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Little Girl in a Hurry: The Story of Maureen Connolly

Mary Karen Beckwith

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LITTLE GIRL IN A HURRY:
THE STORY OF MAUREEN CONNOLLY

by
Mary Karen Beckwith.
Bachelor of Arts, Long Beach State, 1969
Bachelor of Arts, Pacific Union College, 1975

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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This Thesis submitted by Mary Karen Beckwith in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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This Thesis meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Department English

Degree Master of Arts

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This work is dedicated to the memory of Maureen Connolly, who as an adult encouraged young people to believe in themselves.
ABSTRACT

LITTLE GIRL IN A HURRY: THE STORY OF MAUREEN CONNOLLY is a biography written for young people from approximately nine to thirteen. It opens when Maureen was nine-and-a-half, when she began her love affair with tennis, showing both the external and internal obstacles she overcame to become, at seventeen, the women's champion in world tennis. Whenever possible the emphasis has been upon showing rather than telling, so that readers may discover the world of Maureen Connolly for themselves. In order to achieve this I have used the devices of the novelist to bring the facts alive. The biography ends with Maureen at the height of her career, followed by an afterword depicting the remaining highlights of her life.
Chapter One
Tennis

Maureen was a nine-year-old in a hurry, she didn't have time to stop. She was on her way to play softball with the boys, passing the neighborhood tennis courts. Plop, Plop. She stopped by the wire fence, listening.

Two men were playing tennis. Maureen's eyes followed the ball—it moved so fast it was fun to watch.

"Deuce," shouted the dark-haired man who delivered a powerful serve. The other man gave the ball a quick return. His opponent barely got the ball back. A rally began—it was a fight, keeping Maureen close to the fence until it was over.

Before moving away she glanced over to the next court. There she saw a blonde man with an artificial leg showing two girls the right way to serve.

"No, no," he was saying, "when you serve you've got to follow through with your arm, like this." The two girls were trying to follow his instructions but couldn't seem to understand what he meant.

Those girls sure are dense, Maureen was thinking. I'd like to try playing tennis. I know I could do it.
A frustrated frown on his face, the instructor looked away from his two pupils for a moment. His eyes locked with Maureen's. "Hey," he shouted, "you've been glued to that fence for almost an hour. How'd you like to make yourself useful and come in here and shag balls for me?" He looked down at his artificial leg as if to explain his request. Maureen agreed he could use some help with the two girls. As she nodded he said: "Later I can pay you back with some hitting time."

"That'd be great," Maureen said and ran into the tennis area, her cheeks flushed, her eyes wide in anticipation. Maureen moved all over the court, chasing the wild balls. After what seemed a long time, the girls were finally through with their lesson. Finally, Maureen thought, now I'll be able to try it.

The instructor leaned against the fence for a few moments and wiped his brow. "You ready to hit a few?" he asked.

"Sure," she said as she bounded over to take the racket he offered her.

"What's your name?"

"Maureen . . . Maureen Connolly—we live just across from here, on Idaho Street."

"Mine's Wilbur. OK, let's see what you can do."

She hit the first ball right into the net. Again she did the same thing. Clunk. Maureen frowned. Those men made
it look so easy.

"No, no," he said. "Hitting the ball over the net is like netting a butterfly, gently, like this."

"OK." Not wanting to appear like the two girls he was just teaching, she set her jaw, determined to get the ball over the net. It went over. "I did it . . . I did it," she yelled.

The hour passed. Maureen was ready for more. "Do we have to stop?"

"Yeah, that's enough for today. But why don't you come back tomorrow afternoon? After you chase balls, I'll let you hit again."

Maureen was back the next day, but she couldn't wait for the afternoon. She was there before Wilbur opened the shop, pacing the courts like a filly at the starting gate, ready to win.

Haunting the University Courts of San Diego that summer of 1944, Maureen was Wilbur's constant companion. No ball boy was more eager than she was when it came to recovering the ball and learning all about the game of tennis.

One day Wilbur asked Maureen to bring her mother to the courts sometime, so that he could talk with her.

"Why?" Maureen asked.

"Oh, I just like to meet the parents of my students. Besides, it's time for you to have some real lessons. You
Maureen sighed and shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know what she'll say, though. We don't have much money."

"Well, just let me handle it. Now get busy and chase those balls!"

The next day Maureen brought her mom to the courts. After the introductions, Wilbur said: "Why don't you get Maureen a racket and let her take some tennis lessons? She's been here every day and I think it's time."

"Really? I had no idea," she said. "But we can't afford anything like that—"

"It would only cost a dollar-fifty for a racket, and two lessons a week would be only a dollar."

"But your sign says lessons are a dollar each."

"She's small, so we only charge half-price."

Maureen's mom laughed. "Oh, all right. I can see this means a lot to both of you."

Maureen smiled as she grabbed her new dollar-fifty racket. Tennis was going to be her game, she just knew it.
Maureen heard the front door slam. Good, she thought. Mom's home. Now I can get up.

"How'd your date with Gus go?" she heard Aunt Gert say. "Oh, fine, it's just that--Maureen! What are you doing still up?"

Maureen had come running out of her bedroom. Her wide-eyed expression made it obvious she hadn't been sleeping. "Mom, who in our family's left-handed? Was my Dad left-handed?"

"She's been like this all night, Jess," Aunt Gert said, "wanting to know if any famous people have been left-handed. And her father--why, she hasn't even seen him since she was four, when he walked out--now she wants to know all about him." Aunt Gert, really Jess's aunt, had supported both Jess and Maureen since the departure of Maureen's dad and didn't understand Maureen's sudden interest in her father.

Jess moved across the living room to the couch, taking off her shoes before she sat down.

"No, your Dad wasn't left-handed, Maureen. But why
all this interest in being left-handed?"

"Oh, it's something Wilbur said today when I was practicing." Maureen looked away from her mother's eyes as she continued: "He noticed I was a lefty. He said no great tennis players have ever been left-handed."

"Oh, is that all?" Maureen noticed her mom was trying to hold back the laughter in her voice. "Don't worry yourself over that."

"But Mom, can a person ever change from being a left-hander?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know and I don't think it's worth discussing anymore. Now, off to bed."

Reluctantly Maureen turned to go back to her room. "Good-night, Mom, C'night Aunt Gert."

The next day Maureen played an older girl, using her right hand. She missed an easy return. Maureen bit her lower lip, but relented to switch back to her left hand. She continued missing easy shots. Her right arm ached as she forced it to move her racket. Out of the corner of her eye Maureen could tell Wilbur was watching her, an expression of doubt on his face. After Maureen lost, Wilbur came up to her: "So, playing with your right hand, huh? You were doing fine with your left. Why the switch?"

Maureen raised her wrist to her bottom lip, sore from the continual biting. "Yesterday you said no great players ever used their left."
"Maureen, I was talking about tournament tennis. The best players in tennis."

"So, the best players are right-handed. I want to be right-handed." She looked up at Wilbur and lowered her right hand to her hip.

"Do you realize what it takes to do tournament tennis? It takes your whole life . . . nothing left for anything else."

"I know I want to be the best, that's why I'm switching."

"OK," Wilbur said, grabbing some tennis balls, "since you've made up your mind, let's get to work. You'll need lots of help."
Every day, weather permitting, almost daily in the mild climate of San Diego, Maureen was out on the courts to practice. I need all the help I can get, Maureen told herself, as she ran to the courts after school one day. Switching to my right hand has sure made my game rotten, she thought, remembering the easy shots she had missed yesterday.

Getting ready to rally with Wilbur, she winced in pain as she circled her right arm through the air, to warm it up. "Great, now it's sore, besides being weak!"

"How's school, Maureen?" Wilbur asked, starting the rally.

"OK, but this is more fun," she answered and returned the ball with better control.

Slowly Maureen's game improved. One day she was playing with Patsy Zellmer who, although a year older, was Maureen's best friend. There was fire in Maureen's eyes as she returned a hard ball, her brow soaked with perspiration. I'm going to win this point, Maureen thought, unwilling to give Patsy the advantage when the score went to
deuce for the fourth time. Returning the serve, Maureen hit a ball to Patsy's backhand and placed it within an inch of the line. Patsy swung to return the ball but wasn't quick enough. Maureen's advantage. Her arm ached as she served again, this time for the game if she won the point.

A rally started with Maureen on the offensive. She moved Patsy from side to side. She hit the ball to Patsy's backhand, forcing her to the back of the court. Patsy returned it, then Maureen hit the ball close to the net. Patsy ran to hit the ball, her mouth opened in disgust.

"Oh, I'm not going to make it," Patsy said, as she missed the ball. "Your game, Maureen. Hey, you've gotten better. No fair. You can even beat me with your right hand." Patsy ran over to the water fountain.

"Yeah, all that practice and a sore arm are finally paying off," Maureen said, as she swung her right arm in circles through the air.

"Oops--there's Mom. Gotta go. Can you play later tonight, after dinner?"

"Nope, can't tonight." A frown began. "Gus is coming over for dinner, so it'll be later than usual. Mom likes me around when he's over. Thinks we need to get to know each other better."

"Oh well, see you tomorrow then," Patsy yelled, on the way to her mom's car.
Things remained much the same, as the days and months went by. Maureen spent every hour possible on the courts and Gus came over for dinner every Thursday night. What did change was Maureen's playing. It improved steadily. I'll do whatever it takes to play tournament tennis, Maureen thought, on her way to the courts one day. I don't care if Gus disapproves. Mom doesn't mind, why should he?

Her frown turned to a grin when she saw Patsy waiting by Wilbur's clubhouse next to the courts.

"It's about time you got here," Patsy shouted. "I'm going to beat you today, so be prepared."

Maureen's face wrinkled at the thought, remembering how Patsy had almost won last night. "Oh yeah? We'll see about that," she yelled back, with a grim smile.

Maureen won the rally and served first. Patsy won the first game, the second, then the third. Maureen mopped her brow as she charged into the fourth game, her mouth set in determination as Patsy served. I've got to concentrate on the ball, Maureen thought, as she worked to gain the offensive.

Slowly Maureen began to even up the score. Nothing was on her mind but winning the match. When the score reached 3 all, Maureen really began pouring it on.

"Hey," Patsy yelled, as Maureen got ready to serve, "don't you see the rain?" The rain had already started frizzing Patsy's hair when two giant drops splashed into
Maureen's eyes.

"What?" Maureen's face turned crimson, in spite of the cool weather. "How dumb." She began to laugh at herself as she wiped the rain from her eyes. "Sorry, Patsy. Guess I was concentrating too hard on the ball."

"That's OK, but let's go. Come on, I'll race you to your house!" Grabbing their things, they ran off down the street, looking more like they had been swimming than playing tennis.

A few months later, just before her tenth birthday, Maureen was running through the front door in her usual hurry to change and head for the courts.

"Watch out," Jess yelled, barely missing a head-on collision with her daughter in the doorway. "Maureen, why don't you move more slowly when you're near home? Gus is always saying you should be more ladylike. I think he's right."

"I'm sorry, Mom, but I'm late. I've got to meet Wilbur. He's helping me with my serve."

"Well, hurry up then, but I want you back before dark. Gus is coming for dinner too, so don't be late."

"OK--bye."

Later that evening, after supper, Aunt Gert and Maureen were doing the dishes, while Gus and Jess were talking in the living room.

"Aunt Gert, why does Mom spend so much time with Gus?"
"I don't know, Honey. I guess playing the organ for the church choir doesn't keep her busy enough. Maybe she thinks he can offer her the security she feels she's lacking."

Maureen's eyes opened wide. "Security? What more does she need? She's got you and me. We're not rich, but we're happy."

"Well, Maureen, sometimes people don't know when they're really happy. They think they've got to change things from the way they are. Your mother seems to think having Gus around makes her happy... although I've seen her mighty unhappy from some of the things he's said to her."

"Well, I'm not happy when he's around. He's always telling me I shouldn't spend so much time with tennis. That it isn't ladylike." Maureen twisted the dish towel into a knot, waiting to wipe the next glass. "And that I'll be in for big disappointments when I start playing tournaments. I don't see what business it is of his, anyway."

"It may start becoming his business, Maureen. You see... Gus and your Mother are getting quite serious--"

"What! You don't mean... married?" Maureen almost shouted. Aunt Gert nodded, but before she could say anything more Maureen flung the dish towel on the counter and ran into her bedroom. She threw herself onto the bed,
burying her head in her pillow, sobbing. There was nothing Aunt Gert could say to make her feel better.

Mom knows how I feel about Gus, Maureen was thinking as she sobbed. Maybe if I'd spent less time on the courts and more time at home, Mom wouldn't be planning on marrying Gus. No--I can't think like this. I love tennis more than anything in the whole world. And I love it even more now. Drying her eyes, she began to feel better, determined to let nothing stand in her way.
Chapter Four
A Dollar-Fifty Racket

Maureen was ten-and-a-half when she started playing tournament tennis. She entered the thirteen-year-old-and-under division of the girls' singles in the annual playground event at La Jolla, a seaside suburb of San Diego. Wilbur Folsom (her coach), her mom and new step-dad were there, watching her make it all the way to the finals.

Maureen looked over at her opponent, a girl named Ann Bissell. Look at that fancy racket. I'll bet it cost a lot, Maureen thought, as her fingers pressed into the handle of her dollar-fifty racket. But she didn't care how special Ann's racket was. The possibility of defeat never entered her mind.

Everything went well in the beginning. Maureen won the first two games. She looked over to where her mom and Gus were sitting. Gus was looking the other way with a bored expression on his face but her mother smiled encouragingly. Then Ann's game picked up. She began forcing Maureen to work the net, where she was least confident. Ann scored a point. She continued forcing Maureen to play the net and
scored more points. Maureen glanced over to where Wilbur sat. He shot her a smile, and then a cloud settled on his features. Ann's been looking for weak spots, Maureen thought, and now she's moving in for the kill. I can't give up.

Maureen moved quickly, bobbing her head in a determined manner. But Ann kept forcing her to the net and scored more points. At last, after strenuous battle, Maureen made one final effort to return Ann's serve. She was caught off-balance and Ann moved in for the score and the game.

"Game, set and match for Ann Bissell," the umpire shouted. Maureen tried to look happy when she shook Ann's hand but only managed a smile that was tight and strained. As the well-wishers began surrounding Ann, Maureen wandered away, wondering why she lost.

Wilbur and her mom reached her first. "You did great, kid. Made the finals first time out," her coach said, beaming.

"I lost. I wanted to win."

Jess put a sweater over Maureen's shoulders and gave her a hug. "You did your best, Maureen. I'm proud of you."

"But I lost. Why did I lose?"

"Because she's better--" Gus said, walking over to them. He had his mouth open to say more when Wilbur broke in.
"--which is OK, kid. You did your best." He scowled at Gus as they started toward their cars. Giving Maureen a wink before he got inside, he added: "See you tomorrow on the courts, bright and early."

After Wilbur left, Maureen couldn't hold it back any longer. She broke into uncontrollable sobs.

"I told you this would happen, Jess," Gus said, as he opened the car door. "The kid gets her hopes all up and then comes the let down when she loses."

On the way home Maureen continued to cry. She used her mom's shoulder as a sponge to soak up all her tears.

"Maureen, it's only a tennis game," Jess said, "not the end of the world. It doesn't matter that you lost."

"That's right, kid. Nobody's gonna care tomorrow who won or lost."

Maureen lifted her head from her mother's shoulder. "I care--"

"Take the racket away from her for a while, Jess," Gus said. "The kid's got to learn that there's more important things in life than tennis. Besides, the sooner she realizes tennis is for rich folk, the better off she'll be."

More surprised than frightened, Maureen looked up at her mother. "No Mom--don't take my racket away--please? Let's talk about it later--just the two of us, OK?"

"OK."
"Trouble. This tennis thing is nothing but trouble," Gus said as he turned a corner. "I don't know what good it does me being the man around here, when nobody listens to what I say." He settled into any icy quiet.

Later that night before bed Maureen talked with her mom.

"Mom, please don't take away my racket. I promise to do anything you want, but don't take away my racket." She sat on the edge of her bed, her eyes shifting from her mom to her racket. It's the prettiest racket in the whole wide world, she thought. They can't take it away from me.

"Gus just thinks you spend too much time with your tennis. That you give it too much importance."

"I want to be the best--really be somebody," Maureen said, hearing the blood pounding in her ears. "Some day I'm going to be the best tennis player ever. I know you'll be proud of me. But please, just give me a chance. Don't take away my racket. Let me keep on trying."

Jess picked up Maureen's racket and began turning it around in her hand. "Well, it's against Gus's better judgment, but we won't take it away. Stop sniffling. Please try to realize he's only trying to do what's best for you in the long run. He thinks you're letting yourself in for bitter disappointments, wanting to play tournament tennis." She put the racket back on top of Maureen's dresser. "Today was a good example of what he's afraid of--"
"But Mom, I know I'll be the best." She took the Kleenex her mom offered and blew her nose, feeling better. "Thanks for leaving me my racket. You'll see. You'll be proud of me some day."

"OK, but before you become world champ, you'd better get some sleep. Goodnight."

"G'night, Mom."

As she rolled over to go to sleep the last thing she saw before the lights went out was her dollar-fifty racket, propped up on her dresser. Just you wait, Ann Bissell—Maureen thought, remembering Ann's triumphant look from today's game. Next time we play, I'll beat you.
Chapter Five
"Little Mo"

After school Maureen spent every daylight hour on the courts. She had six months before her next match with Ann Bissell and this time she was going to win. Every muscle and nerve ached to win. Nothing else mattered. And tennis was Maureen's escape from the increasing problems at home. She hated coming between her mom and stepfather, Gus, but he refused to understand how important tennis was to her. Tennis gave Maureen the chance to be best in something that really mattered, a chance to be noticed and important—if she won.

Her turn to beat Ann came when Maureen was eleven, at the Harper Ink Tournament, San Diego's big annual Junior Event. Again, both Maureen and Ann made it to the finals. This time Maureen's supporters were only Wilbur and Jess. Maureen stood by the side of the court, looking at Ann. You look so smug, she thought, standing there, smiling, with your fancy racket and clothes. You won't be smiling long, 'cause I'm going to win.

Maureen charged into the game as if it were a battle, her dollar-fifty racket held high and deadly like a war-
rior's banner. The memory of her recent humiliation in losing gave her new energy. I just have to win, she thought.

Maureen won the first point. She returned Ann's ball and it hit the top of the net, trickling over to Ann's side. Ann could not return it. The game's mine, Maureen thought. Luck is on my side. I'll win. A good volley began. Maureen moved quickly all around the court and made seemingly impossible returns for points. Ann was no match for Maureen, even if Ann were the older, more polished player. Maureen knew Ann was beginning to tire by the way she walked to the baseline to serve. Maureen kept up the energetic pace and returned Ann's balls expertly. She bobbed and danced on the baseline, catching her opponent offguard whenever possible. Finally they came to the last point. Ann was unable to return Maureen's shot. Maureen heard the umpire shout: "Game, set, match. Connolly."

"I did it! I did it!" She yelled, jumping up and down. She ran over to shake Ann's hand and smiled, as the crowd applauded. She reached out to take the trophy and thought of her stepdad. If only Gus could see me now. He's always telling me I'll lose. But I knew I could do it.

"Maureen, here are some people who'd like to meet you," Wilbur said, as she turned to face the crowd.

"Hi. I'm Nelson Fisher. This is my wife, Sophie." Maureen shook their hands and noticed the tall gentleman with his tiny wife. For some reason he looked familiar.
"Nel. is an old high school friend, Maureen," Wilbur said. "Now he's a writer in the Sports Department for the San Diego Union."

"Oh yes," Maureen said, the light of recognition dawning. "I've seen your picture on your column in the sports section."

"Well, after the way you played today I think a lot of people will be seeing yours," Nelson said, smiling.

Maureen threw back her head and laughed, little realizing she was listening to a prophetic statement by the man destined to become the father figure she desperately needed.

"Do people ever call you 'Mo' for short?" Nelson asked.

"Sure . . . some of my school friends."

"Hmmm--Mo. . . Little Mo. . . that would be a great nickname for a one-column headline," Nelson said.

Sophie looked at her husband and then over at Maureen. "Newspaper copyists prefer short names," Sophie explained. "With a short name that's catchy you're likely to be mentioned more."

"You know," Nelson said, "the World War II Battleship Missouri is called 'Big Mo,' but here's San Diego's 'Little Mo,' a gal with more firepower and drive!" Amusement flickered in his eyes as he continued: "Look for an article on 'Little Mo' in my column tomorrow."

Hmm, "Little Mo," Maureen was thinking. It sounds a little strange, but who knows--it might catch on!
Chapter Six
A New Coach

Maureen went back to play tennis at the old, cracked cement courts near her home, where Wilbur promoted tennis among the neighborhood youth. But things were never the same after the Harper Ink Tournament. Wilbur made her a target for the other girls to beat, which made Maureen angry. Besides, she had one goal: to become the best. A chance for improvement came when she was offered a complimentary membership in the Balboa Tennis Club.

"Take it, Maureen," Wilbur told her. "You've gone as far as I can take you. Now you've got to push on, if you're going to play tournament tennis."

It was a hard decision to make. Maureen didn't want to leave Wilbur. He'd been so good to her—a real inspiration. However, Maureen knew he was right. She joined the Balboa Tennis Club, but Wilbur would always remain one of her true friends.

When Maureen was twelve-and-a-half she took a chance entering a big tournament and ended up meeting the person who could turn her tennis dreams into reality. She entered the Pacific Southwest Tournament in Los Angeles, in two
Maureen and her mom were walking quickly toward the bus station, carrying suitcases: "Hurry, Mom, or we'll miss our bus."

"I'm coming, ... I just wish I knew if we're doing the right thing. Gus said--"

"Mom, let's not go over that again. You promised you'd come. You know how important this tournament is to me--it attracts all the big winners from Wimbledon and Forest Hills."

"Yes, I know, Dear--that's what scares me. Besides, Gus was so angry when I left. I'm so tired of having to choose between the two of you."

"I know things haven't been going too well for you and Gus, Mom, and I'm sorry. I'd even give up my tennis if it would help."

Oh no you won't. I wouldn't let you. You're the one who's really accomplishing something." Maureen knew by the tone of her mother's voice she was thinking about the career in music she never had. "Besides, it's not your tennis that's the real problem. Gus just seems to make that the center of all our disagreements. I'm glad you do so well at it. That's why I'm here, going with you to L.A."

Upon arriving Maureen found all the courts for practice taken up by other contestants, so she and her mom
went to the public playground in Griffith Park. There practicing with other competitors she worked hard and attracted the notice of Curt and Daisy Tree, tennis enthusiasts. After she finished, Curt and Daisy came up and introduced themselves.

"We’re really impressed by the way you move around the court," Curt said. "You seem to have boundless energy."

"Yes, you not only go for the impossible shots, you get them in," Daisy was saying. Before Maureen could respond, she added: "I feel sure Eleanor Tennant could turn you into a champion."

"Tennant? Who’s Eleanor Tennant?" Maureen and Jess both asked.

"Only one of the top three tennis coaches in the United States," Daisy said. "She coached Alice Marble and Bobby Riggs—both Wimbledon winners—and now she’s the professional coach at the Beverly Hills Tennis Club, where she teaches celebrities: Groucho Marx, Joan Crawford, Errol Flynn..." Then she laughed. "Carole Lombard called her ‘Teach’ one day and the name stuck."

"And you think someone like that might be interested in me?" Maureen asked, her eyes widening in astonishment.

"Not only do I think Teach would be interested in you, I think she could make you into a champion," Daisy said. "If you’d like, I could set up a meeting for you with her tomorrow at the club."
Maureen was thrilled. She had no coach at the present and was not satisfied with her strokes. But would such an important person like Teach really be interested in a little girl from San Diego?
Chapter Seven
"Teach"

The next day Maureen and her mom went to the exclusive Beverly Hills Tennis Club. They walked slowly as they headed for the courts, not sure what would happen once they got there.

"Maureen, just look at this fancy place," Jess said. "Look at how the people are dressed. We don't belong here."

"Come on, Mom. We're not turning back now," Maureen said, sounding more courageous than she felt.

"You're still a little girl. Why rush into all this now? Gus is right--"

"Mom, I think that lady over there is Miss Tennant, the one in slacks, with the grey hair. Come on."

As Maureen moved closer, the grey-haired woman said: "You must be Maureen?"

Now that she was standing so close, Maureen lost her nerve. "Y-yes, Miss Tennant."

"Let's hit a few. I want to see what you can do," Teach said, pointing to a place for Jess to sit before she started rallying with Maureen.

Power was part of Maureen's style, so she hit every-
thing hard in the rally, wanting to impress Tennant. Most of her drives were good but Teach still had lots of pointers:

"Don't be late with your backhand and be sure to hit the ball on the rise. Your serve is off—you don't throw well with your right hand." She gathered up some old rackets and had Maureen throw them, pretending she was serving, which improved Maureen's serving toss at once.

"You playing in the Pacific Southwest?" Tennant asked.

"Yes, in both divisions, the thirteen and fifteen-year-old," Maureen answered.

"Well, I'll be there to watch you—if you make it to the finals," Tennant said matter-of-factly.

Maureen did make it to the finals, with Nelson and his wife Sophie sitting beside Jess, cheering "Mo" on. Nelson was holding the trophy Maureen had won in the thirteen-year-old division, as they all watched her play a hard game in the older girls' division. Maureen looked for Teach and saw her sitting apart, remote, watching.

Maureen volleyed, using a backhand return the way Teach recommended. She knew she was playing well. She crowded her opponent, working her from one side of the court to the other. A point away from victory she moved her opponent into the forecourt and dropped the ball on the baseline. The ball was impossible for her opponent to return.

I won both divisions! Maureen's eyes glowed. After shaking her opponent's hand, she looked around for Teach but she was nowhere to be seen.

"You played well, Maureen," Nelson said, handing her the trophy he'd been holding. "You get better every time I see you. As soon as I get back to San Diego I'm going to write a column on you. Be prepared for a photographer knocking on your door--"

"If I did so well, why didn't Teach wait to talk with me, to tell me how good I was?" Maureen asked, the light dimming in her eyes. She knew her game had faults and that her strokes weren't right. That's probably why Teach didn't stick around.

"You don't think you did well?" Sophie asked. "Winning both divisions was bad tennis?"

"Hurry and get dressed and we'll all go out and celebrate," Nelson said. "There'll be other times when Miss Tennant can watch you win."

But as Maureen walked into the dressing room, there was Teach, waiting.

"Congratulations. You won, but I'm not sure how you managed. Your playing was sloppy, shot through with faults. Your serve is off--needs more power, and you're afraid to play the net. But I noticed you took my advice with your backhand. It was better."
"Tha--thank you, Miss Tennant."

"So--you go to school in San Diego?" Teach said. She handed Maureen a towel.

"Yes."

"OK, you'll spend every weekend here at the club with me."

"But--that is, how much will all this cost? We can't afford much--"

"I won't charge you anything. But I'll expect you to follow my rules and to believe I know what's best for you, OK?"

"Yes," Maureen said.

"Here are the rules: You'll be here every weekend at the club--to practice, not to play, no matter who asks you to play with them, clear? No swimming--it develops the wrong muscles, and no junk or rich foods. You accept? Anytime these rules are broken, you go right back to San Diego, understand?"

Maureen nodded, realizing these were but small requests for so great an opportunity.
Chapter Eight
Teach Takes Over

For the rest of the school year Maureen made her weekend two hour bus trips from San Diego to Beverly Hills and back again. She looked forward to summer and to the time when she could practice without the intervening trips. Teach changed Mo's game completely. She corrected the various faults Mo had acquired.

Running to the courts one Saturday in her usual hurry, Maureen saw Teach carrying an armload of old rackets.

"Oh, so it's back to throwing the old rackets again, huh Teach?"

"Yep... remember, serving is like throwing a ball—we've got to correct your shoulder coordination. It's bad."

"Well, I'm really not a right-hander. That's my problem."

"I know. I know. Here, throw these over the net. Pretend you're serving. This will improve your right-handed throw." After they worked on Mo's serve, Teach then said: "You've also got to learn how to pace your ball. In a rally you've got to be able to put the ball exactly where you want it. You can do this by using a flat drive. This
gets rid of your tendency to undercut and slice the ball. Remember, good ground strokes are essential for good tennis."

Teach took Maureen's racket and showed her how to hold it loosely with two fingers and her thumb. Then she had her hit the ball flat, with no spin.

"Relax each time after you hit the ball. Be firm while hitting, then relax, so the tension in your arm will go." Maureen obeyed by starting the racket back with her wrist, letting her arm follow. She used her wrist as a hinge, firmly but avoiding tension. She pointed her racket in the direction she wanted the ball to go.

Another approach Teach took to improve Mo's ground strokes was imagining a clock system.

"Look," Teach said, "stand in the backcourt and imagine you're in the center of a large clock dial, with twelve o'clock directly behind you. Start your forehand at twelve, hit at nine o'clock and follow through to six o'clock. For your backhand, do just the reverse."

Under all this practice and direction from Tennant, Mo's game slowly improved. She developed pace on her ground shots and learned to hit the corners of the court, keeping the ball deep, within a foot of the baseline. One of Mo's best tactics was learning how to hit the ball on the rise effectively, making the ball move quicker so that it would be harder for her opponent to return.
The next winter when Mo was thirteen, Teach had her take up skipping rope, ballet and tap dancing: all to improve her footwork. Tennant also asked Nelson and Sophie to take Maureen to boxing matches and classical ballet performances, where she could observe expert footwork. She did all this in between the times when she wasn’t on the bus weekends, going to and from her lessons.

That following summer, still thirteen, Maureen was given the opportunity of going on her first tennis tour. Teach says I'm ready for it, Mo was thinking one night as she climbed into bed. And I really want to go. Money's no problem, thanks to Nelson, Teach and the Southern California Tennis Association. But will Gus approve?
Chapter Nine
Going On Tour

Maureen slammed the front door. I've just got to go on this tour, she thought, as she came running into the living room, in more haste than usual.

"Hi, Aunt Gert. Where's Mom . . . and Gus?"

"She's in the bedroom, resting, so try to be quiet. Going out again?"

"Yeah. Ben Press called last night. He wants me to be his doubles partner tonight in a game with some of his friends from out of town. I've only got time to take a quick shower and grab a bite to eat."

"Just try to be quiet. Your Mom's not feeling too well."

"Oh--she and Gus have another fight?" Maureen asked, walking toward the bathroom to get ready for her shower.

"You could call it that."

"Aunt Gert, I've just got to go on this tour." She walked back into the living room, crumpling her shower cap as she talked. "Do you think Gus will talk Mom out of letting me go? It's only a week before we're supposed to leave."
"What Gus thinks doesn't matter anymore," Gert said, looking seriously at Maureen, her voice softer than usual. "When he left today, he said he wasn't coming back. Said he was through worrying about what you did or didn't do. . . ."

"You mean, he and Mom are breaking up?" Part of Maureen felt relieved. There wouldn't be any more of those awful scenes between her mom and Gus, especially the ones over her and tennis. Gus felt her tennis career was being pushed too fast and Maureen felt it wasn't going fast enough. But another part of Maureen felt sad. She knew she'd never liked Gus and she felt partly responsible for his leaving. She was worried about her mom. How was she going to take this? Even though her mom and Gus never seemed to get along very well, she knew her mom would miss him.

"What's Mom going to do now, Aunt Gert?"

"Just what she's always done, survive. She'll be OK, Maureen. It wasn't the happiest of marriages, you know. Gus always seemed to resent the closeness you have with your Mother. No matter what you did or didn't do, it wasn't right. Now you can go on that Pacific Northwest tour without worrying. Your Mom and I are both behind you and we want you to do your best."

"Thanks, Aunt Gert." Maureen hugged her aunt and then ran back to the bathroom. "Tell Mom I'll talk with her
Maureen did go on tour that summer and played well. She played in Salt Lake City, Denver, Seattle, Tacoma and in Vancouver and Victoria, in British Columbia. She won both the singles and doubles divisions of the eighteen and fifteen-and-under groups. But every time she tried playing in the older divisions with girls four years her senior, she lost.

It was good experience, Maureen thought, looking up at her trophies one night before going to bed. She laughed as she remembered back to when she first started playing tennis. It's true, I've come far, but I'm not stopping here. I want to become the best.

Then she thought of Gus. He never wanted me to play tournament tennis. I wonder what he'd say if he saw my trophies. I'm sorry he and Mom are divorced, but she doesn't seem unhappy. Maureen smiled, grateful for her mom's encouragement regarding her tennis. Yes, I've got to keep working. I want to become the best—for both of us.
Maureen was walking into the library at Cathedral High, an all girls' Catholic school, where she was a popular freshman. She was in a rush to get her work done so she could get to the courts and practice. Quickly she found the books she needed and then started home, to meet Patsy in time on the courts. She did well in her studies, but tennis was always on her mind. She continued her weekend lessons with Teach, happy her reputation was that of Southern California's up-and-coming tennis star. Under the guidance of Teach, Mo's perfectionism heightened. Winning was the all-important goal—the world's championship her aim.

Tennis will bring me everything I want, Mo thought. This was how she rationalized the many hours spent upon the courts. She felt she had to win, because only by winning would she be liked. This fear of not being liked unless she won stayed with Maureen many years. It became apparent to her for the first time during her freshman year when she played in a singles' match against Laura Lou Jahn, at the Hotel del Coronado.
Maureen, as defending champion, was confident of victory since she had previously beaten Laura Lou three times in Los Angeles. Listen to the applause, Maureen thought, her eyes sweeping over the crowd as she moved into position to start playing. They like me. They want me to win. She beamed out at the crowd. This is wonderful.

But it didn't turn out so wonderful as the game progressed, with Laura Lou in the lead. Maureen's confidence left her, her fear of losing grew. Maureen could not get her game together. She lost in three sets.

I am no longer important, Maureen thought, as she walked away from the crowd, her head down. Now Laura Lou is the one they want. They don't want me anymore. As the photographers ran over to take Laura Lou's picture, Maureen's mind was racing...

They hate me... I lost... If I'd won they'd be taking my picture. She had become convinced that she must win in order to be liked. After she lost, the indifference of the crowd felt like hatred. It seemed people hated her. No one cared about her anymore. To avoid this negative reaction from the crowd, she must win. Maureen's opponents became targets for her anger. They had the power to keep her from being liked. Winning in tennis became much more than a game for her; winning became an affirmation of her very life, of who and what she was.

This anger toward her opponents and fear of losing
was unknowingly fanned by Tennant. "Remember Maureen, you're not out there to make friends with your opponents," Teach was always telling her, "you're out there to win. You've got to keep pressure on your opponents at all times." This attitude of aloofness and detachment toward her opponents, coupled with her fear of losing, Maureen turned into a cold, angry feeling when she was on the courts.

I'll never forget this defeat, Maureen thought, determined to beat Laura Lou the next chance she got.
Chapter Eleven

Great Things to Come

Maureen had her chance to face Laura Lou Jahn again, when she was still fourteen, on the courts of the Philadelphia Cricket Club. Both girls made it to the finals but only one would emerge as the winner of the Junior Nationals.

Mo stood facing Laura Lou from across the court, minutes before the game was to start. It's disgusting how confident you look, Maureen was thinking, as Laura flashed Mo a smile and moved into position to start playing. Maureen's eyes narrowed. She remembered the bitterness of her Coronado defeat. Just you wait, Laura Lou! You may be everyone's favorite, but you won't be for long.

Laura Lou served. Mo broke her serve by returning a hard ball down the center of the court. Laura Lou could not return it. Point for Mo.

Laura Lou served again. Mo returned it, placing the ball near the baseline. Laura missed it. Another point for Maureen. Mo glanced to where her mom, Nelson and Sophie sat and smiled; she knew she'd win. She could do nothing else. She'd gone over this game a hundred times in her mind, winning each time.
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