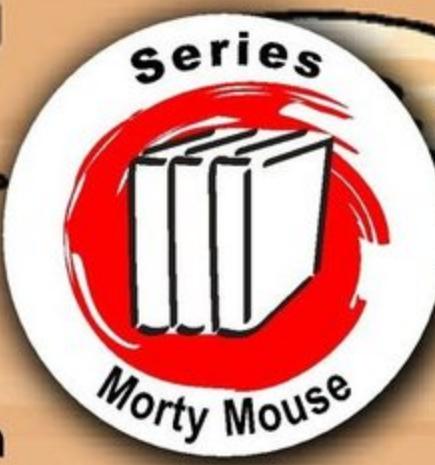


LEVELED BOOKS

# Chef Morty's Party Surprise



Written by Kathy Hoggan  
Illustrated by Joel Snyder



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"Grown-up parties must be really boring," Morty groaned. He was sweeping the back porch, and his older sister was cutting fresh flowers in the garden.

"They just sit around and talk and eat. No piñata. No Pin the Tail on the Cat. No goodie bags."

Morty stopped sweeping and looked at his sister. "I don't understand why we have to spiff up the house and go to bed early for that. And why does Mother spend all day in the kitchen getting ready?"



His sister was snipping fresh mint leaves for Mother to freeze in ice cubes for drinks. It was the latest entertaining idea in *Good Mousekeeping* magazine, which is where Mother found all of her fancy snack ideas.

"It's always the same. Someone will say, 'Wow! Your house looks so nice! You've gone to lots of trouble,'" Morty squeaked in a nasally voice. "And Mother will say, 'Oh, it was nothing,'" Morty mimicked Mother.

"Well, maybe it is NOTHING to her, but it is SOMETHING to me! I could be hanging out with Ben and Fred RIGHT NOW!"

Morty heard the backdoor slam and realized his sister had gone into the house. He quickly ran to the front of the house and swept the steps before scampering to the park where Ben and Fred were playing.

"Where have you been, Morto?" Fred called when he saw Morty round the corner.

Ben, Fred, and Morty always met at the park on Saturday mornings. Sometimes they played soccer. Other times they raced on their skates or built ramps for jumping their bikes.

"My parents are going to your parents' party tonight," Ben said. "I bet you were slammed with chores."



Morty groaned and rolled his eyes. "It is so unfair. I wish you guys could come. Then it would be a real party."

The best third-grade buddies played a game of Chase and Stomp into the early afternoon. They were resting under a shady tree, massaging their sore tails when Morty brought up the party again. "The only good thing about Saturday night parties is Sunday morning. Mother and Father sleep in so we wake up early and nibble the leftover snacks!"

"It is SO UNFAIR," Morty spoke loudly. "They should invite my friends, too!"

Then Morty had a very mischievous idea.

"I've got to go, guys," he called as he scampered off. "I'm going to help Mother with the cooking."

Ben and Fred looked at each other, puzzled. They hadn't thought about the party all morning.

Ben said what they were both thinking, "Morty is definitely scheming."

"Could you use some help?" Morty asked as he swung open the kitchen door.

"I would love some, sweetie," Mother replied. She was whipping a bowl of cream cheese. "I need to hang the tablecloths on the clothesline. Would you spread this on the bagels?"

Two platters of sliced bagels were waiting for the creamy spread.



"Sure," Morty cheerfully answered. He took the bowl from her, thought for a minute, and scampered to the bathroom for the toothpaste. It was the same color and consistency as the cream cheese. He quickly returned to the kitchen and squirted toothpaste on the bagels.



When he heard Mother returning, he stuffed the empty tube in the pocket of his jeans.  
"Mother, there is a lot of this cheese left."

"That's okay," Mother assured him. "I'm going to put it on the celery sticks, too."

"Now I want to make the punch. Would you mind mashing some bananas for me?"

Everyone loved Mother's famous fruit slush. She would freeze a mixture of mashed berries and bananas and later pour lemon-lime soda over the frozen slush for a double delicious treat. Morty peeled five bananas and dropped them in the blender. Then he tossed in six cloves of garlic and pushed the button labeled *puree*. The strong smell of garlic made him sneeze, but there were so many delicious odors in the kitchen that Mother didn't seem to notice.



Morty was rinsing out the blender when his mother asked, "Are you ready for another task?"

"Sure. What's next?"

"Cheesy popcorn," she replied, getting a large serving bowl out of the cupboard.  
"Would you mind popping some corn and sprinkling it with the cheese-flavored salt?"

Morty had the popper humming before Mother finished her request. With a heaping bowl of fresh popcorn on the counter, Morty opened the cupboard for the cheesy salt, hesitated for a moment, and chose the onion powder instead. His eyes watered as he generously coated the popcorn.





"Oh, sugar, I don't know what I would have done without your help," Mother gushed. "It's just an hour until the guests arrive!"

"No problem!" Morty said. But there was one little problem; he was starting to feel bad inside.

Morty was already in his Mega Mouse pajamas when Father came to tuck him in.

"Did you brush your chompers and wash behind your ears?" Father asked.

"I couldn't find the toothpaste, but I water-brushed," Morty offered.

"Great." His father looked puzzled and wondered out loud, "Where did that full tube of toothpaste go?"

Father kissed the top of Morty's head. "Go right to sleep, Mega Mouse. I don't want to hear a squeak from you while the guests are here."

Father moved on to tuck in Morty's younger brothers in their room, but the smell of Old Mice, Father's aftershave, lingered. Morty felt guilty about using up all the toothpaste. But it wasn't long before the melodic sounds of his parents' favorite musicians, Marvin Tinklekeys and the Squeakers, lulled Morty to sleep.

“Let’s see if any food is left!”

Morty awoke to his younger brothers scrambling down the stairs. Morty struggled out of bed and sleepily trudged down the stairs to search for those fancy snacks.

One of Morty’s brothers discovered a nearly full bowl of cheesy popcorn in the living room. He and Morty reached into the bowl at the same time, but before Morty could toss a kernel in his mouth he got a whiff of onion and snapped his hand back. His brother wasn’t so lucky. With a panicked look, Morty’s brother frantically searched for a napkin to spit his popcorn into.



Now fully awake, Morty vaguely remembered waking up a few times last night to the sounds of loud choking and sneezing.

"Hey! There's a full plate of bagels in here!" another brother called from the kitchen. Then Morty heard his brother gag and run to spit out his bite. Now it all came back to Morty. He had a sinking feeling there would be an unpleasant conversation in his near future.

"Stop!" Morty yelled.

Too late. Morty's older sister ran for the bathroom with one paw over her mouth and a glass of fruit slush in the other.



“What’s all the racket?” asked Father from the top of the stairs. He looked angry, so the mice didn’t make a sound.

Morty’s younger sister broke the silence, “This stuff is NASTY!”

“I know,” Father said solemnly. “The guests took a bite, gulped water, and left early with upset stomachs.”

Father looked into the eyes of each of his mice. “Does anyone know how the party food got ruined?”

The ears of Morty’s siblings flapped as they shook their heads no. But Morty could not shake his head. There is one thing about Morty, HE ALWAYS TELLS THE TRUTH.



Mother joined Father at the top of the stairs as Morty softly answered, "I did it. I spoiled the food. I was mad that our friends couldn't come to the party."

"The bagels?" Mother asked.

"Toothpaste," Morty mumbled.

"The popcorn?"

Father shook his head and asked, "The punch?"

"Garlic," Morty admitted.



His brothers and sisters looked from Morty to their parents, anticipating what would happen next.

Mother headed into the kitchen. "Morty, we have a lot of clean-up ahead. Let's get started."



Morty nodded and had begun to follow Mother when Father spoke up. "Young mouse, you are grounded for a month. You should have plenty of time after clean-up to write apology notes to each of the guests."

While he carefully dried the dishes, Morty noticed his mother looking at him. "I was so proud of you for helping me," Mother said. "I am hurt and disappointed that your only intent was to ruin the party."

"I am really sorry," Morty muttered. "I didn't think my actions through. I didn't want to hurt you or make anyone sick. I'm so sorry."

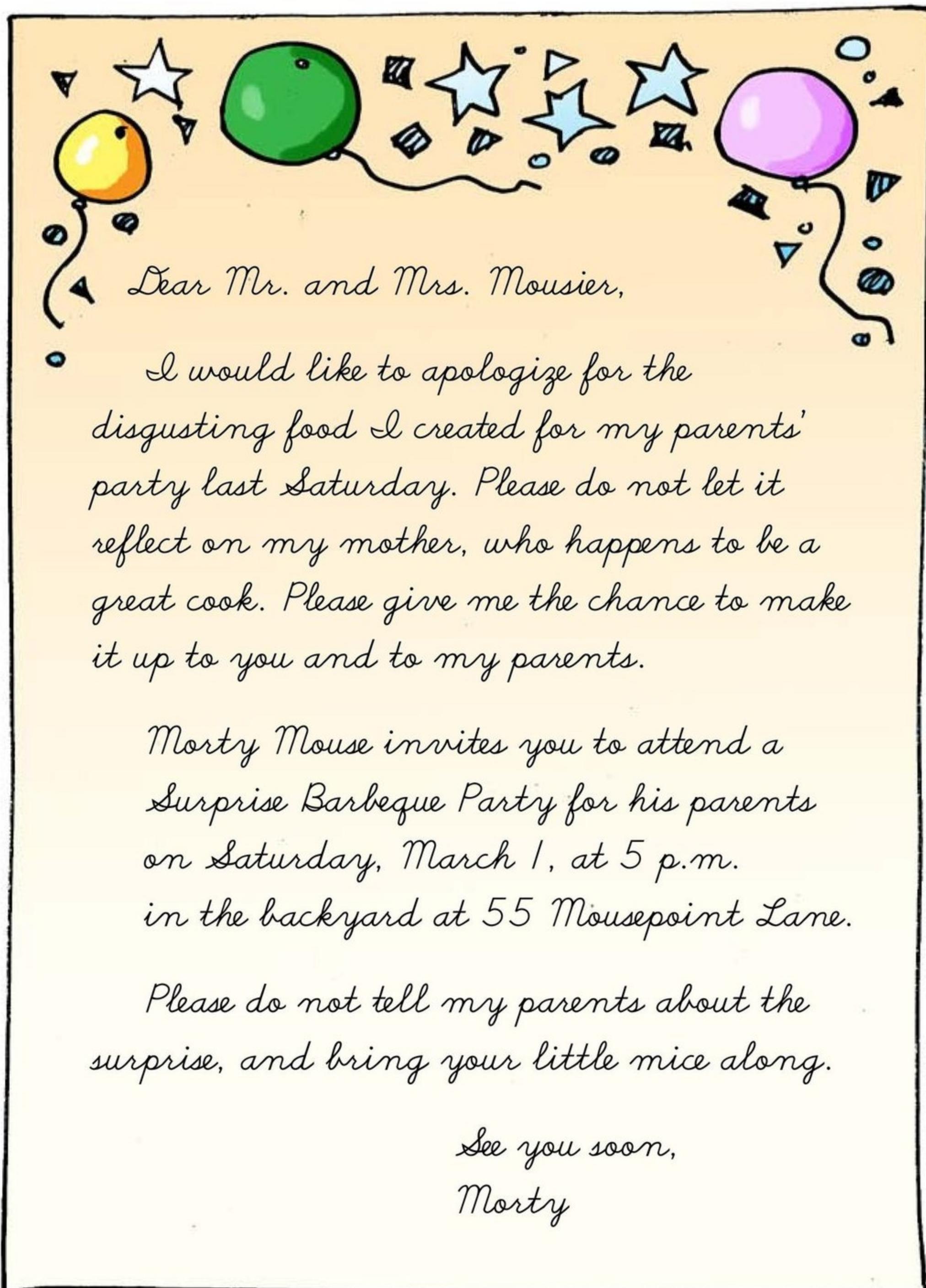
He reached out to give Mother a big hug.





Much later in the afternoon, Morty sat at his desk with a blank notebook of paper in front of him and many apology notes to write. He was trying to work out what to write when he had a brilliant idea. Morty's grandparents had sent him some money for his birthday. Add that to his earnings from the lemonade stand he ran with Ben and Fred last week, and he might have enough for a small party.

He wrote to each guest in his best penmanship:



Morty Mouse's stories began with author Kathy Hoggan telling her children about the adventures of a mischievous mouse, inspired by her grandmother's tales of Suzette Scamper. Now, more than a decade after she shared the first Morty Mouse stories with students, you too can enjoy the exciting adventures of mischievous Morty Mouse in this series from ReadingA-Z.com.

Chef Morty's Party Surprise  
Level S Leveled Book

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