

**creative
nonfiction**

The Prince

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the net at Andrew Benedict, my nemesis. He bounces
ten. He believes he is superior and tennis is his proof. It is set point, in the

rants about how the world is wrong and he is right. He is always right, apparently. He is incendiary and I never know what will trigger him. He keeps wondering if it keeps away the ghosts of all the men he killed.

Sometimes, when Dad has a girlfriend, he is alright. Trish is the best. She dotes on my sister, Catherine, and me. She makes my father laugh and distracts him. I like her and talk her up. Dad enjoys hiking mountains and playing tennis. These are the best times that he and I share. He beats me easily but teaches me how to take the net and poach and how to get into the other

Grandfathers and grandsons are natural allies, and I wish I lived with him. and play my best.

Andrew and I return to the court for the deciding third set. He is com- I hit everything in, run down every ball, and play weird and unpredictable tennis. missing. Andrew falters. His lips pull tight into a frozen smile and his eyes run him side-to-side mercilessly. It is over eighty degrees Fahrenheit. I extend points to tire him more. Sweat stings his eyes and rains down his face. I tell him "almost" and "good try" as sickly sweet as I can. He tries to be perfect. I play smart and loose. I feed him funky chip shots and dinks and my sinister lob, drop-shot combos. The lucky bounces all land my way. Five straight games fall to me in a blur.

Win this point, I tell myself.

The only moment is now. Andrew looks numb, close to death. I serve. nets the next two returns. It is triple-match-point. I serve with kick spin to the corner. We rally twenty times. I rush the net. He tries to pass and I slice a court.

I win.

I go to the net to shake hands, but Andrew walks to courtside. He cuts through the Eucalyptus tree border of the club and across the fairway of the golf course.

I report the score to Dophie, the head Pro, and she looks at me with surprise and pride. She smiles warmly.

Later, whenever I see Andrew in the halls or on the blacktop at school, he lowers his eyes and avoids me. We never speak again.

thing in his childhood? What if it was the only time his father was proud? I tled demons that our fathers summoned. His darkness is not his fault, either. All I know is that I forgive him, for my own peace.

Today, Andrew is a minister. Now, I return to school to become a hydro-geologist. I worked for ten years and ten thousand hours with kids through adventure camps, specializing in bully prevention. Along the way, I climbed Colorado's two hundred highest mountains. Perhaps we both became kinder, more self-aware men than our fathers. I hope that one day, as fathers, we will smash the cycle and help our children live their own dreams.

