MUSTACHES FOR MADDIE

Chad Morris and Shelly Brown
Twelve-year-old Maddie has a quirky sense of humor and a fondness for sporting fake mustaches—a neon pink handlebar, a green fuzzy chevron, a blue pencil mustache—her fake mustaches always seem to get a laugh. Being funny gets her noticed by class queen Cassie and things are looking up when Maddie is cast as the lead in the school play. When strange things start to happen to her body, like tripping when she walks and having her hand curl up by her side, she blames it on growing pains, but her mom isn’t so sure. The doctor confirms Maddie has a brain tumor and in an instant her world is turned upside down.

With scary medical tests and surgery ahead of her, as well as typical sixth-grade problems—including the class queen who quickly turns into a bully—Maddie uses her friendliness, positive attitude, imagination, and her fake mustaches to battle her challenges. Maddie even gets an unexpected surprise when she receives hundreds of photos from friends, family members, and even complete strangers wearing fake mustaches to cheer her on. Based on a true story, Mustaches for Maddie teaches that everyone is going through something hard and everyone needs a compassionate friend and maybe a little bit of laughter from a mustache.
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FOR
Maddie

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MUSTACHES FOR Maddie

CHAD MORRIS and SHELLY BROWN
Fact: mustaches are hilarious. Which is why I collect them. Everything is funnier with a mustache.

At least that’s what I hoped. I had a plan, but it was risky.

I overheard Cassie telling Sailor that they were going to talk about the school play at recess. I needed to be in on that conversation. After all, it might start off my amazing career as a comic. Or an actress. Or a comedic actress.

Deep breath.

They might think I was a complete weirdo. Or they might think I was hilarious and let me in on all their plans.

I reached into my pocket and looked down at my choices. The green one? Brown?
Nuh-uh.
Pink? Yeah. Pink for sure.

Before I could change my mind, I peeled off the thin sheet of paper on the back and slapped the pink strip onto my upper lip.

Sailor happened to glance over at me through her red curls as we walked down the school hallway toward the big doors. Maybe my movement caught her attention. She did a double take. This was it. I wiggled my eyebrows for effect, but on the inside I was holding my breath.

*Please laugh. Please laugh.*

Sailor’s eyes widened and then a giggle escaped. The giggle grew into a full-on laugh, which made her curly hair bounce. I broke out into a celebration dance that started out as a little shaky-shaky of happiness and ended in me doing the worm down the hall.

Okay. I didn’t actually dance. Part of me wanted to, but the rest of me couldn’t quite do it in the hall with everyone watching. Maybe if it was just Sailor, but she wasn’t the one I was worried about.

Plus, the worm is really hard.

Hannah looked back too and choked down a laugh. It wasn’t enough for her to show her braces, but her cheeks bobbed. Then Sailor almost snorted. If she had, maybe I really would have danced.

“Oh, hilarious,” Yasmin said, quickly reaching into her
pocket and pulling out her phone. Was she going to take my picture? No one had ever taken a picture of me at school before. Well, not counting class pictures. I smiled and gave Yasmin a thumbs-up while she clicked the pic. She probably didn’t have any other photos of a short, twelve-year-old girl with sandy-blonde hair wearing the most beautiful pink mustache a quarter could buy. I hoped I looked cute.

What was I worried about? Of course the photo was cute. I also had a thick green mustache and a curly brown one, but they were still in my pocket. Like I said, everything is funnier with a mustache. For example, think of a pig. They’re cute and funny with their piggy snouts and curly pink tails. Now imagine one with a mustache. Yep. Funnier. Or think of a woman in a fancy dress singing opera. Now imagine a mustached woman in a fancy dress singing opera. Think of your baby brother . . . with a mustache.

Hilarious. I almost snorted just thinking about it. But laughing at my own jokes wasn’t the best idea, especially jokes I didn’t say out loud.

Three of the girls liked my mustache, but I still wanted to win one more girl over. The hardest to impress.

Cassie turned to find out why everyone was laughing and taking pictures. She had been talking to Sarah at the front of the group. Cassie is like the queen of the sixth grade. Well, the queen, the president, the fashionista, winner of the People’s
Choice Award—pretty much everything important. It isn’t official or anything, but everyone knows it.

She wore her blonde hair long and flowy, with a few fancy braids, the kind moms have to learn how to do by going to beauty school or by watching a lot of videos on the Internet. She also wore a glittery red sweater. Super cute, but we wouldn’t expect anything less.

“Maddie! So funny,” Cassie said, showing her brilliantly white teeth. “Weird, but funny.”

I wanted to pump my fist in the air. The queen thought I was funny. Maybe I could work my way up to becoming the jester of the sixth grade. That would be awesome. My risky risk was paying off. Hopefully, she would let me hang out with her today.

I jogged to catch up to the other girls. All of them were taller than I was, and they seemed to walk faster too. We opened the big black doors and walked out of Acord Elementary, glad to have at least a few minutes of freedom.

We had only walked a few more feet before Cassie turned again, this time walking completely backwards, looking at the bunch of us following her. She could even walk sassy backwards. “Okay,” she said, with her big bright smile, “I need to talk with Sailor, Sarah, and Hannah.”

She looked over her shoulder to make sure she was following the walking path around the school. Every recess Cassie picked who got to walk around with her. Sometimes she chose
me and we talked about movies and makeup and funny jokes and boys. Well, I didn’t usually do much of the talking, but it was still fun.

Some recesses I didn’t get picked. Cassie didn’t like it if I tried to hang out with a different group, so if I didn’t get picked, I usually chilled by the door and made up jokes to myself or invented some crazy stories. Once I made up one about a cyclops who had to go on a treacherous journey to get the only contact lens big enough for his monster eye. It was pretty awesome. Well, as awesome as telling a story to yourself can be.

“And Yasmin,” Cassie said.

I liked Yasmin and was glad Cassie picked her. And not just because she took a picture of me with her phone. Yasmin and I walked most of the way home together every day. She lived a street over. She had really dark straight hair and dark skin. She once told me to guess where she was from. I guessed India. I was so wrong. It was Ohio. But her grandparents were from Malaysia. That’s somewhere way across the ocean. I could point it out on a map, I think.

“And . . .” Cassie said.

This was it.

Please. Please.

I hoped my mustache sealed it. “Definitely Maddie.” Phew. I almost danced for real. Not only was I in, but I got a definitely. Behold the power of the mustache. “Even though she’s holding her arm weird again,” Cassie added.
For the love of potatoes! I had forgotten about my arm. I stretched it out quick and hoped my face didn’t turn too red. For some reason my arm liked to rest in a funny position sometimes. Cassie had pointed it out twice now. My fist would tuck in close to my chest and my elbow would stick out behind it. It was probably because I was growing. Bodies do weird things when they grow. At least that’s what they told us in that super awkward presentation at school. You know, that one your parents have to sign the permission slip for you to go to and where they talk about deodorant and your body changing. The permission slip probably asked, “Is it okay for your son or daughter to sit through the most embarrassing presentation of their lives?” And all the parents signed it.

Or maybe I held my arm weird because of the ninja training I was doing after school in the invisible dojo in my basement. That was probably it. I was almost a titanium belt. That’s like twenty levels above black, and it’s when you learn to break cars with your pinky finger and bust through freeways with your head. Yeah. That kind of training is intense.

Okay, I made up the ninja stuff, but it sounded pretty cool. Anyway, I straightened my arm. At least Cassie had still picked me.

But Cassie wasn’t looking at me anymore. She looked at Lexi, the last girl not picked. She had only been in our school since the end of November and now it was January, but she seemed nice enough. She looked at us through her dark hair.
“Sorry,” Cassie said. She smiled nice and big, but I don’t think she was smiling on the inside.

I had seen that same smile lots of times. Like all the times when she told me she was sorry but I couldn’t walk with her.

I really didn’t like that kind of smile. It was like it was painted on.

I took another deep breath. A thought was pounding on my brain, but I wasn’t sure I should say it. I had risked a lot for this. “Wait,” I finally said. And then everyone looked at me.

Gulp.

I glanced at Lexi. She was nice and probably hated being alone for recess just as much as I did. “Let’s let Lexi hang out with us too.”

Silence.

Nobody said stuff like that. Cassie was in charge. Kelsi said something like that to Cassie once last year and hasn’t been invited back since.

“Seriously,” I said, finding some courage somewhere deep inside me. “I don’t think it’s fair to invite all of us and then leave her out. Plus, she’s new. Let’s let her hang out with us.”

Something about that felt really good. Well, it would have if I had actually done it. I wanted to, but I didn’t do it. I only imagined it. Just like my celebration dance and my ninja training.

Maybe I could suggest that . . . No. Cassie might kick me out of the group. Just because I made everyone laugh with
my mustache didn’t mean they wouldn’t drop me. And then I wouldn’t be in on the plans about the play. And maybe, just maybe, my comic-actress career would be over before it even started.

I felt bad for Lexi, but I didn’t say anything. I was just glad it wasn’t me.