

A Creepy-crawly Camping Trip

story by Marian McGuinness | illustrated by Amy Golbach

STELLA WAS PACKING the last of the supplies for her family's camping trip. 'But Mummm,' she whined, stuffing the bag of sausages into the esky, 'why do we have to take Egmont with us? All he does is read and talk about boring stuff like planets and dinosaurs and pelicans. He's no fun AT ALL!'

'Honey bunch, give your cousin a chance,' her mum said, tweaking Stella's ponytail. 'We all know Egmont loves reading, but maybe you can show him some bush skills. You're good at that.'

'Camping time!' called Dad from the front door. 'Egmont's here. Let's hit the road!'

Stella sighed and walked to the car. Her eyes popped. While she was in shorts, T-shirt and joggers, Egmont looked like he was going on a safari. He wore a khaki shirt with glow-in-the-dark stripes and cargo pants that bulged with pockets full of tissues, ziplock bags and hand

sanitiser wipes. Dangling from his belt were a mini torch, a compass, binoculars, a magnifying glass, bug spray and a whistle.

'Hi Eggie,' Stella sighed again. 'Mum, can I sit in the front?'

'No way,' Dad replied. 'You two haven't seen each other for ages.' He opened the back door. 'Hop in, fellow campers!'





Stella shoved Egmont's duffle bag between them on the back seat to create a wall. After a few minutes of driving, Egmont rummaged in his bag and pulled out a large book.

'I hope we see some ant-eating assassin bugs,' he said excitedly, 'because they pile their bug carcasses on their bodies to warn off predators!'

Stella shuddered. 'I don't want to see any bugs!' She glanced at the book's title, *Bizarre Book of Bugs and Crazy Critter Facts*. Bugs were her most unfavourite things. Bugs of any sort. They were all creepy-crawlies.

Egmont opened his book and began to read. 'Did you know that fleas can jump 350 times their body length? That's like us jumping the length of a footy field in one go.'

Stella looked out her window as Egmont recited bug facts. Bug facts about cockroaches and fleas and katydids (whatever they were). After what seemed like twenty thousand bug facts, Egmont went quiet. 'Eggie,' said Stella, looking over at him, 'you're turning a slimy green colour. MUMMMM! Eggie's going to be sick!'

Dad quickly pulled off the road. Mum handed Egmont a bottle of lemonade. She put his book in the front with her so he wouldn't read it and get carsick again. When Egmont was feeling better they continued on their winding journey up hills, down valleys and over rickety bridges.

Dad stopped the car at an old cattle gate. A rusty sign swung overhead. Some of the letters were scratched out. There were faded pictures of platypuses.

L CH CR EK
Riverside Camping
No bathroom amenities

'It looked much nicer on the website,' said Mum.

'Well, we're here now,' said Dad, scratching his chin. 'It'll be fun. I hope it's called *Lunch Creek*, because I'm starving!'

'Looks like Jurassic Park,' Egmont said, wide-eyed. 'There might be giant creatures living in there!'

'There might be Drop Bears,' Stella teased.

Dad frowned at her.

'I was only kidding about the Drop Bears,' she said.

Egmont looked back at the sign. 'Actually, did you know that platypuses are poisonous?'

Stella thought for a moment.

'How can they be? They're so cute.'

'Egmont's right,' said Mum, flipping through his book. '*The male platypus has a venomous spur that can kill small animals.*'

'Let's hope we only meet lady platypuses, then,' Stella said, and they all laughed.

They bumped over the cattle grid and drove towards the camping area beside the creek.

Stella's shoulders slumped. There were no other families and no other kids. It was going to be just her and Egmont.

As she helped her mum set up the campsite, Egmont sat on a log

with his nose in his bug book.

'Kids!' Dad called as he jogged past carrying a Y-shaped branch. 'Let's build the pit toilet. I've already dug the hole!'

'Okay, Eggie,' said Stella, 'I'll give the instructions. This is an important bush skill!'

Soon she had Egmont building a stone ring around the hole and laying the Y-shaped branch over it for a toilet seat. She wedged a small Y-shaped branch next to it for the toilet roll and stuck Dad's shovel into the pile of loose dirt. 'Eggie, make sure you cover everything you do in there with dirt when you're done,' she instructed.



When they got back to the tent, lunch was ready. As Stella bit into her salad roll, Egmont opened his bug book. 'Did you know that dung beetles can bury 250 times their weight in animal poop every night?' he asked, grinning. 'If they didn't, the whole planet would be covered in squillions of flies!'

After lunch, when Egmont was showing Dad a rhinoceros beetle he'd found near a log, Stella flopped

into her camp chair. She crossed her arms.

'Mum, Egmont's driving me crazy,' she whispered. 'All he talks about is bugs!'

Mum thought for a moment. 'You know, Stella-Bella, everyone's different. Maybe you're driving him nuts too. Why don't you both collect some wood for a campfire. We'll toast marshmallows and boil billy tea.'

Stella shrugged her shoulders. 'Hey, Eggie,' she called, 'let's find some firewood. We might even see one of those cute girl platypuses at the creek.'

Egmont opened his compass. His face lit up.

'We're going east,' he said, as they started walking. 'Now we're going north.' He changed direction. 'Now we're going northeast.'

It was getting muddier and muddier as they flicked through bushes along the creek track.

Stella felt something sticky as she stumbled into a spider's web that was hanging like a suspension bridge between two branches.

'Ewww!' she squealed, trying to flick off the silky threads sticking to her hair and eyebrows.

'Cool,' said Egmont, watching the spider trampolining on its web. 'It's a St Andrew's Cross. See the stripes?



It's a girl spider; they're bigger than the boys. They're pretty friendly.'

'Except if they want to eat you,' Stella said.

Egmont unclipped his magnifying glass and handed it to Stella. 'Want a closer look?'

Curious, Stella got closer. 'Oh wow! She's really pretty, for a spider.'

While she was studying the spider, Stella felt something cold and slimy creeping up her legs. She looked down and squealed. Shiny, squelchy worms were dangling from her legs.

'EWWWW! LEECHES! Get them off me, Eggie! This place is LEECH Creek!'

Egmont whipped out his bug spray and squirted his shoes. 'Hold still! You don't want the leeches to vomit and give you an infection!'

'This isn't a science class!' Stella yelled. 'Just get them off!'

Calmly, Egmont guided Stella over to some dry dirt.

'Most people try to rip them off,' he said, carefully sliding his fingernail under the sucker of each leech and flicking it away.

Stella watched in awe as he counted off each leech. 'Six. Seven. Eight,' until only one remained.

'Can I do the last one?' Stella asked, feeling braver. She flicked it to the ground and shuddered.

'Eggie, have you ever thought of going on a quiz show? You'd totally win a million dollars!' she said, smiling at her cousin.

Egmont didn't answer. He just looked at the ground.

'Actually, I don't like being called Eggie. Egmont means *Great Protector*, but I like Monty better.'

Stella felt herself going red. 'Sorry, Monty. I didn't realise.'

'Did you know your name means *Star*?' Monty said, a bit brighter.

Stella blinked. She was surprised. 'I love stars. That's actually pretty cool.'

On the way back to the campsite, as they gathered sticks and branches, Stella and Monty laughed and talked nonstop about bugs.

'What happened to your legs?' called Mum from the campfire.

'I'm okay,' Stella said, beaming. 'Monty rescued me from the *ATTACK OF THE LEECHES*. Did you know his name means *Protector*?''

Monty blushed as Stella continued. 'Mum. Dad. Did you know that leeches have 32 brains?' She nudged her cousin. 'Just like Monty!' ■



A little knowledge goes a long way, my word, yes!