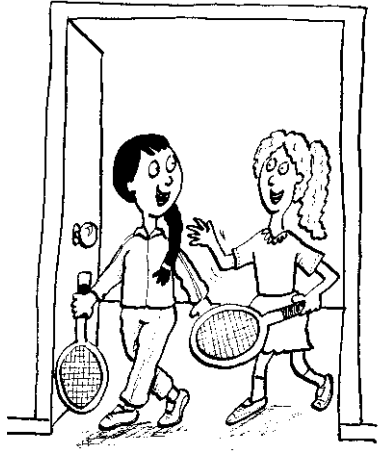


Chapter four

After breakfast the next morning (not a single bowl of porridge in sight), we went up to our room to get ready for our activities. Alice and I were already in our track-suits, so we only had to clean our teeth and brush our hair. Alice had a big box of new hair-slides, and she lent me a really nice blue one. She tied my hair up, and then twisted it around and tied it with the slide so it looked great. After that, I helped her to plait her hair. Then we sat on our beds and waited for Hazel.



Hazel had gone to breakfast in her tracksuit, but now she wanted to change. She spent ages deciding which of her many designer tennis dresses to wear. She tried each one on, and walked up and down the room like a model, asking Alice and me to decide for her. I knew she was just showing off, but I had to admit that she looked really lovely in each dress. Actually, she was so pretty she would have looked lovely in anything. Even my faded old tracksuit.

At last she was ready, and we all stood up to go. Alice hadn't brought a tennis racquet, but guess what? Hazel had two and was more than happy to lend one to her new best friend. As we went downstairs, Hazel walked next to Alice, telling her how 'super-great' it was that they were going to play tennis together. I wanted to laugh at Hazel, but I had no-one to laugh with, so I didn't bother.

Outside, Alice and Hazel had to go one way to the tennis courts and I set off the other way to

the big sports hall for the basketball. I felt kind of lost and lonely – I hate doing stuff on my own.

Alice ran after me.

‘I feel bad, Meg,’ she said. ‘I wish you were doing tennis too. Why don’t you change to our group? No-one will mind, and someone will lend you a racquet.’

I was really, really tempted, but I knew it would have been a mistake. I’d heard Gloria telling one of the boys that after the first half-hour the tennis people would be divided into groups according to how well they could play. I knew for sure that I’d end up with the total beginners, and wouldn’t be anywhere near Alice. And I didn’t want to give Hazel any more reason to laugh at me. And so I was brave. I shrugged, and said, ‘thanks, but no thanks,’ and set off for my basketball session.

* * *

The basketball was really good. The two coaches

were nice. We did loads of exercises and drills first, and then we played some matches. I played my very best, and was put on a very good team. There was a really funny boy called Sam on my team. He was the best player there by miles, but he wasn't all conceited and horrible. He messed around a lot, and made us all laugh with his jokes. One of the girls on my team, Sarah, was really nice too, and she asked me to sit with her and her friends when we took a break for juice and biscuits. And the biscuits were chocolate ones, and we could eat as many as we liked.

So I should have been really happy.

But I wasn't.

I kept on thinking of Alice and Hazel together. Hazel would be laughing at Alice's jokes, and Alice would be admiring Hazel's tennis shots. At break-time they'd be sitting together, having such a great time, and not thinking of me at all.

Everyone had lunch together. The tennis

people were back late, so when I came out of the queue with my tray, I didn't know where to sit. Sam was there with some of his friends, but I was too shy to go over and join them.

Then Sarah saw me and called me over. I sat down with her, and we ate and chatted for a while. I couldn't really concentrate on what Sarah was saying though, because I kept watching the door for Alice to come in. It was totally pathetic, I know. But I couldn't help it.

After about twenty minutes, the tennis group came in. They were all laughing and breathless. At the end of the group, Alice and Hazel were together. Hazel had her arm around Alice's shoulders, and Alice didn't even look embarrassed. This made me really cross, because Alice and I used always laugh at Melissa (the meanest girl in our school) when she and her friends went around like that.

I waved, and Alice and Hazel came over and joined us as soon as they had picked up their

food. They went on and on and on about their totally cool tennis coach, and how good-looking he was, and how he once played in Wimbledon, and how he had this special technique for teaching how to serve and how everyone had improved so much already. In the end I felt like throwing up all over my jelly and custard.

After lunch we had art and French and then we went orienteering. Alice and I did everything together, as usual. This was different to usual though, because every time I turned around, Hazel was there beside us, bragging about something.

In some ways, Hazel reminded me of Melissa – always boasting – always trying to be the centre of attention. The big difference was, Alice had always hated Melissa, but she seemed to love Hazel.

Why couldn't she see through her?

Why couldn't she see what she was really like?

What was going on?

As the afternoon went on, Alice must have noticed that I was feeling a bit jealous. She was really nice, and she was careful not to pay too much attention to Hazel, and she didn't mention tennis once. It didn't help though. With every minute that passed, I found myself hating Hazel even more.

In art class I kept hoping that Hazel would get tangled up in the pottery wheel until she was all wrapped around it like a big long smiley snake.

In French I kept hoping that she would be so bad at grammar that the teacher would send her to Mrs Duggan's office for the day.

And in orienteering, I kept hoping that she'd take a wrong path in the woods, and never be seen again.

I know this all makes me seem really, really mean. But I couldn't help it – honest. You see Alice had been my best friend since we were toddlers. And in the past year when she'd been having such a hard time, I'd always been there

for her. Whenever Alice got a crazy notion, I was there, waiting to help her. And I didn't mind. That's what friends do, isn't it?

And at Easter, when Alice finally got her greatest wish, and came back to live in Limerick, I was there waiting for her. I'd never given up on her. Ever.

The way I saw it was this – there were a hundred girls and boys in the camp, and Hazel could have had any one of those for her best friend.

Any one at all.

As long as it wasn't Alice.

I only wanted Alice.