

School Photo Shenanigans – Eleni, Year 9, WA

Last year I may have lost the battle, but this year I'm out to win it. I've been practising for months to get this right. But it all comes down to a most auspicious day, a day that occurs ... tomorrow.

This was going to be the year I beat Jack in our ongoing Who Can Achieve The Worst School Photo competition. I hadn't won since Year One, when I shaved one of my eyebrows off the night before photo day. That was an accident – I was *actually* planning to put two peas up my nose and breathe out hard right as the photographer clicked the button. I still used the pea trick on the day, but the missing eyebrow made it just a little bit better.

Jack's parents think it's adorable to see their child grow up through a series of cross-eyed, pouting, red-dyed hair pictures, but my mum goes ballistic whenever she sees the result of my efforts each year.

"Come on, Maya," she pleaded this morning. "You're in Year Six now. Surely it's time now to stop all this childish stuff? Can't I just get one nice school picture of you, now you're in your graduation year? Just one?"

Worse still, she went through all my stuff and found the vampire make-up kit, complete with fake blood, that I had hidden in my wardrobe ready for tomorrow, so how was I supposed to beat Jack now?

I slouched into school, grumbling under my breath. Stupid Mum! This was my last year of primary school – I had to make sure this photo was the best one yet! My thoughts about whether I could hire an inflatable dinosaur costume by tomorrow morning were interrupted by Jack tapping me on the shoulder.

"Boo!" he yelled, and my heart sank as I turned around. Jack had really outdone himself this year. His nose was swollen to the size of a golf ball and neon-pink medical tape was strapped diagonally across it, making a big pink X in the middle of his face.

"You like it?" he said, grinning. "I tripped over my skateboard last night and fell face-first into my bedroom door. The doctor says it's broken and I have to wear the tape for four weeks! Just in time for photos!"

This was a complete disaster. Jack's nose topped anything either of us had ever done over our last seven years at Bradfield Primary School. There was no way I was going to win the competition this year unless I thought of something *fast*.

My eyes strayed to the group of kids playing cricket on the oval, an idea slowly forming. Jack's broken nose was pretty good, and I knew deep down that I could never top it, especially with only a day to go until photos. But I could match it. How hilarious would it be to take home a group class photo with me and Jack sitting next to each other with matching neon tape on our noses?

I waved goodbye to Jack and sprinted over to the cricket pitch. Lucas was batting, and I knew he always hit the ball far and to the left. I ran out into the field to my friend Leila.

“Hi Leila!” I said, skidding to a stop next to her on the wet grass, purposely not paying attention to the action on the cricket pitch. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Lucas stepping forward ready to bat. I turned my face towards the sun and closed my eyes, pretending not to see the ball coming.

“Aaah, the sun’s so nice today, isn’t it?” I said happily. I heard the crack of the bat and waited for impact. But it never came. When I opened my eyes, I saw a very frustrated Lucas jumping up and down. The ball had missed me by a metre and Leila had caught him out!

The bell rang for class, and I started walking towards our classroom, dejected. But hope wasn’t lost ... there was still a day until we got our photos taken. Plenty of time for an accidental broken nose.

The first lessons of the day flew by, until the bell rang for recess, and my class poured out onto the oval. I ran over with Jack to the playground, excited to try out the new Tarzan swing that the school had installed. I grabbed the rope and swung over the sandpit a couple of times, jumping into the sand. But the next time the rope swung back for me to climb on, I was ready for something a bit different.

As the rope swung over the pavers surrounding the edge of the playground, my hands slipped from the handle and I fell face-first towards the bricks. I waited for the crunch when ... OOOMF! All the wind was knocked out of me as I landed not on the bricks, but on the hot gritty sand of the sandpit. Darn! I had let go at the wrong time! Leila rushed over to me.

“Maya, are you okay?” she said, pulling me up.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I groaned. I sat up and trudged back inside as the bell rang. Another failed attempt! I was going to have to time my next shenanigan perfectly.

I found the perfect opportunity after Maths, right at the end of the day. It had been Leila’s birthday on the weekend, and she was allowed to pick a friend to go and bake cupcakes with. She picked me (I think she felt sorry for me falling on my face this morning) and we walked down to the canteen with Mrs Robins, our assistant.

We were just measuring the flour into the bowl when Leila peered at the wooden spoon she had picked up to stir the batter with.

“Yuck, the spoon’s still got all dried stuff on it,” she said. “Maya, can you go and rinse it?”

“Sure!” I said. I took the spoon over to the sink and twisted the tap on. Water sprayed everywhere – onto the bench, my skirt, and ... the floor.

“Whoops! Stupid tap!” I called. I walked over to grab a paper towel to wipe up the mess and made sure my foot was positioned *just* over the water spill ...

THUD! Sure enough, I went skidding towards the bench, my nose ready to make impact with the hard granite countertop, when I smooshed into something soft and definitely not nose-breaking material. I had fallen right into Mrs Robins!

“Heavens, child, are you all right?” she cried. “I’m so sorry, dear, I really didn’t see you slip over!”

Great. I had been formulating plans all day and *nothing* had worked. It looked like I was going to have to forfeit to Jack this year. I helped Leila finish the cupcakes and walked back to class under a cloud of gloom. As the bell rang and we all walked outside to the pick-up area with our backpacks, I noticed Miss Peters gesture to my mum to come over. They talked quietly for a few minutes, Mum nodding and looking concerned. My heart began to speed up. Had they discovered I’d been purposely trying to get a broken nose all day?

Finally Mum came over to collect me. After we got in the car, Mum said, “Miss Peters is a bit worried about you – she says you’ve been awfully clumsy lately. She said your friend Leila had noticed it too, and she was wondering if you might need glasses.”

I was confused. Glasses? What was she talking about?

“Short-sightedness runs in our family, so I thought it’d be best if we went straight to the optometrist now. I’ll call her when we get home to see if we can have an emergency appointment.”

I was dismayed, but there was nothing I could do. Sure enough, an hour later we were standing outside Dr Connell’s optometrist ready for an eye test. The doctor seemed nice enough, and she shone lights in my eye and asked me to read letters and numbers off big sheets of paper. I was so mad at myself that I’d misled my teachers and Mum so badly, but there was no way I was going to end up with ...

“Glasses,” said Dr Connell. “She’ll need prescription lenses right away. If you just sign these, most of it should be covered by Medicare ...”

And that’s how the next day I came to be standing outside the photographer’s booth in the hall, wearing the most disgusting glasses in the world. They were ugly. They were thick. They made me look like an owl. Suddenly, a grin spread across my face. They were ... *perfect* for beating Jack in our photo war.