

# Nothing to Fear

## 1. HOLIDAYS

“Crocodiles!” I jumped off the couch and dropped the remote. “I hate crocodiles. They eat people and they’re ugly.”

Mom held her forehead and sighed. She thought I was being a pain in the butt. She always did that when she thought I was being a pain in the butt. She did it a lot.

Charlie, who was doing his math homework at the dining table, laughed out loud. I knew he was thinking, *Max, go ahead, be a pain in the butt because that always makes me look good.*

Mom pulled dead flowers out of the vase as though she was angry with them. “Maaax, we’ve been planning this holiday for ages. We’re going and you’ll have a wonderful time.”

“I’d rather go to Nanna’s,” I said. “She likes me helping her.”

“Nanna is going to the Gold Coast—”

“Great ... I’ll go to the Gold Coast.”

Charlie looked up. I bet he’d rather go to the Gold Coast too.

“You can’t,” replied Mom. “She’s going with her friends. You’d spoil her fun.”

I flopped down on the couch. I hated that. I hated being a kid. Always being told what to do and never getting to decide where we’d go for holidays. When I have kids, I’ll let them choose where we go for holidays every year. If my kids wanted go to Disneyland ten years in a row, I’d take them.

Mom put the dead flowers in the bin, then came over and sat next to me. She squeezed my hand and whispered, “We’ll only see the crocodiles from the safety of a boat. People only die from crocodile attacks because they swim where they shouldn’t. They ignore the *No Swimming* signs.”

Could all moms read their kids’ minds? My mom just knows when I’m scared of something. I wondered what else she knew. Did she know that I listened to music at night when I was meant to be asleep?

“So it’s safe?” I whispered to her.

Charlie called out, “Max, you’ve got more chance of being killed by lightning than being killed by a crocodile. In Australia last year, ten people

died because they were struck by lightning and only one died of a crocodile attack. And if you lived in Africa, you're much more likely to be killed by a lion."

Typical. He was always trying to impress Mom with facts and figures. I told him, "I'd rather be killed by lightning."

"Yeah, being zapped would be electrifying." He stood up and shook like a bolt of electricity had shot through his body.

"Get lost," I said.

"I hope you don't come," he said as he went back to tapping numbers on a calculator and writing down figures. "I'll have the whole back seat of the car to myself. I won't have to share a room. I can watch whatever I want on TV."

I hated the way he could talk and do math as though it was as easy as walking and breathing at the same time.

"That won't happen," said Mom. "Max is coming."

I folded my arms. "You can't force me."

She shook her head as if I were a hopeless case. "You know there's nothing to fear but fear itself."

That was one of her favorite sayings. She said it to me a thousand times a year. She used to say it when I was afraid of the dark, afraid of the invisible monster hiding in my wardrobe and afraid of strange noises at night.

Without looking up, Charlie said, "We should see Kakadu before global warming wrecks it."

Typical. Charlie and Dad reckon we have to see everything before global warming wrecks it. I bet we'll never again have a normal holiday at the beach. Now we have to see stuff. We would've had to gawk at icebergs in Antarctica last summer, but luckily that was too expensive. I said, "I wouldn't want to see Kak-my-du even if it didn't have crocs."

"It's called Kakadu National Park," said Mom. "Thousands of people visit it every year. And I bet most of those people are terrified of crocodiles. But they still want to see them in the wild. And there are lots of walks, swimming holes and waterfalls. The landscape is stunning and there are Aboriginal rock paintings too." She gave me one of her pleading looks. "Max, when you were little, you were so brave."

"WERE BRAVE," Charlie repeated, without looking up.

I yelled, "I'm still brave!"

Mom smiled at me and messed up my hair as if I were five years old.

"Okay, I'll go," I said. I'd show her how brave I was. I decided right then that I wouldn't be afraid of crocs. I'd be brave like Charlie. I was only two and a half years younger than him, so I should be brave like him. And from now on I would be. And even if I wasn't, I'd pretend I was.