

They happen every year at our family reunion. This time, Grandpa Max picked the location: Mosstop Mountain State Park, because the moss is so thick it looks like even the trees have moustaches. I'm sharing a tent with my cousin Daisy, which is a disaster. She doesn't know what to do with a tent peg even if you put the hammer in her hand.

All the boys who are old enough have been prepping in the bathroom for hours: Dad, my three brothers, Grandpa Max, five of my cousins, Uncle Javier, Uncle Ernie, Uncle Sneed and Uncle Steed. The rest of the boys can't wait till they get moustaches, because when the hairs pop out on a boy's face, he's turning into a grown-up. And that means he can compete in the Olympics.

I don't remember when my brothers got their moustaches. They're all older than me. I forget how old. They have babies who cry and drool a lot, but at least they don't have to share tents with their cousins. They get to drive their own cars. One even has his own motorcycle. They can eat peanut butter and jelly for breakfast **and** dinner if they want to. And Mom can't make them wear dumb dresses for a camping trip in the woods!

Anyway, there's, like, twenty events in the Olympics this year. Length, thickness, and originality; twirliness, silkiness, shagginess, bristliness, distinguished-ness. Then there are the really amazing ones, like 'Change-Up', where you have to totally transform your moustache in three minutes, and 'Pop It!', where you have to pop as many balloons as you can with its tip.

And this year, just like every year, what are us girls supposed to do? Nothing, that's what! We watch. We sit back and let them have a ball. And we're supposed to clap. I'm sick of it. 'Y'all are the vainest bunch of men I ever saw,' old Auntie Rae scoffs, smoothing her skirt as we sit down at the picnic table for pre-Olympic burgers.

'Obsessed with looking manly,' cousin Tina adds. She's the one with the cut-off shorts and the dragon tattoo. 'Nothing manly about that.'

I don't want to look manly, whatever that even means. I just wish, wish, wish there was some way to stop the boys from having all the fun. Maybe this year, we can boycott the Olympics. Or girl-cott them, to be exact. We can all march to the trailhead and go on a seven-mile hike. Just then, cousin Daisy interrupts. 'Could you please pass the gravy boat, Uncle Mo?'

Daisy is a year older than me and about to start sixth grade, which is why she thinks she can sit with her legs crossed like she's a grown-up and call our paper cup full of barbecue sauce a 'gravy boat'. She has a pink bow in her hair and she does ballet and everyone in the family thinks she's the one thing no one ever calls me: 'adorable'. 'Uncle Mo', of course, is my dad. Now HE's got some facial hair. The Mo-stache, as he calls it, is blondish-grey and droopy, like the whiskers of a walrus, 6.5 inches long. Sometimes I watch when he grooms it. That's what he calls it: grooming. He even washes it with special shampoo.

So 'Uncle Mo' turns to look for the barbecue sauce. And I might be pouring half of it all over my burger. 'Emily!' he says. My cheeks heat up. But he isn't looking at the barbecue sauce. He's looking right at my face. 'You have a moustache!' Everyone stares. Daisy bursts out laughing. 'Oh my gosh, she does! She totally does! There it is! Look! It's all bristly and yellow and… moustachey!' My hand flies up to my face so fast I capsize the gravy boat. And I feel it. A little splash of barbecue sauce, and…hair. Above my lip.

Abandon ship!

I practically leap off the picnic bench. Ten seconds later I'm in the stinky campsite bathroom. I don't recognise the face in the mirror. I'm turning into Dad, I think. Or maybe a walrus. And my moustache is getting thicker by the second. It doesn't look like a bunch of sawdust anymore. Now it looks like a third eyebrow below my nose.

I can't go back there.

I run out into the forest. I tear through the bushes until I find a fallen tree to sit on and I hide my face in my hands.

People with moustaches are supposed to be grown-ups. They're not supposed to cry. Suddenly, there's a rustle.

'Emily?'

It's Dad. I wipe my eyes on the collar of the flowery dress I hate. He picks his way through the trees and sits down beside me.

'It's not fair,' I say. 'I always wanted to be a grown-up, but…why do I have to have a moustache?'

'Hey, what's wrong with a moustache?' Dad says, stroking his whiskers.

'Girls aren't supposed to have moustaches.'

'Why not?' he asks.

I look at him for a while. 'I don't know.'

'See?' he says. 'Neither do I.'

He stands up and shrugs off his backpack. 'But there's one thing I do know,' he says, fishing around inside. 'No one, boys or girls, should have an ungroomed moustache, that's for sure.' He tosses me a black leather bag: his groom kit. I can't help laughing.

'Emily, are you ready to look stunning?' And that's when I realise. This is how I can stop the boys from having all the fun. I'm not going to girl-cott the Olympics.

I'm going to compete.

I whisper something to Dad. Slowly, he grins, then rushes out of the woods. When he comes back, I can see that only five of the girls have accepted my invitation. Mom and Daisy haven't, but too bad for them. They won't be on the Girl Team.

Dad whips out a mirror and a measuring tape. My moustache has stopped growing for now. It's 4¾ inches wide and exactly one inch high. 'It's got a nice spikiness to it and an interesting bit of bounce,' Dad mutters.

'It's got character,' agrees Auntie Rae.

'I can see it holding well as a chevron or a paintbrush...'

'Or, we take it to the next level,' Tina jumps in, 'and go for a handlebar….'

We talk it over for ages. We experiment. And when I step out of that forest, I have a moustache like no one's ever seen before. It's thick and fuzzy in the middle and thin and prickly on the ends, curling upwards on the right and downwards on the left. Totally off-kilter and a little defiant.

Like me.

In the field by the picnic area, the Olympics are about to start. The flag with five interlocking moustaches is waving in the wind. The boys nervously take their places on a wide wooden platform, while the girls find seats. Up on the platform there are moustaches like shaving brushes, moustaches like pitchforks, moustaches like feathers and moustaches like wings. Massive brown moustaches sticking up like donkey ears, and pointy black moustaches like giant beetle antennas.

But when I walk out onto the field, everyone's looking at me.

Tina and Auntie Rae are grinning and clapping and cheering like crazy. Two of my little cousins are raising a pizza box that says 'GO GIRL TEAM!!!' Mom looks like she's about to faint. And Daisy is so completely awestruck that she drips chocolate ice cream onto her dress.

I march up to the platform smiling bright as the Sun and take my spot between two of my brothers. But I don't feel like one of the boys. I feel like Emily. And I feel beautiful. The whistle blows. The judges step forward. I think we might have a shot at a few of the events. But I don't care what happens next. To me, I've already won.

The End

Illustration: Ed J. Brown