

Crossing the river

‘Susie,’ says Alice. ‘Crocodiles come from eggs.’

‘Yes, they do,’ I say.

Alice is reading a book – *Australian Animals*. She is my cousin. Her mother is my Aunty Beth. Aunty Beth is my mother’s sister.

‘They come from eggs?’ asks her little brother, Jamie. ‘Like chickens?’

‘Yes,’ says Alice. ‘Like chickens.’ She closes her book. ‘But chickens have little eggs and crocodiles have BIG eggs – BIG eggs, BIG mouths and BIG teeth. Crocodiles have BIG teeth to eat you with!’

Alice laughs. Jamie hits her head.

‘Ouch! Don’t hit me!’ says Alice. ‘That hurts.’ She isn’t laughing now.

‘Stop it, you two,’ says Uncle Rob, their father. ‘I’m driving and you aren’t helping!’

‘Jamie, don’t be naughty,’ says Aunty Beth. ‘Don’t hit your sister.’

Jamie is always naughty. He is five and Alice is ten. Aunty Beth, Uncle Rob, Alice and Jamie are on holiday in Australia. They live in England. Mum and I live in Sydney, but now we are on holiday with them – in Far North Queensland. We are driving in a big car. We are going to a hotel near the Daintree River.

Uncle Rob stops the car. We are at a small river. The road goes across the river.

‘Can we go?’ says Jamie. ‘I’m hot.’



‘I’m hot too,’ says Uncle Rob, ‘but we have to stop. There is water on the road.’

‘It’s okay,’ says Mum. ‘We can drive across the river in this car.’

‘Is it dangerous, Meg?’ Aunty Beth asks my mother.

‘No,’ Mum says. ‘We are safe in this car.’

‘Yes,’ says Uncle Rob. ‘We are very safe in this car.’

‘Oooh, look!’ says Alice. ‘There’s a crocodile!’

‘Where?’ says Jamie. He looks out of the window.

‘There,’ says Alice. There is a sign beside the river. On the sign there is a picture of a crocodile.

‘That’s not a crocodile,’ says Jamie. ‘That’s a picture.’

‘Yes,’ says Alice, ‘but there *are* crocodiles in the river. It’s dangerous in the river – DAN-GER-OUS!’

‘Okay, let’s go,’ says Uncle Rob. ‘Close the windows.’

We close the windows and Uncle Rob drives the car into the water. SPLASH!

‘Ohhh!’ says Jamie and he closes his eyes.

SPLASH! SPLASH! Water hits the window. Alice looks out of the window and laughs.

Uncle Rob drives the car across the river. ‘This is a good car,’ he says. ‘We are safe now.’

Jamie opens his eyes. ‘It’s okay, Jamie. We’re safe now,’ says Aunty Beth.

What a brat!

‘Look!’ says Mum. ‘There’s the hotel.’

A sign says ‘Daintree River Hotel’. Uncle Rob drives the car into the hotel car park. He stops the car and says, ‘Okay. Everybody out!’

We walk through the car park, through a garden and then through a big door into the hotel.

‘Hello,’ says the man behind the desk in the hotel. ‘My name is David Mills. Can I help you?’

‘Yes,’ says Mum. ‘Thank you.’

Mum and Auntie Beth talk to Mr Mills. Uncle Rob, Alice, Jamie and I look at the pictures on the walls. There is a picture of a river. There is a boat on the river. The people on the boat are looking at a crocodile in the water.

‘I want to go on that boat,’ says Alice.

Uncle Rob asks Jamie, ‘Do you want to go on the boat?’

‘No!’ Jamie shouts. ‘I hate boats!’

‘Jamie, sshh,’ says Uncle Rob. ‘Don’t shout. And don’t be silly. You don’t hate boats. We go on boats at home.’

‘Yes,’ says Auntie Beth. ‘You love going on boats at home in England.’

‘I’m not silly,’ says Jamie. ‘I hate boats.’

Mr Mills looks at Jamie. ‘But people like going on this boat. You can see birds and you can see...’

‘CROCODILES!’ says Alice, jumping up and down. ‘You can see crocodiles!’

‘Yes,’ says Mr Mills, and he smiles at her. ‘You can see crocodiles.’

Mum has a room. Auntie Beth and Uncle Rob have a room. And I have a room with Alice and Jamie.

‘Can I sleep in your room?’ I ask Mum.

Alice and Jamie are in the bathroom. They are cleaning their teeth. Auntie Beth is in the bathroom with them.

‘No, Susie,’ says Mum.

‘But, Mum, I’m twelve years old. Alice and Jamie are babies,’ I say. ‘And Jamie is a brat – he’s always naughty!’

‘Alice is ten! She is not a baby,’ says Mum. ‘And Jamie is not a brat. Jamie is...well, Jamie is unhappy.’

‘Unhappy? Well, I’m unhappy too! I do *not* want to sleep in this room with those two.’

‘Please, Susie,’ says Mum. ‘Jamie likes you. You can help him.’

‘Me? What can I do? I can’t help.’

Alice and Jamie come into the room. Mum and I stop talking. Alice gets into bed and opens her book. ‘Crocodiles eat fish and birds,’ she reads. ‘Crocodiles eat big animals like cows, and small animals like...like Jamie!’

Jamie jumps into bed and hides. He hides under the blanket and we can’t see him.

‘They *don’t* eat people, Alice,’ I say. I get into bed too. I don’t get under my blanket – it is hot.

‘Yes, they do,’ she says. ‘There is a story in this book. In the story a crocodile eats a girl.’

‘Well, okay, *sometimes* they eat people,’ I say. ‘*Sometimes* people go near the water and *sometimes* crocodiles eat them. But crocodiles like fish and birds and small animals.’

Auntie Beth comes into the room. ‘Mum, when are we going to see the crocodiles?’ says Alice.

‘Tomorrow, Alice,’ says Aunty Beth. ‘We can go on the boat on the river tomorrow. We can see birds and animals and...’

‘I hate animals,’ says Jamie. ‘I want to go swimming tomorrow – in the swimming pool.’ He is still under the blanket.

‘Don’t be silly, Jamie,’ says Aunty Beth. ‘You don’t hate animals.’

‘I do, I do! I hate them!’

‘Well,’ says Mum, ‘we can go on the boat in the morning and then we can go swimming in the pool in the afternoon.’

‘No! I don’t want to go swimming in the afternoon,’ says Jamie. ‘I want to go swimming in the *morning*.’

What a brat!

‘Oh, okay, Jamie,’ says Aunty Beth. ‘We can go swimming in the morning.’ She looks at Mum. ‘I don’t understand...’ Her face is sad. ‘He is a happy boy at home.’

‘Susie likes swimming.’ Mum is looking at me. I don’t understand. Does she want me to speak?

‘Yes,’ I say. ‘I like swimming.’

Mum is still looking at me.

‘I *love* swimming,’ I say.

Now Mum’s eyes are speaking to me. *You can help him.*

‘You can come swimming with me, Jamie,’ I say.

Mum smiles. The blanket on Jamie’s bed moves. I can see his hair and his eyes, and then his nose and his mouth.

I have to sleep in the room with this brat. And now I have to go swimming with him too!

This is the German version of **Cousins and Crocodiles**

Cousins and Crocodiles



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