

A fat, jolly-looking man about forty-five years old, dressed in white flannels, appeared round the corner of the piazza. Good humor shone upon his face. Frances forced a smile; she was always glad to see Cousin Ned. He was a bachelor, who lived in New York, but spent his springs and autumns in the old cottage on the Lane place.

'Well, my word!' he exclaimed. 'I thought I was going to see you play in the tennis tournament this morning. All prepared to go down and root for the Lane family!'

Frances remembered what had been of supreme importance that morning, before the interview with her father. Not even the tennis-racquet, clutched firmly in her hand, had reminded her. All her enthusiasm for the tournament that was to be the most exciting one of the year—a team of New England girls against a New York team—had departed. She said to herself that she did not see how she could play. Her eyes were so full of unshed tears that they smarted. She felt that she would not be able to see the ball.

'Whom have you drawn?' Cousin Ned asked. He had perceived that something was wrong, but he turned and smelt the blossoms of the Rambler rose that embowered the pillar near him.

'I don't know. There are five on each side. It's to be finished in one day—not like an ordinary tournament. Each of us will have only one match to play, and the team that gets the most points will win. It's all arranged by the team captains. I shan't know whom I'm to play till I get there. I don't even know who's coming.'

'I heard rumors,' said Cousin Ned. 'I heard rumors that they were going to bring Miss Boyden.'

'Miss Boyden! Well, then, we shan't find it so easy! Every one's been saying, Ellen May especially, that the New Yorkers were no good. But Miss Boyden! I thought she was playing abroad. Well, I never!'

'One of those tennis families. I played Harry Boyden once myself,' said Cousin Ned. He sank comfortably into a big rocking-chair. 'I was a bit lighter in those days, and I really ranked pretty well. I gave him something of a match, if I do say it.'

Frances smiled; she had heard this battle referred to before.

'The score wouldn't show what a hard rub it was,' Cousin Ned continued. 'Every point was fought to a finish.'

'What was the score, Cousin Ned?'

'Why, six-two, six-one, if I remember right,' Cousin Ned replied, somewhat reluctantly. 'But I tell you, half the games were deuce!'

'A pity you couldn't have beaten him,' Frances had become interested in tennis again. 'I suppose we'd better go along.'

'Come on!' Cousin Ned followed her down the path. 'I'd have made a good player if I'd had more time for the game. But that Boyden fellow—there was something about his way of playing more than his actual strokes that bothered you. His balls weren't so awfully swift—except, of course, his serve. That came with a terrific twist and break. I can remember just how I felt when I first stood and saw it bound off at an angle.'

'Why, I have a mind,' Cousin Ned exclaimed, with a sudden return of his former exasperation, 'to give a good round prize to whoever beats the Boyden girl! Anything the winner wants, practically, within seventy-five dollars' worth. It would give me real pleasure to make that present. How I should like to see a Boyden outplayed!'

Frances drew a deep breath, and then laughed at the preposterousness of thinking of herself and Miss Boyden, the Eastern champion, in the same breath.

In a few moments the County Club appeared before her eyes. The two tennis-courts built near the house were already surrounded with a gaily-dressed crowd.

'A great day,' said Cousin Ned. 'No wind.'

It was a great day for tennis, Frances felt. Her cheeks flushed with anticipation.

As soon as she entered the dressing-room, where shoes and racquets and clothes of all descriptions littered

the chairs and floors, the girls greeted her with a mournful outcry:

'Do you know who's come? Miss Boyden!'

'And do you know what I'm going to ask you?' said Ellen May impressively, when she could at last make herself heard above the chorus of despair. 'I'm going to ask if you'd mind playing against her. I have a lame wrist, and Katherine isn't on her game. And besides, you can beat any of us ordinarily. But of course, as for that, no one would have any real chance. It's only the question of giving her a good match.'

Frances, who was almost ten years younger than any of the others, and was regarded by them as a kind of infant prodigy, and by herself as a most incompetent person, replied only with a gasp. There were girls, women rather, in the room who had won laurels in many a match. Although it was true that in everyday play she had beaten them, not one of them had ever succumbed to her in a tournament. It was a difficult thing, tournament play. It took different and more mature qualities.

Her first impulse was to refuse the honor assigned her, but instead she replied:

'Of course I'll play her, if no one else will.'

'They've brought better players than we expected,' she said. 'The rest of us may lose. You'll have to do your best. Try to get your own service. You won't be able to do much against the Boyden serve.'

'The Boyden serve!' Frances repeated, with some wonder.

'That's the famous serve she learned from her brother. It's not so good as his, naturally, but very few girls can return it.'

When they went out on the verandah the New York girls, who were staying at a country house near by, were alighting from a carriage. There were introductions all round. The crowd was steadily increasing. There was a great buzz and flutter of interest among the spectators and of excitement among the girls. Two matches were immediately started on the two courts. Frances, whose turn had not yet come, hid herself among the group of strangers. She felt cold to the tips of her fingers. She did not want to have to talk to anybody. Cousin Ned smiled and waved his hand from across the court where he was sitting with friends. But Frances could not return his smile. If he only knew that she was to play Miss Boyden he would not smile so lightly! And she was to play her as soon as the match he was watching came to an end!

She saw Miss Boyden, to whom she had just been introduced, seated on the ground, quite at ease and chatting gaily. She was very pretty and pink-cheeked. She was broad-shouldered and slim. She wore an embroidered sailor collar, a neat-fitting linen dress, and a black velvet band round her hair.

'It will be pitiful!' Frances said to herself at one moment glumly, and at the next, 'I'll show them!'

The thought of the prize and of Cousin Ned's offer was obliterated from her mind. One desire wholly absorbed her—to play her best. The match going on before her was close, but she could pay no attention to it. When finally it came to an end amid much applause, and Ellen May, purple but triumphant, received congratulations, she felt dazed and stiff of body. She did not even know the score. She realised that on the farther court play had been finished, and then she heard the scorer, an important-looking youth, call her name and Miss Boyden's.

Frances felt numb as she got to her feet. Ellen May, hurrying up, grasped her arm.

'Peggy Brown has been beaten,' she whispered, 'and we counted on her. It means you must do your best.'

'I didn't need that to make me,' said Frances. She was irritable with nervousness.

She won the toss, took serve, and immediately won the first three points, although her ears buzzed with excitement and she was acutely aware of every person looking on.

'Forty-love!' cried the scorer.

She heard one of the spectators give a low whistle of surprise. She was surprised herself, but for a few moments only.

Ken. Mayo

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