

# Playground Problem

"A colossal storm will be making its way in from the Atlantic Ocean shortly," the radio blared. "Residents are being advised to stay indoors and batten down the hatches. Local shops, offices and schools will remain closed during this time..."

Louise's mum switched the radio off.

"That's the first I've heard about a storm," she said, placing two slices of toast in front of Louise. "I hope it doesn't last too long. Looks like there's no school for you today!"

Louise bit the crust with a grin.

She sat by the window for most of that day, waiting impatiently for the storm that had saved her from a difficult times-tables test. The first sign was a gentle swaying of the treetops, followed by a flurry of raindrops. Before long, the soft pitter patter on the windows had transformed into a loud banging against the glass, like someone striking a drum more and more forcefully. As the storm raged into the evening, several slates fell from the roof of Louise's house with a startling crash, and a garden chair went skidding across the lawn as if it were being dragged into a frantic jig with an invisible partner.

By sunrise, the worst of the storm had passed, and the residents were left to survey the devastation. The roof of Louise's school had sprung several leaks, and the church's weather vane had blown off and landed halfway down the street. But the thing that bothered Louise the most was the playground in the park. The damage caused by the storm was catastrophic. There was a big crack in the slide; the roundabout was hanging lopsidedly and would no longer spin; and some of the chains on the swings had broken, leaving their seats slumped forlornly in the mud.



*The story continues over the page.*





Within a few days, the battered weather vane had been returned and replaced on top of the church steeple (though it was now a little less reliable than before). The school's corridors were still littered with buckets, but the head teacher had announced a special fair to raise funds for repairs to the roof. However, despite all this activity, nothing had been done about the playground. For the children gathering by the playground gate, looking in at their old hangout, it was nothing short of a tragedy.

Louise knew that action was needed. After doing some research on the internet, she found out that the local council was responsible for the playground, so she wrote them a letter.

A few days later, a simple white envelope, addressed in her name and with a circular logo on the front, arrived through the door. Louise tore it open with anticipation and pulled out the thin sheet of paper inside.

Miss L. Young  
3 Park Crescent  
South Patford  
SG94 9YN



Dear Miss Young,

Thank you for contacting South Patford County Council.  
We appreciate your concern about the playground, but  
unfortunately its repair is not a priority for us at the moment.  
We hope to be able to reconsider this position in the future.

Yours sincerely,  
Ms D. James

Louise's heart sank. The council didn't think the playground was important enough to fix, despite how much it meant to her and her friends. They needed to get the playground fixed, but without the council's help Louise didn't know where to turn next.

At school, the fair had gone well. Everyone had enjoyed themselves, and Suman Patel, a reporter from the South Patford Gazette, had even come along to interview the head teacher for a front-page article. In the end, the school fell just short of their target for repairing the roof. Fortunately, Alfonso Brighthorn, owner of the local bakery,



Brighthorn's Buns, spotted the article about their plight in the Gazette and donated £350, which had made all the difference.

This gave Louise her second brainwave. With a plan forming, she gathered all her friends together for an urgent discussion. They resolved to hold a party at the playground to mark a month since the storm. They'd blow up balloons, have a cake and invite everyone they knew — including Suman Patel. If she considered their cause worthy of writing about in the local newspaper, the people at the council might read about it and realise how important the playground was — and Louise was hoping that might just be enough to change their minds.

It took days of nervous planning to organise the party, during which time Louise kept her fingers crossed tightly, hoping that the party would be successful enough to merit an article in the newspaper. Without that article, the party would make no difference at all. The thought made Louise's stomach churn.

In the end, interest in the party far exceeded their expectations: the noise and chatter of everyone attending was deafening. But Louise was looking out for one person and one person only — Miss Patel. Finally, she spotted the reporter standing beside the playground gate, wearing a long, smart coat and uncomfortable-looking high-heeled shoes. Louise ran over and pleaded with her to write about the damaged playground in the newspaper. Miss Patel looked at the destroyed play equipment, and at all the local people who had come down to the party, and agreed immediately.

The next day, Louise grabbed the first copy of the newspaper she could find, and read the headline gleefully: 'Patford's Playground Problem'.

One week later, a second white envelope landed on Louise's doormat, with the council's familiar logo on the front. Louise smiled, confident that she knew what the letter would say.

