticed how long a chat it was, both forgot how slow it might be for Alan. They chatted of athletics, mutual friends, bicycles, the last new song—that led to Cicely's new piano, and of course it must be tried. The day waned, the dusk crept up the earth, and both forgot the still figure leaning against the casement, watching the overspreading bank of grey, with the underline of gold across the west.

When they remembered they were sorry and apologised. He put them off with quiet indifference. They thought he had not cared, and said what an equable fellow he was. But he would not accompany Harold again.

Harold's steps were bent that way again and yet again, and after a while oftener; he had left college, and as yet had settled to nothing. Presently he would go to London and read for the Bar, and he was supposed to be studying at home now. No doubt he was in a fashion, but those last exams. had pulled him down; and then he had not come out as he knew he deserved, which was damping to the ardour, and he had no extensive acquaintance in this place; his friends were not dead, but gone before, he was wont to say. And then Mrs. Bancroft took her girls to Scarborough, which created an absence Cicely helped to fill.

And Harold never thought what he was doing, until going down to the river through the abbey ruins one day the two came face to face with Alan himself coming up. They did not know that for an hour or two he had been down there under the trees, waiting behind his paper and briar-root. Cicely quite forgot that on Thursdays, of old time, a favourite boat had always been reserved for Alan; and had no idea that all the summer through the old compact had been silently kept. Any everyday young fellow would of course

have told her. Alan was waiting for her to find out. Harold had met her quite casually in the Row just now, and after calling at the library they had strolled round here, in mere idleness, and both were much more startled than the occasion warranted on meeting Alan at the turn of the path. He had no appearance of the avenging angel, he lounged along in boating flannels, his cap on the back of his head, his hands in his pockets, his briar in his mouth; and he did not pause, though they stopped involuntarily; just removed cap and pipe, and pursued his way, shaking his head indolently at his brother's gesture.

They went on, vexed, angry; Cicely with a strange flutter in her throat. Harold roundly voting his brother a bear. "He's grown a regular snob since he went abroad, it's that underbred tutor fellow's doing—I never thought old Alan could be such an idiot."

"No, it's not that—it's the oral system, it has made him shy and awkward. Miss Grey always said it would."

They had reached the top of the steps leading down to the river. Cicely's downcast eyes were full of tears; she made a false step, only a quick catch of Harold's saved her from a headlong fall. He kept her hand for safety's sake, till they reached the bottom. Then she withdrew it almost pettishly, wishing she had vetoed his suggestion of the river, that she could get rid of him; now, of course she must go.

Harold had a distraught companion. He himself unusually silent as he pulled up the shining rushes in the warm September sun, and glanced with some anxiety at the girl's averted face from time to time. She was plainly distressed—what about?

"Never mind him, Cicely, he did not mean to be rude. I'll speak to Alan."

"Indeed you must not. He was not rude, he—he—can you not see? He is wounded, he is lonely—and he is so—so—" her voice died away in something like a sob, and Harold wondered; it was not like Cicely to get upset in this way, for though sympathising, as all nice girls must be, she was too healthy to be emotional.

"I expect he finds this place dull after the excitement and interest of travel," she said presently, to cover her discomposure.

"Slow—it is, at this time of year; no one about but beanfeasters. I've a great mind to go to Scarborough to mater and the girls; I would if—"

"If what? Certainly I'd go—" with an alacrity for which he was unprepared.

"If you were going too, Cicely."

"That is nonsense, and my company can't detain you, for mamma and I are going away too."

"Where, when?"

"I don't know, it's not arranged."

"Cicely, tell me when you know. I declare to you I shouldn't know what to do with myself, and seeing how soon I shall be stewing in London."

"Go to Scarborough."

"Hang Scarborough!"

"Harold, it is not so cool here as I thought it was going to be. I think I will go home now and have a cup of tea, I'm thirsty."

"Let's go on and have tea at the Ferry."

"They don't make it fit to drink. I would rather go home. If you want to go on you can put me ashore, and I'll walk back." There was nothing else for it. Harold turned his skiff and pulled homewards a little sulkily; everything seemed out of sorts this afternoon, but Cicely was too good-natured and too wise to allow this state of things to continue, he must not meet Alan like this; she rallied her forces, and by the time they reached the stage had charmed him out of his temporary mood, and they set off homewards amiably enough. But raising her eyes as they passed along the