

# Royal Blood

## Chapter I

Nothing could have prepared me for the sense of wonder that is Prince. Although I have been inspired by an endless spectacle of creativity, with a driven need to create; it is quite ironic that this journey begins not with my own creativity, but that of my fathers.

Raised in a pub and spending much of his working life operating machines, it was always of my assumption that Prince shared very little common ground with the average cultured or creative thinker. Unless of course you consider Dylan Thomas who could be just as imaginative with a pint glass as he was with a pen and paper.

During a great number of observations, however, I have been inclined to see another side, a side that has been seen by little or no one. Besides being an artist with the spoken word, with the 'F' word in particular; his creative prowess is lesser witnessed than that of the budding artist, I have glimpsed what I believe to be the waking frustrations of the unconscious surrealist, compelled to escape the shackles that prohibit his innovations.

### **“Artist? Piss-artist, more like”. Prince**

To illustrate this, on one occasion, shortly after arriving at my parents' house I remember being informed by Glyndwr (my Brother) that

I should witness Prince's new invention. I knew instantly that what I was about to see would be something a little different. For my brother to have given this event such importance this had to be something outside of the box, or in this case very much inside it.

On opening the door of the toilet shed what was instantly obvious was a box-like structure stuck to the wall beside its porcelain companion. A biscuit tin with three holes. I studied it for a moment fascinated by its enigmatic nature before continuing to remove its lid. This revealed three tea-light candles placed meticulously in a straight line directly in the centre.

In awe, without a moment's hesitation, I rushed home to get my camera so that I could document its peculiar splendour, and when I returned I went straight back to the shed so as not to raise alarm. However, it was too late. It was as though he had been waiting, and as I was quietly pulling the door off the hinges to get a better positioning for my camera, he caught me in the act.

With his head protruding from the small gap in the window, which he opened to let out the smoke from his cigarette, he began to shout, “What the fuck are you doing to my shed?” Trying not to laugh, I explained that I was interested in his invention, and asked what it was? “it's a toilet roll warmer, what does it look like.

Now far be it from me to comment, but it has been said that ‘genius is next to madness’. It was still winter and the shed was cold at the best of times. But was this the workings of a brilliant inventor? Had he answered the calls of all those who had endured one too many cold rubbings of the backside? Whatever it was, I was perplexed by the contrast of logic and unconventionality. Trying to further contain my laughter,

I continued to position the camera ready to take my shot. Then with utter conviction, he shouted: “don’t fucking laugh, everyone will want one of those. You’ll be laughing on the other side of your face when I’m a millionaire”. Now at this point I laughed uncontrollably, fuelling his frustrations, to which he demanded to know the purpose of my photographing his invention. Before I had time to think of a conceivable answer he quickly concluded our conversation by informing me that there’s something “fucking wrong with you”, then slowly he closed the window again.

## Hoarding Wildcard

It is not unjustified to assume that every great artist, creator or neoteric thinker is blessed with a touch of the ‘eccentric’ about them. Part and parcel, boon or burden, it seems to bleed into absolutely everything they do; the way they live, the way they walk or even talk. Eccentricity is often manifested in oddities, oddities of which Prince is aplenty. If measured simply by his collections alone, here we see his ‘uniqueness’ transpire. From rooms, signs, flags and structures, to keyrings, badges, pens, and fixtures; tickets, coins, stamps, and pictures, also jackets, tools, and even fridges. And almost everything he owns can be compartmentalised into collections of no less than five, regardless of size.

Before the mark that now blazons his back, there was a time where the only jacket my father would wear was the Lumber Jack. He had five of these jackets and each one was different in colour. Back then, we would make fun that he would one day be buried in one. My mother would have to hunt high and low for these jackets and no other jacket would do. That was, until one particular day.

It was a Summer at the end of the nineties. My father walked into a room wearing a gift he had been given by an Australian cousin all the way from Down Under. It was a “Genuine” Harley Davidson jacket, a little piece of Americana made in Thailand. This jacket changed everything, breeding a whole new collection that would become part of my father’s makeup. He stood a little taller that day, and to this very moment I can’t say I have since seen a lumber jacket on his back. Instead, you will find in its place the mark of a giant motor company such as Ferrari, BMW, or of course the wings of Harley Davidson.

Beyond the wardrobe, however, his collections are not limited by dimension; in fact the bigger the better or the more the merrier and much like any who live in their garden, Prince too is partial to the odd old ‘Shed’. Although unlike most, who like stamps or coins, these to him are something to collect. Not one or two, not three or four, but if we include all structures, it currently stands at seven, with an eighth in the making.

**“I’ve gone, when I get up I’m frightened of what I’m going to find. He’s got a new project on the go now again. You’ll want to see this one. Not only has he put another bloody glasshouse on the last patch of grass that I had, but he’s now planning a safety perimeter too, with a huge windbreaker**

**and safety net. I’m telling you he’s fucking cracked. He’s out before the sun’s up, digging and hammering away. There’s nothing left of my garden. And he’s got the cheek then to ask me how much I think he’s spent on “this garden”, I don’t really give a shit. I gave him half the money for peace and quiet, and look at the fucking mess on the place”. Pearl**

Each shed or structure is unique in purpose, design and content and each is utilised like clockwork. Although, some more than others and one in particular. Shrouded in mystery, with no special markings, my father once described this specific shed as “better than any caravan” due to its unique acoustics delivered by the weather. And it is here it would seem he does nothing, nothing at all but listen.

With as little as a deck chair, ashtray and a radio surrounded by clutter, this is the only room in the garden that has a padlock. And although most of these collected rooms have a single seat in which he parks to ponder, it is here that I imagine him sitting and thinking all kinds of things and, I guess, this is where it happens. This is where all his ideas come to him, all the weird and eccentric concepts that fill his home and garden. This is where they are born, alone in the dark listening to the rain upon the roof.

If we look closer we begin to see. Although his possessions are seldom single, in every hoard, stack or stockpile, there is among its centre a gem, a dearest adored. For every group of sheds there is, ‘A’ shed, and for every collection of single chairs there is, ‘A’ chair, and ‘this’ chair would be what we call ‘Prince’s Throne’. Surrounded by all that he needs. This chair, like no other, is his chair, and his alone.

Distinguished by features that separate it from all the other chairs, the ‘Throne’, made of chrome, is a swivel chair with a ‘Snooker green’ felt-cladded seat. In this chair, it is agreed, that no one should ever plant or plonk themselves unless of course it is done so by his lordship himself. Frustrated by the constant need to tell people to leave his chair, he once protested, “it’s funny, mun. If I sat in that chair, no one would be interested in this one. Because I’m sat in this one every fucker wants it. This is my chair. Get your own fucking chair, buy your own fucking glue!”

However, among these cherished possessions there is one thing ungoverned by bias or favouritism that gains president above all, and this would be the timepiece. While emblematic of his nature and obsessive behaviour, the clock is the tallest and most telling of Prince’s treasures.

**“I could hear the boys laugh from outside, I thought nothing of it. Then I heard the whispering; something about clocks as they passed on the stairs, and that’s when I realised they were talking about Dad’s clocks. They are fucking everywhere. They must have seen the Grandfather clock in the toilet and pissed themselves”. Glyndwr**

Symbolic of many things that relate to my father, not simply getting things done on time, the clock emblemises perfectly his incessant need to have everything run to the exact minute of every hour of every day. If you say you are going to be there at a certain time, you better be there at that precise moment, or you can be on your way, or as he recently put it, “You can fuck off now, I’ve got other things to do”.

**“I wonder where your father gets this fascination for clocks. He is obsessed; they are everywhere, in every room. In some rooms there are three. All I hear is ticking. He gave Jac (his grandson) a clock for his room last night. Oh, he loved it”. Pearl**

## The Maker's Hand

“I told your father, leave it to me don't touch that clock until I get home, I'm not sure where I'm going to put it yet. But oh no, he couldn't wait could he. This is a big clock, not a small one. It's a miniature Grandfather Clock, and it's the only one we have that doesn't need power, in case of a power cut. But it's too loud so I have to put it at the other end of the bedroom. Now he assumed I meant I had no space to put it. But, as soon as I left the house, the tools were out. When I got back, I swear, you wouldn't believe it even if you saw it with your own eyes. He had gone and made a shelf to hold the clock right by the bed. Not a shelf that you might buy from a shop, no, this was a fucking ice cream lid nailed to a block of wood. You know, the type that comes off an ice cream container. Who the hell in their right mind uses an ice cream lid as a shelf, what a moron”. Pearl

Many things considered, in addition to his artistic or eccentric tendencies, it could be argued that my father may even be an inventor and innovative thinker. Not quite like Thom-

as Edison or Alexander Graham Bell; he may never invent anything as world changing or practical as the light bulb or the telephone but he certainly makes things, and although these “things” are often stretched or jilted, scratching on the surface of madness, it is here in the construction we see his most creative flair.

For every problem there is often a solution, and although this may be his primary motivation, Prince's solution is often another problem. Difficult to forget, I once entered the kitchen of my parent's house and reaching to turn on the light, instead of my hand meeting a switch that had been there since long before I was born, my finger was met with the sharpest of prods. This was a real stir to the senses and left me with the question, what the fuck was wrong with the switch? What was designed to do just one job was now stabbing me in the finger. When I finally found the actual switch, which was now located on the other side of the door, I discovered the switch that I was looking for had been replaced by a clock. I don't mean that there was a clock hanging in its place rather that this clock had been tailored and fitted, using the face of a small carriage clock and had been embedded where the old switch had left a hole.

Prince's inventions have to be seen to be believed, and even then you would look twice. His most suspicious and perplexing invention to date however would have to be what we called the 'chamber'. This can only be described as a plastic eyesore, or as my mother once put it, an “unfortunate state of affairs”. Built around 'Ebenezer', a garden bench made from a reclaimed concrete windowsill named and engraved after the demolished church it was taken from, the chamber was made of half-inch thick corrugated plastic. It was five foot by three foot, and about three foot tall. It had its own path leading to a hinged door with a green exit sign,

and was decorated with toy soldiers, bullets, and brass ornaments. It had no roof, and over all it would seem to possess very little

practicality, and if it did it was not obvious to those who studied it.

When I asked my father why he had built this structure, and what it was for, his answer was simple, “to stop the draft when I'm having a fag”. Bewildered by his answer I was compelled to investigate this structure further. So I opened its door, and there I discovered it even had a wheel that aided its movement, which he informed me, was to stop the door from scraping the decorated floor tiles. One tiny step in, and I had reached the concrete bench. Then I turned and sat down, leaning forward as I had seen my father do on one or two occasions, where he smoked his roll ups and contemplated the ways of the world. And that's when I discovered that the one and only purpose this structure had been designed to fulfil, had no effect at all. Not only did the wind still hit me around the ears, due to the height of the walls that barely reached my shoulders, but it also rearranged everything that sat inside, including a few plants, that had all but given up the ghost. If anyone had succeeded in keeping a roll-up in their mouth within this plastic monstrosity, they would still be trying to light it long after everything inside its walls had blown away.

## Decoys

Whether we recognise my father as an artist or inventor, genius or joker you'd be hard done by to know which side of his multifaceted talents was on display when you witness any of his conceptions. For every object of practicality or

striven efficiency, there is a gadget or article of bewilderment, artistic brilliance, or simply 'box of frogs' madness. Some things, however, can only be described as beyond the realm of the lateral thinker.

Directly adjacent to the back door of the house, he once had an old industrial winding fire alarm affixed to the brick wall, which he referred to as the doorbell, and right next to that there was an ashtray almost always completely full. With no clear objective or obvious logical motive, one could only assume that my father was waiting for that ashtray to one day combust into uncontrollable flames, whereupon he would need to sound an alarm and evacuate the entire village.

Stumped by his decision to clad the wall with such objects outside the entrance of the house I had to ask why he had put such a device where he had, or in fact anywhere come to that. What was it for? Was he expecting a fire? His answer as always was quite simple:

**“Don't be so fucking stupid, that's the Postwoman's doorbell [obviously]. If she doesn't get an answer when she knocks, I've told her to ring that bell, just in case I'm down the garden, see. If she doesn't get an answer from that, well, I'm most probably out. So, tough shit”.**

Over the years, people have become accustomed to Prince's ways, almost suspecting something or other, but there is always someone willing to fall prey to his menace, and when this happens you can almost hear a voice of anticipation narrating the scene as it unfolds before your eyes. First he will lay his trap, often

this is a decoy 'invention', one without any real function. Then he will sit and wait, almost like a burrow spider who waits expectantly at its trapdoor. This could go on for hours with no prospect at all, and then as though by magic, snap, someone takes the bait.

Back in the late nineties, on a hot Summer day, spotting someone walking the field behind the house, Prince quickly removed an old broken TV from the shed, positioned it central to the garden and buried its plug in the ground. On the arrival of the unsuspecting victim, my father turned the radio up, whipped out a deck chair and sat gazing into its empty screen. "New telly, is it John?" said the onlooker. "Yes, state of the art", he said, "Waterproof, and there's no need of electric, you just plug it straight into the ground". The onlooker was amazed, he'd seen nothing like it, and after a brief chat on the wonders of technology, he was off to get one for himself to watch the big match.

**"People here thought I had wind powered electric for a long time. I knew somebody would say something see, so I bolted an old ceiling fan to the line post down the garden. It was one of those that had fan blades and a pull cord with four speeds. Low and behold, it wasn't long before I had a customer. One of the neighbours had come to investigate. "What in the hell is that", he said, so I told him, "What the fuck do you think it is? it's a windmill mun" I said. "What does it do", he said. "Well, how do you think I've got all this electric in my sheds then, it has to come from somewhere" I said.**

**He looked at the fan for a moment, while looking back at me suspiciously. "That's a fucking good idea too", he said before he went about his day. That thing blew at speeds of a hundred miles an hour sometimes. It actually blew off one day... down the field. When I went down to get it, it was stuck in the ground with only two blades left on it, it was fucking chilled. Never mind though, that's when I had the idea of putting in an unplumbed tap at the bottom of the garden. That caught a few too". Prince**

It is said that my father once almost commandeered a Ferrari on a racetrack, nearly fooling its owner into allowing him to test-drive the vehicle. This was spoiled by a friend who had realised his intentions and who justifiably informed the vehicle's driver that Prince was out on day release. In the driver's defence, who nearly succumbed to a rather costly mistake, when one sees someone approaching wearing a Ferrari jacket on a racetrack, one naturally assumes that one has arrived with one's own shiny prized car.

This is a man who turned up late to his own mother's sixtieth birthday, held at the local Social Club and instead of surprising her with hugs and lavish gifts, Prince, being Prince treated her to an unexpected pieing. Entering the room like a bull in a china shop he flew through the crowd swooping up a whole slab of birthday cake, only to splat it into my Grandmother's face like a scene from the three stooges, before then running off again at a faster pace than he had arrived. When asked why he did this, he later admitted, "I don't really know? I just did it. It came to my noggin in the

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moment, and I thought it would be funny. Her face... I tell you”.

Relishing in a ceaseless endeavour to satisfy his juvenile urges, he will often be seen pacing the garden path deep in thought. Sometimes he will even laugh to himself in a boyish tone, when I assume he is planning his next prank. And while many might see this as simply who he is and what he does, I for one believe this to be his greatest art. Besides his collecting and his over expressive ways, and beyond all his obsessions, it is his humour that has been most crafted and sharpened with care. It is in this accomplishment that we most glimpse a sense of his boyhood wonder and optimism, where anything is possible, and it is here I most recognise the marvel my father was to me when I was just a boy.

**“The council called this morning. I was half expecting them not to show up. But here they were at 9am. Big job apparently, they are going to be here all week. It’s going to be a long week for some. I had one of the youngsters on pins this morning, when he knocked on the door. I could see that your mother had left the kid’s pushchair outside the back door, so I shouted, “oh-for-fuck-sakes! Where’s the baby?” This boy’s face dropped... he was all over the place. He looked behind him to see an empty pushchair, and I said, “Fuck, did you just see a little boy crawling past you? I hope he hasn’t gone out onto the road”. Before I could say another word, he was off like a bullet. I could hear him shouting to his work-mates to see if they had seen a little baby. The next thing I knew, he**

**was running up and down the garden looking everywhere. So I pretended to panic, saying my wife is going to kill me... then I shut the door, and off I went to make a cup of tea. About quarter of an hour later I could see the boy running past the window. This poor fucker, he was still looking for the baby. If the boss hadn’t come back, he might have been looking all day. I could hear the boss, “don’t listen to a fucking word that idiot tells you, that’s John Prince”, he said laughing. Prince**