

Took a Face Plant in the 2nd Grade War

It's war! The boys and girls of 2nd grade at Traub Elementary have decided to spend recess outwitting members of the opposite sex and taking prisoners when and however possible, to be released during the next day's recess, when we will pick up where the action left off.

As a relatively new kid, I do not buy into the conflict. I like the girls in my class well enough and have no beef with the boys. Somehow, I negotiate to be a neutral party – a horse, actually. I work it so that, as a horse, I can go to



either side with messages from the opposing forces with no threat of capture. This makes perfect sense in 2nd grade.

I find this an excellent arrangement. I trot over to the boys and get their demands. I prance back to the girls, deliver the news, get their reply and return with the boys' rebuttal. Then its back again with a revised list of issues – all with full diplomatic immunity.

During one of these crossovers, I am stopped in my tracks by Jimmy, the class heartthrob. He has not heard of my special status and thinks I'm making it up on the fly to evade capture. Frozen in a stand of trees by the side of the schoolyard, I plead my case. Yes, I have special status - just check with Bruce or Bobby. Jimmy isn't buying it. He doesn't know me well and does not want to be tricked by a girl.

Meanwhile, in my head, I am exhilarated by my situation. Like the other girls in my class, I have a stone-cold crush on Jimmy. Maybe it's his bunny-brown eyes, tan skin, and those bangs! Maybe it's his sense of style. After all, he's the only boy who wore a cardigan sweater on class picture day – teal blue at that. But here I am, face to face with Mr. 2nd Grade, together... alone... in the woods. While arguing my case for passage, I'm secretly hoping this takes a long time and that someone will see us together.

Meanwhile, Jimmy isn't buying it, and in loyalty to his gender, gives chase – either to capture me or drive me back deep into Girl Territory.

I think this is great and take off. Little but swift, I give him a literal run for his money. Glancing back to enjoy the view of The Man of My Dreams chasing me, I trip on some vines and fall forward, landing flat on my face in the damp schoolyard mud.

I must have been knocked out, because the next thing I remember I'm in the arms of a very large schoolyard monitor, someone's mom in charge of keeping some semblance of law and order during recess. Jimmy is at her elbow, clearing the way through a crowd of kids while explaining what just went down.

My knees, dress and lower face are covered in mud. Blood trails from my nose, across my face, down my chin and neck to my collar. My parka is coated with a mixture of mud and blood, and I'm not thinking "Ow!" I'm thinking, "Mom is going to be so mad that my parka is such a mess."

As the three of us trudge up to the school on this cold spring day, I hear Jimmy recounting my fall to kids who have gathered to see who is being carried in from recess. Having no recollection of what happened, I'm listening to his account. He is clearly enjoying the attention of being the sole eyewitness to my face plant and assures everyone it was really something to behold, re-enacting the impact of my face to the ground with a hinged clap of his two hands.

The look of alarm on my homeroom teacher Miss Brockman's face as she enters the nurse's office tells me I took a pretty good fall. Jimmy is there too, being debriefed by the schoolyard monitor, school nurse and assistant principal, making some sort of official statement. What I'm also piecing together, since we couldn't be seen from the main yard, is that he had to run for help. He came to my rescue, alerted the authorities, and led the search team. This thought helps me get through the stinging delivery of Bactine on my scrapes, as well as the indignity of the insertion of rolled tissues into both nostrils and another piece of tissue under my upper lip to stay the bleeding.

The nurse cleans my legs, hands and face and calls my mom.

Jimmy steps over to my cot and I let out a thin “Thanks, Jimmy.” He gives me a dignified nod, like the sheriff in a spaghetti western, and walks back to class with Miss Brockman, confident that all is well.

Next day, war resumes. Not only do I retain my diplomatic status, but I get major street cred with the girls for even speaking with Jimmy, let alone having him chase me. He may have not known me two days ago, but we are now veterans with a singular war story.

Gamed Pin the Tail on the Donkey

In 1st grade, I am not a gambler by nature, but happy to embrace a shortcut.

Birthday parties are a highlight of my social life, and I am an enthusiastic party guest. I love being with a crush of school and neighborhood friends, as well as getting in on the birthday cake/ice cream. It's a rare kid who gets to invite the entire class to their party. Most celebrations involve 6-10 kids, depending on how many can fit around the family's kitchen table, along with the birthday kid's brothers and sisters. Balloons, crepe paper streamers, and colorful paper plates and napkins set the mood.



Pin the Tail on the Donkey is a standard game at birthday parties – along with Duck, Duck Goose; Red Light, Green Light; What Time is it, Mr. Fox?; and, at a larger lawn party with lots of kids, Red Rover, Red Rover. Pin the Tail involves a poster-size illustration of a donkey without a tail taped to the family room or basement wall at chest height for the party guests. Attendees are given a numbered paper tail with either a piece of tape, or (for potentially edgier results, including holes in the wall, furniture and/or fellow guests' clothing) a thumbtack. One by one, the children are blindfolded and spun in one direction, in reverse, and in the original direction again; then they're released in the general direction of the donkey picture.

Dizzy from the spinning, the child in question staggers and sways (to the great amusement of the other guests) in what they think is the right direction. Arms are extended to both protect yourself from crashing into furniture and locate the wall with the donkey so you can “pin” or tape your numbered tail. As soon as your hand touches the wall, you must plant the tail on where you guessed the donkey's rear end is located. Then you can take off the blindfold to see just how off the mark you are – again, a great source of laughs.

The child whose paper tail lands closest to the correct location wins the game. For your effort, you get bragging rights – no trophy, ribbon or bag of candy and low-grade toys; just the pleasure of telling your parents, as you slide into your Country Squire station wagon at pickup, that you won Pin the Tail on the Donkey.

I am second to last in line for this game, which allows me time to watch the other kids play and take in the room and location of the poster. No great master plan, just quietly spacing out as I bide my time before my turn. I only

realize after I'm blindfolded how much information I've taken in. Spun and then released, the back of my heel strikes the curved edge of the braided rug, which really helps orient me. The sun on the back of my head gives me a sense of how close I am to the wall.

Dizzy from the spinning, I try to walk as straight as possible. Being a lefty, the paper tail is in my left hand, which is also the side of the poster where the donkey's backside is located. As I make contact with the wood paneling, my right hand lands squarely on the paper of the poster, but my left hand lands on the edge of the poster. I can feel the slight curl of the poster away from the wall. Having stood in line so long, I know exactly how far in the donkey's rear end is from the left edge of the poster, and I quickly plant my tail. Pulling the blindfold off, I am only an inch and a half from a perfect plant – FAR closer than any of my opponents, some of whom hadn't even landed on the paper. I win!!

Flush with victory, I enjoy the rest of the games, cake and ice cream, but I am more excited by the realization that I have cracked a code. With my hand on the edge of the poster, it was so easy to estimate where to put the tail. This party is the start of a sensational season of birthday parties, with me getting a bit of a reputation for being a ringer on Pin the Tail on the Donkey. The trick now is to back off on my precision, making my wins appear as organic as possible. Happily, the parties are infrequent enough that no one has the time, energy or interest to watch how I win.

It is best to retire from a crime before being found out.