

Crow's Downfall
By Tyler Patrick

Darius Fox bounces a basketball between his legs with his left hand. The ball comes up to his right. He catches it, dribbles, and shoots the ball toward the hoop. It flies through the air in an arch and TINGS off the rim, another missed shot. He runs over to grab the ball before it bounces off to where the other kids, the big and mean ones, are. He catches it mid bounce and dribbles back to his hoop.

Aaron Crow, the biggest and meanest kid, leans against the fencing around the court. He flips his lucky coin as he watches Darius. Dribble, dribble, shoot, miss, retrieve, repeat. Over and over again the new kid misses. Nolan and Pete, Aaron's followers, stand on either side of him with their arms crossed.

"You going to let that new kid suck this bad on YOUR court, Aaron?" Nolan asks.

"Yeah, you can't let him play here. Who does he think he is?" Pete adds.

Aaron flips his coin into the air and catches it. He steps away from the fence and stomps toward Darius.

"Yeah, get that punk!" Nolan says.

"Yeah!" Pete echoes.

"Hey, new kid. What do you think you're doing here?" Aaron asks.

Darius ignores him and shoots the ball. It hits the rim and sails through the air towards Aaron. He catches the ball and tosses it to Nolan.

"I'm talking to you, punk. What are you doing here? This is my court," Aaron says.

Darius tries to walk past him; Aaron sticks his arm out to stop the younger kid. Darius ducks under and continues toward Nolan.

"I'd like my ball back, please," he says.

Nolan passes the ball to Pete.

"What ball?" Nolan asks.

Pete tosses the ball to Aaron.

"Yeah, what ball?" Pete repeats.

Darius shrugs his shoulders and turns back to Aaron.

"Well, if this is your court, how about a game?" he asks, "One on one, just us two."

Aaron bursts out laughing. He drops the basketball and doubles over. The ball rolls to Darius' feet.

"You got to be joking. Me? Play you? You're not even close to my league," Aaron says between laughs.

Darius picks up the ball and puts it under his arm. He walks off.

"If you're scared, that's fine," he says over his shoulder.

Aaron stops laughing. Nolan and Pete stare blankly at their leader.

"You going to let him talk to you like that?" Nolan asks.

"Yeah, you can't let him get away with that," Pete says, "Kick his butt, Aaron."

Aaron runs his thumb over the face of his coin.

"New kid! This is my house. I'm going to teach you some respect," he says.

Darius stops, a smile crosses his face before he turns back to Aaron.

"So, what are your rules?" he asks.

Aaron crowds Darius. He looks down at the smaller kid.

"Half court. First to five wins. I beat you and then you leave."

Darius nods and passes the ball to Aaron.

"Okay. Your court, you go first. But, if I win, I get your coin."

Nolan and Pete slap each other on the back and laugh. They hold each other up as they squawk like birds. Aaron gives them a harsh look and they stop.

"Okay, new kid. IF you win, I'll give you the coin. Nolan, Pete, you guys retrieve the shots."

Aaron's followers head behind the hoop. He dribbles the ball and bounces it toward Darius.

"Check," he says.

Darius bounces the ball back. Aaron catches it and dribbles to Darius' right. Darius sticks his arm out to block him, but the bigger kid spins and goes left. Aaron jumps, shoots, and scores.

"Good shot, big guy," Darius says.

Nolan tosses the ball back to Aaron.

"You're going down, noob!" he yells to Darius.

"Yeah!" Pete repeats.

Aaron dribbles to the left and knocks down Darius. He shoots the ball and scores again. Darius looks up at the bigger kid. He stands up, brushes himself off, and gets back into position.

"You're a tough one," he says.

"Two down, three to go," Aaron replies.

He dribbles to the left and bounces the ball between his legs. Darius leans in to steal the ball and trips over his own feet. Aaron lobs the ball toward the hoop. It flies through the air, banks off the backboard, and goes in the hoop.

Pete and Nolan wrestle each other for the ball. Nolan rips it out of Pete's hands and tosses it to Aaron.

"You're the best, Aaron!" he cheers.

"Yeah, the best," Pete says as he jabs Nolan in the side.

Darius picks himself up off the ground again. He claps his hands and smiles at Aaron.

"You ARE really good," he says to the bigger kid.

Aaron sneers at Darius.

"I'm not good, I'm the best. You'll remember that after today."

He dribbles the ball to the left, jumps, and shoots the ball over Darius' head. The ball sails into the hoop without touching the rim.

Pete catches the ball and runs away from Nolan. He tosses it to Aaron.

"One more point, Aaron!" he screams as Nolan tackles him.

The two followers roll around behind the goal post. They jab and poke each other until Aaron yells at them.

"Chill out, jerks. It's almost time to send this loser packing."

The duo stops fighting and help each other up. They return to their spots.

Aaron looks down at Darius and pats him on the head.

"Can't say this was fun, but at least you learned a lesson today. Always respect your elders."

Aaron dribbles left, spins, and shoots. Darius lifts his hand and blocks the shot. The ball bounces away from Aaron.

Darius grabs it and dribbles back to the half court line. Aaron's mouth hangs open. He stares at the smaller kid, confused at what just happened. Darius bounces the ball to him.

"Check," he says to Aaron.

Aaron bounces the ball back to Darius. He shakes off his confusion and starts to laugh.

"You got lucky, small fry. Just give the ball back, and we'll call it a day. We already know you can't shoot."

Darius dribbles the ball and shoots from half court. The ball passes straight into the hoop.

"Looks like I can shoot, big guy. 4 to 1, let's go," he says to Aaron.

Aaron's face turns red. He stomps over to Darius and gets into a guarding position.

Nolan kicks the ball toward Darius. It rolls across the ground.

Darius leans over and picks it up. He dribbles the ball casually and looks up at Aaron.

"You know what your problem is?" he asks as he dribbles, "You're too cocky. You think you're better than what you are."

He dribbles to the left of Aaron. The bigger kid swipes his huge hand at the ball. Darius spins out of his reach and goes to his right. He jumps and shoots the ball into the hoop.

"You always go left," Darius says, "Your friends pump you up so much that you don't work on your game."

Nolan and Pete refuse to touch the ball. It bounces off and hits the fencing. Darius walks over and picks it up.

"No matter. The score is 4 to 2 now, right?" he asks Aaron.

Aaron stares at Darius as the kid dribbles back toward him. He doesn't answer the question.

Darius dribbles, bounces the ball between Aaron's legs, catches it, and shoots for another score.

Nolan and Pete back away from the hoop. They refuse to help Darius, so he runs over and catches the ball before it bounces off. He smiles and nods at the two followers as he runs back to his spot.

Aaron stands with his hands on his hips and stomps his feet like a child having a tantrum.

A crowd forms around the court to watch the match. A few of the kids start to cheer on Darius, but most stay silent.

Darius runs past the stomping Aaron and dribbles.

"You mad, bro?" he asks with a smile.

Aaron stops his tantrum and turns to face Darius. He plants his feet and stares down.

"You're not getting past me this time, you little jerk."

Darius bounces the ball off Aaron's forehead, catches it, and shoots another basket. The crowd erupts in laughter. One of them grabs the ball and passes it back to Darius.

"I don't need to get past you, only the ball does," Darius says with a wink.

Aaron rubs the spot the basketball hit. His face is dark red and his nostrils flail.

"I swear, I'm going to get you, you snot nosed little brat," he says.

Nolan and Pete slowly walk away. They hide in the back of the crowd.

Darius starts to dribble. He rushes toward Aaron, spins left, then back to the right. Aaron gets twisted up and falls to the ground. He watches the ball fly over him and into the hoop.

The crowd erupts in applause. Kids run up to Darius and pat him on the back.

Nolan and Pete leave the court.

Darius leans down and offers Aaron a hand. Aaron slaps his hand away and picks himself up. He turns his back on Darius and the crowd. He digs in his pocket and pulls out his coin. He throws it over his shoulder and walks off.

Darius picks up the coin. It shines in the sunlight. He smiles and puts it into his pocket. The crowd cheers and congratulates him as he walks away.

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