

PASSING THE BUCK

By Carole L. Cooney

In a 19th Century American poker game, “buck” was a piece of buckshot or a pocketknife with a buckhorn handle. It was passed to you if you were the next dealer. By 1900, “passing the buck” meant shifting responsibility for something to another person.

Setting: Newport Beach

Characters:

Narrator

Wendy

Matty

Skip

Jack

Narrator: Wendy, Matty, Jack and Skip were finishing their volley ball game. Wendy has the ball and is about to serve.

Matty: Come on, Wendy, you can do it. Just wallop it over the net!

Wendy: Okay. Here it goes.

Narrator: Wendy hits the ball but it bounces on the net and falls back onto her side.

Skip: (laughing) Way to go, Wendy. Didn't you eat your Wheaties this morning?

Jack: Hey, gimme the ball. It's our turn to knock you out of the park...

Narrator: Matty picks up the ball and angrily shoves it under the net.

Jack: Now watch, Wendy and Matty – *I'll* show you how to hit the ball.

Skip: Take it nice and easy, Jack.

Narrator: Jack hits the ball hard. It flies high into the air and lands outside the line. Wendy and Matty jump up and down laughing.

Matty: You sure know how to hit the ball but you have no control! It's outside the line.

Jack: Well, *Skip interrupted me.*

Wendy: I think he's passing the buck.

Matty: Do you want to call it a tie game or shall we finish?

Skip: Let's finish. It's your serve, Matty.

Matty: Okay. Wendy, get in position for a return. Here goes.

Narrator: Matty hits the ball into the air and Jack jumps up to hit it to Skip. Skip spikes it over the net. Wendy dives under the ball and hits it up to Matty who wacks it over the net. Jack punches the ball into the air and Skip bashes it over Wendy's head. She jumps up and misses.

Skip: Good try, Wendy.

Wendy: Matty, I thought you were supposed to be right beside me? *Where were you?*

Matty: I *was* beside you and then I moved toward the ball but I was too late *and you were in my way*.

Jack: Now who's passing the buck?

Skip: Okay. Okay. It's no ones fault. You just missed. Let's finish. My serve.

Narrator: Skip belts the ball into the air. Matty hits it to Wendy who spikes it over the net. Jack carefully thumps it to Skip, who whacks it toward Wendy. She bumps the ball over to Matty who smacks it down toward the sand. Jack lunges for it and misses.

Girls: It's a tie! (giving each other a high-five) Way to go!

Jack: (exhausted) I'm beat. Let's stop. Okay?

Skip: Are you sure? It's okay by me.

Wendy: Are you giving up? I can't believe it!

Matty: Let's call it a tie... but *never again!* Hey, how about getting something to eat?

All: Yes!

Narrator: Laughing, they shake hands and run down the street.