

Another One Bites the Dust

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The match had not gone well. Roger had been stiff since the beginning. The challenge lay not on technique, for he was a veteran player with many years' experience. The problem was in his fitness. His body had not reacted well in the previous week, and his overexertion was not helping in the least. Apart from that, the opponent had been flawless, while none of his own tactics had been effective, from backhands to forehands to the occasional dropshot. The opponent's youth was certainly an advantage. Roger was serving against match point; he would not go down so easily.

He took two balls, put one in his pocket, and started bouncing the other one. The sun was not in his favour, either, for it shone brightly on his rugged face. Strands of light hair falling over his eyes hindered eyesight. The strain on his joints had been enormous, as the opponent had made him run around the court like a cat toying with a mouse.

With one not-so-swift movement, Roger put all his strength onto the serve. His heavy build allowed him to hit the ball with all his might, sending it with some force towards his opponent's backhand, but there was a price to pay: a stab of pain in his shoulder weakened his arm, already languid from the effort. The opponent's return was sudden, its direction unexpected. This time, the ball went to his backhand and, since all his weight was put on his forehand side, with the change of direction came the cracking sound of his twisted hip. Stifling a grunt, he decided to place a safe slice to the opponent's backhand, in order to buy some time. Sluggishly, he returned to the center of the court, but the ball was already heading to the opposite side. His ankle was the last soldier standing, and even he failed Roger: a wave of fire went up his leg, and it was clear that a sprain would afflict him the following day. The ball bounced once, twice, and his fate was sealed.

GAME, SET, MATCH. He painfully tried to pick himself up. Biting the dust once more. Except that he could not even bite, for his set of dentures had slipped from his mouth as he tripped, and there it was, lying on the clay court. "Thon! Thon, come help me up! And give me my teethie-th back!" he lisped. "Curthed thing..."

"Easy, Gramps, easy. Don't get worked up. It's okay, you gave me a good workout today. Let's go get you cleaned up, and I'll fix you some tea."

"Tea? I don't want no thilly tea!" the old man muttered. "I almotht had you on that latht point!"

The boy steadied him, slipping an arm around his waist.

"Sure, sure, you almost had me. Next time, huh? After a nap, you'll be back on court and running me ragged again."

"Hmph. Don't patronithe me, boy. Jutht wait—nexth time, you're gonna bite the dutht."

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