

3 COMPLETE STORIES AND OTHER FEATURES WITHIN

The Schoolgirl

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Every
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INCORPORATING
"SCHOOLDAYS"



THE LAST HUNDRED YARDS...

One of the many exciting incidents in this week's enthralling long complete Cliff House School story

A Powerful Complete Cliff House School Story, Featuring Tomboy Clara Trevlyn



Just a Chance

"I'm jolly well fed-up!" exclaimed Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, the games captain of the junior school at Cliff House. And her expression certainly bore out her words. And never, surely, had her gentle-natured chum, Marjorie Hazeldene, looked more worried or more harassed.

The two of them sat in the Fourth Form room at Cliff House School. Exercise books were before them, but neither of them was making the faintest attempt to work.

Marjorie, pen in hand, was gazing dumbly, appealingly at her chum. Clara, without even pretending, was staring through the open window.

That window was one of the most pleasantly situated in the whole of Cliff House School.

It afforded a view of the quadrangle, where girls, in the mellow evening sunshine, strolled and talked. It showed the Senior Side, where Dulcia Fairbrother, games captain of the school, was putting the first eleven through their paces at the nets.

It showed the junior side tennis courts, where four girls—Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, Joan Cartwright, and Frances Frost of the Fourth Form, were energetically disputing themselves, under the instructions of a tall young man wearing tinted glasses, and with a little black moustache.

Clara shifted restlessly. Her eyes went to the clock above the blackboard.

"Oh crumbs, another half an hour!" she groaned. "And there's the tennis practice going on. Oh, good, Babs!" she cried involuntarily, as Barbara Redfern, playing in singles with fair-haired Frances Frost, flashed back a return which had Frances beaten all the way. "Babs' backhand is certainly improving," she remarked to Marjorie.

MISJUDGED BY CLIFF HOUSE

CLARA TREVLYN has pledged herself to help Ralph Lawrence. And even though it means keeping his secret from her chums, and at the same time incurring their disfavour because of what happens, the Tomboy never flinches from her self-imposed task.

"Did you see that shot? She played it like a champion!"

Marjorie smiled rather wanly, shaking her head. She had not seen the shot. She had been studying Clara. She and Clara were in detention, and rather unjustly, perhaps, the sensitive Marjorie was blaming herself for that.

But Marjorie knew—none better—what this enforced inactivity meant to Clara.

For those four girls out there, being instructed by the new games coach, were in the team which Clara had gathered together to compete in the coming tennis tournament at Courtfield. And that young man, though he was

masquerading under the name of David Grantham, was her own scapegrace, reckless cousin, Ralph Lawrence.

"Clara!" she said.

"Eh?" Clara turned.

"Clara—oh, I—I'm sorry," Marjorie said, with quivering lips.

Clara shrugged.

"Oh, it wasn't your fault!" she said gruffly. "Marjorie, don't blame your self. It's pretty beastly being cooped up in detention when we should be practising. But—" She broke off.

"Marjorie," she added, "nobody besides you and I know who Ralph is?"

"No," Marjorie replied, her eyes troubled. "Nancy Bell has a good idea, though she has no proof. Oh, Clara, if only this wretched business were over!"

"It soon will be!" Clara said grimly. "But—but how?" Marjorie shook her head in self-confessed hopelessness. "Look at it, Clara. Ralph has been here three days now, and we're just as

By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

far from proving his innocence as we ever were."

There was silence. Clara again stared at the clock on the wall. Mabel Lynn and Jean Cartwright were playing now. Jean certainly was improving, she noticed.

Her mind for a moment wandered over the circumstances which had led to her detention.

The theft of Dr. Barrymore's coins at Friardale School by Noah Bell, brother of the sneak of the Fourth Form. The accusation of Ralph, who had run away from the school. The theft, mysteriously the handing over of the coins by Noah to Nancy, who had hidden them in the loft. The arrival of Ralph at Cliff House as David Grantham, the new sports coach.

Such a lot had happened, it seemed, and she and Marjorie, helping Ralph to get back those coins so that he could prove his innocence, had been victims of scheming Nancy's wiles—Nancy, who was mortally afraid that they would get hold of the coins before her.

"Marjorie," Clara said, "don't worry. It's all going to come right, I tell you. We know where the coins are. I've made it my business to keep an eye on Nancy, and I know she hasn't jolly well got hold of them yet. We'll clear Ralph between us, never fear. Oh, good stroke, Mabs!" she applauded, her attention still on the courts outside.

Marjorie smiled again, a rather wistful smile it was.

Dear Clara! What a chum she was, to be sure.

She looked at the clock. Five minutes to go, four minutes—three. The classroom door opened.

Miss Charmant, the pretty mistress of the Fourth, appeared.

"Right, girls, you may go," she said quietly.

In a moment Clara was on her feet. Up went the flap of her desk. Joyfully she took up into it. Down slammed the flap again, and, all eagerness, she leapt into the aisle.

At last! At last! Oh, thank goodness, detention was finished at last! Now for the real work of the evening—tennis!

"Marjorie, you coming?" she cried. "Yes, in a minute. But you go, Clara. I'll join you later."

No second bidding did the Tomboy of the Fourth need. She was quivering with impatience. Just one flashing smile she bestowed upon Miss Charmant as she rushed past that mistress into the corridor.

Then into Study No. 7, which she shared with Marjorie and Janet Jordan, there to snatch up her tennis racket and bolt down the stairs.

Breathless, she arrived at the court, pushing her way through the crowd which had gathered on the lines watching the practice.

"Mr. Grantham!" she burst out. Ralph Lawrence, alias David Grantham, turned towards her. His face lighted up.

"Miss Trevlyn—at last!" he cried delightedly, and smiled that very fascinating smile of his. But as he bent towards her he whispered:

"Any news?"

Clara briefly shook her head. But even in her excitement she saw Nancy Bell. Nancy standing on the edge of the crowd, her sallow face crafty, her eyes narrowed and gleaming, obviously watching the two of them most intently.

"Well, here we are!" she cried. "And—my hat, am I just dying for a game! I say, Babs is improving, isn't she—and Mabs? I've been watching them through the window, you know. Babs, give us a game?" she called.

"Why, Clara!" Babs cried in delight. Immediately she dropped her racket. She and Mabs and Jean Cartwright surrounded Clara. Frances Frost, the fourth member of the team, however, stood a little aloof, a haughty, disdainful smile upon her face.

"Well, you old Spartan," Babs laughed, "finished detention then? Of course I'll give you a game—two, if you like. But watch out," she added laughingly. "I've got a simply marvellous backhand drive since Mr. Grantham showed me a few things."

"Yes, rather! And my overarm service—"

"Mabs chuckled. "And you should see my return," Jean Cartwright laughed. "I never knew I had it in me. Whoever thought of giving Mr. Grantham the appointment of games coach certainly had the brainwave of a century. But we're miles up on you, Clara. What with extra practice in the mornings and all that. Let's make it a double, shall we? Frances, you'll join in?"

"Thanks, but I've had enough tennis for one day," Frances said disagreeably. "Get someone else."

"Well, Marjorie, then. Here she is. Come on, Margie!"

Marjorie it was, hurrying towards the group. Marjorie still looking troubled and worried, and shooting just the briefest glance at her cousin as she passed him—as though, indeed, she were afraid of betraying him even by a look.

Ralph smiled.

"Good chum," he approved. "Jean, you and Clara, and Marjorie, you take Babs. I'll umpire."

The players took their places. Clara was quivering now. No, it was true she hadn't had the practice the others had had, thanks to being deprived of the early morning lesson, and losing an hour to-night.

But she was going to do her best. She was going to make up for lost ground. After all, she was the captain of the team, wasn't she? And she had vowed that she would lead her side to victory in the great tournament at Courtfield, which was due to be held the week after next.

"Service!" she called boisterously. "Here you are, Babs!" She tossed the ball. Babs served. Over the net came the ball to Clara, a tricky serve which had the Tomboy beaten from the word go. She laughed ruefully as she fielded the ball.

"My hat, who taught you that?"

"Mr. Grantham," said Babs.

"Jolly good shot! Fifteen—love," Clara added.

Babs served again, this time from the other court. The ball went over to Jean, who took it smartly and knocked it back to Babs. Swish, swish! For a few moments the ball flew to and fro across the net, then—

Smooch! Babs, with a shattering return, pitched right into the corner of Clara's court, had the Tomboy beaten.

"Oh, my hat!"

Clara set her lips. On the side lines she saw girls grinning. Lydia Crossendale, her enemy of the Fourth, was whispering something in an aside to Freda Ferriers, whose mouth was twisted in an ill-natured grin. She saw Brenda Fallace smiling scornfully, she caught a whisper:

"My hat, what a captain! Clara can't play for foffee!"

Clara looked grim. "What a captain!" That was what they were saying, was it? Never taking into account that she had not had the advantage of extra training and the coaching that the others had had. They thought she was letting

the team down! The game ended—against Clara.

"My service!" she called.

"Smash! Down went the ball. Marjorie, who had changed over, missed it completely. Well, that levelled up things a little. Now she was getting into her stride.

And then—Clara stared.

While Marjorie was fielding the ball a soft, cautious whistle reached her ears. She spun round, just in time to see Nancy Bell, her arch-enemy, whom she mistrusted and suspected, who, unavailingly, she had been following and tracking these last three days, whirling round towards the gates. In that direction Clara's gaze shot at once.

"Clara!" Marjorie called.

But Clara was not listening, she was looking. And suddenly she drew a deep breath as she saw the figure which stood at the gates—a figure she had such cause to know.

It was a boy—a rather slouching figure—who lounged there, the telltale Friardale Boys School cap pulled well over his face.

Noah Bell, Nancy's brother, the boy who had stolen the coins, for the theft of which Ralph Lawrence had been blamed!

Clara's eyes narrowed.

"Clara!" yelled Babs.

"Oh, sorry!" And Clara, all confusion, noticed that the balls had been sent back to her and gone past her, and she not even aware that they had been returned. A titter went up from the crowd.

But Clara was not heeding. She had forgotten for the moment the importance of her tennis.

Now she saw Nancy moving towards her brother, saw them conversing together. She saw Nancy look towards the playing-fields. She saw Noah give her a slight push as if urging her on. Again Nancy nodded.

"Oh, my hat, what's the matter with you, goose?" Barbara Kedfern cried. "We're all waiting for you to serve!"

Clara flushed. She fielded the balls. Now she saw Nancy hurrying off towards the school, and she knew in that moment. She knew—she knew! Noah Bell had come for the stolen coins which Nancy had hidden in the loft. Nancy was going to get them.

"Serve!" yelled Babs.

But Clara did not even hear. She looked at Ralph again, agonisingly, appealingly. But Ralph was talking to Rosa Rodworth. He did not see.

For one brief moment Clara hesitated, then—crash, down went her racket. If Nancy were going to get those coins now she was going to be present.

"Clara!" cried Babs.

"Clara, who's up?"

A chorus of amazement, of consternation, went up. What on earth was the matter with the Tomboy? But there she was sprinting across the field as fast as her long legs and her rather too large feet would carry her.

At last, she was thinking—at last—at last!

Here was the chance for which she had waited! The chance of proving Ralph Lawrence's innocence. This time there should be no backing out of it for Nancy Bell! She would catch her red-handed with the loot in her possession.

After that—

Whiz! Up the stone steps that led to the doors she went with a rush. Blindly she flung into Big Hall, and then—crash!

"Oh!" gasped a voice.

Clara stopped, preventing herself, in

the nick of time, from sprawling over the figure into which she had blundered. "Oh crumbs! I'm su-sorry!"

"Sorry! Sorry!" Quivering, the figure heaved; and then Clara's expression changed from one of regret to one of utter consternation as Miss Bullivant, the acid mathematics mistress, furious and dishevelled, struggled back on to her feet. "Sorry, indeed!" she got out gaspingly. "What do you mean by rushing into the school in that hoidenish manner?"

"Well, you see, I—I—"

"I do not see! Clara, you will come to my study at once!"

"But—but—"

"Come!"

Clara groaned. Oh, what beastly luck! Where was Nancy? But there was no gainsaying the Bull when she spoke like that. And the Bull was angry.

Into her study Clara trailed, mutely listened to the ten-minutes' lecture, climaxed by an imposition of two hundred lines with which the acid Form-mistress rewarded her. Her eyes glinted.

"And please bear what I have told you in mind, Clara. Now go!"

Clara went—gladly, relievedly. But she had hardly got outside when another figure pounced upon her. This time it was Dulcia Fairbrother, the captain of games.

"Oh, Clara! Clara, I've been looking for you!"

Clara started.

"But—I say, Dulcia, can you excuse me a minute or two?"

"I'm afraid I can't—not now," Dulcia said. "I've just got to see you, Clara, so that I can catch the next post. Come into my study!"

"But—what—"

"It's about the tennis."

Clara sighed. Oh, what evil fate had ranged itself against her and on the side of Nancy Bell? But she couldn't very well run off after that request. Dulcia would require explanations. And how could she explain? It was quite likely, indeed, to judge by Dulcia's extremely urgent manner, that she would insist upon accompanying her.

She trailed into the study, leaving the door open, however, so that she could see Nancy Bell when she came down the stairs again. Dulcia laughed.

"Well, what is it?" Clara asked rather impatiently.

"Now, Clara, don't speak like that! It's a challenge—from Whitechester!"

"Whitechester?" Clara started, her face flushed. Whitechester were Cliff House's sternest tennis rivals—and Whitechester, too, were also entered for the Courtfield Tournament.

"You mean—"

"I mean that Whitechester has offered us a match on Saturday," Dulcia said.

"They've made the challenge to me, of course, as games captain. But it's your team they want to meet. Have I to accept?"

Had she to accept? The enthusiasm that flamed into the tomboy's cheeks at once gave the answer to that question. Oh, this was good—good!

What a dazzling rehearsal for the big event itself! What a match—and what a fillip it would give to the hopes of the team if Cliff House came away victorious!

"Accept!" she cried. "I should say so!"

"But you realise," Dulcia added seriously, "what this means, Clara?"

"Eh—what?"

"Well, it means you will have to put your very, very best team in the field.



IF YOU ARE ON THE TALL SIDE—

There are several ways in which you can disguise the fact—providing you want to, of course.

be your choice when possible. These give width to your shoulders, and so make the rest of you look "less lanky" in proportion.

—TAILORED suits, whether fancy or plain, suit the tall girl, you'll be happy to know. And how much nicer you'll look in this always-smart fashion than your dumpler friends!

—FLAT heels will make you look shorter than high heels—naturally. So it's doubly nice to realise that "flats" are all the rage this year!

—HATS with high crowns, or with very stand-up feathers as trimming, should be passed over by the toot-tall. Instead, select the pull-on, or the beret style, as squat and as fashionable as you like.

—FOR party wear, sandals are still worn with even the most grown-up frocks. But if you feel more at home in a slipper with a higher heel, don't hesitate to wear it for fear of adding to your height. It won't make all that difference! And if you FEEL better in it, you will certainly look it!

—YOU'RE really very lucky.

—THERE are few styles that you cannot wear, and you look as well in sporting as in fluffier, indoor dress.

—YOU have more opportunity to look nice in whatever you do wear than those who are not so tall, providing—

—YOU walk and stand gracefully, and are able to add poise to your already attractive appearance.

—AVOID frocks of materials that have rather a bold pattern. These tend to make you look bigger, and are for your smaller and slimmer friends.

—TRIMMINGS that go round-wards rather than downwards are for you, for roundward stripes, in a jersey or frock material, give width and so detract from the height.

—BELTS, you should rejoice to know, are definitely your style. So keep your waist slim and attractive, to make the wearing of them a real addition to your appearance.

—THE wider the belt, the better for you tall ones. And, how fashionable.

—THE CAPE, whether on coat or frock, is another fashion that will suit you, and again you are lucky, for this is to-day as fashionable as it has ever been.

—SWAGGER coats look better on you than the pencil-line style. These, with their swing-back fullness, tend to make you look a little shorter.

—FINGER-TIP length coats, which are so useful in the summer, are also yours. The hem of the coat with your pretty frock showing generously beneath, has the effect of "cutting up" a tall line.

—BOLEROS—you know, those very, very short jackets that come only to below the armpits—should

You'll have to play your hardest. It means, if you win, that you've the brightest prospect on earth for the tournament trophy—"

"Yes, yes," Clara said impatiently.

"And if you lose"—Dulcia regarded her gravely—"if you lose it won't be so good, will it?" she asked seriously. "It might undermine the self-confidence of your team!"

"But we won't lose," Clara cried fiercely—"we won't! And, anyway, we can't refuse a challenge!"

"No."

"Then accept!" Clara cried. "We'll take them on. Don't worry about the team, Dulcia—they're fine! Playing better now than they've ever played—thanks to Mr. Grantham's coaching! Can—can I go now?"

"You seem in rather a hurry!"

"Well, I am!"

"Very well, then I'll accept!"

And Clara, with an eager nod and bursting heart, flew. Would she still be in time to catch up with Nancy?

She was not.

For Nancy, by that time, had retrieved the bag containing the coins. It was in the pocket of her tunic, and very glad indeed was Nancy of the prospect of getting rid of it.

Fear of Clara, of Marjorie, of the young games coach whose real identity she only suspected, had made Nancy's life these last three days a nightmare at Cliff House School.

Now Noah wanted the coins—was asking for them. Noah was going to London to-morrow, and would dispose of them.

So glad indeed was Nancy to retrieve

those coins which she had hidden in the water-tank that she completely forgot to close the trapdoor which gave entry to the loft, or to remove the steps which gave access to the trapdoor, when she had finished with them.

Her heart was jumping, her whole frame was trembling, as guiltily, furtively, she slipped downstairs, hoping to goodness that she would meet nobody. But alas for Nancy's hopes!

Like Clara, she was doomed to be interrupted.

For flitting along the Fourth Form corridor, she was in the act of turning the corner when—

"Nancy!" a voice called.

Nancy, the colour of death, stopped as if she had been shot.

"Nancy"—and Miss Charmant came rustling along the corridor—"Nancy! Why, goodness, child, you look quite scared! What is the matter?"

"N-nothing!" Nancy gulped.

"You don't feel ill?"

"No, Miss Charmant."

"Well, thank goodness! But I want you, Nancy," she said briskly. "Will you come into my study?"

Nancy stifled a groan. She thought of the little bag in her pocket—that bag which seemed suddenly to have become a lead weight. She thought of anxious brother Noah outside the gates there, waiting apprehensively for her return. "Is—is it very urgent, Miss Charmant?"

"Very," Miss Charmant said dryly. "I want you to address some envelopes for me. They are rather important!"

Nancy bit her lip. But, like Clara, she dare not refuse. Her guilty conscience scared her from inviting questions, and thereby perhaps courting suspicion. If Miss Charmant only guessed for a moment what she had in her pocket!

"You don't mind?" Miss Charmant asked keenly.

"Oh, nun-no!" stammered Nancy.

"Then come with me."

Nancy went with her. Dumbly she trailed off in the mistress' wake. But she hesitated for an instant when she reached the window at the end of the landing—a window which overlooked the drive and the gates—outside which Noah Bell could still be seen.

Just for a moment she paused, intruding her shoulders into the open air. Thank goodness! Noah saw her.

Impossible, of course, from that distance, to call to him. That would attract the attention of every girl in the quad and on the playing fields.

But she waved her arm—once, twice, making a downward gesture with her hand at the end of each stroke. It was a signal of dismissal—a message which said as plainly as any words could have said: "Go away—go away!"

Noah Bell saw it. He understood and, being the coward he was, knew a qualm of fear.

Once he waved a hand, just to show that he understood, then pointed over his shoulder in the direction of the woods. That, too, was a message to Nancy. Her brother was asking if he should go back to Friardale.

She nodded vigorously. Then, as Miss Charmant's voice sounded from the end of the corridor, Nancy turned and ran.

While Clara, reaching the attics, stared grimly at the steps—the open trapdoor. Those steps and that trapdoor told their own tale.

Nancy Bell had flown, and with her had gone the bag of coins which would establish Ralph Lawrence's innocence!



"In the Know"

CLARA TREVLYN frowned. "But how the dickens," she thought exasperatedly, "did Nancy get away without my seeing her?"

That was the question. For there was only one way of entry and exit from this particular part of the school. That was by the main doors, to approach which, anyone going out would have to pass through Big Hall.

How, then, had she got out?

Rather fierce was the frown that came to the Tomboy's face.

Not Clara to leave any stone unturned, and never guessing, at that moment, that her arch-enemy was furtively addressing letters in Miss Charmant's study, she climbed up the steps into the loft.

The merest glance showed her that Nancy was not there. Her subsequent search, which occupied, perhaps, ten minutes, failed also to reveal any clue to the bag of coins.

Disappointed, and confirmed in her belief that Nancy had at last got away with the one clue which would have saved Ralph Lawrence, the Tomboy descended the steps again.

Well, what now?

She paused on the landing. There was a fierce glint in her eyes. She had failed Ralph! Ralph, whom she had promised to help!

Her lips compressed. Well, she must tell Ralph—tell him at once. Down the stairs she raced, was passing the prefects' room in the Sixth Form quarters when—

"Yes, yes," said a voice in that room, "I've got them."

Clara jumped. The voice was Nancy Bell's.

She paused. Got them—got what? Usually Clara scorned eavesdropping. Ordinarily she would have felt contempt for herself for stooping to do what she did now. Yet deliberately she paused now and listened.

Nancy had waged bitter and unrelenting war against her. Nancy had used the circumstances, the most cruel of weapons, and a boy's honour was at stake.

She strained her ears.

"Yes, I tell you—I've got them!" Nancy's voice came again—Nancy speaking into the telephone. "I couldn't get them to you at the gates. Miss Charmant stopped me and gave me a job to do. Are you at Friardale now?"

Clara's eyes gleamed. Nancy was speaking to her brother.

"Well," Nancy went on, "meet me in the woods—quarter of an hour. I shall go grey if I have to keep the wretched things another night. Yes, the usual place. Oh, don't worry. I'll be there all right!"

Clara heard that. Oh, my hat, then all was not lost! What was this she was hearing? Nancy—meeting her brother in Friardale Woods in a quarter of an hour! Nancy, then, was going to hand over the stolen loot to him. But was she?

A moment Clara hesitated; then she made up her mind. Ralph should know about this! Ralph must know about it!

Silently she tiptoed away from the door, doubled back upon her tracks and bolted downstairs, letting herself out at the servants' entrance. She rushed across the playing fields.

The tennis was over now. The crowds had dispersed. Ralph, carefully slacken-

ing the nets, turned as the Tomboy came up. He saw at once from her face that she had news of importance to impart.

"Clara—"

"Ralph!" Clara gasped. "Oh, my hat! Listen—listen!" she cried fiercely, heedless, apparently, that Ralph was listening.

"Nancy Bell—" And gaspingly she got out the story. "Ralph, they're meeting in the woods in a quarter of an hour."

Ralph Lawrence's eyes gleamed.

"Oh, are they?" he muttered softly.

"Ralph, what shall we do?"

His face grew grim.

"You mean, what shall I do?" he asked. "This is my job, Clara. You've done enough—you and Marjorie. I'm going to the woods."

"But you don't know where they're meeting."

"No." He stroked his chin. "Well, that's easily discovered," he opined.

"All I have to do is to watch for Nancy, and follow her."

"And then?" Clara asked sarcastically.

"Then," Ralph muttered, "depends the circumstances on which my future action rests."

"And I'm to stop here and wait for the good news?" Clara asked ominously.

"I don't think," she added with emphasis, "There's going to be two of us on this job."

"But I tell you—"

"Where's Bab?" Clara asked.

"I don't know. She and Mabs, and one or two others went off with Jimmie. But—" And then he straightened up.

"Look!"

Hardly need for Clara to look, however. Instinctively she knew. Swiftly she turned towards the school, and her face grew grim as she saw the figure that was at that moment sneaking out of the School House. Nancy Bell!

"Come on!" she said.

"But, Clara, really—"

"Come on!" Clara repeated fiercely. She tugged at his arm. But caution—

caution! Ralph pulled her back as she would have started forward, so that the pavilion interposed between them and the view of the new girl, who was walking rapidly down the drive.

Nancy came on, gazing swiftly to right and left. She reached the gates.

"Now!" said Ralph.

He strode across the field, Clara at his side. They reached the gates—just in time to see Nancy taking the footpath that led into Friardale Woods, on the other side of the road.

One look passed between Clara and Ralph. Together they started forward at a run. They entered the woods.

"Now, careful," Ralph warned.

Clara was trying to be that. But it was quite impossible. It was like Clara, of course, to go straining on, keen as a bloodhound.

Now, she felt, she was hot on the trail to the climax which would relieve herself and Marjorie of so many worries and set Ralph right in the eyes of the world once more.

The path was narrow. In places where the sun had failed to penetrate through overhanging branches it was slippery with the moisture left by recent rains.

Quite by accident, Clara's rather large feet found one of those slippery patches. She gave a gasp as she found herself stumbling backwards.

"Hold on!" Ralph muttered.

He caught her as she would have fallen, restoring her to the upright with one thrust of his hand.

But the mischief was done.

Nancy, in front, heard that startled exclamation. She looked round, her face blank, her eyes suddenly wide and frightened.

Then she halted.
"Oh, my hat, she's seen us!" gasped Clara.

"After her!" Ralph cried grimly. No use now in continuing stealth. The hunt was up! Terrified, Nancy flew. Crashingly Ralph and Clara pelted behind her.

In her hand Nancy clutched the little leather bag which contained the coins. If she were caught—if these were found upon her—

Clara and Ralph were gaining. She knew it! She felt it.

She knew that long before she met her brother at the appointed rendezvous they would have caught up with her. Terror came to Nancy. She saw herself embroiled in the disgrace which would be her brother's, saw herself condemned, an accessory to his crime.

Panic shook her. She mustn't be found with the coins on her!

Suddenly, swiftly obeying the dictates of her cowardly instinct, she tossed the bag into the bushes as she ran.

Ralph did not see the action. Clara did not see it. They redoubled their efforts.

"Stop!" yelled Clara.
"Nancy flew like a frightened deer
"Stop!"

But Nancy did not stop. A hundred, two hundred yards she ran. Then Clara, with a last, fierce rush, hurled herself forward, almost flinging herself upon the girl. She caught Nancy by the shoulder.

"Now, where are they?" she gasped.
"Where are what?" Nancy stut-tered, trembling with fright.

"You know! Come on!"
"I don't know what you are talking about!"

Clara's eyes glittered.
"Right-ho!" she said, between her teeth. "Then we'll jolly soon show you! If you don't hand 'em over of your own free will, I guess we'll have to search you. Hold her, Mr. Grantham!"

But Ralph shook his head.
"No, thanks!"

Clara set her lips. One look she flung towards him. How like Ralph, even in such a moment, to think of chivalry! But she was more than equal to Nancy Bell—Nancy, weedy, trembling, shaking as she was with fright. One strong arm was wound round Nancy's waist, imprisoning both her arms to her sides. Nancy squeaked:

"Let go! Oh, help—help!"

But Clara was deaf to her cries. Never in her life had Clara been more determined. Desperate situations called for desperate measures, and surely any measure served the purpose she was bent on accomplishing now! Ralph, a cynical smile on those mustached lips of his, stood by, keenly waiting, ready if Nancy got away to head her off. Nancy furiously struggled.

"Let go! Let go! You're hurting, Clara!"

"Give them up, then!" grated Clara.

"I won't! I tell you—"

"Then—"

"Oh, help!" Nancy shouted. "Help, help!"

And then she saw—her face being towards the thicket on the Pegg side of the woods—what neither Clara nor Ralph could see, and shouted the louder.

Five startled faces suddenly glaring through the trees at the scene; five horror-struck, incredulous girls blinking with amazement. The five were Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, Jemima Carstairs, Bessie Bunter, and Rosa Rodworth.

"It's Clara!" gasped Babs.
"Oh crumbs! I sus-say—"
"And look! The games master!"
"Ye gods!" Jemima breathed.
"Clara! Clara!"
"Help, help!" shrieked Nancy.
"Clara, you dumm y!" And Barbara Redfern rushed on to the scene. "Clara! Oh, my hat! Clara, you're hurting her!"

Clara turned. As if Nancy had suddenly become red hot, she released her grip. Ralph, dismayed, took off his cap, while Nancy whimpered, forcing the very ready tears to her eyes as she stood aside.

The five stared at the Tomboy.
"Clara, what on earth—"

"Oh!" Nancy moaned.
Clara's face flushed. Ralph coughed uncomfortably.

"Er—you see—"
"Yes, we see!"

Rosa Rodworth eyed him scornfully. Rosa was not a friend of Clara's—never had been. She was not, for that matter, a friend of Babs & Co., but she had been invited by Jemima, with whom she shared a passion for geology, to go and examine some fossils which Jemima had discovered the other day in the old disused quarry on the Pegg side of the wood.

"We've got eyes, and a fine thing it was we saw!" she added contemptuously. "You standing by, just doing nothing, while Clara browbeat poor Nancy here!"

Ralph bit his lip.
"Oh, goodness! Wait a minute!"

Babs cried. "There must be some explanation. Clara—"

But Clara flushed.
"Oh buzz off!" she muttered.

"But, Clara," Mabs protested. "Oh, goodness, don't be a goose! Why were you going for Nancy?"

"Yes. And why were you standing there with your hands in your pockets, looking on?" Rosa Rodworth flashed at Ralph Lawrence.

Ralph shrugged. He looked far from happy. The advent of the five had taken him, like Clara, completely by surprise, and, like Clara, he read in the condemning looks upon the faces now turned towards him exactly what everybody was thinking.

"I am sorry," he said quietly. "I have no explanation."

"Meaning," Rosa sneered, "that you were just enjoying yourself? Nice thing that is for a man," she added wittingly—"that is, if you call yourself a man!"

"Oh, be quiet!" Clara retorted. "Save your insults, Rosa! If you jolly well want to know, Nancy's taken something that belongs to—someone else!" she snapped. "We knew she had it. We chased her. I caught her. If you want to know what I was doing, I was searching her."

"Nancy, is this true?"
"No—no, it isn't!" Nancy whimpered. "Oh, Clara, how can you tell such fibs? I—I was walking through the woods," she added. "Then I heard footsteps. I thought it might be a tramp, and so I ran. Then next thing Clara had got hold of me, was pinching me!"

"Why, you little—"

"No, wait a minute—wait, a minute," Babs said. "Oh, my hat!"

But for a moment her eyes fastened upon Clara queerly, telling the



BLINDLY Clara Trevlyn dashed into the school, colliding violently with a tall, grim-faced figure. There was a muffled gasp which told the Tomboy the worst. Miss Bullivant it was!

Tomboy plainly enough what was in her mind.

Perhaps Babs was thinking of the incident on the tennis court when Clara, without a word of warning, had suddenly thrown down her racket and rushed into the school. What was the matter with Clara?

"And if—" Nancy blubbered, "Clara thinks I've got anything of hers, she can search me now! Oh dear! I'm all bruised!"

"Is that an offer?" Clara flashed.

"Y-yes."

"Then—"

"But look here—" Rosa exclaimed. "Out of the way!" Clara rasped.

"You heard! I'm jolly well taking her at her word! I want to search her, and I'm jolly well going to search her—the fibbing little cat!" She ran her hands swiftly over the sneak's clothes, and Nancy, whimpering still, held up her arms willingly enough. Then Clara glowered. "What have you done with it?"

"I—I don't know what you mean!" Nancy sobbed.

Clara glared. But she was not convinced, although it was obvious that Nancy could not possibly have those coins upon her.

"Well, are you satisfied?" Rosa sneered.

Clara did not reply. She looked at Ralph—Ralph standing there, his face the picture of mystification, very slightly shook his head. Rosa looked after him.

"And that," she cried bitterly, "is what we're expected to put up with at Cliff House!"

Ralph heard that. His ears tingled. So that was what they thought of him—that he had been enjoying Clara's attack upon Nancy—that he had callously stood by, condoling Clara, enjoying the spectacle.

A rather angry light came into his eyes. That old bitter, cynical smile, so typical of the one-time black sheep of Friardale School, curved his lips. Then, as now, he had had a bad name. Then, as now, circumstance had never been fair to him, the luck had always been against him!

"I'm a failure!" he thought bitterly. A failure, yes! He saw now his mistake. He should never have come here in the guise of David Grantham, bringing trouble and perplexity to these fine girls.

Far better if he had remained on at Friardale and suffered expulsion for the crime Noah Bell had committed! Or, better still, if after he had run away he had remained in London! He thought moodily:

"I've a jolly good mind now to go straight back to my digs and pack my bag!"

Then—should he? He straightened up, angry with himself for thinking such thoughts.

"Bah! You coward!" he told himself scornfully. "And leave the field to that cur? Leave Clara and Marjorie behind? Let them go on fighting your battles in your absence? No, Ralph Lawrence. You may be several sorts of a silly ass, but you haven't sunk to that yet, I hope. You've put your hand to the plough; you don't jolly well leave it until the furrow's complete!"

Moodily he strode on. Bitter were his thoughts. Trouble, trouble everywhere! He seemed destined to court trouble, destined to bring it upon the heads of his friends without ever accomplishing anything. Here he was, having involved Clara and himself in a fresh scrape—and for what?

But, by Jove, though, it was funny that Nancy hadn't got those coins.

His brow puckered. Funny it was! Jolly funny, especially when—And then instinctively he jumped back as he saw in the clearing into which he had been about to break a solitary figure seated upon the bole of a fallen tree.

The figure was that of a boy in a Friardale cap. The fellow had his back turned towards Ralph, and he was smoking a cigarette.

But even so, Ralph recognised it.

Noah Bell!

Ralph's hands clenched.

Noah Bell!

For a moment he struggled with the temptation to rush forward and take this, the author of all his woes, by the scruff of the neck.

Oh, wouldn't he just like to see that crafty face! Wouldn't he just like to shake him till the teeth rattled in his head!

But he calmed himself, remembering all at once what Noah was here for—to meet his sister, Nancy. Ralph's eyes narrowed.

Well, he had the time to spare. He wondered, if the whimpering Nancy would turn up. Rather interesting, he fancied, to witness the meeting between the two—more than interesting to hear what they had to say to each other. He waited.

Ten-fifteen minutes went. Noah Bell shifted restlessly, looking this way and that. Then there was the snapping of twigs at the other side of the clearing, and Nancy Bell, with a furtive glance to right and left, came on the scene.

Noah Bell rose.

"Nancy, you got them?" he cried eagerly.

Nancy shook her head.

"What?"

"Noah, listen!" she panted desperately. "Oh, my goodness! I—I-I had them; I was bringing them to you. Then that spy, Clara, and the games master came rushing after me.

"Noah, don't look at me like that," she went on tremblingly. "I knew I was bound to be caught, so I—I threw them away."

Her brother's eyes gleamed.

"You—you threw them away—two hundred quid's worth of gold coins?"

"Noah, I had to!"

"You idiot!"

"But I tell you—Oh," Nancy panted. "Noah, listen, do! I tell you if I'd been caught with them on me—you'd realise," she added vituperatively, "both of us would have been in the soup?"

Ralph tensed.

"Where did you throw the bag?" Bell snarled. "In the bushes—to the right of the path."

"What part of the path?"

"I—I don't know," Nancy faltered. "Oh, Noah—Noah, don't talk so loud!" she whispered, suddenly remembering. "We may be heard—"

She dropped her voice.

But there was no need for Ralph to hear more. He was glad now that he had stayed.

So that was the way of it! That was the explanation.

Somewhere in these woods the coins, possession of which would put him right in the eyes of the world again, were hidden.

Noah, of course, would search for them, but so would he.

He would leave no stone unturned until he had found them. But Noah Bell, who already suspected his real identity, must not see him searching these woods.

Ralph turned and retraced his steps.



The Evidence Against Him

"CLARA!" Quite white and strained was Marjorie Hazeldene's face as she came in Study No. 7 later that evening.

Clara Trevlyn was at the table. She was doing her prep. Janet Jordan, her olive-skinned chum and studymate, looked up.

"Hallo, Marjorie!" she cried.

"Clara—" And Marjorie paused. She glanced hesitantly at Janet, who, reading the appeal in her eyes, straightened up. "Janet," she asked, in a stifled voice, "I—that is, would you mind?—I—I want to speak to Clara."

Janet eyed her wonderingly. Then she flashed a quick look at the Tomboy's downbeat head. A rather strange glance—different from her to Marjorie, for Janet too had heard the rumours which were flying round the school, but, knowing Clara, had wisely decided to say nothing about them until Clara chose to speak herself.

Without a word she rose; without a word went out. Marjorie, closing the door behind her, approached the Tomboy.

"Clara," she whispered—"Clara dear, look at me. Clara, they're saying horrible, horrible things—"

"Such as?" Clara asked grimly.

"That you and Ralph were bullying Nancy Bell in the woods."

"Who's saying it?" Clara pressed.

"Everybody. The whole school's buzzing with it!" Marjorie despairingly shook her head. "It's just the sort of thing Nancy would try to make capital out of!" she cried. "She's spreading the news, and Rosa's there, backing her up. Rosa says—Oh, Clara, what does it mean? Please tell me—what does it mean?"

Clara bit her lip. She looked towards the door, as though it were in her mind to stride away and settle with the trouble-makers there and then. If the truth be told, Clara would rather have done that than face Marjorie now.

Desperately the Tomboy had been struggling for some way of keeping this latest exploit from her chum.

Marjorie was so sensitive. Above all, Marjorie, loving Ralph as she did, her nerves already frayed by what had happened, was on the verge of collapse.

But it had to come. Clara saw that.

"Well—" she blurted out. "Oh, bother it, Marjorie, I can't tell fibs to you! You see— And, desperately trying to lighten the blow, she related what had happened.

Marjorie winced.

"And—and you didn't find the coins? She hadn't got them?"

"No."

Marjorie was silent. Her face was working. Clara put her arm round the other's shoulders.

"Marjorie," she said gently, "don't take it to heart—don't, please! Old girl, we've got to stand together in this. We've got to fight it out somehow—for Ralph's sake. It's not so bad. It'll all have blown over by to-morrow, you see."

But by to-morrow it had not blown over. Nancy Bell, spiteful, vindictive, saw to that. Nancy had a poisonous tongue when she liked to use it—and she used it to some purpose now.

The school was buzzing with rumours. As a result, Clara found herself favoured with many scornful glances when she came down to breakfast the next

morning. The Lydia Crossendale factor, especially, were unfeignedly pleased to have some new weapon with which to prick the susceptibilities of their old enemy.

"Bully" went up from Lydia Crossendale as Clara passed.

"Cat!" Freda Ferriers supplied.

Clara took no notice.

She went to her place, pretending to ignore the stares which fastened upon her. She caught Babs' eyes, wondering, anxious, a little perturbed. She saw Mabs looking at her—strangely. Even Miss Charmant glanced at her sharply when she came in.

Clara set her lips.

She said no word. In silence she ate her breakfast. She didn't care, she told herself; but her face burned. Her eyes, when she lifted them to meet Nancy Bell's sneering gaze from the opposite side of the table, flashed. Let them think what they like.

Breakfast over, she was the first to rise. She was thinking now—not of Ralph, but of the tennis. She was remembering Dulcia's words:

"You'll have to put your very best team in the field. You'll have to play your hardest."

Well, she hadn't very much doubt that in Babs and Mabs, Marjorie and Frances Frost and Jean Cartwright she had the best team. And, as for playing their best—well, just look how the team had come on.

She beckoned Marjorie to her side.

"Half an hour before class," she said. "That means we can get in a bit more practice. Rotten, of course, that we shan't have the benefit of the extra hour later, but—"

And then, becoming aware of Marjorie's white, strained face, the heavy eyes which so plainly betrayed the fact that Marjorie had spent a sleepless night, she regarded her sharply. "Marjorie, you feel all right?" she questioned.

"Why, y-yes, of course," Marjorie unfeigningly faltered.

"Oh, good! Then come on!" Clara cried. "Got to work hard, Marjorie, you know. You've heard about the Whitechester challenge? Babs, Mabs," she cried, "Frances, Jean—this way!"

Frances Frost paused.

"Wait a minute! Is Mr. Grantham taking us?"

"Why, of course!"

"Then," Frances said, with a curl of the lip, "I'll be excused, thank you! I don't fancy taking orders from a man who stands by while he sees a girl being bullied."

There was a murmur. Clara's anger flamed in her face. Marjorie, who heard it, winced. Her pale cheeks turned paler than ever.

For a moment the Tomboy's hands clenched fiercely by her sides. She took one threatening step forward, and then paused as she felt Babs' hand upon her arm.

"All right," she said thickly. "Then jolly well stop away! Come on, everybody else!"

"But we can't do without Frances," Jean expostulated. "Frances—"

Frances' black eyes glittered.

"I've told you," she said, "I don't take orders from that kind of man. And"—with a sneer—"I'm not so sure that I'm keen on playing under Clara's captaincy."

There was something like a buzz at that. Frances, very well aware that she had caused a sensation, drew herself upright.

Frances had a great opinion of her tennis. Frances had shown herself from the first resentful of the new coach's interference.

But there was no doubt that Frances could play tennis. No doubt that her non-inclusion would be a serious handicap to the side.

Clara knew, despite her own personal dislike of the girl, that Cliff House couldn't afford to do without her. She bottled her pride, and made one last appeal.

"Frances, I ask you, not for myself, but for the sake of the team—"

"And," Frances said, "I ask you, for the sake of the team, to drop David Grantham."

They stood glaring at each other. Then Clara's lips pursed.

Not the Tomboy to give way under a threat. Not the Tomboy to surrender quietly to such arrogant demands. And time was getting on. She turned to Rosa.

(Continued overleaf)



THE BEGINNING OF BEAUTY

Freshness and charm are the essentials of schoolgirl beauty

Gradually, you'll find yourself actually revelling in a cool bath. Then is the time to think about the cold!

CARE AT FIRST

For the first few days, cover the bottom of the bath in warm water, just for your feet to stand in.

Have a jug of cold water handy, and pour this all over yourself. Then without giving yourself time to say "br-r-r," or even "gorgeous," hop out, and give yourself the briskest towelling of your existence.

The glow that will reward you, and the excellent exercise afforded by the use of the towel, will make you healthy, wealthy, and wise—in beauty!

MORE FREQUENT

SHAMPOOS

Just as baths are even more important in warmer weather than in cold because, you see, your skin gives off more moisture in the hot days!—so does your hair need more frequent washing.

If you wash it once in three weeks normally, once a fortnight is not too often in the summer. Once-a-fortnight girls will very likely find that their hair will keep prettier if washed once in ten days this weather.

And gashed on the sunshine is for your hair, you'll get-used to going without a hat gradually, won't you? Make your first hatless trip on a fine, warm day, so that you won't miss your head-covering. Also, carry a beret with you, in case a sudden cold wind or down-pour of rain should surprise you.

If you're one of those girls who enjoy the final rinsing after a shampoo in warmish water, now is the time to accustom yourself to the cold one.

Try this on a really warm day, and although you may find the cold-water rinse a little breath-taking at first, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing it's doing you a lot of good.

It will do just the opposite to making you catch cold, for it will close the pores of the scalp and so prevent any sudden draught from affecting you.

In this way, you will actually be improving your good health—and beauty will certainly be its reward.

WHEN you're really tired, or a little cross, or feeling just miserable for no reason at all that you can think of—have you ever tried a really refreshing wash as a cure?

It's almost magical in its results, believe me!

Just as it can have such a wonderful effect on your mind, so it can on your good looks, for cleanliness is the foundation of health—and so, as I know I am often saying, of beauty.

When your face is looking tired, your skin dull and your cheeks pale, your first step to cure this is a really good wash.

You needn't use tons of soap, for that "shining, morning look" is not the schoolgirl's ideal to-day. But you'll find that a wash in warm water, with a brisk splashing in cold water afterwards, is just as cleansing, and will restore rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes.

A daily bath is ideal for energetic schoolgirls. But I know this is not always possible in homes where hot water is rather precious and there is a large family to take turns in enjoying it.

CONSIDER A COLD BATH

But have you ever considered the joys of the cold bath? I know you must have done, many times, but haven't known just how to begin such a bracing habit.

If you're really keen to start, now is the time.

There will be very little risk of catching cold, as there might be in the winter months.

And by the time the winter does come, you'll find yourself so "tough" that not only will you actually enjoy your cold bath on the most freezing day, but you'll find yourself not catching cold at all!

In thinking of cold baths, you must start gently.

Have your bath regularly, but have the water a shade less hot each day. (A bath thermometer is a good investment if you're going to be really serious about this.)

"Not under David Grantham."

"What about you, Jimmie?"

"Well, I'm not a great player, but anything to keep the old school ship from sinking—what?" Jimmie said.

"But what about Diana? The Royston-Clarke of that ilk, I mean," Jimmie added, with a grin. "Diana will play, won't you, Diana?"

Diana Royston-Clarke would. Diana was good, but she was erratic, preferring to treat every match as a means of showing off. She grinned.

"Ask me," she retorted.

"All right, Diana, will you take Frances' place?"

"With pleasure," the firebrand of the Fourth agreed.

"O.K.! Then let's go."

They went, in a body. But Marjorie hung behind—Marjorie pale, rather trembling, looking as unhappy as it was possible for a girl to look.

They reached the courts, bright and gleaming in the morning sunshine, the nets already up, and Ralph, in a spotless suit of flannels, bouncing two balls and catching them with a cheery grin. He welcomed them with a cheery grin, but with the exception of Clara they took no notice of him.

"Morning, girls!"

"Good-morning, Mr. Grantham!" Clara cried.

But the others only eyed him. Ralph saw the questioning looks, and winced. "Well, let's get on with it," he said.

"Where's Miss Frost?"

"She's not playing."

"What?" He stared. "Who's taking her place?"

"Diana."

"I see." And Ralph nodded, though a rather queer expression came into his eyes. "Well, that's rather rough, isn't it?" he asked. "Miss Frost was good, and, after all her extra coaching—"

Still, never mind. Well, Clara, and you, Marjorie, what about a doubles game with Miss Royston-Clarke before you go into lessons? Miss Cartwright, perhaps you'll make up the four?"

"With pleasure," Jean said.

The game started. Ralph, looking on, frowned. Something was wrong—definitely wrong. Clara played with vim and energy, but her stroke still lacked the precision which a few hours' extra practice would have given her.

Marjorie this morning seemed all to pieces.

Diana was good, but rather too spectacular; not, Ralph thought, in the same class as Frances Frost.

And this was the team with which Clara hoped to beat Whitechester on Saturday.

Ralph pursed his lips. He saw work in front of him. The material was promising—but only promising. Required some effort to lick it into the right shape before the match. He called to Clara.

"Keep back on the line, Miss Trevlyn."

"Yes," Clara gasped.

"Ask Miss Clark—"

Diana stopped, putting.

"Well, what's the matter with me?" she asked touchily. "And my name's not Clarke, anyway. It's Royston-Clarke—spelt with a hyphen, and a final 'e'."

"Well, Miss Royston-Clarke, then," Ralph said good-humouredly. "I'm sorry; but that sweeping back-hand stroke of yours— Really, you know, you waste effort by bringing your arm over like that. Can I show you?"

He came forward. Diana, who did not like having fault found with her tennis—even by a coach—suffered in

mutinous silence the fault to be adjudged. The game continued.

But it was not a good game, judged by the new standard of tennis which by the coming of the games coach had set up in Cliff House.

Clara, though she played her hardest, was conscious that she was not at her best.

Diana, preferring to go her own wilful way, and, as usual, hoping to bag all the limelight, ignored her own faults.

Jean was good, but Jean, perhaps feeling the tension, the unhappiness of the atmosphere in which she was playing, was not so sure as usual.

As for Marjorie—

Marjorie just couldn't play. She felt strung up, overwrought, all at sixes and sevens. Three times she muffed shots that a Third Former would have treated with contempt.

How could she concentrate on tennis when this horrible cloud hung over her cousin? When girls were saying such wretched things about him, about Clara, and—

"No, no!" she cried suddenly. "I can't go on! I can't! Please, Clara, I—"

"Oh, my hat!" Clara was at her side in a moment. "Marjorie, what's the matter?"

"I can't play!" Marjorie tremblingly cried. "Clara, I don't want to play. Leave me out, please—please do! I shall only disgrace the side! Oh dear!" And suddenly, to everybody's horror and consternation, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"But, Marjorie—" Clara gulped.

But Marjorie's unfitnes for tennis was obvious. Marjorie, at this juncture, was just a bundle of nerves. Clara helped her off, while Ralph, reviling the masquerade which prevented him from comforting his cousin, looked after them with yearning eyes. Poor Marjorie!

They went back to the classroom, leaving Babs, Mabs, Diana, and Jean behind in Ralph Lawrence's charge.

Marjorie was so ill, looked so white, that Miss Charmant, who, thank goodness, was taking first lesson, immediately told her to go and lie down, while Clara, taking her seat, looked out of the window at the four girls disporting themselves, and worried.

Her team—Frances Frost gone. Marjorie gone—Diana—

"Oh, my hat!" she groaned.

"Clara, you spoke?" Miss Charmant asked.

"Eh? Nun-no!" Clara gasped.

"Then kindly concentrate upon the lesson."

Clara did her best—but how could she concentrate? She was thinking of the Whitechester match. She had to play her best team—her best team! What hopes of playing the best team now?

She had lost two of her best players. She herself wasn't up to the standard of the rest. There were murmurings in the school against her, and against her coach, and, apart from that, the spirit of the team was not what it had been.

Enough to distract Clara. Well it was for Clara that she possessed that indomitable spirit which had always been so strong a characteristic.

Well, she wasn't going to give in. She wouldn't give in. Ralph wasn't to blame. Oh, if these fools only knew the truth!

First lesson over. Second lesson commenced with the team, back in class, looking flushed, healthy, and excited after their bout on the courts.

But if Clara's thoughts were bitter, how much more so were Ralph's!

Wasn't it just his luck, he asked himself bitterly, to bring these worries, these troubles, on the heads of the two girls he adored above all others?

His jaw set.

Well, there were two ways out. One was for himself to get out of it. Easy enough for him to disappear. The second was to find those coins, restore them to their rightful owner, and denounce Noah Bell at the same time.

Very fiercely Ralph debated those two courses. He felt tempted at first to take the former. Once he was out of the way, at least, this trouble would cease. Frances Frost would come back into the team, Clara's troubles would be at an end. Marjorie would be believed, too, to think that he had gone.

"But if," Ralph told himself, "I do that, what about the Bells?"

Ah! That caused him to flinch! The winning cards were no longer in Noah Bell's hands. Those coins were as lost to Noah Bell as they were to himself. If he cleared off now, allowing Bell to pursue the search on his own, Bell would inevitably find them. Having found them, Bell would dispose of them, and he—Ralph Lawrence—would be for ever judged as the thief.

Instinctively Ralph's shoulder squared. No, not that! He wasn't going to desert the field, leaving victory to that thief. That was surrendering to Bell. That was taking the easy way out. He would search for those coins. Every spare moment, every minute while daylight lasted, he would go on searching. Victory in the end was bound to be his!

Not a word either to Clara or Marjorie had Ralph said of that interview between Nancy and her brother, which he had overheard. That, for the time being, was a secret to be locked in his own breast. If they knew, they would insist upon helping, and the two of them had got into enough scrapes through him. To the task of finding those coins, therefore, Ralph pledged himself alone.

That morning he searched. That afternoon he searched. Immediately the tennis practice was over in the evening, off he went again into the woods, tramping every inch of the path along which he and Clara had pursued Nancy. But there was no sign of the bag.

Still, it must be here!

He went on slowly. Then, suddenly glancing towards a thick clump of bushes, he stopped. What was that? Dimly he observed, rather obscured from his view by the interlacing network of thorn and foliage, something hanging from one of the branches in the middle of the bush.

Something small—oh, could it really be the bag? In a moment Ralph was on his hands and knees. In a moment was worming his way under the tangle of briar and blackberry which screened the spot.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Tiny thorns snapped in front of his face. Thorns brushed his flesh. Excitement possessed him, he hardly noticed. Now—and as the branches clashed and crackled and snapped to admit his weight, he reached up.

He had it! His hand closed upon it. And then a grunt of disappointment left his lips. Oh, confound it! All that worry and trouble for nothing. For what he held was simply a tattered piece of felt, caught by a thorn, as it had whirled in the teeth of some blustering gale, and hung there impaled ever since.

"Hang!" snapped Ralph.

He wormed his way back. But if it had been difficult to get inside the bush, how much more difficult to get out!

Tiny thorns tore at his hands and face,

a twig leapt sharply back at him, smacking him across his eyes and almost blinding him.

He shook his head, and then gave a gasp of consternation when he felt a sudden coldness upon his upper lip, and realised in frantic anxiety that his false moustache, too, had vanished. Desperately he groped round.

At that moment Babs, Mabs, Jemima, Janet Jordan, and Bessie, coming back through the woods after an evening stroll before call-over, appeared along the path. Ten yards off they were from the fuming figure of Ralph when they halted, blinking in amazement.

"What the——" Babs gasped.

"My hat!"

"Oh, I sus-say!" Bessie stuttered.

"W-what is it, you know?" The bushes heaved and rocked. Ralph, half-in and half-out, was muttering vitriolic things, as he pawed the ground in search of that little moustache. Jemima grinned.

"Gentleman in difficulties," she said. "Famous detective, children, disguising himself as a blackberry out of season!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But——"

Then Mabs started.

"My hat, I believe it's Mr. Grantham!"

They stared. But there could be no doubt of it then. Ralph, with a grunt, came out, half-turned his still moustacheless face, and then, with a gasp, plunged his head into the bush again. Oh, goodness! Now what was he to do?

"Mr. Grantham!" Babs breathed.

"Gr-r-r— Go away!" Ralph gasped.

"But what are you doing?"

"Nothing," came Ralph's smothered accents.

"Can we help?"

"No."

"I sus-say, have you lost sus-something?" Bessie asked concernedly.

"No," Ralph shouted, and searched desperately. "Go away—go away!"

"Jimmy, the man's gone batty!" Janet said.

"Will you—please go away?"

"But why don't you come out?"

Something between an exclamation and a snort came from Ralph. His legs waded wildly.

The chums stared. What was the matter with the man? Why was he hiding there like some human ostrich, with his head buried in the bush?

If they had only known! If they could have seen the games coach's face at that moment, his eyes half blinded, desperately, unavailingly groping round!

"Oh, come on!" Babs muttered.

They withdrew. In mystification they went on their way. Something was decidedly wrong with the new coach. In utter bewilderment they reached the gates of Cliff House, at Bessie's suggestion turned into the tuckshop. Then they stopped as a girl came out. Marjorie Hazeldean.

She looked at them quickly.

"Oh, Babs," she said, and bit her lip.

"Have—have you seen Mr. Grantham?"

"Mum-my hat, I should jolly well think we have, you know," Bessie returned.

"Where?"

"Well, in the woods, you know, lying down on the path with his head in a bush, just as—if he thought he were a rabbit," Bessie answered. "He almost frightened Babs to death."

"Why, you great chump!" Babs indignantly expostulated, and then stared as she saw Marjorie's face. Marjorie, who had suddenly turned pale, who had



AT the open window Nancy made frantic signals with a hand—gestures which said as plainly as any words could have done: "Go away—go away!" How Nancy hoped that her brother would understand!

given the most frightful jump. "Marjorie!" she cried.

Something like a cry came from Marjorie. In horror her eyes fastened upon Bessie. Marjorie had been looking for her cousin. Marjorie worried, haggard, felt that she must see Ralph.

Usually Ralph came back to the tuckshop after practice and stayed there until gates closed, which was his official time to go back to his billet in Friar-dale Village.

Now—this. Ralph again in the woods. Ralph exciting curious comment and suspicion. Oh, what had happened to him—what—

Marjorie acted then on a blind impulse. She said no word. She turned, flying through the gates.

"My hat! Marjorie!" Babs called. "Marjorie!"

But Marjorie simply flew. Into the woods she went. Babs looked at her chums.

"Is everybody going crazy?" she cried. "What's the matter with Marjorie?"

"She looked ill," Jemima announced. "She's gone into the woods," Mabs cried, "just as if she were anxious to see Mr. Grantham. Oh, my hat! Come on!"

Why they did it they did not know, but there was something about Marjorie, that strange, distraught expression on her face, which filled them all with uneasiness.

That sudden flight, coming on top of the amazing spectacle of the mysterious games coach on his hands and knees in the wood, filled them all with uneasy alarm. Perhaps they were remembering the Nancy Bell incident of the evening before as they flew after their chum.

"Marjorie!" But Marjorie was out of earshot then.

Up the path that threaded its way through the wood she was racing. Ralph, by that time, had found his moustache. He turned with a start as desperately she called his name.

"Marjorie!" he muttered. "Ralph! Ralph Oh——" And Marjorie, all out of breath, gasped. "Ralph, they're saying things about you again," she cried.

His lips compressed. "Oh, Ralph, why are you here?" Marjorie asked. She clutched at his arm. "Why give the school a chance to talk about you? Ralph——"

Ralph stood tense. Marjorie did not notice what he had at that moment seen. She felt him tense, saw his head jerk round suddenly.

But Ralph had seen. A hundred yards farther up the path that sneaking, stealthy figure of a boy in a Friar-dale cap, gaze glued to the ground, shuffling along. Noah Bell! Bell was on the track of the coins.

"Bell!" he gasped.

In a moment he had forgotten Marjorie. His teeth set. A gust of bitterness, of hatred for this boy at whose hand he and others had suffered so much, who was here now, patently intent upon robbing him of that one last chance he had to redeem his honour.

Like the sight of a red rag to a bull was Noah Bell to Ralph Lawrence in that moment. With a rush he started forward.

"Ralph!" gasped Marjorie.

But Ralph for the moment had forgotten her. He did not realise that Marjorie's desperate grip was still upon his sleeve. As he swung round Marjorie swung round with him. With a little cry she released her hold and went stumbling forward, catching her foot in a trailing branch.

At that moment Babs, Mabs, Janet, and Jemima came rushing up the path. "Marjorie!" they shrieked.

"Look!"
"Oh, my hat! Mr. Grantham!"
For Marjorie had crashed to the ground. She rolled over suddenly, white, unconscious.

Ralph turned. Bell, hearing the commotion, looked up and, like the craven he was, immediately took to his heels.

Ralph gave a choked gasp.
"Marjorie!"
Babs' face flamed, Mabs' eyes glittered. They had not been close enough to see the incident in its entirety, but it looked to them as if Ralph had deliberately pushed Marjorie. Babs rushed up.

"You bully!" she cried.
"What?"
"We saw that!" Babs' face was furious. "You pushed her, Marjorie! Marjorie!" she cried.

But Marjorie did not move.
"But—oh, my hat, wait a minute!" Ralph cried wildly. "Wait a minute—Barbara!" In his agitation he used her Christian name. "What the dickens are you talking about?"

Babs threw him a scornful look. She was on her knees now, holding up Marjorie's head. Janet, pushing right past the games master, favoured him with a bitter look and ran to her chum's assistance. Jemima eyed him scornfully.

"Pretty low, what?" she asked coldly.
"But I tell you," Ralph wildly got out. "Oh, what are you thinking? What are you saying? I pushed her? I didn't push her! She had hold of my coat, and I—I didn't know." His face turned white. "Barbara—"

"Thank you," Barbara said bitingly, "but we saw. That's good enough."
And she bent over Marjorie again.



Conflict on the Courts

"NONSENSE!" Clara Trevlyn exploded.

"But I tell you—"
"I don't believe a word of it. My hat!" And she glared at Janet Jordan in Study No. 7. "I tell you," she rushed on furiously, "I don't believe it. And you wouldn't jolly well believe it, if you knew what I know!"

Janet glared. Her own face was rather angry then. Not often was there a rift in the usual harmony that prevailed in Study No. 7, but decidedly there was that at the moment.

For the story had spread, and, like all stories, it had lost nothing in its repetition.

Nancy Bell it was who was responsible for the trimmings. Nancy, hating Ralph Lawrence, hating Clara, was in high glee. Her own story of yesterday's happenings added colour to the other story she was now spitefully spreading through the school.

But Clara, who knew the relationship between Marjorie and the games master, who knew that Ralph would sooner have thought of cutting off his own right hand than hurting a hair of Marjorie's head, was furious.

What idiots! What blind fools these girls were! She wanted to shriek at Janet. She wanted—

Janet, her lips tightened a little, eyed her.

"But, Clara, we all saw it. Babs, Mabs—"

"I don't care who saw it. I tell you it's just a fib," Clara hooted. "Or

if it isn't a fib, it's a mistake. Ralph—I mean Mr. Grantham—oh, bother!"

She went out, slamming the door behind her.

She went into Study No. 4. Babs and Mabs were there, just in the act of drawing out their books for prep. Clara, red-faced, eyed them.

"What's this yarn?"
"What yarn? You mean about Grantham?"
"Yes."

"Well, we saw it."
"Oh, you did, did you?" Clara said, between her teeth. "You're against him, too?"

And she went out, her temper rising. She went to the sanatorium. Marjorie was there—Marjorie, whose nerves had been completely given way under this latest catastrophe, was in the ward, and had not yet given her own version of the incident. Clara knocked on the door.

Mrs. Thwaites, the motherly matron, came to open it.

"Oh, Mrs. Thwaites, how's Marjorie?" Clara asked.

"I am sorry, but if you want to see her—"

"I do."
"Then I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the doctor comes."

Clara heaved a sigh. In a stormy frame of mind, she trailed off to the Common-room. At her entry there was a dead silence. Then a titter from Nancy Bell.

"Here she comes. Now what about your champion, Clara?"

"Are you spreading this yarn about?" Nancy flushed.

"Is it a yarn?" she asked. "When your own friends, Babs and Mabs, and the rest of them, vouch for it. Of course," she added scoffingly, "we don't expect you to believe it—not when you and he are as thick as thieves—"

"You little—"
And angrily Clara took a step towards her, while Nancy dodged behind Rosa Rodworth.

But in time Clara remembered. Her hand dropped to her side.

Not in a sweet mood was Clara for the rest of that evening. She was angry at this new slur on Ralph. She was harassed at its possible repercussion upon the tennis.

In the morning, during the after-breakfast practice, those repercussions were manifest. Nobody would speak to Ralph. His advice was taken in silence, and there was a lack of interest, of spirit, of enthusiasm that dismayed the Tomboy.

Ralph seemed to understand. That morning, at least, he did not say much, looking at the tennis with a gloomy face, with just the faintest bitter smile playing at the corners of his lips.

As Clara, impatient, left the field he caught her arm.

"Clara!"
Clara flung round.

"Ralph!" she muttered.
"This has gone far enough," Ralph said quietly. "Too far, Clara. The team is not putting its back into it—and you know why. Me! The old bad luck comes back, I guess. Once again I'm the dog with a bad name; and the bad name looks like clinging. I'm quitting!"

"You're what?"
"I'm going," Ralph nodded. "I'm going to resign, Clara. It's better for you, for Marjorie, for the tennis team. Once I'm out of the way, the atmosphere will clear, you'll find."

Clara drew a deep breath.
"And that, of course," Clara said sarcastically, "will settle every difficulty?"

"But, Clara, you must see—"

"No, I don't see," Clara broke out

viently. "Ralph," she added quietly, "I never thought you were a funk."

"He wined."
"You don't realise—"

"I realise. Oh, I realise, all right!" Clara's expression was hard. "But look at it, if you can, from my point of view," she added. "What am I going to look like in the eyes of these girls? If you do that, they'll still blame me. And look at it from poor old Marjorie's point of view—how she'll feel when she knows you've quitted and given in to the Belle. And look at it from Nancy's point of view—what a victory for her and her brother. And," Clara added grimly, "what about the team? They still need your coaching, Ralph. I want your coaching. Diana wants it."

No arguing with Clara in that frame of mind. No counter-argument was there for her arguments. She understood the motive which inspired his decision, all right, but Clara was a fighter.

The greater the difficulties, the bigger the obstacles which stood in her path, the more fiercely she was resolved to fight.

Clara had two objectives for which to fight now—the honour of Ralph; the winning of the match at Whitechester.

A glow of determination came into Ralph's eyes.

"Clara, you really are a sport," he said. "Right—ho, then. I'll stick on. But the offer still stands open. If things get too warm, give me the nod and I'll go."

Clara did not intend him to go. Rather than that she would have thrown up everything. Meantime, Nancy Bell, aided by Lydia & Co., was spreading her malicious gossip throughout the school.

Clara, though she would not admit it, was the most worried, the most harassed, girl on earth.

Evening practice was largely a repetition of the morning. It was not a happy team which served under Ralph's coaching. Babs, Mabs, and Jean played with their usual brilliance, and Ralph stood rather tight-lipped and silent. Only when Diana, in straining back to reach a ball which she should have sent back with ease, did he speak.

"Miss Royston-Clarke—"

Diana turned.

"You talking to me?"
"I was," Ralph said quietly.

"Then," Diana sneered, "please don't. When I want advice on how to bully girls I'll come to you. Meantime, I'll play my own tennis!"

Ralph's face went white at that. Diana, who overheard the remark, breathed thickly.

"Diana!"
"Oh, well?" Diana drawled insolently.

"That's a pretty rotten remark."
"Is it?" Diana's delicate eyebrows lifted in disdain. "It might be," she considered, "if it didn't fit the one for whom it is intended. But let's get on with the game."

Clara's eyes glistened. She strode across the courts. Her face was fierce. "We're not going to get on with this game, not until you've apologised to Mr. Grantham!" she cried hotly.

"Indeed?" The colour ran up in Diana's cheeks at once. "Then if that's the attitude you're going to take," she snapped, "you can jolly well do without me!" And off went Diana in high and mighty dudgeon.

"Diana!" cried Babs. "Diana—oh, you hot-headed idiot, come back!"

But Diana did not come back. Diana, to use her own words, was through.

Clara, after her passion had worn off, was frantic. What about the team now?

In Common-room and class-room she

was freely and fiercely criticised. Cliff House, it was declared, couldn't possibly hope to win.

In desperation Clara gave Diana's place to Peggy Preston, but Peggy, though she would have given a term's pocket-money to be included a fortnight ago, accepted without any enthusiasm.

"But you know, Clara," Babs said, when Clara in her extremity called upon the members of Study No. 4 that evening, "we'll never get through!"

Clara set her lips.

"And—and—well—" Babs flushed a little. "Oh, Clara, why not be sensible?" she asked. "We've got just one day now before the Whitechester match. I've been talking to Frances and Rosa and Diana, and they say they'll come back into the team if only you give Grantham the tip to resign. Clara, why don't you?" Babs asked pleadingly.

Clara's grim look did not relax.

"Is that the only advice you can give me?"

"But, Clara— Oh, don't flare up, you old goose!" Clara, listen. We're your friends—"

She paused.

"Clara, you do know that we want to help you, don't you?" Babs went on. "But what can we say? What can we do when you take up an attitude like this? The girls are clamouring for the resignation of David Grantham—"

Clara's eyes flashed.

"Well, let them clamour!" she cried. "That's all very well, but you can't go against the wish of the whole school." Babs reminded her seriously. "And, anyway, old thing, you have rather left us in the dark, haven't you? I'm not saying anything against Grantham, although—" And Babs paused, biting her lip as she remembered Marjorie. "Clara, don't be a chump, please!" she pleaded. "Get rid of Grantham. Make your peace with Frances and Rosa. You know what they're saying?"

"No!"

"Well," Babs gulped, "they're saying, Clara, that if we lose the Whitechester match—and you must admit we haven't got much of a chance—that they'll call upon you to resign!"

"And you'll support them?" Clara asked fiercely.

"Of course not. Don't be a silly chump! But—"

"You don't believe in Grantham?"

"Clara, how can we? I mean— Oh, Clara—"

Clara, without replying, went out, closing the door with an unusually loud slam behind her, and leaving Babs & Co. staring at each other in mystified dismay.

What had come over Clara? Why was she so keenly championing the cause of a man who had proved himself such an outsider?

Friday came. Saturday, the day of the Whitechester match, dawned.

The team—Babs, Mabs, Jean Cartwright, Peggy Preston, Clara herself, and Margot Lantham—at Clara's request, foregathered in Study No. 4 before going over to Whitechester. Defeat, even the most optimistic declared, was a foregone conclusion.

But Clara was determined. She knew what the game meant. It meant much more now than a rehearsal for the bigger and more ambitious events at Courtfield. It meant that she was fighting for her captaincy.

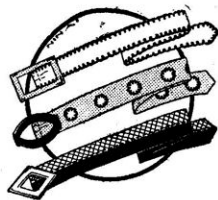
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favour. They felt—perhaps with some degree of rightness—that Clara was acting just like a hot-headed, obstinate duffer in going against the wishes of the whole school. There was a movement on foot to compel Clara to resign her captaincy if this match were lost. Clara knew it.

One other girl knew it, too. That was Nancy Bell.

Nancy Bell was gloating. Freed of her custodianship of the stolen coins, Nancy felt that she could concentrate all her spite upon this girl who, almost from the day of her entry into the school, had been her enemy.

And Nancy saw in the threatened deposition of Clara as captain her crowning triumph.



BELTS FOR BRIGHT DAYS

These gay belts will add such a spring-like touch of gaiety to your everyday frocks. Make them yourself—in a few minutes.

THREE joyful belts I have planned for you. Wear them on your best, your second best—and your oldest frock! Not only will they perk up your frock, but they'll also make you feel it's good to be alive. (For no one ever feels better than when knowing one looks really smart.)

For the first belt, all you require is a strip of material, or ribbon, long enough to fit your trim waist—and a buckle. The buckle will probably come from an old belt. I'm sure there are several of these floating around your house.

Blanket stitch along each edge of the strip of material and attach the buckle. The brighter the

stitch, the smarter the belt, remember!

The second one here can be made new if you like, or you can transform an old belt.

Cut several tiny circles of material, and applique—which only means sew, after all!—them to the actual belt. Choose spots of gay colour to contrast with the actual belt—possibly of the same material as your frock.

Two strips of bright material, joined together, make the third belt—and a very jolly one, too!

So, out with needles and cottons to make not only one—but all three!

Nearly everybody forecast that Cliff House would lose, but Nancy, if she could help it, was going to make that forecast certain. And Nancy, in advance, had made sure of her plans.

While Clara was addressing that meeting in her study, Nancy was busy in the pavilion, where the team's bags had been stored preparatory to being packed into the Whitechester coach when it arrived. In Nancy's hand was a brown-paper parcel, and on her face was a crafty smile.

Very quietly she opened Clara's bag. She took out the tennis shoe, which were there, and, undoing her parcel, replaced them with a pair of very similar shoes which that parcel had contained. Then, wrapping Clara's shoes in the brown paper, she stole out with a soft chuckle.

Meantime, Clara was facing Babs, Mabs, Peggy, Margot, and Jean.

"You know what they're saying," she said—"that we're going to lose! Well, it's up to you—to see that we don't lose. I'm not going to beat about the bush," she went on. "We're all friends—or were," she added, her eyes roving the group.

"Oh, Clara, please!" Babs begged.

"Well, it's up to you—to back me up!" Clara said grimly. "In backing me up, you back up the school. If we don't win, then we can prepare ourselves for a licking in the tournament. If you possibly can, just forget Mr. Grantham for to-day, and think of the school. In any case," she added, "you won't be troubled with him at Whitechester. He's staying away."

The girls stared at her. Babs bit her lip.

"But, Clara, why have you been so mysterious? You know—"

"Because," Clara said, "you haven't given me a chance to be anything else. Still, don't worry about that now. This is tennis. You're fighting for the school. We've got to win through."

Clara's eyes flashed.

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ing in the old, animated way. Clara, resolutely throwing all her worries aside, entered with them into a discussion. They reached Whitechester, were shown into the pavilion.

They changed. Almost boisterously Clara kicked off her school shoes and groped for the white ones in her bag. Clara had rather a large size in feet, a fact of which she was rather self-conscious, since it formed a basis of so many jokes in the Form.

She had no suspicion as she reached for those shoes that they were not the ones she had packed in the bag earlier that morning. But when she thrust her foot into the first—

Clara frowned. "Oh, my hat! What was the matter? Had the shoes shrunk? Or had she brought the wrong ones?"

She forced her foot into one. The shoes, being of canvas, were pliable. All the same she had to squash her foot. They pinched at the toes. They were not her shoes. She took the shoe off, rummaged in her bag, and ruffled her rather wild locks in confusion.

Babs, from the other side of the room, saw that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Clara?"

"These shoes!" Clara muttered. "Oh, my hat! I couldn't have packed the wrong ones!"

"Perhaps they've shrunk," Mabs suggested. "Shoes do shrink some-

times. Have you been in water with them?"

"Of course I haven't!" Clara shook her head. "I suppose none of you has a spare pair?"

"But nobody had, and even if they had it was extremely unlikely that they would have fitted Clara. There was no help for it but to use the tinier shoes which, by some freak, had got into her bag.

All the same, they were unbearable. Oh, boy, she'd never be able to play in these!

But Clara had to play in them, for at that moment the call came from outside. The first set was a doubles, in which she and Babs were partnering each other, to be followed by two singles, Mabs doing battle in one, Peggy Preston in the other.

The last set of all was another doubles, the combination of the Cliff House side not yet decided. A ripple of handclapping and cheering greeted their appearance.

"Now watch." Nancy Bell turned to Lydia Crossendale. "Oh, my hat!" she added craftily. "What's the matter with Clara? She's almost limping."

Clara was limping. Her face was fiery red. These shoes—what agonies they were giving her!

But she was fighting for Cliff House, fighting for her captaincy—fighting, in

an indirect sense, for Ralph and for Marjorie, who still lay in the Cliff House sanatorium.

"Fit, Babs?"

"As a fiddle!" Babs whispered.

"Right!"

Now the Whitechester captain was approaching. She and Clara tossed for service. Clara won. She tossed the balls to Babs.

A breathless silence followed. Now what would Cliff House do?

Swift, lightning-like were the first returns. Smash—smash! These shoes! With her feet crumpled up in them, Clara could have cried out every time her toes stubbed the ground. She tried to ignore them. Whack, whack, whack! My hat, that was a high one! She strained upwards to reach it, then flung herself backwards with a cry as her toes doubled beneath her weight.

"Away!"

"Love—fifteen!" the umpire announced.

Clara gritted her teeth. Her feet felt on fire. Now! Again! And again! She rushed forward, missing the shot. Love—thirty!

Babs was looking grim.

But it was Cliff House's turn then. A smart return by Babs beat the Whitechester girls in the opposite court all ends up.

"Fifteen—thirty!"

Again. At it hammer and tongs. Bang, bang! Again Clara threw herself back. Again—her feet. Her toes, crumpling up, seemed to break and bend beneath her weight. Against to Cliff House. Fifteen—forty.

Nancy giggled delightedly.

"You see, we'll get the licking of our lives," she said. "Clara can't play for toffee!"

Now the battle raged briskly indeed. For three minutes the ball sailed to and fro over the net. Then Babs—Oh, lovely shot, Babs! Thirty—forty! Wasn't so hopeless after all!

Four, five, six games were played. The score stood then—Cliff House, 2; Whitechester, 4.

Clara was perspiring then—not with the heat, but with pain. She couldn't stand it. She'd have to go off. Smash! That got past her. Oh, goodness! Another game to Whitechester!

"Five—two!"

"Oh, come on, Cliff House!"

"Let's hear from you!"

"You're playing like kids!"

Clara set her teeth. It was her service. She ran for the ball, fielded it, and then, to the utter amazement of the crowd, she suddenly wrenched off those shoes and flung them over the lines.

There was a gasp at that. Girls blinked. Expectant eyes were turned towards the umpire, but as there was nothing in the rules of tennis to prevent Clara playing in her bare feet if she wanted to, the umpire shook her head.

But from that moment—

What a change came over the game! Clara was grim. Now that those wretched shoes were off she felt ten times better. Victory was still within reach, and she went all out to get it.

Smash! Oh, what a service, beating the Whitechester girl all along the line.

Five—three! The match went on. A buzz now. Some new needle-like vitality entered the battle. Breathless the chances in the next game. Then the Whitechester girl hurled the ball into the net.

Five—four!

Immediately afterwards—Babs very cunningly tricked her opponent into



TENNIS TIPS

Weather experts promise us a fine summer again this year—and fine weather means more tennis! And as it's never too early to begin practising, here are a few tips which you may find useful.

YOUR RACKET will come out of its winter retirement looking a little jaded, perhaps, after strenuous games last season. A painting over with gut varnish, obtainable at all sports outfitters, will work wonders with its tautness, you'll find. Are there any strings which look somewhat frayed? Then have them replaced at once—there is no need to have the whole racket re-strung if only one or two strings look a little "rocky."

TENNIS BALLS appreciate a little kind treatment, and I don't suppose you'll want to practise with new ones, for fear of losing them. The best way to clean them is to rub them smartly on the wrong side of an ordinary coconut doormat. If they're very dirty, a good scrub with soap and water will work wonders.

THE NET.—If you're lucky enough to own your own tennis court, the centre net must come in for its share of attention. Holes which have mysteriously appeared during the winter must be repaired with tarred string, obtainable at the ironmongers'. Knot the squares in the same way as the rest of the net, and it will look almost new. It won't do the top white strip any harm to have a clean up, either, with blanco or marking chalk.

YOUR SERVICE.—I expect you'll agree that the weakest part about most young players' game is their service. The ball simply won't go where it's meant to. So practise very hard "placing" the ball. It may help you to pin a piece of white paper just where you want the ball to land, and aim at that. Try to serve well back into the court, and not just over the net, for

many players have a habit of running forward to play the ball, and a long service is apt to be very disconcerting. Don't try to serve too hard—placing counts for much more, until your service is really good.

THE STRIKER.—Stand well back on the court when taking a service, for the reason mentioned above. It is much easier to run forward to a ball than it is to run backwards.

THE FOREHAND DRIVE is one of the most-used shots in the game, of course. The best way to practise this is to remember the slogan:—"Swing—grip—press—relax." Try this simple exercise a few times without the ball. Swing—your racket well back, keeping it as nearly parallel to the ground as possible. Grip—the racket firmly as it meets the ball; this gives both power and direction to the stroke. Press—the racket over towards the left shoulder in a swinging follow-through. Lastly, relax—your grip and prepare for the next stroke.

THE BACKHAND DRIVE is most important, and not nearly so difficult as it seems. You cannot, of course, get the whole weight of your body into it, as you do with the forehand, so you can understand that wrist action is most important in this stroke. "Swing—grip—press—relax" applies here as well, but the ball should be hit slightly in advance of the body-line, instead of on a level with it, as in the forehand. In this stroke your thumb, instead of being curled-round the handle, should be placed along the handle, and your wrist turned well down.

Practise hard, and you'll find your game almost miraculously improving. Good tennis players are born, but they can also be made—and it takes constant practice to make them!

running forward, and lobbed the ball over her head.

Five-five!

It was agreed that the set was not to be played out. If Cliff House could only win the next round they had won the set!

They did! A smashing, crashing return from Clara, a shot which bounced just an inch inside the back line, and it was theirs!

"Oh, bravo, Clara!"

"Good old Cliff House!"

Clara glowed. This was something like!

But her enthusiasm received a check when the result of the next set was announced. Peggy Preston lost in the singles against Vivienne Gray.

A set-back. But that was more than accounted for when Mabel Lynn, with her smashing service, simply overwhelmed her opponent in the next singles. Two sets to Cliff House.

The tenth game of the set Whitechester just managed to pull off. Five all! Excitement grew tenser. Cliff House or Whitechester—which?

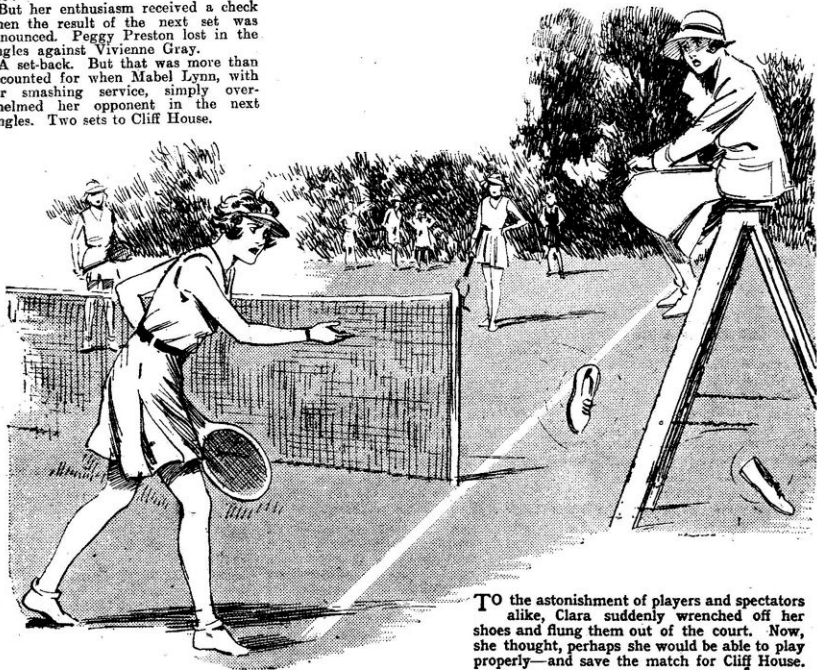
Once again it was decided, as time was getting short, not to play out the set. One game would be the deciding factor.

One of the Whitechester girls was about to serve. Jean waited, slightly crouched.

It came—a whizz-service that hummed hardly an inch above the net. But Jean was there!

wresting victory from Whitechester, she felt she had not solved her problems.

That last game had been tough and go. Jean, Babs, and Mabs were splendid. Peggy was not. Margot, obviously, despite the fact that she had been handicapped by twisting her ankle in the last game, was not on the same high plane as the others. They would want more practice, would have to polish up considerably if they were to win the Courtfield Tournament. The team was good, but it was not good enough.



TO the astonishment of players and spectators alike, Clara suddenly wrenched off her shoes and flung them out of the court. Now, she thought, perhaps she would be able to play properly—and save the match for Cliff House.

A breathless silence as the last set—a doubles match between the two Whitechester cracks and Jean and Margot—commenced. Clara, tight-lipped, stood watching from the side lines. Whitechester, keyed up, were out to avenge their narrow defeat in the first game.

Jean and Margot, realising all that was at stake, were anxious for the captain's and the school's sake to take the victory.

They started in fine style, Jean and Margot taking the first three games off the reel. Then Margot fell, grazing her knees and slightly twisting her ankle.

Clara watched with hard eyes. But from that moment the battle was a ding-dong affair.

The next three games Whitechester took with ease. Then Jean, valiantly attacking, took two others. Whitechester, hitting back fiercely, won the next round.

Ding-dong! Everybody was on tip-toe of excitement. Clara, clenching her hands, was on tenterhooks. Would they get through? Would they?

Tang! The ball flew back over the net, was returned to Margot's backhand. Margot swung for it desperately, but missed.

Fifteen—love.

Fifteen—all. And then Jean seemed suddenly to reach the top of her form.

Fifteen—thirty. Thirty all. Thirty—forty!

"Match point!" proclaimed the umpire.

Margot, rather pale, waited for the service. So much depended upon her.

With an inspired effort she got her return over the net. It flew back—between her and Jean.

And then—crash! More by luck than by judgment, Jean, whirling round, won the last point with a smashing return. The Whitechester girl, running forward to return, stumbled. Cliff House had won by a solitary game!

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Cliff House!"

But it was by the narrowest possible margin. There had been little, if anything, to choose between the two sides. If Clara had confused her critics by

Still, there was time. A whole week's practice loomed ahead. Clara brightened as she thought of that. With the assistance of the games coach, surely the team could be moulded! It was the best material available, at any rate. It would have to be moulded.

"Well," Clara thought, "if anyone could improve their play that someone is certainly Ralph Lawrence."

The team required coaching—coaching! They should have it! On Ralph now depended her every hope for the Courtfield Tournament!

But, alas for Clara, who could not foresee the great disaster that awaited her! And who, in her optimistic intentions, completely forgot to reckon with her arch enemy, Nancey Bell, and her desperate brother, Noah!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Turn over now and read all about the magnificent long complete Cliff House School story which is a feature of next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL.