Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Singles Game

Written by Lauren Weisberger

Published by Harper

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

The Singles Game

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA

It's a match made in hell



LAUREN WEISBERGER

The Singles Game

LAUREN WEISBERGER

HARPER

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.
The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are
the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is
entirely coincidental.

Harper
An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
The News Building,
1 London Bridge Street,
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

A Paperback Original 2016
1

Copyright © Lauren Weisberger 2016

Lauren Weisberger asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-00-756924-3

Set in Meridien by Palimpsest Book Production Ltd,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publishers.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or
otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it
is published and without a similar condition including this
condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.



MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C007454

FSC™ is a non-profit international organisation established to promote
the responsible management of the world's forests. Products carrying the
FSC label are independently certified to assure consumers that they come
from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and
ecological needs of present and future generations,
and other controlled sources.

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at
www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

For Sydney, Emma, Sadie, and Jack
I love you all so much.

1

not all strawberries and cream

WIMBLEDON, JUNE 2015

It wasn't every day a middle-aged woman wearing a neat bun and a purple polyester suit directed you to lift your skirt. The woman's voice was clipped, British proper. All business.

After glancing at her coach, Marcy, Charlie lifted the edges of her pleated white skirt and waited.

'Higher, please.'

'I promise you, everything's in order down there, ma'am,' Charlie said, as politely as she could.

The official's eyes narrowed to a steely squint, but she didn't say a word.

'All the way, Charlie,' Marcy said sternly, but it was obvious she was trying not to smile.

Charlie pulled the skirt up to reveal the waistband of the white Lycra shorts she wore beneath. 'No underwear, but they're double-lined. No matter how much I sweat, no one will get a show.'

'Very well, thank you.' The official made a notation on her legal pad. 'Now your shirt, please.'

At least a dozen more jokes sprung to mind – it's like going to the gynecologist, only in workout wear; it's not just anyone she'll show her underwear to on the first date; et cetera – but Charlie held back. These Wimbledon people had been welcoming and polite to her and her entire entourage, but no one could accuse them of having a sense of humor.

She yanked her shirt up so far it covered most of her face. 'My sports bra is made of the same material. Totally opaque, no matter what.'

'Yes, I can see that,' the woman murmured. 'It's just this band of color here around the bottom.'

'The elastic? It's light gray. I'm not sure that counts as a color,' Marcy said. Her voice was even, but Charlie could hear the smallest hint of irritation.

'Yes, but I must measure it.' The official removed a plain yellow tape measure from a small fanny pack she wore over her uniform suit and gingerly wrapped it around Charlie's rib cage.

'Are we through yet?' Marcy asked the official, her irritation now readily apparent.

'Very close. Miss, your hat, wristbands, and socks are all acceptable. There is only one problem,' the official said, her lips pressed together. 'The shoes.'

'What shoes?' Charlie asked. Nike had gone above and beyond ensuring that her regular sneakers were modified to fit Wimbledon's stringent standards. Her usual cheerfully bright outfits had been changed entirely to white: not cream, not ivory, not off-white, but white. The leather around the toe cage was pure white. Her laces were white, white, white.

'Your shoes. The sole is almost entirely pink. That is a violation.'

'A violation?' Marcy asked in disbelief. 'The sides, back, top, and laces are entirely white, strictly to code. The Nike logo is even smaller than it's required to be. You can't possibly have an issue with the soles!'

'I'm afraid swaths of color that large are not permitted, even on the soles. The rule is a band of one centimeter.'

Charlie turned in panic to Marcy, who held up her hand. 'What do you suggest we do, ma'am? This young lady is due on Centre Court in less than ten minutes. Are you telling me she can't wear her sneakers?'

'Of course she must wear trainers, but according to the rules, she may not wear those.'

'Thank you for that clarification,' Marcy snapped. 'We'll handle it from here.' Marcy grabbed Charlie's wrist and hurried her toward one of the private training rooms in the back of the locker room.

Seeing Marcy rattled gave Charlie the sensation of experiencing turbulence on a plane. When you glanced toward the flight attendants for reassurance, it was almost nauseating to see them panicked. Marcy had been Charlie's coach since Charlie was fifteen, when she'd finally excelled beyond her dad's skill set. Marcy was chosen for her coaching

acumen, of course, but also for the fact that she was a woman: Charlie's mom had died from breast cancer only a few years earlier.

'Wait here. Do some stretching, eat your banana, and do not think about this. Focus on how you're going to dismantle Atherton's game point by point. I'll be back in a minute.'

Too nervous to sit, Charlie paced the training room and tried to stretch out her calves. Could they be tightening up already? No, that was impossible. Karina Geiger, the fourth seed with the body of a refrigerator that earned her the unfortunate but mostly affectionate nickname the Giant German, popped her head into the training room.

'You're on Centre, right?' she asked.

Charlie nodded.

'It is a madhouse out there,' the girl boomed in a strong German accent. 'Prince William and Prince Harry are in the Royal Box. With Camilla, which is unusual, because I think they do not like each other, and Prince Charles and Princess Kate are not there.'

'Really?' Charlie asked, although she already knew this. As if playing Centre Court at Wimbledon for the very first time in one's career wasn't stressful enough, she had to be playing the lone seeded British singles player. Alice Atherton was only ranked number fifty-three but she was young and being hailed as the next Great British Hope, so the entire country would be cheering for her to crush Charlie.

'Yes. Also David Beckham, but he is at everything. It is not so special to see him. Also one of the Beatles, which one is still alive? I can't remember. Oh, and I heard Natalya say that she saw—'

'Karina? Sorry, I'm just in the middle of some stretches. Good luck today, okay?' Charlie hated to be rude, especially to one of the few nice women on the tour, but she couldn't stand the talking for even one more second.

'*Ja*, sure. Good luck to you, too.'

Karina passed Marcy on the way out, who had reappeared at the door with a tote bag full of all-white sneakers. 'Quickly,' she said, pulling out the first pair. 'These are a ten narrow, by some miracle. Try them.'

Charlie dropped to the floor, her black braid smacking the side of her cheek hard enough to hurt, and pulled on the left shoe. 'They're Adidas, Marce,' she said.

'I am really not interested in how Nike feels about you wearing Adidas. Next time they can get the sneakers right and none of us will have to worry about it. But now you'll wear what feels the best.'

Charlie stood up and took a tentative step.

'Put on the other one,' Marcy said.

'No, they're too big. My heel's slipping.'

'Next!' Marcy barked, tossing over another Adidas shoe.

Charlie tried the right one on this time and shook her head. 'I'm a little jammed up in the toe cage. And it's pinching my pinky toe already. I guess we could tape the toe and try it . . .'

'No way. Here,' Marcy said, untying a pair of K-Swiss sneakers and placing them at Charlie's feet. 'These might work.'

The left one went on easily and felt like it fit. Hopeful, Charlie slipped on and tightened the laces on the right shoe. They were clunky-looking and ugly, but they fit her feet.

'They fit,' Charlie said, although they felt like she was

wearing cinder blocks. She did a few jumps followed by a short jog and a quick cut to the left. 'But it's like wearing a pair of bricks. They're so heavy.'

Just as Marcy was reaching into the bag to pull out the last pair, an announcement came over the ceiling speakers. 'Attention, players. Alice Atherton and Charlotte Silver, please report to the tournament desk to be escorted to your court. Your match is scheduled to begin in three minutes.'

Marcy knelt down and pushed against her toes. 'You definitely have room in there. Not too much, right? Will they work?'

Charlie did another hop or two. There was no denying they were heavy, but they were the best of the three. She probably should try on the final pair, but she glanced up just in time to see Alice in her own all-white outfit walk past the training room and toward the tournament desk. It was time.

'They'll work,' Charlie said with more conviction than she felt. *They have to work,* she couldn't help thinking.

'Good girl.' The relief on Marcy's face was immediate. 'Let's go.'

Marcy slung Charlie's enormous racket bag over her shoulder and headed out the door. 'Remember, as much spin as you can. She struggles when the balls jump high. Take advantage of your height over hers and force her to hit high ones, especially on her backhand. Slow, steady, and persistent will win this one. You don't need excessive force or flash. Save that for the later rounds, okay?'

Charlie nodded. They were only just approaching the tournament desk and already her calves were feeling tight.

Was the right heel rubbing a little? Yes, it definitely was. She was going to get blisters for sure.

'I think I should try on those last—'

'Charlotte?' Another Wimbledon official, also clad in the same purple polyester skirt suit, took Charlie's elbow and led her the final ten steps to the tournament desk. 'Please, just a signature right here and . . . thank you. Mr Poole, both ladies are ready to be escorted to Centre Court.'

Charlie's and her opponent's eyes met for the briefest of seconds and they each nodded. Half nodded. The only other time they'd played before had been in Indian Wells two years earlier in the first round, and Charlie had beaten her 6–2, 6–2.

The entire group – Charlie, Marcy, Alice, and Alice's coach – followed Mr Poole through the tunnel that led to the most storied tennis court in the world. On both sides were enormous glossy black-and-white photos of tennis legends who had emerged victorious from Centre Court: Serena Williams, Pete Sampras, Roger Federer, Maria Sharapova, Andy Murray. Clutching the traditional trophy, kissing it; thrusting their rackets high into the air; pumping their fists. Exultant. Winners, all of them. Alice was glancing from side to side, too, as they walked toward the door that would take them onto Centre and thrust them onstage.

A hard squeeze on her upper arm from Marcy brought her back to the moment. She accepted her racket bag and slung it over her shoulder as though it weighed nothing, even though jammed inside were six rackets, a roll of grip tape, two bottles of Evian, one bottle of Gatorade, two outfit changes identical to the one she was wearing, extra

socks, wristbands, shoulder and knee tape, Band-Aids, an iPod, over-the-ear headphones, two visors, eyedrops, a banana, a packet of Emergen-C, and the lone laminated photo of her mother that lived in the small zipped side pocket and attended every practice and tournament with Charlie.

Marcy and Alice's coach left to take their seats in the players' box. Although the two women walked onto the court at the same time, the audience cheered extra loudly for Alice, the hometown favorite. But it didn't much matter who they were cheering for: Charlie's pulse began to race in the exact same way it did before every match, big or small. Only this time she felt a tingling wave of sensation through her chest, a fluttering of anxiety and excitement so strong she thought she might be sick. *Centre Court at Wimbledon*. She allowed herself a quick look up to the stands, a moment to take it all in. All around her were crowds of well-dressed people standing and politely clapping. Pimm's. Strawberries and cream. Pastel suits. She'd played Wimbledon before, five glorious times, but this was Centre Court.

The words reverberated in her mind over and over again as she tried to will herself to concentrate. Normally, the routine Charlie performed when she reached her courtside chair was focusing: racket bag placed just so, water bottles neatly arranged, wristband put on, visor adjusted. She did all those things in the exact same order as always, but today she couldn't pull herself together. Today, everything registered when it should have disappeared into the background: the on-court anchorwoman repeating her opponent's name into the camera; the match

announcer introducing the chair umpire; and most of all, the way her socks slipped into her sneakers, something that never happened when she was wearing her own shoes. She had enough experience to know that none of this was a particularly good omen – not being able to control your thoughts before play began usually didn't end well – but she simply could not block out all the stimuli.

Warm-up was a blur. Mindlessly, Charlie whacked the ball to Alice's forehand and backhand and then fed her volleys and overheads. They each retreated to opposite sides to try a few serves. Alice was looking loose and comfortable, her lean legs moving fluidly around the court, her narrow, boyish torso twisting effortlessly to reach the ball. Charlie felt tight just watching her. Although the new shoes technically fit, they were making her arches ache and her right heel was already beginning to chafe. Again and again she willed herself back to the present, to the natural rush she felt every time she stroked the ball just so and it spun and bounced exactly where she'd intended. And then, suddenly, they were playing. She had lost the coin toss and her opponent bounced the ball on the opposite baseline. They'd done a coin toss, right? Yes, she thought so. Why couldn't Charlie recall any of the details? *Whoosh!* The ball whizzed past her left shoulder like a bullet. She hadn't even managed to make contact with it. Ace. First point of the match to Alice. The crowd cheered as madly as British etiquette permitted.

It took four minutes and thirty seconds for Alice to win the first game. Charlie had only one point to show for it,

and that was because Alice double-faulted. *Focus!* she screamed to herself. *This whole match will be over before you know it if you don't get your damn act together! You want to flame out on Centre Court at Wimbledon without even trying? Only a loser would do that! Loser! Loser! Loser!*

The mental screaming and cursing worked. Charlie went on to hold her own serve and break Alice's. She was up 2–1 and could feel herself starting to settle. The queasy adrenaline that had troubled her before the match was morphing into that blissful state of flow where Charlie could no longer feel the irritation of her socks slipping or see the familiar faces in the Royal Box or hear the golf claps and quiet cheers of the infinitely well-mannered British audience. Nothing existed but her racket and the ball, and nothing mattered but how those two made contact, point after point, game after game, crisply, powerfully, and with intention.

Charlie won the first set, 6–3. She was tempted to congratulate herself, but she knew enough to recognize that the match was far from over. In the ninety seconds during the changeover, she calmly drank some water in small, measured sips. Even that took mental discipline – her whole body was screaming for huge, cold gulps – but she controlled herself. When she had rehydrated and taken three bites of a banana, she rooted through her racket bag and pulled out her backup pair of socks. They were identical to the ones she was wearing, and while there was no reason to believe they would perform any differently, Charlie decided to try. When she removed her old socks, her feet were a horror show: meaty, swollen, red. Both pinky toes were bloodied and the skin on her heels hung

in loose, blistered rolls. The outsides of her ankles were covered in purple bruises from hitting the stiff tops and tongue of the leather. The whole of her feet ached as though they'd been run over by a bus.

The new socks felt like sandpaper, and it took every ounce of willpower to push her mutilated feet back into the shoes. Pain shot from her toes and heels, her ankles and arches, from the ball-of-the-foot bone that hadn't even hurt until that very moment. Charlie had to will herself to cinch the laces tight and knot them, and the moment she did so, the chair umpire called time. Instead of running high-kneed back to the baseline to keep loose and responsive, she found herself walking with a slight limp. *I should've taken some Advil when I had the chance*, she thought as she accepted two balls from a teenage ball boy. *Hell, I should have had the right shoes in the first place*.

And *bam!* That was all it took to open the floodgates of anger and, worse, distraction. Why on earth couldn't anyone have predicted that her shoes would be deemed inadmissible? Where were her sponsors at Nike? It's not like they'd never outfitted Wimbledon players before. Charlie tossed first one and then a second ball into the air to serve. Double fault. Whose responsibility was it anyway? She switched sides, offered a weaker-than-usual serve, and stood dumbly still as Alice blazed a forehand winner right past her. *Tennis players are superstitious. We wear the same underwear at every match. We eat the same foods, day in and day out. We carry good-luck charms and talismans and offer prayers and chant mantras and every other crazy thing to help convince whoever's listening that if only, please, just this once, we could win this lone point/game/set/match/tournament, it would*

really be so great and soooo appreciated. Charlie's first serve was powerful and well placed, but again she was flat-footed and unprepared for Alice's return. She got to the ball but wasn't able to steady her stance enough to clear the net. Love–40. Was she seriously expected to wear someone else's shoes during her first match on Centre Court, the biggest, most intimidating stage on which she'd ever played? Really – shoes? She and her team spent hours selecting and fitting new sneakers when it was time for a change, but hey, here, just wear this random pair. They'll be fine. What do you think this is, Wimbledon or something? *Whack!* The anger coursed through her body and went straight to the ball, which she hit at least two feet past the baseline, and just like that, she had lost the first game of the second set.

Charlie glanced toward her box and saw Marcy, her father, and her brother, Jake. When Mr Silver caught her looking, he broke into a reflexive smile, but Charlie could see his concern from where she was standing on the baseline. The next several games were over in a flash, with Charlie only managing to hold on to one. Suddenly Alice was up 5–2 and something inside Charlie's head snapped to focus: *Oh my god. This is it.* She was about to lose her second set on Centre Court to a player ranked thirty spots lower. To play a third set right now would be hell. It was simply not an option. The infinitely polite British crowd was downright raucous by their standards, with light clapping and even the occasional cheer. Forget the blisters, forget the brick-like shoes, forget the raging anger at all the people on her team who should have prevented this from happening. None of that mattered

now. *Hit hard, hit smart, hit consistently,* she thought, squeezing her racket tightly and releasing, something Charlie often did to relax herself. *Squeeze, release. Squeeze, release. Forget the bullshit and win the next point.*

Charlie won the next game and then the game after that. Once again she settled down, forced her mind to think of nothing but stroking the ball and winning the point. When she tied up the second set at 5–5, she knew she would win the match. She breathed deeply, evenly, summoning huge reserves of mental strength to tune out the pain that was now radiating from her feet up her legs. Cramping. She could deal with that, had a thousand times before. *Focus. Hit. Recover. Hit. Recover.* In an instant it was 6–5 in the second set and Charlie had to secure only one more game to win it. It was so close now she could feel it.

Alice's first serve was high on spin but low on speed and Charlie jumped all over it. *Winner!* Her next one was much harder and flatter, and Charlie smashed that one straight down the line. They rallied back and forth a few shots on the next point before Alice dropped one just over the net. Charlie read it early and set her body in motion, running as fast as her legs would take her toward the net, her racket outstretched already and her entire upper half bent forward. She could get there, she knew she could. She was almost there, literally within inches of connecting the very top part of her racket head to the ball, only needing to give it a little tap to get it back over the net, when her right foot – feeling like it had a five-pound bag of flour attached to it – slid out from under her like a ski. Had she been wearing her own light, properly fitted sneakers, she

may have been able to control the slide, but the heavy, blocky shoe flew across the grass court as though it were a sheet of ice, and it pulled Charlie with it. She flailed gracelessly, tossing her racket so she could use both hands to break her fall, and then . . . *pop*. She heard it before she felt it. Didn't everyone? It was so damn loud the entire stadium must have heard that awful popping sound, but on the off chance they missed it, Charlie's scream caught their attention.

She hit the ground hard, like a kid falling from a top bunk. Every millimeter of her body hurt so much it was nearly impossible to ascertain where the awful popping sound had originated. Across the net Alice stood watching Charlie, a sympathetic expression carefully arranged on her face. Pushing her palms into the impeccably manicured grass, Charlie tried to hoist herself to sit but her wrist folded in like paper. The chair umpire held her hand over the microphone and leaned forward to ask Charlie if she needed a medical time-out.

'No, I'm fine,' Charlie said, her voice barely a whisper. 'Just need a minute to get myself together.' She knew she had to pull herself up and get back into position. She could take a medical time-out, but it was practically cheating: unless a player was actually bleeding all over the court, it was generally thought that they should suck it up. *Suck it up,* she thought, giving herself another little hoist. This time she felt the pain that shot up her left palm, straight through her wrist, and into her shoulder. Two more points to even it out. *Suck it up. Stand up and win your match!*

The spectators began to clap for her, tentatively at first and then more enthusiastically. She wasn't the favorite,

but those Brits knew their sportsmanship. Charlie raised her right hand in a gesture of thanks and reached forward across the grass to get her racket. The exertion made her head spin, and more pain – this time from her foot or ankle or shin, it was impossible to tell – shot up her leg. *Those f'ing shoes!* she yelled to herself, the panic beginning to set in. Was she seriously injured? Would she have to withdraw? *Dear god, what was that awful sound and how hard is it going to be to rehab? The US Open is only eight weeks away . . .*

The umpire's voice interrupted her thoughts, and the sound of her own name snapped her back to reality. 'I am granting a three-minute medical time-out for Ms Silver. Please set the timer for . . . now.'

'I didn't request a medical time-out!' Charlie said peevishly, although her voice clearly wasn't carrying. 'I'm fine.'

In an effort to ward off the head trainer, who was fast approaching her, Charlie swung her legs beneath her body and summoned every last ounce of energy to push herself to stand. She made it upright and was able to glance around her, to take in Alice's barely detectable smile and the umpire's careful observation of the televised match clock, ready to pounce the moment the time-out was over. In the front row of the Royal Box, Charlie could see David Beckham checking his cell phone, her injury of no interest whatsoever to him, and then to the right, in Charlie's own box, the panic-stricken look of concern on Marcy's face; she was leaning so far into the court from her seat that it looked like she might fall. Her father and Jake wore matching grave expressions. All around her people chatted

with good cheer, took sips from their Pimm's, and waited for the match to resume. The trainer was standing next to Charlie now and had just reached his cool, strong hand to her throbbing wrist, when, without any warning at all, the whole world went black.