



1 The times that Fadi felt at his most alone were when he was at school. He sat on a bench by himself at recess and lunch, reading his book or, when it was a really inspiring day, he lay on the grass and stared up at drifting clouds. A few years earlier, when Fadi had first arrived in the country, he often caught snatches from the hum of whispers surrounding his classmates. Most of the time it was just another child fascinated by his artificial leg, but there had been other, crueller voices. These had taught him the words that made his mother cry whenever he repeated them. Since then Fadi had taken her advice and ignored those voices. Instead of teasing, Fadi was now

surrounded with a daily isolation that left a cold pinch in his chest.

2 Fadi's home life was as congested as his school days were empty. Three generations of his family sat for dinner each night in his kitchen — fifteen people in all, squeezing their life into four bedrooms. He always looked forward to these evenings, sitting amongst his siblings and cousins to listen to their grandfather's stories about the 'time before all the fighting'. While Fadi had been too young to remember those conflicts, he knew they had been brutal; he had lost a father, a leg and a homeland to them.

3 One night Fadi gave his mother a permission note for a day excursion to the National Park. The entire school was going to hike through the bush before taking a lunch break, followed by an afternoon swim in the lake. Secretly, Fadi hoped his mother would refuse to give her permission. The note became, instead, the centrepiece of a large family meeting that night, with everyone urging Fadi to use the excursion as a chance to make friends.

"Kids are different when they're outside of school, you'll find them easier to talk to," said his mother.

"How about you impress them at lunch time, eh?" his grandfather suggested. "You're a very strong boy — show them your muscles."

His older sister ruffled his hair and said, "Just smile for once, Fadi. Show them you can have fun too."

4 Fadi thanked his mother for giving him permission; he knew his family meant well, but they did not understand his situation. He was the youngest of the household and no one else had experienced the challenge of school in this country. For the next few nights Fadi lay awake in bed, relentlessly playing over the possible events of the National Park excursion in his mind. He could see children laughing at him, calling him those horrible names he used to hear. One time he pictured a giant crocodile leaping out of the bush and chasing him along a dirt track. Even in his imagination the old artificial leg was cumbersome, and he was forced to stay and wrestle the crocodile until he fell asleep.

5 Finally, at the end of those sleepless nights, the day of the excursion arrived. That morning Fadi couldn't finish his cereal, it having turned to cardboard from all his worrying. It was worse on the bus; packed tight amidst fidgeting gigglers, Fadi pressed his face against the glass of the

window and watched the rows of houses melt into an endless green blur.

6 Fadi felt his greatest disgrace when it came time to actually walk through the bush. Trying to shield his blushing face, Fadi walked far behind the other students, chaperoned by Mr Fisher, a PE teacher who tried to make small talk as they ambled along. Being polite, Fadi answered with short words. Soon they were walking in silence and Fadi returned to the task of dreading lunch by the lake.

7 Despite his fears, lunchtime was a great improvement on the bushwalk, and Fadi was able to find a calming spot amongst some trees by the lake. Here he sat, eating the sandwiches his mother had made for him, while the sounds of playing classmates droned away in the background. Soon the lake's serene stillness lulled him into a doze. His mind wandered back along the events of the day — the crowded bus, awkward Mr Fisher and the crocodile that splashed in the lake ...

"Help!"

8 Jolted by the sudden cry, Fadi sat upright and knocked the sleep straight from his mind. It was not a crocodile he heard splashing in the water, but a young boy from Fadi's class. His name, Fadi remembered, was Kyle, and he must have snuck away from the teachers to swim before it became too crowded. Erratic ripples flowed away from the boy as he thrashed about in the lake, trying to stay afloat. Fadi looked around him; there was a group of teachers and students about a couple of hundred metres away. It was too far away for Fadi's artificial leg to carry him with the speed such an emergency demanded.

"Help ... cramp!" Kyle blubbed.

9 His energy was ebbing, Fadi saw, and Kyle would not be able to keep afloat for much longer. Resolute, Fadi scrambled down towards the shore of the lake near Kyle, and undid the belt that attached the leg to his thigh. He edged himself into the chilly water, making sure not to slip into its depths until his left hand had anchored him onto a thick, submerged tree root. Finally, Fadi extended himself, reaching out towards Kyle with his artificial leg — its leather belt wrapped around his wrist so that it would not slip out of his grasp. The distance between the two boys was a bit greater than Fadi needed.

10 “Come to me! Reach here — grab the wood. I’ll pull you out,” Fadi shouted.

Kyle’s panicked eyes locked onto Fadi’s and, in that moment, an unspoken agreement stilled his terror. With the last of his strength, Kyle leapt out and gripped the pockmarked end of Fadi’s leg.

11 The muscles along Fadi’s back and shoulders snapped taut with the strain. A red thunder growled behind his eyes as he tugged at Kyle, drawing him closer towards the shore. Finally, with a barbaric roar, like a crocodile bursting from Fadi’s lips, he heaved Kyle onto the muddy shore. Panting, the two boys lay there, side by side, looking up at the clouds shifting in the sky.

12 At assembly the next week, Fadi was called up to the front of the school hall, along with his mother and grandfather. Kyle’s family was there too, beaming with joy at their son’s saviour. Standing there, surrounded by all those smiling faces, Fadi felt warmth blooming in place of that cold pinch in his chest. He was a hero and for the first time in his life he could hear nothing but the cheering applause of his friends.

Questions

- What had made Fadi’s mother cry?
 - the words he heard from the cruel voices
 - his artificial leg
 - him feeling isolated at school
- What advice did Fadi’s sister give him?
 - Show the kids your muscles.
 - Kids are friendlier outside of school.
 - Smile and show people you are friendly.
- In his dream, Fadi had to wrestle the crocodile because
 - his artificial leg was cumbersome.
 - he was lonely.
 - he didn’t want to go bushwalking.
- What did Fadi use to stop himself from slipping into the deep water?
 - his leg
 - a tree root
 - Kyle’s hand
- What feeling has passed in the final section of this story?
 - blooming warmth
 - cheering voices
 - a cold pinch
- What is the most suitable meaning for the image of a crocodile bursting from Fadi’s lips?
 - Fadi was no longer afraid of crocodiles
 - Fadi no longer felt helpless with his artificial leg
 - Fadi no longer felt alone

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- Intrigued (1)
- Overly crowded (2)
- Awkward because of something’s size or shape (4)
- Accompanied and supervised someone (6)
- A person who rescues someone else (12)

Grammar

Simple sentences have a **subject** and a **verb**. The **subject** tells us who or what the sentence is about, the **verb** tells us what the subject does.

E.g. *Jacqui played netball.*

The **subject** is *Jacqui*. The **verb** is *played*.

Find the **subject** in these sentences.

- He sat on a bench by himself.
- Fadi’s mother gave her permission.
- I’ll put you out.
- Kyle’s family was there too.

Back To The Text...

- There were crocodiles in the national park.
 - true
 - false
- Fadi’s father had been killed.
 - true
 - false

18 Fadi was the only one in his family still at school.

- true
- false

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- Mum said that kids are different outside school.
 - Fadi’s sister just told him to smile.
- Fadi had trouble eating his cereal.
 - Fadi’s mother signed the permission note.
- Fadi dreamed of crocodiles.
 - Fadi roared like a crocodile.

Think About This

- What do you think the “endless green blur” is in section 5?
 - The roofs of the houses.
 - The trees in the national park.
 - Students rushing past Fadi.
- Which of the following words best describe Fadi’s family?
 - small
 - subdued
 - wealthy
 - caring

Challenge Option

Writing: Write two paragraphs about a rescue you have heard about recently.

