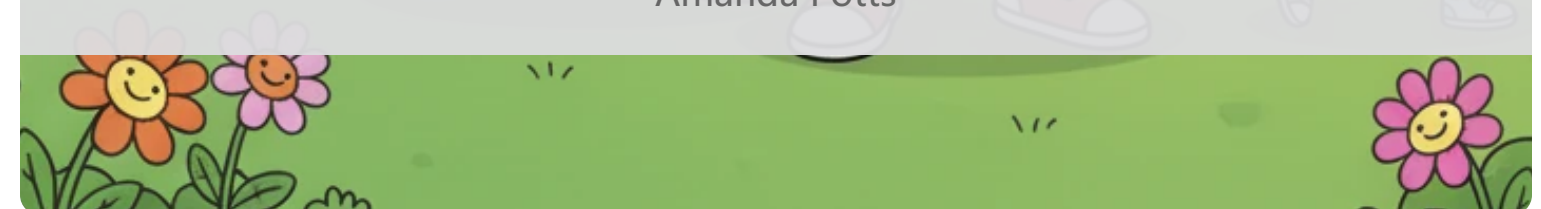


CARLTON'S COURAGEOUS COMEBACK



Carlton's Courageous Comeback

Amanda Potts





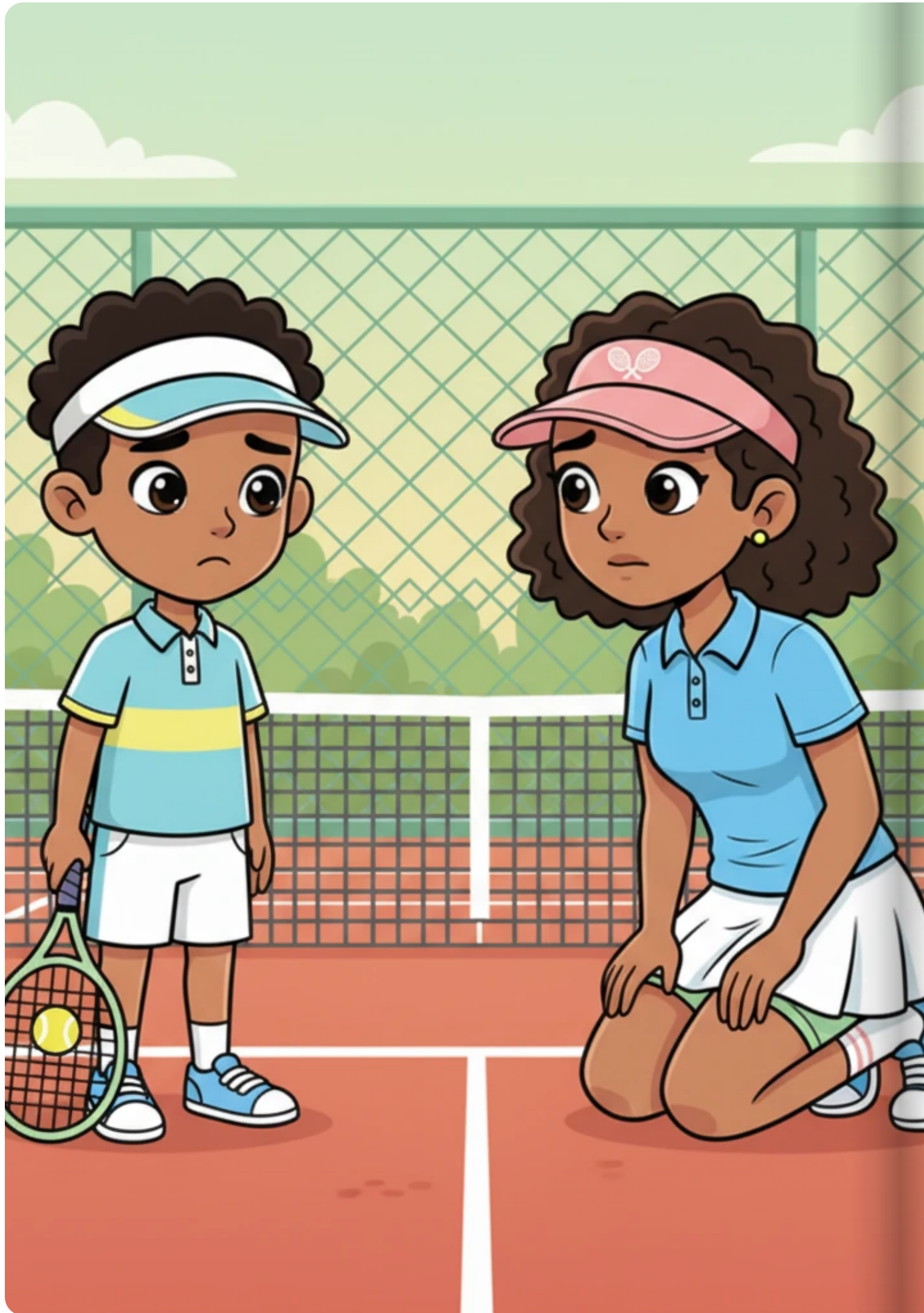
On the bright green tennis court, Carlton was a true star, his racket a blur as he sent balls flying. Yet, off the court, his striking green eyes often looked down, and his shoulders hunched with a quiet sadness. Despite his talent, he was very shy and timid.



Whispers and unkind words sometimes followed Carlton through the school halls, making him feel small and alone. He wished he could be as strong and confident off the court as he was on it. The hurtful comments made him feel like hiding away.



One afternoon, Carlton watched his assistant coach, Mary Beth Aveni, demonstrate a powerful serve. She was tall and strong, like an Amazon warrior, with her blonde hair pulled back in a neat ponytail. Her athletic leggings and top showed off her impressive strength.



Gathering every bit of courage, Carlton approached Coach Mary Beth after practice. His voice was barely a whisper as he explained the unkind things he faced, his eyes fixed on the ground. He felt a lump in his throat, but he knew he needed help.



Mary Beth listened with a kind, serious expression, then placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Her smile was warm and friendly, promising support. "We'll work on building your strength, inside and out, Carlton," she said with determination.



In a bright, spacious gym, their special training began. Mary Beth taught Carlton confident stances, how to project his voice, and simple moves to feel strong and secure. Carlton practiced with focus, eager to learn and grow.



Day by day, Carlton's movements became more fluid, and his posture straightened. He started walking with a new lightness, and a small, hopeful smile often appeared on his face. He was learning not just skills, but a powerful inner resilience.



One afternoon, the familiar unkind words started again from a group of students. But this time, Carlton didn't shrink. He stood tall, met their gazes with his bright green eyes, and spoke clearly and firmly, telling them their words were not welcome.



Surprised by Carlton's newfound confidence and calm strength, the students hesitated. They saw a different Carlton, one who was no longer afraid, and they awkwardly backed away, realizing their hurtful words had lost all their power.



With a triumphant smile, Carlton now owned the tennis court, his green eyes sparkling with joy and unwavering confidence. He knew he had the strength to face any challenge, both on and off the court, thanks to his amazing coach and his own brave heart.