



ALONE IN PARIS.

BY ANNIE S. SWAN.

CHAPTER I.

Two girls sat, on a sunny May morning, in a quaint corner window of a small house in Mayfair. It was a very quiet and dull little street, but they could just catch a glimpse of the way, in the height of the season, carriages seem to roll all day long. It was long indeed since there had been a gathering of any kind in that unpretentious little house.

The room in which the two girls sat was shabby to the last degree; yet it was a pleasant, homely place, with many little touches of individual taste, which proclaimed the refinement of those who dwelt in it.

"Aunt Eleanor will never consent, Cicely," said the elder of the two; "it's not a bit of good to ask her."

"Well, then, perhaps I shan't ask her," answered Cicely, knitting her fair brows significantly. "I think it is just about time we were allowed to have some little say in the ordering of our lives. The only voice we ought to have, in the estimation of Aunt Eleanor, is when we say we to have an eligible match; and I'm quite sure she thinks that we have failed miserably in not having said yes long ago to Tom Willis, for instance," said Cicely with an incomparable grimace. "I'm quite sure she has decreed that one or other of us is to say yes to Tom sooner or later. The question is, which is it to be?"

"That is not the question at all, Cicely," answered Eleanor rather curtly. "It is you, and you alone, that Tom wants, and what we are all waiting for is to see how long you are going to keep him dangling after you."

"He needn't dangle," said Cicely severely. "I shall never marry a man like Tom Willis. He's very good and all that, but, my dear, he hasn't got any mind—not an aspiration beyond the management of his estate and the perfection of his stables. I haven't cherished so many ideals for years to end up in any such prosaic fashion."

"But I think you might do worse, Cicely. Why, here he is just coming round the corner. I'm sure he is very good looking."

"Passable," said Cicely carelessly; "but I don't admire his type. Now, why is he coming here to-day again? He was here yesterday and the day before, and the day before that, and Aunt Eleanor out too. I think I shall leave you to entertain him."

"No you won't, Cicely," said Eleanor determinedly; "if I have to look the deed to keep you in. It is you that Tom comes to see, and you alone, and see him you shall, until you tell him yourself that he needn't come back."

"Oh, I shouldn't like to hurt the poor boy's feelings so badly as that, Eleanor," said Cicely saucily; and before she could make any further remark Mr. Tom Willis was announced.

Cicely Chester was a very dainty and winsome person, all the more so because she could so successfully keep her admirers at a respectful distance.

Eleanor was cast in a different mold. She was a very sweet, unselfish woman, devoted to her aunt and uncle. But at five-and-twenty she still remained unmarried, and Mrs. Chester felt rather hurt because both her nieces, who had been so much talked of, in their first season should have disappointed all her expectations.

That very morning Cicely had had a little tiff with her aunt on Mr. Willis's account, and the memory of it did not make her greeting to him particularly cordial.

"Don't you get sick of dressing up and walking down Bond Street, and coming here to tea, Tom?" she asked innocently. Tom reddened slightly.

"There's nothing else to do here," he answered. "Well, since you ask me the question, I may as well tell you I am thoroughly sick of it, and I am going away as soon as I can get. To-morrow, perhaps."

"Oh, but you can't, Tom," said Cicely quickly, "because, you see, there's Aunt Eleanor's dance."

"Yes, I know; but I am not obliged to stay for that, am I?" he asked with slightly uplifted brows.

"Oh, certainly not, though I believe Aunt Eleanor would say yes," said Cicely. "Where are you going, Eleanor?" she said sharply as she saw her sister going towards the door. If there was one thing she dreaded, it was a *te-a-tete* with Tom Willis. Matters were at that stage when the young man was eager to seize the slightest opportunity, and Cicely was by no means anxious that matters should be brought to any sudden crisis.

"I shall be back in a moment, Cicely," said Eleanor, and quite disregarding her sister's pleading look, she disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

"I was just saying to Eleanor before you came in, Tom," she said, with great volubility, "that I am awfully sick of my life, and I have quite made up my mind to go away to Paris to study, if they will let me. Of course, I can go without money, and it is just possible that Uncle Edward may see fit to withhold the needful."

Tom Willis, leaning on the stick standing between his knees, looked at her blankly.

"Go away to Paris!" he repeated. "What on earth do you want to do that for?"

"Why, to go for study—my painting, you know. I have wanted to all my life, but Aunt Eleanor would never listen to me. I am so sick of this empty, silly life, and I do want to be doing some useful work. In your more sensible moments you are sick of it too. Just think what a life it is for sensible men and women, to be forever dressing up and driving out, and going to balls and dinners, and things of that sort."

"It does seem rather stupid, I admit," said Tom with a good deal of readiness.

"So you want to go and study art in Paris, and you think you'll like that better," said Tom, looking at her so fixedly that she began to long furiously for Eleanor to come back.

"I shall try it, anyhow. If Aunt Eleanor says anything to you about it, I hope you'll side with me. Oh, do, Tom," she cried, clasping her hands, and looking at him with a most dangerous sweetness in her eyes; but Tom steadily averted his eyes from that bewildering face, and kept them on the pattern of the carpet.

"I am very sorry to be disobliging, Cicely," he answered; "but I couldn't possibly do that."

"But why? It's too bad of you; I thought you would do as much for me as that."

"So I would, and a great deal more if you only knew," he answered. "But of course I'm not going to put a spoke in my own wheel like that."

"Now, Tom, I don't want a word, not another word," she said desperately, seeing in a flash that he meant to have it out at last. "I've been silent to please you," he said quickly. "What do you suppose I come to here, fooling about like this for, if it isn't to see you. Do you think I enjoy this sort of thing any more, or even half as much as you do? If you're tired of your present life, there's another open to you. You can come down to Errington, and try to improve it; or you can go to the people. Goodness knows they have need of it."

Cicely shook her head.

"I am very sorry, Tom," said the girl, rising, and both her voice and her eyes were tender as she spoke these words a little falteringly; "but I couldn't. Only marry me, I know. I'm standing in my own light, and if you and every body will be dreadfully angry with me; but I don't care for you in that way."

and you ought to marry somebody who will appreciate you as you deserve."

"Oh, stop that, Cicely. It's not a question of appreciation at all. I am awfully fond of you, and I shall never care about anybody else. You've teased me a lot, but I never thought that you would throw me over at the last, and you're not going to, are you?"

"Really, you express yourself very uncomfortably, Tom," said Cicely, then a trifle pettishly. "Surely I have the right of choice! I am only twenty-two, and I'm not going to tie myself up for life yet."

"Some day perhaps, then, you will listen to me," said Tom eagerly. "I am quite willing to wait as long as you like, if only you will give me a little hope."

"I am not going to pretend I don't care, because I do; and I promise you I shall never give up until you are married to some other fellow."

"I don't suppose that will ever happen," she said sharply; and at that moment the door was suddenly opened, and Mrs. Chester entered the room.

She simply bade Tom a pleasant good-afternoon, and asked where Eleanor had gone.

"I am just going, Mrs. Chester," said Tom quickly. "No, thank you, I won't stay to tea to-day. I really came to say good-bye. I am going back to Errington to-morrow; and I am afraid I have been rather a nuisance to you the last few weeks."

"You have sent Tom about his business, Cicely, I see," said Mrs. Chester the moment the door closed.

"Yes, Aunt Eleanor," answered Cicely cheerfully. "I am much disappointed, Cicely; and I don't know what I am to do with you," said Mrs. Chester severely.

"I'll tell you, auntie; let me go to study my painting in Paris," cried Cicely eagerly, "and I should be as happy as a queen."

"To go and study in Paris!" echoed Mrs. Chester blankly. "And pray, who is to chaperon you there?"

"Oh, nobody is chaperoning me; they are supposed to take care."

CHAPTER III.

After a talk with her husband, Mrs. Chester, contrary to Cicely's expectations, agreed to send her to Paris.

Although she did not at all approve of her niece's project, she took great pains to make arrangements for her comfort and well-being. In the first week of September Cicely found herself the occupant of a pleasant little house on the Boulevard Port Royal.

In this house lived Madame Cazelet, who had been the governess in the English school where the Chesters had been boarded. After years of waiting she had married a lawyer, and came back joyfully to her beloved Paris to spend the remaining half of her life. The worthy couple had no children, and they were easily persuaded to take charge of the young English lady who wished to study art in Paris.

Mrs. Chester, who did nothing by halves, had also made arrangements for her niece to attend at the studio of a well-known painter, who was not above taking such pupils. Cicely having thus obtained in the most unexpected manner her heart's desire, was correspondingly pleased and entered upon her artistic career in Paris with the full determination to make it a success.

She was somewhat disappointed at the appearance of the other students in M. Deshayes's studio. Brought up as she had been in a somewhat aristocratic home, she was naturally fastidious in her tastes. The men at the studio she could not stand; their free-and-easy manner disgusted her. Not only did they seem commonplace and uninteresting, but at the first glance the fastidious young Englishwoman felt inclined to set them down as vulgar. But Cicely was only at the beginning of her career, and had yet to learn how misleading are appearances, and how very frequently first impressions are afterwards proved to be incorrect.

After she had surreptitiously studied the other occupants of the room over her easel, Cicely came to the conclusion that the most interesting—or, to put it more correctly from her point of view, the least objectionable—of her fellow-students was a little dark-skinned girl with short black hair curling all over her head. She was not at all pretty, she had a keen, clever face, and there was something in her large dark eyes especially winning. She was very shabbily dressed in an ill-made frock of poor material, and the huge painting pinafore which almost covered it did not by any means enhance her appearance. Yet Cicely felt oddly interested in her, she could not tell why, and she determined that, when the lunch hour came she would try and have a little talk with her.

The moment the teacher left the room the young men followed him, and the girls were left alone. So far none of them had spoken to Cicely, except to bid her the briefest good-morning. Although she was not aware of it herself, there was a certain *hauteur* in her manner which rather repelled people, and which was particularly objectionable in the eyes of these Bohemian young women. Two of them immediately put on their hats, and taking their gloves in their hands, marched out of the room.

"We don't go out for lunch, Maud and I," said the little dark-haired girl, turning to Cicely. "We bring ours with us. What are you going to do?"

"I suppose I shall have to go out, since I have not brought any; but I don't in the least know where to go. To-morrow I shall bring some, of course."

"If you can afford it, Cicely," said the girl who had been spoken of as Maud, "I should advise you by all means to go out to lunch. I can tell you it gets stuffy enough up here by four o'clock."

"I can afford it quite well," said Cicely, "only I must stop in to-day, as I don't know where to go."

"If you wait till Maud and I have finished our modest repast," said the little girl, "we'll go out and show you, like we shouldn't mind a walk."

"Suppose you come with me now, and let us have lunch together," said Cicely.

"Oh, my dear expense, do you mean?" the other one asked with a quaint smile.

"Why, certainly. I should not have asked you otherwise. But perhaps we'd better know each other's names. Mine is Cicely Chester."

"I am Molly Endicott, and this is Maud Harris. I am American and she is English. I hope we shall be good friends."

"I am sure I hope so," said Cicely sincerely. "Well, shall we go now?"

CHAPTER IV.

So the three girls went out together in the pleasant sunshine, and after their modest lunch at a café near by, chatting all the time in an unconventional and pleasant way which filled Cicely with secret delight. Before they had risen from the table they knew a good deal about one another's antecedents and prospects. Cicely learned that both girls were poor—that Maud, like herself, was an orphan, and having a very small income of her own, had elected to spend it in this way, and gratify her taste for art. Mary Endicott was the daughter of a widowed American lady who had two children, an invalid boy and Cicely's new friend.

When they went back to the studio, she could not help observing with what feverish eagerness she devoted herself to her work, and how closely she listened to everything the teacher said. Cicely herself, of course, did not make much progress that first morning. She was disheartened, as most beginners are, by having all her methods condemned.

M. Deshayes was a good teacher, but always more chary of praise than blame.

"It's dreadfully disheartening just at first, don't you think?" said Cicely as she put on her hat before the scrap of mirror in the queer little dressing room. "I must say M. Deshayes is not too lavish in his encouragement."

"No," answered Miss Endicott; "you may be sure that if he commends you, you have done something worthy of commendation. He is dreadfully disagreeable sometimes, but he has not soiled you nearly so much as he soils some. Where are you going?"

"On the Boulevard Port Royal. Do you go that way?"

"No, I live in the opposite direction; but if you don't mind, I have half an hour to spare, and we might walk as far as the Luxembourg Gardens. It is a little out of the way, but I don't suppose you are in a hurry."

"No, indeed I am not, and I should be delighted," said Cicely quite gratefully. "I want to ask so many questions about everything."

"How long have you been with M. Deshayes?" asked Cicely as they walked along the sunny street together.

"Oh, I have been off and on with him a good deal, but it is only this autumn that I have been able to take some consecutive lessons, and now I can only afford that because I have been so very fortunate as to get an evening engagement as a secretary with a gentleman who is engaged at our legation here—we are Americans, you know. This gentleman is engaged with his Government duties all day, but he has a hobby at night. He is a great student of philology, and I help him in his researches and take down notes for him in shorthand, for which he is good enough to pay me twenty-five francs a week. I assure you that makes me feel quite rich, and so I have been able to take out the life class at the studio, which I have been dying to do for two years past."

"And do you mean to say that you go and work of an evening for five francs, up till ten o'clock. Sometimes I am dreadfully tired, too tired to sleep. But there, I have got my heart's desire at the studio, and if I succeed as I hope and mean to do, I'll soon forget all that."

"You make me feel ashamed," said Cicely, and she meant every word she said.

CHAPTER V.

"Now if there's anything you want to know," said Molly, "I will try and tell you. I have been in Paris a long time, more than three years, and I know it as well as you know London, I suppose. Do you come from London?"

"I live in London part of the year," said Cicely, "in the season."

"Oh, in the season," said Molly reflectively. "Then you are what is known in vulgar parlance, a swell. I thought you were by your clothes and your general appearance."

Cicely laughed.

"What made you go to leave? I have always heard from Americans who go over for the London season that it is delightful. Was there any unpleasantness at home?"

"Well, there was just a little, because my aunt and uncle wanted me to marry a man I don't like."

"Oh, that was bad," said Molly significantly. "Well, I know nothing about these sorts of things, seeing no man has ever wanted to marry me, and it is a contingency which is not likely to happen. So you thought you'd launch out on your own account. Are they providing you with an unlimited amount?"

"Oh, no," said Cicely. "My aunt and uncle have been very kind about it, I must say. They are not rich, and they are allowing me a hundred a year. I shall just manage to make it do."

"A hundred a year!" repeated Molly, drawing an impossible figure on the gravel with her shabby little sunshade, "and you are as poor as a church mouse as that to live on, and then there is Dick."

"How do you manage?" inquired Cicely blankly.

"Oh, we manage somehow," said Molly with a swift, bright smile which made her face for the moment almost beautiful.

"And, you know, God helps those who help themselves. We have proved it again and again."

Cicely was somewhat startled by these words. Although she had been taught to pay respect to the outward forms of religion, she knew nothing of its great principles, nor had she ever met any who took these principles much into account in their daily life.

"What are you going to do with yourself on Sunday? Sunday is always the worst day in the week for those who are alone in a big city; I always think one gets so homesick then."

"I am living with friends, you know," said Cicely gently. "At least, with a lady who was French governess in the school where my sister and I were educated. They are very kind, Madame Cazelet especially."

"Well, suppose you come over to us in time for early dinner; then we can go in the afternoon, if we feel disposed, for a long walk in the Bois de Boulogne. It is lovely down there, and we are quite near, you know. It is no use trying to explain how near, as you are quite a stranger in Paris."

"I'd like to come very much," said Cicely earnestly. "And I think it so good of you to ask me, when you never saw me at all before to-day."

"That's quite true, but I like you, and I am sure mother will too," answered Molly, in her quaint, frank fashion. "Dick will be very pleased to see you, too. He is not able to walk far, poor boy, and so he never has been to the Bois yet. It is one of the dreams of my life to be able to buy him a real comfortable invalid chair, and to pay someone to wheel him out every day."

Cicely said nothing. She was thinking of the money she had so carelessly spent every day of her life, on a thousand unconsidered trifles which she had supposed to be necessary, while a poor invalid boy was compelled to remain indoors because he was not able to walk, and those who loved him not the wretchedness of buying him an invalid chair.

"You look as if you were homesick now," said Molly presently; "but you must cheer up and not give way so soon. You will soon get accustomed to the life, and will like Paris so much that you will never wish to leave it."

"I was not thinking of that at all," answered Cicely; but she did not say what her thought had been.

"Well, I am sorry my time is up, and I must go," said Molly, jumping up. "Do you think you will be able to find your way back? You know a little French, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, enough to get along with. Good-bye, and thank you so much. We shall meet again in the morning, I hope."

Molly nodded brightly, and with a warm hand-shake they parted.

The next few days served to deepen the intimacy between them, and when Sunday morning came, Cicely prepared to go and spend the day with her new friends with the most pleasant anticipation.

It was about one o'clock when she arrived at the door, which was opened to her by Molly herself.

"Good morning; we are so glad to see you. Dick has been in the most tremendous state of excitement all the morning. He's up already, and has his best bib and tucker on in honor of you. This is mother."

She drew Cicely across the little hall and into the bright sitting-room, where a slight, graceful-looking woman with soft hair rippling under a dainty widow's cap, and a sweet, saintly face which reminded Cicely of some Madonna she had seen in one of the famous galleries, came forward quickly with outstretched hands.

"My dear child, we are so very glad to see you," she said; and there was no mistaking the heartiness of her voice and manner. "Molly has talked so much of you that we have been quite longing to see you. This is my boy."

Cicely's eyes were filled with foolish tears as she tried to respond to this sweet welcome. Then she took a step towards the sofa where the invalid boy reclined among his pillows, smiling eagerly, and anxious to join in the welcome to the stranger. He had his mother's beautiful classic features and also her sweet, rare smile, but his face was very white and worn, and he looked as if he suffered much.

"I am sorry to see you lying there," Cicely said, as she shook hands with him; then, moved by something in his face, she stooped forward and lightly kissed his forehead. "It is too bad of me to intrude upon you like this, but I wanted to come so badly."

"We wanted you to come, too," said Dick shyly. "Molly is always talking about you."

"I thought of something as I came along, Mrs. Endicott," said Cicely, glancing from one to the other and flushing just a little, uncertain how her suggestion would be received, because she could see quite well that though the Endicotts were poor, they were gentle people, and it was just possible that if not careful to accept favors from a stranger. "I thought that if you could allow me to take a little carriage for you and Dick this afternoon, Molly and I could walk on and join you. Please do let me, it would be such a pleasure, and it would be so nice if we could all go."