


# CUDDLES THE CROCODILE

A green cartoon crocodile illustration. The crocodile is shown in profile, facing right. It has a long snout, a small eye, and a row of sharp teeth. Its body is covered in small, dark green scales, and its legs are short and thick. The crocodile is positioned below the title text.

*Stories for Claire and John*

by Thomas Mc Rae

# **Cuddles the Crocodile**

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# 1

## *The Strange Tale of Cuddles the Crocodile*

for Claire by Tomas Mc Rae

Thomas Mc Rae, *Cuddles the Crocodile*

## *The Strange Tale of Cuddles the Crocodile*

**I**t all started one very dark night when I was walking home and the street lights were not working. I was walking very carefully when **THWHACKOH!** I fell over something in the street, something I thought was a large tree trunk. I was winded by my fall but managed to find my little flashlight and shine it on the thing I'd fallen over ...

### **IT WAS A GREAT BIG CROCODILE !!!**

The monster's eyes shone at me in the light of my torch and I got ready to run away as fast as I could. Up the hill towards home I ran but behind me I could hear "Scuffley, skiffley, fwoop, scuffley, skiffley, fwoop" as the beast came after me. (The fwoop was the noise its tail made dragging behind.) I reached my front door but my hand shook so much I couldn't get the key in the lock. The horrid thing came nearer and nearer! Just as it started climbing the front steps I managed to turn the key, get inside, and lock the door. I fell exhausted into a chair, getting my breath back before I rang the police.

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Outside the door I heard scratching then a loud “Ooooooooo Hooooooo!” I peeped out of the window and that crocodile was crying ...



Carefully I opened the door a little. “What’s the matter?” I asked the beast and it rolled on its back with legs in the air. I started to feel a bit braver so I scratched his tummy which he seemed to like. At least it did not seem to want me for dinner. Dinner? Maybe it wanted food?

I opened four big tins of my cats’ favourite fish platter and gave the contents to my visitor who scoffed it in no time then. Pushing by me into the sitting room, he slithered on to my settee, and closed his eyes. My two cats came in and were not amused as he was stretched out where they always spent the night. I left them to it and went to bed myself, but I locked my room door just in case I became a crocodile’s dinner in my sleep. Next morning when I had a look I could not believe my eyes. There was that huge crocodile cuddled up with my little pussies, Ori and P.B., all as happy as could be.

Soon the three of them woke up. And would you believe it? The cats started washing the crocodile! I filled a large basin with cat food and all

three ate breakfast at the same time, then went back to sleep together on the settee. An amazing sight! But I wondered what I was going to do with my strange guest. Where had it come from? I rang the university, but they knew nothing about any missing crocodiles.

As I had run out of cat food I had to drive to the supermarket to buy lots and lots and lots more. Home again I found my pets still fast asleep, cuddled up together. I made several notices which I stuck on walls and trees all around St Lucia. These notices said ...



I waited all day but nobody came to collect the strange creature which had followed me home. All too soon it was awake again, playing wild chasing games with my cats, running up and down the corridor and rolling on its back while

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they danced all over it. You can imagine just how much the house was shaking but what fun it all was. I began to think maybe I could enjoy having this new addition to the family after all.

After school that day Claire, the seven year old girl who lived across the street, dropped by to see the cats. She was very excited about the crocodile ... "Did it really follow you home, Tom? You're always telling fibs." I assured her my story was true and she ended up playing hide and seek with the monster. She it was who gave him his name. "Actually he is quite a cuddly thing, isn't he? Let's call him 'Cuddles'!" And that is what we did there and then.

As the days passed Cuddles became quite useful as, once shopkeepers got used to him, all I had to do was send him up the road with a large basket in his mouth, a shopping list pasted on his back, and a bag of money around his neck. He'd soon come back with what I'd ordered and have correct change in the bag. For some strange reason nobody ever stole that money. Wonder why. All was well until the dreadful day when all the trouble started! I was sitting quietly reading and Cuddles had gone out shopping when Claire rushed in shouting "Tom! Tom! Terrible news! The police have arrested Cuddles!" You can imagine how quickly I ran up the road

after her to find what had happened.

At the bus stop stood a large council bus, two police cars, an ambulance, and a huge truck with a crane on the back. Even as I watched Cuddles was lifted into the truck by the crane as several policemen stood on guard. I went up to them. "What are you doing with *my* crocodile?" I demanded. "*Your* crocodile?" said an inspector, "Should be ashamed of yourself keeping such a dangerous animal in a built-up area. That horrid monster just tried to eat up the bus driver, so it did. Quite shook up, he is, about it too, I can tell you. Your croc is for it, Mate."

Two ambulance men came out of the bus carrying the driver, into their ambulance and driving off. This was terrible. Had my friendly pet gone back to being a savage beast? "Are you sure it was *my* crocodile?" I asked the inspector "Can you see any others round here, Mate?" replied the policeman, "Anyhow there were fifty passengers in that bus and they all saw what happened,. It was your crocodile ... maybe we'll charge you as well. Name and address please, Sir."

I gave him my details but, in the end, although they shouted a lot and waved their arms, they let me go with a warning to chose pets more carefully in future. Deary me! I had kept a savage



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monster pretending to be nice in my home, even fed it regularly. How soon would it have been before it ate me and the cats? ... maybe even Claire! When the police had taken down the stories from all the bus passengers they got into their cars and drove away with the big truck following them. All the passengers had to walk for the police forgot to phone for another bus. The silly people blamed Cuddles for their problems, not the police. "Make it into croc-burgers!" shouted one fat man as he walked angrily away.

Things really did not look good at all for the huge beast who had come to my house some nights before, what would they do with him now? I soon found out for next day a man from the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) came to see me. He told me how the wicked crocky was chained to a post in the jail's swimming pool, the poor prisoners were very angry as this meant they could not have their daily swim. Even worse: the annual swimming carnival was on Saturday and they'd had to cancel it. Cuddles was the most hated creature in Australia, but I still went to visit him. The poor thing was crying all the time and the police said his trial would be in three weeks. Mr Catt, the RSPCA man, was the only person who reckoned

things may not be as bad as they looked. We'd see when the trial started. And start it soon did!

One wet and cold Monday morning the courtroom was crowded with people waiting to see an evil monster get its just desserts. Luckily, as the owner of that monster, I had a reserved seat. When I arrived up came the RSPCA representative and a man with a long beard. "I will be conducting the defence," said Mr Catt, the RSPCA man, "And this is the famous Pro-fessor MacGregor from Glasgow. Don't worry! We'll get this poor innocent creature off." Innocent creature indeed?

The two men went down to the front of the court. Me? I sat down and was just getting comfy when the court usher yelled out, "All rise!" We quickly shot on to our feet. I can tell you just in case we were sent to jail for staying seated.

Judge Durance, who was supposed to be the toughest judge in Australia, entered the courtroom. He glowered at us all and sat in his throne-like seat. "All be seated!" shouted the Usher and we all quickly sat down again just in case the last person on his feet got arrested. Judge Durance put his glasses on the tip of his nose, straightened his wig, glowered at us all again just for luck, coughed, and said, "Bring in the prisoner!" Oh, my poor Cuddles! A policeman dragged him in

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on the end of a long steel chain then stood him up in the dock, fastening the chain to the bars. Two more police with rifles stood beside it in case Cuddles escaped. Poor beast just stood in the dock crying crocodile tears, very sorry for himself... The judge hit the table with a wooden mallet that went ...

BANG!

“Let us give this horrid villain a fair trial then send him to jail forever,” he smiled. “Right, Your Honour,” said the same policeman who had made the arrest, Inspector Lockem. “We’ll soon settle this case and I shall prosecute ... Call the



first witness!” The usher yelled for James Lamb and into the court room came a little man in a brand-new council uniform. Prompted by Inspector Lockem he identified himself as the bus driver. “It was really an ‘orrible thing that happened, Your Honour. This here creature got on my bus. I asked it where it was going to and quick as a flash it jumped on me and started eating me up. If it had not been for the fifty passengers who came to my rescue I’d have been a real lamb dinner, I can tell you.”

Everybody started laughing but the judge

thumped his mallet and yelled, "Silence in court or I will jail the lot of you!" There was silence immediately. Inspector Lockem stood up saying, "Thank you, Mr Lamb. You can go now." "No, he can't!" shouted Mr Catt the RSPCA man "I am defending this poor innocent creature, and there are things to be cleared up." Judge Durance looked very sad, "Oh well, I suppose you better defend the beast before I send it to jail. Get on with it! We haven't got all day you know." Mr Catt bowed to the Judge, "Your Honour, I call on Professor MacGregor of Glasgow, an expert on Africa, to question the driver." The professor rose to his feet and said ... "Ladies and gentlemen ... first a little demonstration." Turning to Cuddles he said, "Werd d'ya wan, *buttum?*" Cuddles suddenly stood up very straight, put his right front foot across his breast, and fell on the floor legs up, eyes closed.

"Oh dear! It's died!" said everybody. "Silence in Court or else!" shouted Judge Durance banging away with his mallet. "Werd ya wan, *cha?*" said the Professor, and Cuddles stood up in the dock again. "Now everybody watch this ... Werd ya wan, *hooch?*" MacGregor started whistling a Highland Fling tune and that crocodile put one paw on its hip, stuck the other in the air and started a wild Scottish dance. "With the right

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music he'll do ballet," laughed MacGregor. The crocodile stopped dancing and even Inspector Lockem joined in the cheers and applause ...

'BANG BANG BANG' went the Judge's gavel ... "Silence in this court! You're all under arrest. Usher, call the police this minute!" "Hang on, Judge," said MacGregor "I shall now explain everything. Have any of you ever seen a crocodile like this one in Australia before? No? That's because he comes from Cabombaland in the middle of Africa. He's a genuine Cabombaland Greeny if ever I saw one." The professor then told us an amazing story ... It seems that the Cabomba tribe were sheep herders. Grass became hard to find in their own country, so they, their sheep, and their herd dogs came to a new land where rivers and lakes kept green grass growing in huge quantities. Trouble is where there is water in Africa there are crocodiles and the ones in this country decided they liked dog meat very much. (Sheep they couldn't stand for the wool got stuck in their teeth.) Cabomban elders worried about what they could get to herd the sheep when all the dogs were gone until somebody said "Why not train the crocodiles?"

And so they did. Over many years, they taught the beasts that they must always obey human commands and soon had sheep cros that

were much better than any dogs. They trained them in more skills until two or more crocodiles could push a canoe to make it speed up a river. On land people sat on their backs and were quickly transported from place to place without buying petrol. The humans even taught the crocodiles to dance, to harvest crops, and even raced them at meetings on Saturdays. The crocodiles loved human company and every Cabomban had several around the place. People and crocs were happy, so Cabombaland is still a great place to live. That is unless you happen to be a dog.

“So that’s my story,” said Professor MacGregor some time later. “Now you, bus-driver Lamb, can you remember what you said to this beastie when it got on your bus?” Mr Lamb rose to his feet, “Not a problem, Mate. Same as I always says to folks gettin’ on: ‘Where d’ya wanna go?’” The Judge thumped his mallet, “That settles it. Performing crocodile from Africa or no, this thing is guilty ... Fifty Years!” MacGregor said, “Respectfully, Your Honour, the jury has still to give its verdict and I’ve yet to finish my evidence. If you don’t let us do our jobs we’ll have *you* arrested for contempt of court.”

Judge Durance went very red in the face and went, “Splither, Splother, Sloother ... Sorry. Let

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the trial continue, but ... make it quick! It's nearly lunch time." He didn't even bang his mallet, he was so shook up. Professor MacGregor smiled at Mr Lamb, "My friend, let me give you a lesson in Cabomba language. You'll recall whenever I gave the crocodile an order I said, 'Werd d'ya wan ...' which means 'Excuse me, please.' Now 'na' means 'eat' and 'go' means 'me', and that explains what happened. Just remember this poor crocodile saw its very first bus, curious to learn more it got on and you, like the highly trained driver you are, asked your usual question, 'Where d'ya wanna go?' Trouble is what you said was Cabomban for 'Excuse me, please eat me,' and this beastie, that's trained to obey all human commands, and knows no English, had to do what you asked even though it didn't want to." Professor MacGregor turned to the Jury "Ladies and gentlemen, from my evidence you can see this poor beastie is quite innocent of any crime. I rest my case." Immediately all the members of the jury stood up and said, "Not Guilty." Judge Durance banged his mallet, "Right! Now I can pass sentence, 75 years!" "You can't do that, you silly old man," laughed Mr Catt the RSPCA man, "This crocodile is now free to go home. So get lost!"

So it was that I took Cuddles the crocodile

Thomas Mc Rae, *Cuddles the Crocodile*

home in a taxi truck. He was welcomed by Claire and the two cats, and soon afterwards Professor Macgregor and Mr Catt came by and we had a marvellous party that lasted until late. Cuddles did dances from all over the world, Professor MacGregor sang Scottish songs, and we all ended up very tired but very happy.

I now make lots of money as I put Cuddles on television. I need all that money as he eats so much. He has a TV fan club with Inspector Lockem as president and always travels free on Mr Lamb's bus. So all ended well, but there remains one mystery ... Where did Cuddles come from? We'll probably never know the truth, but I'm told there used to be a Cambomban student living at St Lucia. Maybe Cuddles strayed from his unit and the chap went home without him when called to be the president at short notice. Who knows?

**OUR WORLD IS FULL OF MYSTERIES.**



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*Cuddles Goes Home*

for Claire by Tomas Mc Rae

## *Cuddles Goes Home*

**C**uddles the crocodile lived quite happily with me and my two cats after he was found not guilty of trying to eat Mr Lamb the bus driver up. Claire came by every day after school to play with him and take him for walkies. He was a popular star on television with his dancing act and everybody liked him and no longer thought he was dangerous. Somebody even said, “Cuddles would not hurt a fly.” That was not true though as he would often sit with his mouth wide open until one flew by then –CLACK– it was gone. He seemed to think flies were airborne snacks and I was happy as I never needed to buy fly spray ever again.

Of course, as you’ll remember, dogs are never safe around Cabomban green crocodiles. This was a good thing as after the unfortunate affair of Snookums, Mrs Brown’s Chihuahua, everybody did what they were supposed to do anyway and took their dogs out on leads instead of letting them run around chasing poor pussy cats.

Mrs Brown’s chihuahua? Well, everybody had hated the brute as it was savage. It used to run up mens’ trouser legs to bite their noses, chased

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cats and little children, terrorised all the local Dobermans, and slunk about wherever he liked frightening people. Ah, but one day Snookums came by our house when Cuddles was sunbathing. The chihuahua rushed at him barking and snarling, then **—CLACK—** no more problems with a savage dog!

Mrs Brown went to the police but Inspector Lockem told her she'd been breaking the law by letting the beast run free and, anyhow, Cuddles had acted in self-defence. The inspector was president of The Cuddles Club and Snookums had even bitten policemen.

Cats loved my green crocodile and came from all around to sit on him in the sun and purr. They took turns washing him so that he had to be the cleanest crocodile in the whole world. The cats' owners gave him lots of sausages to eat because the evil chihuahua no longer frightened their kitties, and the local postmen gave him 10 kilograms of best steak. Mrs Brown went back to England and was never heard of again.

One day I received a letter in my mailbox from The President of Cabomba. It said ...

*“Dear Sir,  
We have discovered that you have a Cabomban  
Green crocodile as a pet. None of our crocodiles*

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*are allowed to be kept outside Cabombaland, so we order you to come to our country day after tomorrow with the crocodile so we can see whether or not you are a fit and proper person to look after it. Please take the enclosed tickets to Cabombaland Airways at once to arrange your free flight.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Jonathan H. Cabomba, President.*

*P.S. I look forward to you telling me all the news about Brisbane where I studied at university.*

*And bring me twenty tins of kangaroo tail soup please."*

A free flight and a chance to see Cuddles' home land? What a wonderful opportunity! Still, I worried in case my pet would be taken from me, but maybe he would be happier back home in any case.

I packed our bags, bought a whole case of kangaroo tail soup, and on the day after tomorrow Cuddles and I sat side by side on the aircraft as it flew off to our destination, Cabom-baland in Africa.

It was a very long flight, but we were well looked after. Lovely cooked meals for me and raw meat and fish for Cuddles, served by crocodiles who'd been trained as assistant cabin staff. The human air crew were happy, friendly people who

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made me feel welcome. If all Cabombans were like them I was in for a great time. What an adventure!

Much later I woke up to find myself looking down from the plane windows at a lovely green land with lots of water ... Cabombaland at last! When we landed at the airport there was a big

crowd waiting for us waving Australian and even Queensland flags. Everybody wore brightly coloured clothes, and when one small girl saw us get out of the plane she sat down on a crocodile and came riding over. "Hi there! You must be Tom. Welcome to Cabombaland! I am Jennifer Cambomba, the President's daughter. You'll be staying with us in our palace ... Dad says did you bring the kangaroo tail soup? He couldn't come 'cos he's busy but will see you later. I am to take you home with me."

Jennifer then looked at Cuddles ... "Werd d'ya wan, parra parra palace yo." Cuddles nodded his huge head and stretched out. Jennifer fixed a saddle on his back and told me, "On you get! I'll soon have you home to meet my family." And would you believe it? There I was riding through the streets on Cuddles' back, my luggage and case of kangaroo tail soup behind me. Why had I never thought of getting him to do this? The petrol money I'd have saved! People waved and cheered as we rode by and I decided I really liked my new dark-skinned friends as they smiled their welcomes.

The houses were well built and I looked forward to being invited to visit some of the families who lived in them. We passed by one place where new buildings were going up and I was amazed

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to see crocodiles shuffling up to the bricklayers with mouths filled with bricks or buckets of cement hanging down. They seemed to enjoy helping the humans do the building.

There were markets filled with lovely vegetables and fruits, many of which I had never seen before, even in Queensland, and everywhere was a feeling of happiness and well-being. I saw no dogs, but there were big fat cats galore. I knew I would enjoy my visit to Cabombaland whatever happened with me and Cuddles.

At last we came to a large building set in a green grassy field filled with grazing sheep. "We're here," laughed Jennifer, "Soon you shall meet my family." Without even being told Cuddles stopped beside her crocodile at the steps of the palace. Two young boys and a little girl came running to meet us. Jennifer explained, "These are my brothers Young Johnno and Chris and my little sister Amanda come to welcome you. Please come inside, for you must be tired."

A lady stood at the top of the steps. When I came up she gave me a big hug and said, "I am Angelica, Jennifer's mother. You are very welcome in our home. Please come and sit down." I wondered about my luggage, but the two boys had taken care of that. One had my suitcase balanced on his head, the other the case of soup.

Amanda went up to Cuddles carrying a bucket and fed him some fish from it. He rolled on his back and she tickled his tummy.

Jennifer showed me to my room. I felt tired and dirty after my long journey, so after having a shower I decided to lie down for a few minutes. I was awakened by a man laughing as he said, "Don't you think you've slept long enough, Tom? Dinner will be ready in about an hour." At the door stood a large smiling African. It was President Jonathan Cabomba himself, and the clock told me I had been asleep for six whole hours.

I jumped to my feet, "Mr President, I ..." "No need for all that formality here, Tom, my friend. Just do what everybody else does around Cabombaland: call me Johnno." He shook me warmly by the hand, "Now you have another shower and I'll send my son Young Johnno to bring you downstairs when you are ready."

So it was that an hour later I sat down to a wonderful meal with my new friend Johnno and the family I was already feeling a part of. Angelica cooked and served the food herself and it was gorgeous. First off we had huge bowls of kangaroo tail soup that everybody agreed was really great. (I promised to send more tins when I got home). Next we had a wonderful spicy mut-ton stew because sheep supplied wool and meat to



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the Cabomban people, and the floors of all the rooms in the house were covered in sheep-skin rugs. All too soon we finished with a mixture of fresh local fruits. The children sang some songs for us, then went to bed, and Johnno called me into his study.

“Sit you down, Tom.” I sat me down and began, “All right, Johnno, about Cuddles ...” “Plenty of time for that, Tom. We’ll settle that in the next few days. But for now please tell me all about what has happened in Brisbane since I was called back last year to become President.” So I brought him up to date with all the exciting things that had happened in Brisbane and also in our sunny state of Queensland. After a few cups of local coffee it was time for bed and despite my long sleep earlier in the day I had a great night’s rest.

When I awoke next morning Angelica cooked me a luscious breakfast of pancakes and fresh fruit. Then the children took me for a long walk around the town. Everybody greeted me with smiles and handshakes. How I loved this little country! But I’d still miss my Cuddles when it came time to go home.

We walked far from the town and came to a river. Flowers grew along the bank and the children made some into necklaces which they hung around our necks. On the other side I could see

badly built dirty houses with smoky fires all around the place. "That's Eloidaland over there," said Jennifer, "They're a very bad people because of their king and they want to eat up all our crocodiles, so we never allow them over on this side." It certainly did not look like a very pleasant place to live. There seemed to be no fruit trees and very little in the way of food crops. Skinny cows and goats roamed around and I never heard any laughter coming across the water. We quickly left to get back among the happy Cabombans, but we never knew that we were being watched by unfriendly eyes in the bushes on our side of the water.

Suddenly with fierce shouts six huge men jumped out at us and began grabbing the children. I tried to fight them off but was quickly knocked down and tied up. We were dragged to a canoe hidden on the bank and soon found ourselves captives in Eloidaland.

The children were hustled into a hut and I was left tied to a tree in the hot sun. Oh, the horrible smell of that place—bad fish and cow dung! Poor-looking people gathered all around. They offered me no violence, just stood looking at me talking quietly among themselves.

A group of tough-looking villains pushed through the little crowd and stood laughing at

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me waving huge pistols. Up swaggered the biggest man I had ever seen, wearing a very ornate army uniform with lots of medals. "Hi, you prisoner man, you look at me!" he shouted as he towered over me. "Me, I am The Greatest of the Great: King Elo of Eloidea, and them mans thair are my polices. Oh, how they keep my fool-ish peoples in order for me and now they bring me a biiiig present: all the children of that baaaad man Jonathan. Oh, now we shall see. Yes, we shall."

He waved an even bigger revolver than any of those his police had in my face, "As for you, you shall be my frien' or else. I give you very big work for to do." He jabbered at his thugs in the local language and they cut me free and gave me some dirty water from an even dirtier cup. I was so thirsty I drank it anyway. "You, my frien, shall be my official messenger. You hear?" He thrust an envelope into my trouser pocket and his men tied my wrists, gagged and blindfolded me. What now? "You will go back an give dis important lettah to foolish Jonathan from me. The lifes of all them children will be lost if you do not."

I felt myself being hustled into something that floated then we seemed to be travelling over water. I was hustled along on land again, then my wrists were untied and I was thrown violently into something soft that scratched my face. I took

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of the blindfold and found I'd been thrown among bushes on the Cabomba side of the river. I tore off that gag and staggered towards the town where people rushed me to the Presidential Office.

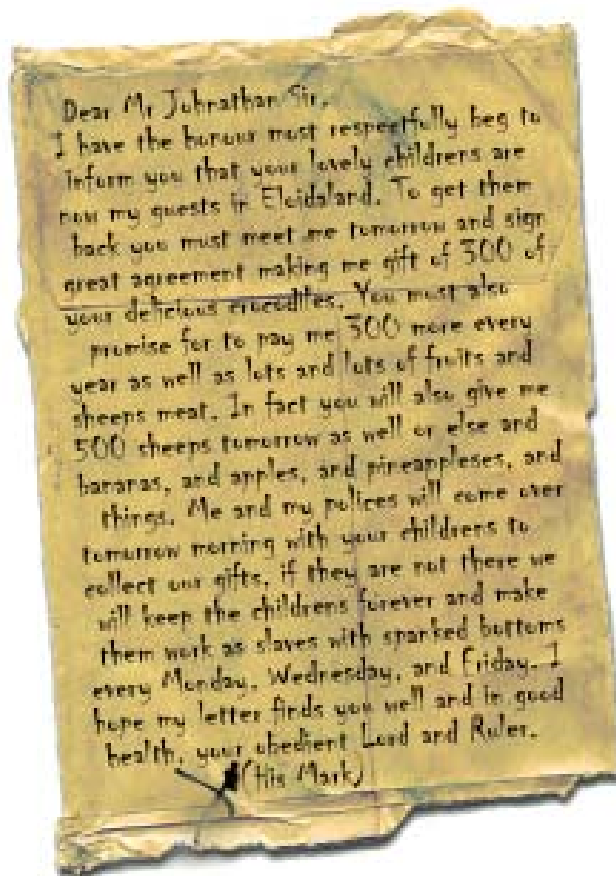
"Good Heavens, Tom!" yelled Johnno, "What's happened? Where are my children?" I gasped out my story and put the envelope in his trembling hands. He read the letter, then passed it to me. It was very badly written and would have made anybody's teacher very angry. It said ...

*Dear Mr Johnathan Sir,  
I have the honour most respectfully beg to inform you that your lovely childrens are now my guests in Eloidaland. To get them back you must meet me tomorrow and sign great agreement making me gift of 300 of your delicious crocodiles. You must also promise for to pay me 300 more every year as well as lots and lots of fruits and sheeps meat. In fact you will also give me 500 sheeps tomorrow as well or else and bananas, and apples, and pineappleses, and things. Me and my polices will come over tomorrow morning with your childrens to collect our gifts, if they are not*

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*there we will keep the childrens forever and make them work as slaves with spanked bottoms every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I hope my letter finds you well and in good health, your obedient Lord and Ruler.*

*X (His Mark)"*



President Johnno was very upset, "My Goodness, Tom! Whatever shall I do?" But the beating I had received from King Elo's policemen began to take effect and I fainted at his feet before I could answer his question. I woke in the palace in my room where a doctor was cleaning and dressing my wounds. As I lay there I began to think about how to rescue the children. What could be done? I noticed all the sheepskin rugs on the floor and suddenly had my great idea, "Please call the President immediately," I asked the doctor.

A very worried Johnno came to my bedside, "Well, Tom, it seems that I must surrender to that evil king's demands. There is nothing else we can do." "But there *is*," I replied, "Just disguise Cuddles as a sheep and all will be well." Johnno looked at me sadly. "Oh, poor Tom! That terrible beating has affected your brain. How could a huge crocodile be made to look like a sheep?" "Honestly, Johnno. I am O.K. Please just listen to my plan. We have nothing to lose." As I explained he started looking calmer. When I had finished he started to laugh, "Tom, we can do this thing, but I'll need your help. Are you fit enough to help tonight?"

I told him I was and for the rest of that day and night Johnno and his people worked hard in the field beside the palace preparing for the

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morrow. As things progressed I called for Cuddles to be brought over. He walked past me and rolled at Johnno's feet.

"Ah! I was right," said the President, "This was once my pet when he was very small. When I left for Australia I could not bear to leave him behind so I smuggled him past the customs hanging down my trousers. For the three years I stayed in Brisbane he shared my flat and he grew and grew. Every night when there were few people around I would take him down to the river for a swim but as I had to work hard at my studies I started letting him out on his own for he always came back. One evening two of my countrymen came to tell me my father had passed away and that I was now President and had to leave with them immediately. In all the confusion it was not until we were in the plane that I remembered poor Cuddles. I often worried about him until I heard about your adventure."

So that explained why a Cabomban green crocodile was wandering around Brisbane.

But we had still work to do. Johnno issued commands to Cuddles and he went straight into action. Doing what? Ah you'll find out when I'm ready.

Next morning everything had been prepared in the big field. There were 500 sheep clustered

in the middle, guarded by two sheep-herding crocodiles. Over to one side 300 crocodiles were lined up ready to be taken away. It was sad to see the poor things so full of trust. On the other side of the field a great barbecue pit had been prepared and joints of lamb were just starting to cook in readiness for lunch. Several large bins were filled with ice and bottles of beer ... Everything was ready to receive our guests.

"Time for you to go down to the river, Tom," said Johnno, "May God be with us all!" Angelica came running up, "Please, Tom, save my children and our beloved country!" "I'll do my best," I answered as I limped away. Would my ideas work? We'd soon find out.

I reached the river bank with four of the Presidents advisers. We could hear drums beating on the other side where they were trying to organise large rafts for crossing over. People were being pushed and herded on to those rafts by the police thugs.

Three decorated canoes were launched and I could see bad King Elo getting into one of them. Two of his police came along dragging four small children and they also boarded the canoe. Several other police got into the other two boats. Then all started to cross the river followed by the rafts of people who showed no enthusiasm for what



was happening.

The canoes reached our bank well before the rafts and the police got out first waving their pistols as they checked for ambushes. The two in Elo's canoe then stepped ashore dragging the four children. "Oh, Tom! It is good to see you. It was horrible over there," cried Jennifer. "Shuddup, you!" yelled one of the policemen as he cuffed her on the head. Elo stepped ashore as arrogant as ever, "Ah! It is my frien. But, please, where is Foolish Jonathan and all my gifts?"

I explained, "The President has put all your gifts outside the Palace where it is fitting for a king such as you to receive what he deserves. After the delivery of the gifts he has prepared lots of roast mutton and beer for you and your people. I and those advisers are to take you there. Please also bring all your people." By now the rafts had arrived and the people who had crossed on them were standing looking very worried.

"O.K., O.K. We will follow you. But no tricks, or I go break both your arms. I like the bruises on your face very much. Would you like if I give you more?" With those words Elo and his gang swaggered behind us dragging the children along. They were followed by his poor subjects, been dragged along to witness their king's triumph. Policemen beat them if they felt they were moving

too slowly. I felt really sorry for them.

Soon we reached the field by the palace. Elo roared with joy when he saw the sheep but yelled even louder when he saw all the crocodiles. "Tonight I shall eat very, very well," he sniggered, "Foolish Jonathan, I, your Ruler am here for my gifts." "Give me back my children and you shall have them," said Johnno. "Ah, no! First I must look at my presents and see they are all there." Elo marched up to the sheep just as I had hoped he would, "Now let me count them. Polices, bring the children over here by me! One, two, three, four, eeeeeehhh ... seven. Kings do not need to count things. You polices do it for me!"

One of the policemen holding the children began to count aloud checking there were five hundred sheep in the flock. As he counted the other thug had to move among the animals and the children were dragged along as well. I felt the time had come ... "Cuddles, werd d'ya wan *now!*" I yelled and an amazing thing happened.

There was a great shower of earth below one of the sheep which flew into the air. It was only a sheepskin and below it Cuddles had been hiding all night in a long shallow pit he had dug. Out he rushed knocking one policeman down with his nose and the other with a flick of his tail, just as we had rehearsed the night before. At the same

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instant Johnno shouted commands and the three hundred crocodiles rushed into the fray attacking the other policemen, shouted to the children, “Run to your father!” and watched with joy as they ran into his arms. I could see Angelica running up to them and I was so happy I did not pay attention to what was happening around me.

Without warning an arm was pressed hard around my neck and a huge revolver was thrust in my face. I could not see my attacker but from his voice I realised it was the evil King. “You, you, very bad foolish man! Now I shall blow off your head unless you shout to that crocodile to attack Foolish Jonathan.” I had to think very quickly as he eased the pressure on my throat. “Oh, great king,” I whispered, “I cannot shout at all as you have damaged my windpipe. I will tell you the command and you can shout it. He must obey any order.” “Then you will whisper it to me and maybe I will not shoot you later,” shouted Elo.

I whispered the necessary command and he threw me to the ground. He laughed as he yelled, “Cuddles, werd d’ya wan na go!” and *we* all know what that means, do we not? Before he could fire his pistol Cuddles had rushed at the villain and knocked it far away with one blow of his tail. His jaws went —CLACK— as he snapped at Elo who turned and ran. Cuddles ripped out the seat of

his trousers and people laughed as he ran, bare-bottomed, to try and escape.

Cabomban crocodiles run very quickly and Elo was soon on the ground with Cuddles ready to eat him up. Johnno shouted a command and Cuddles backed away but kept a close watch on the king. I became aware of a lot of noise and turned to see King Elo's subjects beating the policemen who had survived the crocodile attack. Elo himself was grabbed by four of the president's guards and rushed off to jail along with his policemen. The Eloidean people began to dance and laugh. It was the first time we had ever seen them happy. "We are free!" they shouted, "Oh, thank you! Thank you!"

"As soon as my children and my friend Tom get cleaned up we shall have that feast I have prepared," laughed Johnno, "You Eloideans can celebrate with us. We also have plenty of soft drinks." And so it was that what had promised to be a tragic day ended in great joy. Johnno promised the Eloideans he would help them make schools and hospitals and that his people would teach them proper farming methods. They were a very happy people when they crossed back over the river that night, laden with gifts and with a happy future ahead of them.

The rest of my stay in Cabombaland was

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wonderful. Johnno awarded me The Order of the Golden Green Crocodile, his country's highest honour. Much more important to me, though, was when he appointed me uncle to his children. They all thought this was a great idea and I promised they could come and visit me in Australia.

What about Bad King Elo and his gang? Johnno decided that their crimes were too serious for him to handle. So he flew them to Holland to appear before the World Court of Justice. They remain in prison there awaiting trial as I write and I shall be a witness when the case is ready.

My time in Cabombaland was coming to an end. But what about Cuddles? He and I travelled all over the country and everybody loved his dancing act. It would be really sad to leave him behind. On my last day the President called an assembly of the people. Before that Assembly he told me, "You must realise, Tom, that our ancient laws make it an offence for anybody but a Cabomban to own one of our crocodiles. You as an Australian therefore are not entitled to take Cuddles home with you." I felt very sad and tears came into my eyes. But what was this?

Johnno continued, "We, the people of Cabombaland, in appreciation of all your bravery and help, hereby create you an honorary citizen of our nation so long as you shall live. Cuddles may

Thomas Mc Rae, *Cuddles the Crocodile*

therefore return home with you if he so wishes and we present you with a Golden Pass for our airline so that you and he may come to your other home whenever you want to." Everybody cheered and we all had another great party, my last for the time being.

Next morning I boarded the aircraft with Cuddles trotting behind me. After another pleasant flight we were soon back home with lots of presents for Claire and our other friends.

And that was the end of our second adventure.

# 3

## *Cuddles' Travels*

for John by Tomas Mc Rae

## *Cuddles' Travels*

**A**fter our adventure in Cabombaland and the overthrow and capture of bad King Elo, Cuddles and I returned home to Brisbane for a rest. He remained a star of Australian television and I had a good income from his appearances. But for the next two years life was just a bit quiet. Cuddles and I did make two visits to Cabombaland. Then Jennifer and Chris came to Brisbane to stay one year and Young Johnno and Amanda the next. I had great fun showing them everything and was sorry when they went back home. After all, I was their honorary uncle.

In the meantime the prosecutors at the International Court of Justice were preparing the case against Elo and his nasty henchmen. This was taking so long I had practically forgotten about it when a police officer came to my door one morning and delivered a large envelope for which I had to sign. What on earth was inside? I opened it to find a large sheet of headed paper.

International Court of Justice The Hague The Netherlands
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Part 3: Cuddles' Travels

Dear Mr Mc Rae,

PROSECUTION OF KING ELO & HIS MEN

You and your crocodile Cuddles are hereby summoned to attend this Court at 9 a.m. on July 12th to act as witnesses for the Prosecution in the case against the aforementioned King Elo and his men on charges of Usurping a State, Insurrection, Enslavement, Kidnapping, Robbery, Unlawful Imprisonment, Blackmail, Entering Cabombaland without a Passport, and Extorting Beer.

Arrangements have been made for you to fly via Cabombaland Airways, the only airline which accepts crocodiles as passengers. Two first-class tickets for the flight on June 30th are enclosed. Free accommodation will be provided.

Please be aware that failure to attend will result in severe penalties for you and your crocodile.

With very best regards,



Hans Hoppitt, Clerk of Court

PS: Please do not say Knees and Boomsadaisy when I introduce myself. That is not funny.


So finally Elo would get what he deserved. I returned the air tickets to Cabombaland Airways because, if you will recall, I held a gold pass and Cabomban crocodiles travel free. There was a whole month to organise Claire to cat-sit for me and work out what I would take on my journey.

Another big surprise came next day, a letter from my pal President Johnno telling me that, not only would he and his lovely wife be in The Hague for the trial, but also that the Cabombaland Army Band had been invited to perform at the Edinburgh Tattoo along with its team of dancing crocodiles. He suggested that after the trial we go on to Scotland as he would like Cuddles to do Highland Dancing as part of the Army display. We would all stay in the Cabombaland's Hague embassy first, then in their new one in Edinburgh. More great adventures loomed ahead I was yet to discover just how great and even scary they would be.

A few days later there was a knock at my door and a very scruffy African stood there holding out a piece of paper. "Pleesah. Dis lettah go come from King Elo for you Sah. He go sneak um out qui'et qui'et an now Ah make foh deliber the ting."

I read the letter, Good Grief! That villainous scoundrel had real cheek! It said ...

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**Sir,**  
I have honour mos respectfully beg inform you that I have pleasure to say I am in jail. Dey go say you be witness in dis case they go make foh me.  
I respectfully oder you to no say things that make me look bad. Nossah. You go tell dem I was good for you like a brudder. Dey say me go for steal President Johnno's children, Ha Ha! Nossah! I no go do dis ting. I go findem loss for Bush an was helpin dem go for home to dey Fadder. You go tell dem dose tings I go dash you two thousand dollars american.  
You hear. Make you no go say I be bad man. You heeear.  
Kindly dash 100 dollars for man wid dis letter.  
Elo King of Elodea  
 Him Mark

Sir,  
I have honour mos respectfully beg inform you that I have pleasure to say I am in jail. Dey go say you be witness in dis case they go make foh me.  
I respectfully oder you to no say things that make me look bad. Nossah. You go tell dem I was good for you like a brudder. Dey say me go for steal President Johnno's children, Ha Ha! Nossah! I no go do dis ting. I go findem loss for Bush an was helpin dem go for home to dey Fadder. You go tell dem dose tings I go

Thomas Mc Rae, *Cuddles the Crocodile*

dash you two thousand dollars american.  
You hear. Make you no go say I be bad man. You  
heear.  
Kindly dash 100 dollars for man wid dis letter.  
Elo King of Elodea  
X  
Him Mark

I recognised the bearer of the note as one of Elo's ex-thugs, how did he get into Australia? Give him \$100?! I set Cuddles to chase him up the street ripping his trousers. I then rang Immigration who soon tracked him down as the police had arrested him for showing his bottom in public. He was deported to The Hague to face trial as well for trying to bribe a witness and illegal immigration.

Time rushed by. Then once again me and Cuddles were aboard a Cambombaland Airlines flight bound for Amsterdam and then on to the Hague a few days later. We were met at the Airport by Johnno and his entire family as well as a very officious Dutch official. "I am Hans ..." He paused obviously anticipating. I said nothing "... Hoppitt and it is just as well you came on demand as we have ways of dealing with people who do not. Welcome to The Netherlands. Make sure you attend court on July 12th. Before that Cabom-

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baland and is in possession of his own diplomatic passport. In addition, as a visiting head of state I expect courtesy, not obstruction, from minor officials such as yourself." I sensed a diplomatic incident in the offing. Hoppit apologised profusely and said it had all been an unfortunate misunderstanding.

Pompous oaf! And most Dutch people are so friendly! That did it for me. I shook his hand saying, "Dank u, meneer Hoppitt. Rest assured I will not say 'knees' and 'boompsadaisy', which is not funny." His face turned red and he strode away. My African family roared with laughter and we all went to our hotel to get over our jet lag.

Next morning after breakfast we took a walk around Old Amsterdam and its canals, Cuddles trotting happily along beside us. People seemed scared of him and some even shouted what sounded like bad words. Many even crossed to the other side of the street. The driver of a passing car took one look, swerved, skidded and ran the vehicle into a canal. It started to sink and we could see adults and children inside.

People started shouting what sounded like "Police!" But before any human could do something Cuddles had rocketed into the water and was pulling open a door of the sinking car with his front claws. He dragged two children out and

swam to the edge of the canal with one in his mouth the other in his claws and delivered them into the hands of rescuers on the bank.

Back he swam as the car sank below the surface, dived down and came up with a lady who swam ashore herself as he returned to rescue the driver. People who had abused him just minutes before now hailed him as a hero. Police arrived then and took statements from witnesses.

“It seems, sir,” said a police officer, “that this animal is the hero of the day. It shall be reported.” He took down details of who we were and where we were staying. We walked on a little further. As we passed, everybody applauded Cuddles who looked very smug. Had he been able to speak I am sure he would have said “Shucks! It was nothing.”

We toured Amsterdam’s wonderful museums and, knowing how much Cuddles loves cats, we took him on a special visit to De Kattenkabinet, a museum devoted to cats and things cattish which he seemed to enjoy. News of his rescue efforts had quickly spread. Whenever we passed restaurants and cafes the owners would come out with treats of fish and meat for him.

A really big surprise came next day when we were all summoned to a special ceremony where Queen Beatrix herself presented Cuddles with the

### Part 3: Cuddles' Travels

highest bravery award the Netherlands could confer. Not being able to pin it on his front it was suspended from his neck by a red collarette.

Our Amsterdam period passed all too soon. Off we went to The Hague for preliminary briefing on the trials. Lawyers took us through what to expect and told us we had nothing to worry about so long as we told the truth. At last it was 12th July. We were placed in the witness room where we waited to be called. Nothing happened on the first day, but on the second we were called up one by one.

When my name was called I entered the court to be greeted with "Eeh, ma good brudder Tom! You are welcome." In the dock sat the eight accused in prison clothes and a smiling Elo was having the audacity to greet me! The prosecution guided me through delivery of my evidence and the court was amazed at Cuddles' sheep impersonation. The defence questioned the truth of this story so a sheepskin was found, Cuddles admitted, and we demonstrated what happened as well as we could without digging a hole in the courtroom floor. The defence tried to say this meant nothing and even the panel of judges laughed at that.

The leading counsel for the defence then asked me, "Is it not true that Good King Elo treat-

ed you as an honoured guest, yet you lied about his hospitality?" I denied this and the prosecution drew attention to photographs of the bruising I received from Elo's thugs. "But" said the defence counsel, "I put it to you that you received that bruising by falling from a canoe and that Elo found you when he was taking President Jonathan's children back to him?"

I replied, "As for the first, falling from a canoe does not give someone fist and club marks. For the second ... please ask the children themselves." That was the end of my time in the witness box.

The children then came in and all told the same story of abduction and beatings. Finally Johnno himself was called and the court rose in respect of a visiting sovereign. His account was the clincher, especially when he produced Elo's threatening letter of demand. The judges retired until next day when several inhabitants of Elodea told how Elo and his thugs had just turned up one day and subjected them to years of brutal slavery.

The president of the court declared it closed until next day. We returned to the embassy to rest. Next morning the court re-opened and the judges entered to pronounce that the defendants were guilty on all counts. Elo was sentenced to 40 years



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in jail, his thugs to 30 each, and they all were led off in chains. Justice had been well and truly done. Meneer Hoppitt came up and told me I was now at liberty to leave any time I chose. "Thank you Hans ..." I replied wickedly.

We spent several more days in The Hague but visited other cities including Haarlem. Pity it was far too late for the tulips. One day we visited Volendam, a town of fisherfolk, full of tourists. Everyone regarded Cuddles with interest. One small boy threw a smoked eel at him. Quick as a flash my crocodile companion caught it in his mouth, tossed it in the air, and balanced it upright on his nose. Rising up on his hind legs he then did a dance while the eel stayed in place. Many a camera clicked, I can tell you.

Just beside The Hague is the fascinating town of Madurodam. Why fascinating? Because it is a wonderful collection of scale miniature buildings, including a replica of Amsterdam complete with canals. Cuddles crawled around the site to the delight of visiting children who kept yelling, "Godzilla!" Did he understand? Was that why he stood on his hind legs towering over the small houses? Cameras galore clicked yet again but. Unlike the real Godzilla, Cuddles did not leave a trail of wreckage behind him.

There was only one more incident during our

stay in the Netherlands. On our last full day we visited Alkmaar with its famous cheese market where pairs of traditionally dressed porters carry sledges of round cheeses for sale. Cuddles watched the proceedings with great interest and all would have gone off well if somebody had not started to play one of those glorious Dutch street barrel organs. Caught up by the merry music my Cabomban Green got on his hind legs and began to dance spinning around the market square.

Everybody started to cheer. But then ... disaster! His tail caught on a pyramid of cheeses and they scattered everywhere like wagon wheels. Chaos loomed as people ran helter-skelter trying to catch them.

Where there had been cheering minutes before there were now shouts of anger. Trouble was really brewing when Cuddles saved the day. Still dancing he swirled the tail that had wrecked the cheese pyramid, and he gathered up all the rolling cheeses and restacked them as they had been. We left to great applause. Some even shouted "Encore!"

Next day we boarded a flight for my birthplace, Edinburgh, where Cuddles would join the Cabomban Army Band and its dancing crocodiles

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for the Tattoo rehearsals. first at venues around the City then at Edinburgh Castle itself. Professor MacGregor was at Edinburgh's Airport to welcome us all. He had brought along a large van so he could drive us and Cuddles to the Cabomban embassy where we would stay until the Tattoo finished for another year.

On that same day disaster struck. At The Hague officials had decided that, as Elo and his gang were too dangerous to keep together, they would send him and his two worst henchmen to a tough prison elsewhere. Scotland's Barlinnie is one of the world's most secure jails. So, while we were flying to Edinburgh, those three villains were in transit to Prestwick Airport. From there they would go to their new home for many years to come.

The villains seemed very subdued as they travelled, unchained, on a normal flight, each with two guards. On disembarking at Prestwick Elo collapsed moaning with pain. As concerned guards tried to assist him the other two moved in, overpowered their captors, stole their weapons and ran to the nearby car park with the supposed patient. There they stole a car. Police announced they were still searching for the fugitives but were confident they would soon be recap-

tured.

Over the next few days there were reports of the burglary of a gents clothing store in which extra large garments were taken. Later the robbery of two banks by three large dark-skinned men, thefts of cars by men of similar description, a break-in at a theatrical supplies store, then nothing at all. Things seemed quiet. Had they left the country?

The Tattoo was still some weeks off. But, as already mentioned, the performers had to attend daily rehearsals around the city. Apart from that the humans all explored this wonderful city, receiving warm welcomes wherever they went.

The Cabomban crocodiles of course could not be allowed to wander the streets of Edinburgh with its large dog population. Otherwise a few pet owners could soon have been dogless. Soldiers stationed at Edinburgh Castle with dogs were also instructed to keep their pets indoors when the crocodiles were in the vicinity. Thus there were no "unfortunate" incidents during the reptiles' visit. The Castle cats of course soon befriended them.

Accommodating the crocodiles posed a problem which was solved by placing them in special quarters at the Edinburgh Zoo. They wandered happily around the area and soon became a big

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hit with the visitors. This zoo is famous for its huge colony of penguins and each day the large king penguins go for a walk led by a keeper. They and the crocodiles became great friends and after a few days they joined the parading birds in their march to the joy of spectators.

Cuddles of course stayed with us at the embassy and joined us as I showed my African friends around the wonderful city of my birth. Children made a great fuss of him. Younger ones cried their eyes out when told they could not take him home. I took him swimming in the three lochs at The King's Park and even to local seaside resorts. He had a ball!

Rehearsals proceeded apace. But there was a most unfortunate incident one evening when a piper who was a little drunk decided to teach one of the dancing crocs to play his bagpipes. Holding the mouthpiece towards the croc he said, "Here Jimmy, gie us a blaw!" Alas, there was a loud **CLACK** and a shattered mess of tartan cloth, ribbons, wood, and silver ornaments fell to the ground.

The poor piper was marched off to the cells by a very angry sergeant and charged with causing the destruction of government property, namely a set of bagpipes. Professor MacGregor and Johnno managed to save his skin by explain-

ing that in Cabomban the words for “Here is a special treat” were actually “Gee issa blaow” and that the croc had thought he was being fed.

The soldier was let off with a reprimand but required to pay several hundred pounds for the bagpipes. Hearing of this the Cabomban Army Band held a special benefit performance in a local soccer stadium and raised more than enough to buy several sets of pipes. The army was so pleased it made the piper a sergeant immediately. Thus it was that the Cabomban Band members were very heartily entertained by Scots wherever they went, long before their Tattoo performances. Tattoo time was fast approaching and the first full rehearsals on the Castle Esplanade began.

Initially soldiers wore their normal uniforms and the civilians street clothes as they practiced their entrances and exits over the Castle draw-bridge. As they rehearsed seating was installed and lights began to be set up and tested. Could all this work be completed in time for the opening?

One morning I stood with our band and its dancing crocodiles when a blond woman went up to the band master rudely shouting, “Hey you! Git those igly bists out uv the wey of us girls or we’ll knock yew fir sex.” New Zealanders from the accent, although rudeness is usually rare a-

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mong those lovely people. She pushed past the Cabomban soldiers, a gaggle of other girls followed her smiling sadly at the Cabombans and mouthing, "Sorry." Turned out this was Rayleen, their team leader.

I wondered what they would be doing when a military band started up and the girls started wandering around in drill formations that would have given any sergeant major an epileptic fit. At times they stood quite still apart from wagging their heads from side to side. Marching girls! I cringed, can't stand them at any cost. And here they were at the Castle.

I must admit that, apart from their domineering leader, the other lasses seemed to be friendly enough. They watched the Cabombans practice, then went over to chat to them trying to make up for Rayleen's rudeness while she stood aloof scowling.

Suddenly full dress rehearsal day was upon us. I joined Johnno's family in a special guest area to watch what is actually the first performance of the Tattoo. The grandstands were filled with members of the British military, The Territorial Army volunteers, ex-military, and pensioners. By tradition things start with a wonderful display by the massed pipes and drums then on come other participating groups one by one. What a

show it proved to be!

Mellowed by discovering what a great group the marching girls really were I was still horrified by the brigadoonery of their costumes. Very, very short tartan skirts and disproportionately huge tartan bonnets. Nonetheless they are always popular, particularly with male attendees for some reason. Just as odd is the way many female spectators look daggers at them.

After their contribution, on came the Cabomban Army Band followed by their dancing crocodiles, and led by no less than Cuddles. The band played traditional Cabomban music which went over well with the audience. Then the crocodiles did an amazing dance standing on their hind legs.

The crowd went crazy. Then the other reptiles moved back so Cuddles could do his solo Highland fling. That really got them going. But then attendants brought over four swords and placed them crosswise points inwards. The walls of the Castle shook as they had not shaken in centuries when Cuddles, tail held high out of the way, completed his difficult sword dance without touching a weapon. Band and crocodiles exited to the loudest applause of the night and this was repeated at every other performance.

The show ended with fireworks exploding overhead as all participants marched from the



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Castle down the Royal Mile. Transport was parked at the bottom in a special area from which all would be taken to barracks and other accommodation arranged for them. Thus great friendships developed between people from many nations.

As we walked down with the rest of the exiting crowd I was amused to hear an angry woman say to her husband, "Sandy! I saw you looking at those New Zealand lassies' legs through your binoculars, you wicked man!" Sandy sheepishly answered, "Honestly, Jeannie! All I was doing was trying to identify the tartan they were wearing." I think Sandy stayed in the dog house for a week as did many other male spectators on each night of the Tattoo.

Word of the Cabomban performers quickly spread and demand for tickets to the already sold-out Tattoo grew. Many were sold at huge profits. But there were also reports of some people being dragged into the dark alleys Scots call "closes" and mugged for their tickets. Unfortunately, very few of the robbers were caught despite police efforts. Trouble was so many victims did not know their seat numbers.

Professor MacGregor and I often used to discuss the possibility of the crocodiles communicating with one another. Some incidents did sug-

gest such a thing. But surely it was not possible, was it? An unfortunate event at a performance during the Tattoo Season confirmed our suspicions.

On that night the marching girls came on to the Esplanade and started their performance. As the band began to play the audience was amazed to see the crocodiles, led by Cuddles, march across the Castle drawbridge and merge with the girls, duplicating their formations perfectly. The girls' reactions ranged from marching on, running off in terror to collapsing in fits of the giggles. Blond Rayleen was not amused although the crowd roared.

Nothing like this had taken place at any previous Tattoo. Even the band stopped playing largely because its members were so convulsed with laughter. Cabomban soldiers ran up and herded the crocodiles back over the drawbridge and the girls re-started their routine. The Cabomban Army Band and dancers received even bigger applause that night. But there were repercussions.

Leader Rayleen demanded that the Cabombans be removed from the programme. The New Zealand consul held an urgent meeting with the Cabomban ambassador and President Johnno. All ended satisfactorily with formal apologies and naughty crocodiles being commanded to

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behave in future. This did not satisfy the leader of the marching girls. But she was over-ruled. Little did she know that it would not be too long before she would have cause to bless those self-same crocodiles. This incident proved to the Prof and me that the animals could, and did, communicate.

On one memorable night towards the end of the three weeks President Jonathan of Cabombaland was invited to take the final salute. This was a great honour indeed and he looked most impressive in his full dress uniform. With fireworks bursting in blazing glory overhead he led the parade down the Royal Mile past cheering spectators. When we reached the vehicle pickup area and people looked for their transport a voice called, "New Zealan' ladies, dis way pulleeze!" and a large dark-skinned man with a huge beard came up waving a sign.

The girls dutifully followed him towards a bus. But why, I wondered, did that voice sound familiar? As he climbed up the steps and sat down in the driver's seat I saw two other dark-skinned men inside at the back. I realised what was happening and yelled to Johnno, "Get the police fast!" I ran in front of the girls shouting, "Stop! Do not board that bus!" before I could say anything else the abominable Rayleen shoved me brutally

aside, "Outta our wey, yew!" and the girls dutifully trooped aboard.

As the engine started Johnno called to the crocodiles, "Werdy a wanna rubba flubba!" They divided into four groups and started biting the tyres of the bus which collapsed with loud hisses. The vehicle moved just a few feet, then ground to a halt. There was a moment's silence. Then the door opened and out came none other than Elo wearing a false beard, a huge revolver in one hand, the other round the neck of a screaming hysterical Rayleen. The other two thugs stayed in the bus but moved just behind him. The air was filled with screams from the terrified girls.

Where were the police? Elo looked at me, "Aha, it is my brudder Tom! How happy I be for see you! I have deemans foh to make an' yew will tell dem to the pulleece, or we go shoot all of dem luvvly girls we like tooo much. Lissen! We want plane at airport to take us to Elodea with hunderd million pound on board. First we stop for Hollan' an' my men dere will be at airport for me to take wid me. Den we go fo' home. I go be King again and United Nations see dis is so an' make promise for go leave me alone."

I realised I had to try delaying things until help arrived. Looking around all I could see was one policeman speaking desperately into his ra-

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dio. I asked Elo, "But what will happen to those New Zealand girls if this is agreed to?" Elo laughed, "Ah, dese be fine, fine wimmen. You no 'gree, dey go get shot. You 'gree, dey go foh Elo-dea wit me an be my wives. I like dem toooo much. Three time I go thief tickets for Tattoo from foolish men and go watch dem. All dem girls be for me myself, you heear!"

The screaming from the bus grew louder. Rayleen fainted with terror. I looked at the two huge thugs standing behind Elo. They looked angry. I devised a cunning plan. I asked him, "But surely you will give some of those lovely girls to your two mighty men and also give them a share of that money?" Elo did not seem to know his huge ruffians were standing at the bus entrance listening as he answered me, "As fo' dem, dey be foolish bush men who no sabby nuff-in. Give dem money an' girls? Not at aaalll. Dey go get nuffin. Dey jus' be my small boys foh do what I say."

The two bully boys leapt from the bus steps on to Elo and began beating him. One shouted, "You no give us nuthin'!? We go take eberyting, foolish man!" The gun fell from Elo's hand and the three fell into a punching brawling mass as Rayleen came out of her swoon and ran free.

It was then that Johnno gave the crocodiles a very secret attack command and they all joined

in the fray biting and clawing the evil men. I ran to the rear of the bus and opened the emergency door. The girls had been too panicked to even think about. "Out, lasses, out fast!" They crawled out one by one and I caught each as she jumped.

Above us two large helicopters appeared. The policeman fired a flare to show where the trouble was and two teams of Special Air Service soldiers came sliding down ropes only to find three very bruised and battered African criminals after Johnno called off his reptilian guards.

The helicopters landed as the villains were put in chains by the soldiers and pushed towards them. "Pleesah!" moaned Elo, "I be beaten proper and be very sick. You no go take me to hosipitah, I go die." A soldier I took to be the commander laughed, "Don't you worry! We will fly you to a very good hospital right now. the special one at maximum security Barlinnie Prison." "Oh, Sah, foh myself I no go do nuffin. Dose two bad mans do all. Me? I jus' come look what go happen." All the soldiers laughed as they herded the kidnapers on board and the helicopters took off.

I looked around. A busload of young Edinburgh policewomen had arrived and were comforting the New Zealand girls who quickly recovered. Two entered the bus and found the real driver gagged, trussed up, and shoved under a

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seat. Rayleen, however, stood apart screaming hysterically. She was taken to their embassy for treatment. Unable to ease her hysteria they flew her home and one of the nicest of the other girls was appointed the new team leader. The brave lasses insisted that their show must go on the following night.

I was embarrassed by all the praises heaped on me. After all, I just kept Elo talking. The Lord Provost (Mayor) of Edinburgh granted the Cabombans, their crocodiles and yours truly, Freedom of the City. After a big parade along Princes Street we attended a wonderful party where Cuddles, naturally, did some Highland dancing.

The final few performances of the Tattoo were legendary because, not only were the Cabombans given an even more rousing reception, but beforehand the crocodiles joined the New Zealand girls in their marching routines to tumultuous applause. The girls even placed floral garlands around the necks of their saurian saviours.

All too soon it was the final performance of the year. Everything went exceptionally well, although the marching girls all burst into tears when they realised they would soon part from their crocodilian heroes. The massed pipes and drums marched on to the Esplanade. Then, at a command from the Director, all music stopped.

A spotlight suddenly shone on The Royal Box, and there was Her Majesty and Prince Phillip. The crowd cheered. Then a kneeling stool was placed before the box and a microphone set up. An aide appeared carrying a sword as the Queen descended and stood before the kneeler. What was going on?

I soon found out when Her Majesty said, "Call Thomas Mc Court Mc Rae to my presence!" Who? Did someone else have the same name as me? Two army officers approached me. *Me!* They led me before Her Majesty, commanded me to kneel, and, taking the sword, she created me Sir Thomas Mc Court Mc Rae of Buccleuch Street where I was born. I confess I blushed with embarrassment. She spoke of my heroism in rescuing the girls then the aide asked me to stand back beside Prince Phillip who muttered in my ear. "I say, old chap, Jolly good show what? Tell me, do you think those crocs of yours would be better at hunting deer than our dogs?" I pretended not to hear. But the Queen was far from finished.

The entire troupe of dancing crocodiles, Cuddles included, was paraded before her and each of them had a ribbon bearing the Dicken Medal, Britain's highest award for animals, placed around their necks. Finally she requested President Johnno to come to London so the Order of



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the Bath could be conferred on him with full ceremony. She and Prince Phillip then returned to the Royal Box. Johnno and I resumed our own seats.

As the crocodiles prepared to march off Her Majesty requested that Cuddles stay and repeat his sword dance before her with music by her Royal Piper. Swords were placed before the box and Cuddles danced as never before.

At last all was complete and the massed bands gave their closing performance for the year. The Lone Piper played from a high point in The Castle. Fireworks blazed, flashed, crackled, and banged. The performers marched off down The Royal Mile to the strains of "The Black Bear," a pipe tune traditionally played when troops marched back to barracks. The Tattoo was over for another year. What a time we had had!

The Royal Party drove off in a special car. Johnno and I went back to the embassy exhausted but jubilant, had a very good night's sleep and prepared for what lay ahead. You see, yet again it seemed we would have to act as witnesses in new trials of Elo and his henchmen. Would we have to return to The Hague?

Fortunately, the judges there decided The Terrible Three were too dangerous to be transported back and there was more than enough evidence

against them already. Judges were flown to Edinburgh and it proved unnecessary to call any witnesses, they were sentenced Never To Be Released.

A bearded Elo remained in Barlinnie. He had stuck the false beard on with superglue so nobody could get it off. Not only is he jailed for life but bearded as well and it itches terribly. The other two were sent to the bleak secure Dartmoor, a far-from-happy place. The police discovered that the fugitives had been living in tents at a camping area on the fringe of the city with regular bus services to and from the city centre. They had stayed there undetected for more than a month.

Johnno's great honour was scheduled for two weeks after the Tattoo's end. So preparations were made for the army people and crocodiles to return to Cabombaland. There was however a complication with the crocodiles. You will recall that a great friendship had developed between them and the king penguins. Somehow the animals realised they would soon be parted and showed signs of being very upset. Johnno then had a great idea. Why not send six crocodiles to Edinburgh Zoo every six months while six penguins went to Cabombaland? Zoo officials readily agreed and the scheme was put in place.

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A few days before the crocodiles left they were, as usual, marching down to the Zoo bus stop with the penguins when IT happened. A group of people called "End Animal Exploitation!" love causing trouble with illegal demonstrations. They chose this moment to invade the Zoo without even paying, and march along with banners saying, "SET ZOO ANIMALS FREE", "END ANIMAL EXPLOITATION" and "EAT MORE BEEF", this last from another group who got into the wrong demonstration.

Up the hill they marched, shouting slogans and pushing Zoo patrons aside. Down the hill marched the penguins, crocodile friends in tow. The groups met and the demonstrators tried to push their way through the penguin column. The crocodiles, thinking their friends were being attacked, began biting the demonstrators. The penguins joined in pecking their bottoms as they ran back down the hill where waiting police rounded them up.

Six crocodiles stayed on in Edinburgh while six penguins flew to Cabombaland for six months. Everybody was happy.

We flew down to London where Johnno received The Order of the Bath at Westminster Abbey. Her Majesty also invited Cabombaland to

Thomas Mc Rae, *Cuddles the Crocodile*

join the Commonwealth and Johnno gladly accepted. Me and Cuddles were invited to return to Cabombaland. But we missed Claire and our cat friends and had had enough adventures for a long time to come.

We farewelled our friends. Then back we travelled at long last to Brisbane, a place where I could be just plain Tom. Hopefully we would have peace and quiet there for a very long time to come.

*Dedicated to John, my young friend in Virginia —  
May his every day be filled with wonder  
as he grows in new life!*

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