

Playground payback



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In the far hills of North Carolina, there was a school called Blue Creek Elementary. It was half a century old, and you could definitely tell. The yellow stained walls of the classrooms had marks from play dough and crayon. The chalk board was cloudy with dust from a thousand words before. The smell of each room was basically the same, chalk clappers and weak tea, and the colour of autumn leaves was present throughout the year. It was January 2002. The climbing frame in the playground was rust incrustated, and the paint was crumbling off, but still was in use as if it was new everyday. No one child was dissatisfied with their school life, they could see nothing wrong with the way they were ruled, the rota they followed or the order they had come to be in for so many years.

They were treated equally as each other, by the council they had elected. Every new school year in September there would be an election. Any volunteers would under go a number of campaigns to become the new king of the playground. For the last three years no one had been a match for King Rob. In the last year no one was even prepared to challenge Rob Jenkins, but it wasn't because they were scared, no, quite the opposite. There was nothing wrong with the way he ruled them. He took care of them; he was their agony aunt to their problems, a King Solomon in his own day. He brought them new games, fought for new rights and changed the word recess itself. But all this was about to change, something, or someone was just around the corner.

PJ, Felicity, Pikes, Jennie and Russ were playing kickball, a game Jennie ruled without a doubt. It was known to everyone that they were an untouched gang. They had been for years, what seemed like friends forever. PJ was like

the leader, although he claimed he didn't know it. His round pot belly and backwards baseball cap were historic trademarks in the playground's history, almost hereditary, as his father was also seen wearing them in his time at Blue Creek. Felicity was thought of as "the brains", and she liked it like this. She was studying at a 10th grade level, four years ahead of the rest of her class, but resisted being moved up away from her friends.

She had long brown and unruly hair, which she only ever wore up when in P. E, the only school subject she detested. Unlike Felicity, P. E was the only subject Jennie didn't hate. She was an unlimited fan of wrestling, and never once considered herself a girl, apart from when in the presence of her parents. It was the first week back from Christmas break, and there was already a new kid. His name was Prince Dartmoor. He had black, short and curly hair. His face was coloured, and he wore a red white and blue Globetrotters uniform. He had white sneakers, and was bouncing an orange basketball signed by Michael Jordan. It didn't take long for a disorderly crowd to form around him. They were watching something. The gang stared in amazement. Prince was standing in the middle of the playground, at least twenty five yards away from the basketball hoop.

"Ya don't think he's gonna try for do ya?" questioned Russ. He looked at PJ with a sense of honour. He felt that PJ was all knowing all seeing; he would have the answers to anything and everything.

"Nah! Look at him! His stance is all wrong and his arms are flying everywhere, there's no way he'd even come close to-", PJ halted. Just at that moment, Prince threw the ball with all his might. It climbed the air like a

mountaineer, and flew down gracefully, landing through the hoop. For what seemed like a lifetime, no one made a sound, and then out of the blue, the crowd burst into a thunderous applause. The gang was in awe. Even PJ was stunned. Prince looked at PJ with familiarity. PJ didn't know how, but Prince knew who he was, and it definitely seemed that he was planning something. Meanwhile the crowd was dying down, though kept up their pleasure with Prince. He was stepping up onto an overturned box, and someone handed him a loudspeaker.

" Ch-", he began, but was automatically put off with the alien effect sound that was coming out of the loudspeaker. He switched a button, and restarted, " Children of Blue Creek playground," his voice was loud and unyielding. No one made a sound. Everyone's eyes were on him. " I have done a lot of research before transferring here. I had to find a school where my services are needed, and I have found no other group kept so much in the dark as this one; I am here to put a stop to the treacherous behaviour your ruler has been withstanding. He has made you his servants, while calling you equal. He has held you back from rights you so truly deserve and said you have everything. Listen up, I have someone here to tell you something" Prince finished with a look of confidence. A small, shaking figure was brought through the crowd. His face was irregularly pale, and his black hair was on end.

" My name is Kyle. I go to Belle Fork Elementary, King Rob's cousin used to go there. He ruled the playground there too, up until 6th grade in his fourth year as king, he turned on everyone. No one had seen it coming, but we

found out he'd been doing it slowly, making us think it was for our own good." He halted.

" What he do?" shouted someone from the crowd.

" He changed the rules; slowly as I said, but changed em. First we couldn't have cookies anymore, he'd confiscate em, then we couldn't have snacks altogether, and then... he took away the kick balls. Even if they was our own from home! He'd taken all our games, until there was nothing left. Recess was just kids sittin' around the place. No one was even allowed to speak! And if someone broke a rule, they'd get taken away, no one ever saw Timmy Reynolds again!" Kyle looked in despair at the crowd. They just stared at him, too scared to speak.

" I think everyone here will agree with me that something has to be done before King Rob follows in his cousin's footsteps. My research has told me that his father and uncle did the same thing when they were in their fourth year, and their father before them! I propose we revolt, stopping this cycle dead in its tracks! Now who's with me?" he shouted more confident than ever. And then what followed was a colossal roar of approval, and that was that. The reign of King Rob had definitely come to an end. The crowd followed Prince, half stirred up in the confusion, half hungry for revenge. They came to the Jungle Jim Palace. Prince shouted up to King Rob, " Rob, your people are in total agreement. You are being exiled! I am a civil kid, so I'll give you 'til next recess to get outta our playground!" the crowd screamed with excitement. PJ, Felicity, Jennie, Pikes and Russ looked at each

other for reassurance. They knew, even if they were the only ones who did, that this was not a good idea.

The gang walked away from the mob and came to their territorial kick ball field. PJ turned to the others, " We gotta something."

" But what can we do, you saw em out there! There's no way we're ever gonna change their minds!" laughed Jennie. She was stubborn, more so than PJ, so he couldn't argue with her usually.

" It's like our pretty rainbow of life is being painted with black ink, and we're choking helplessly" Pikes recited. His love for poetry never stood down, even in the face of destruction.

" What are we gonna do when it all goes wrong?" Russ panted. He took a deep breath from his asthma inhaler and looked at it panicking. " I could lose my inhaler! I could end up in hospital! The sky could fall down and we'd all be crushed and go under ground forever and ever and ever and ever an-", Russ was hit over the head by a scowling PJ. " Sorry!" Russ twitched.

" I may have a suggestion to our current predicament." Felicity joisted her words together and flew them out perfectly as ever. " Now as Jennie said, there is no possible way to overthrow the minds of the children. They are under an exciting grasp, and though deep down they may know it is wrong, they can't consciously tear away from it. But there are definitely some exceptions to this hypnotic phenomenon, us being one, and of course another being, as much as I hate to say it... the Jaimes." She gave a pause to invite any protesters.

" Oh no! Don't even think I'll ask for their help again! Never! Not in a million years!" Jennie was convinced that the Jaimes were total hypocrites. All they did was wear make up and talk about boys. They were totally against everything she believed in, especially her tom boy criteria.

" I'm sorry Jennie, but it's the only way. They have an almost never ending access to a boys mind, and if we've got to get rid of this Prince, we need all the help we can get." Felicity stood with authority. Jennie finally, yet dejectedly agreed, as did the rest of the group. The Jaimes Clubhouse was in a large underground shelter they had paid the digger twins to build two years before. Though the outside was plain and misleading, the inside was an interior designer's heaven. There was a lilac carpet, and a purple fur rug. The walls were bright pink, and drapes were icing blue. There was a dark blue sofa, and a mahogany coffee table. The Jaimes were sitting on the sofa when the gang walked in.

" What are you doing here?" said Jaime 1. She had long blonde hair and green surly eyes. She wore a pale blue suit and black soft heels. Although the Jaimes considered themselves equal, they had to distinct each other somehow, and so they were numbered in age order. PJ looked at them with slight pity and disgust.

" We, and don't laugh when I say this... need your help" the Jaimes ignored his request and laughed in his face.

" Why would you need our help?" questioned Jaime 3. Number 3 had dark curly hair and was coloured with brown eyes, but had a nicer smile than number 1. She was wearing a yellow suit, only differing number 1's in colour.

PJ noticed that they always wore the same thing but in different colours years ago, so he wasn't taken back. Felicity took the role of explaining their problem to the girls, while the rest of the group hoped for a good response. The Jaimes sat and listened carefully, even number 1 didn't speak until Felicity had finished. The Jaimes had been inside while Prince's debut had taken place, so everything was news to them. At the end, their faces looked shocked. Number 1 spoke first.

" So what do you want us to about it? I mean, we are obviously concerned, but how are we supposed to help?" it seemed that they were genuinely trying to help, for the first time ever in PJ's knowledge.

" That's the genius of it! Everyone knows that you guys are at least two years ahead of your age; you act like you're already in high school. Well it seems to me that this Prince guy is at the same level as you, so it wouldn't be a misconception if we thought it was possible... for you to, how can I put it, distract him!" Felicity explained with appropriate verbal skill.

" You want us to flirt!" Number 4 caught on. She was wearing the green variety of the suit.

" That's one way of putting it, yes!" Felicity looked at her, expecting disapproval.

" Now you're talking! A way we can put all our uses together! Flirting and lying!" Number two was obviously happy with the proposal.

" Great1 and while you create a few weeks distraction, we can look into Prince, not literally of course! We'll investigate his past, and come up with
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some proof to convict him of..." Felicity thought, " Something we don't know yet!"

The weeks went on, and as far as the gang could tell, Prince was enjoying the act of the Jaimes. Prince had come to be the leader of the playground. He resented anyone proclaiming him to be a king. He said they were all equal, even him. He had produced a short list of laws, which he thought were important if they were to sustain equality, they were: never to downsize another playground associate, always to put others first and never to be selfish. The children of the playground had started up a little chant, and when he heard this, he decided to make it into a regular native song. Whenever there was a meeting, which there frequently was, it would begin with verses of this song, which Prince called Blue Creekers of America. It was sung to the tune of If Your Happy and Your Know it, and went like this...

From the Ball field to the swing set we are free,

All the way across the playground we are free,

When they try to tell us different,

We just turn around from infants,

If you're a blue creeker than shout out we are free.

Don't ever think you'll ever be alone,

Think of the playground as your very happy home,

If you ever need a hand,

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Then Prince will understand,

If you're a blue creeker than shout out we are free.

If you're a blue creeker than shout out we are free!

The gang wasn't having much luck looking for evidence (except they knew that kids toys and candy were going missing, even someone's portable television), so PJ, Russ and Pikes decided to take it into their own hands one Saturday night. They snuck out and met at City Hall. Pikes' dad worked there, so it was easy to get the keys. They were all wearing black, navy blue or any other dark colours, though none of the burglar clothing, it would be extremely suspicious if they were seen. They crept into the hall, and saw a door labelled " Staff only". This was it. Pikes pulled out a set of keys, and tried three before finding the right one. They opened the door, looking out for any night watchers. They slowly and cautiously walked in the room. There were rows of filing cabinets with letter in alphabetical order above each one. They found row D.

" Dakota, Daniels, Darter, Dartmoor! Got him! Prince Dartmoor. He used to go to Belle Fork. But there's no record of him before 1999" whispered PJ. He couldn't help but feel familiar with this school.

" Belle Fork? That's where King Rob's- Rob's cousin went" noted Russ. He was confused, as were the others. If they went to the same school, why would he need Kyle to tell the story, unless, he was just a pawn in Prince's game play, and that would mean the story wasn't true. They decided to investigate further. They found J for Jenkins, and soon found Rob's dad's and

Mum's files. They looked under siblings, and this is where it got interesting. They didn't have any. Rob didn't have a cousin, and the gang had found the evidence they needed. Suddenly, the boys heard a noise from outside the room. It was a guard. They looked hard for a way out, and came to a window. They looked at Pikes. His round chubby body wouldn't fit through that window if a shark was chasing him.

" Go! Take the files! It's the only way!" Pikes forced them.

" But what about you?" Cowered Russ, already hoisting himself up to the window.

" I'll face the consequences alone! Everything comes at a price and this is ours. I'll be grounded for sure, but that's something I'll allow for the sake of the playground, now go!" Pikes courageously whispered. PJ nodded, and within thirty seconds of hearing the guard, PJ and Russ were outside. As they ran with the files tucked in the backpacks, they heard someone shouting, and knew Pikes had been found.

On Monday at school was buzzing. The girls had been told to meet PJ, Pikes and Russ in the Jaimes clubhouse, with the Jaimes present naturally. The boys came in a few minutes late, but with plenty of time to spare before the first lesson began. They showed them the files, and explained thoroughly what had happened on the Saturday night. The girls were immediately excited, and were mentally prepared for the removal of Prince.

" Pikes, what did your parents say?" asked Jennie.

" Oh I'm just grounded until I'm fifty. My dad says I could have got him fired, but I think he's just trying to scare me." Pikes didn't sound his usual self. He seemed down, but was still anxious to get this thing going. The gang and the Jaimes racked their brains to form a plan but finally agreed that one was solid just as the bell went. The playground emptied, and the gang left separately from the Jaimes so as not to cause suspicion. The rest of the morning was spent making preparations. Jaimes 1 and 2 'distracted' Prince and the rest snuck around, and secretly spoke to kids they thought were suitable for certain... jobs.

Pikes and Russ had a very important thing to do. It was morning recess. They went to a wooden gate and heard screams of terror and playful games. They walked through the gate, and entered Kindergarten Territory. They trekked passed the mass of wresting toddlers and painted tribal faces until they got to the Kindergarten King. His name was Lyle, but was called Tootodyna in a mark of respect. Tootoo was short and fat, with red long hair. He, as the others, had clannish markings on his face, a beaded necklace and wore a grass skirt.

" Morning your highness." Greeted Pikes. He was well-known to Tootoo, and had been named his big kid friend.

" Tootoo happy to see you big kid friend. Do you want favour?" Tootoo's language was primal, but understandable.

" Yes. The big kids need your help." Pikes began to explain the plan to the Kindergarten King, and Russ helped fill in things to. After a while, King Tootoo agreed to the plan with ease, and settled terms with the boys.

The rest of the morning ran smoothly. The gang and the Jaimes acted normal, not doing much work with the exception of Felicity obviously. They were apprehensive, yet wanted it all the same. They wanted it over. They wanted things to go back to normal. Most of them were wondering what PJ had done. He had told them he had to do something at morning recess, and snuck out of school to do so, but when they asked what it was, he just smiled and said, " You'll find out."

Lunch came. The cafeteria was almost silent. Most because they could sense something was up, but some because they knew what was up. The gang left the cafeteria ten minutes after entering, and waited for the rest to follow. The gang knew that Prince would be sitting on the Jungle Jim Palace. He had forbidden anyone to touch it, including himself. He said it was a historic figure, one to remind them of the reign of King Rob. Two bodyguards were surveying the entrance.

" We got it!" said Jaime 4 with pleasure. PJ nodded and smiled. The gang hid behind a bush, and watched the Jaimes bring the guards into the clubhouse. It was clear. The playground was starting to fill up by now. It was the perfect time, and there was no going back. PJ lead them to the palace. A few kids saw him and gathered round. What they'd been sensing, this was it. As the gang climbed up, more people gathered round, though no one was saying anything yet. When the last was in the palace, Jaime 3 came out. She spoke to the crowd in a quiet and calm yet commanding voice, " you have to make sure that Prince doesn't know you're here. Don't make a sound. You'll find out something you deserve to know, just as long as he doesn't think you're here, understand?"

" Why should we listen to you? Prince has done nothing wrong" said one weasel like child.

" Then it won't matter if you hear what he has been doing, if there's nothing wrong with it, like you said. Now go round to the back. We rigged a cup and string phone so you'll hear everything, but when you get there someone will be waiting. When you see them don't make a sound, they're important in all this, and you'll probably change your mind about them soon enough." Jaime 3 instructed. They did as they were told, and as she said there was someone waiting. King Rob. A few of the crowd opened their mouths, but then remembered Jaime's words and didn't make a peep. They listened through the phone, and recognized the gangs and Prince's voices.

" What are you doing here?" Prince asked angrily.

" Could ask you the same question" replied PJ. His confidence astounded even him and especially Prince. " We know what you're up to. We know you made up that story and we know what's in this box right here" PJ stepped forward pointing to a large oak toy box, and opened it. There were all of the missing toys and candy. Prince stood there, stunned. He'd been found out, but wasn't going down without a fight.

" Oh yeah, well who cares, you found me out, but as far as those idiots know, I'll tell em you took their stuff, and they'll believe me too, gullible and stupid. They follow my every move and guess what? There's nothing you can do about it!" Prince grew an evil smile.

" Wanna bet?" King Rob entered the room and snatched the evil smile right of Prince's face. " You know as well as I do that I don't have a cousin, and yet you paid off some kid to lie about it. How much did you pay him? Ten, twenty bucks?"

" Fifteen, but that's not the point. The point is, no one's gonna believe an outlaw and a gang of self righteous twits?" Prince felt safe again. There was no way they'd stop him now, was there?

PJ picked up the box, took it to the balcony, and tipped out the contents, but holding the television. Prince was curious. He walked out onto the balcony, and saw the children of the playground listening to every word he'd been saying. " Fine. So you know. I applaud you all. Good job. But guess what Rob, you may have got out of this one, but I'll be waiting. Every move you make, every step you take I'll be ready to-" Prince was stopped dead in his tracks. The bodyguards walked up to him and dragged him towards the principle's office.

" But why'd he do it PJ?" shouted someone from the crowd.

" Rob, o you remember the name Jack Hollows?" PJ asked.

" Yeah, he was my best friend up until 3rd grade, when he-", Rob paused, " he swore he'd get me back after I pulled down his jeans in the school play." Rob had had a break through. He knew what was going on.

" Pikes, Russ and I snuck into City Hall on Saturday night. We found out that Prince had lied about that story. Rob hasn't even got a cousin. Then we found out about Prince. There was no record of him before 1999. Then this

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morning I went home and searched his picture on City Hall records internet. They only give you their name of course, but that's all I needed. It came up with two records. Prince Dartmoor 1999 to present, and Jack Hollows 1991 to 1999. He changed his name right after the play incident, so he could get his revenge without a trace." PJ gave the crowd a few seconds to mull over the information they had just been given, and then spoke once more, " So I ask you, are you regretful? Are you sorry? But most of all, do you want King Rob back?" the crowd gave no pause, just a dramatic, deafening " YES!"

Prince (or Jack) was expelled from Blue Creek Elementary for stealing. He and his family moved to Alabama. King Rob was restored to his throne. The Jaimes were given luxuries to go in their clubhouse. The gang were labelled playground heroes, and Pikes was given an honorary stationary kit because of his bravery in City Hall. As for PJ, he was given the job of Royal Assistant. He monitored Jack's movement in Alabama, and checked out any new kids. Blue Creek Elementary was back to where it started, but with more trust, guidance and hope for the future- High School.