

Juli & August

CROCODILE OVERBOARD!

by Alexander von Knorre
Sample translation by Erik J. Macki



This is August. He's sitting in the sunshine on his inflatable rubber crocodile, floating on the water. This would generally be something nice, but at the moment, unfortunately, he can't see any land. Earlier he had eaten a soda-flavored ice pop from the ice cream truck, read *A Semifunny Paperback* on the beach, and secretly peed in the water. Then he set sail on his rubber crocodile to chill out for a while.

Now I feel like meatballs and mashed potatoes, August thinks. August knows how to build really good sand castles; he can play volleyball and grill hotdogs. But he really has no idea where he is right now. When August woke up, the beach, the ice cream truck, and the seagulls were all gone. Everywhere he looks now is water: in back, in front, to the right, to the left, below. Not above, though. There's not a cloud in the sky.

Darn it, August thinks. Too bad my ice pop is gone.





This is Juli. She's sitting under the awning on her raft, brushing her teeth.

Juli knows how to build a raft, how to catch fish and cook them, how to knit, and how to tie good knots. She knows where she is (right here, on her raft). What she doesn't know is whereabouts the raft is floating, but she doesn't care because

she has an awning and enough provisions with her. Then she encounters August.

Funny, a little boy on a crocodile, Juli thinks.

Funny, a little girl on a raft, August thinks as he spots Juli.

He kicks and paddles to get closer. Juli looks on intently. After a while, the mouth of the rubber crocodile hits one of the car tires tied around the outer edge of her raft.

"Hey!" Juli yells. "Watch out where you're floating!"

August grabs the rope Juli tosses him.

Juli knots one end to a hook on her raft and sits down in the shade on a coffee bean bag. August ties the other end of the rope around the snout of his crocodile.

"I like your raft," August says. He rocks back and forth a little on his crocodile.

"Me too," Juli says, topping off her tea. "So, what's your name?"

"I'm August. And you?"

"I'm Juli, captain of this raft. It's really good. It's got a hen and a bathroom."

A hen and a bathroom? That sounds great, August thinks. "Do you have any room?" August asks. "Can I maybe ride along with you?"

Juli shakes her head. "I don't think so. Unfortunately, you don't look like much of a sailor. Plus, all our positions have just been filled: captain, helmswoman, lookout—those are all me!"

"Oh, too bad," August says. "I could just come for a visit," he says after a pause.

“No go,” Juli says. “Crew only, I’m afraid. Unfortunately. I don’t make the rules.”

“Yes, you do!”

“True,” Juli admits. Then neither of them says anything for a bit.

“Well, then,” August mumbles. “Bye-bye, Juli. I’m pretty hungry, so I’m going to get paddling back to shore.” He looks at the horizon.

“Wait a sec, August,” Juli says. “See what I’ve got here? A pickle. Do you like pickles?” She tosses it to him.

“Pickle?” August says. “Thanks!” August snatches it just before it would have plopped into the water.

“Know what?” Juli asks. “I’ll just tow you until we sight land. Tomorrow. Or in a week . . . But just please keep quiet now! I’ve got to practice my drumming.”

“All right,” August says.

“Shh!” Juli says, tapping the drum.

And so the raft bobs up and down with drum rolls through the balmy evening air. As always, actually. Only this time there’s also a rubber crocodile tied to the back.

Tonight as usual, Juli sleeps in her hammock under the awning. August lies on his stomach on his crocodile, nibbling his pickle. He looks at the water. The waves are silvery, lit by the moon. The crocodile rocks gently. The air is slowly cooling off. The hen clucks in her sleep. The waves slosh. Otherwise, everything is quiet.

August wants to look at the moon, so he slowly turns over. The crocodile wobbles so wildly that August almost falls into the water.

I guess I’d rather stay on my stomach, August thinks, and he eventually falls asleep, too.

Woo hoo! August exclaims in his head after waking up. He can still see nothing but water here and there and everywhere. But now there’s also the raft, and August is glad he’s not alone with all this water—because that really would be too much for a kid on his own.

The sky is pink, and fog lingers over the glassy surface of the sea. August notices the raft. Something is different from yesterday, he thinks. A notice has been posted on the water barrel. August paddles closer and reads:



What a coincidence, August thinks. He tugs hard on the rope to ring the raft's bell. It sounds, the hen clucks, and Juli leaps out of her hammock. She squats into a yoga position on the tufted carpet. She sets a pen and a crumpled sheet of paper in front of her.

"What can I do for you?" she asks.

"Hello," August yells from his crocodile. "I'd like to speak with the captain!"

Juli glances at the sundial.

"You're in luck. She just had a cancellation!"

"I'm here about the job," August says. "I want to be the cabin boy."

"You're applying!" Juli says, "Gutsy! Do you have any experience?"

"I went on an excursion once on the SS Cheerio for Aunt Nicola's fortieth birthday; plus, we've got an A-1 kiddie pool in our yard."

"Nice. I'll think I'll give you a trial run. Of course, you'll need to pass the tests of courage. Everyone has to. The raft is not for cowards."

Duh, August thinks. Rafts, freedom, and adventure. Plus tests of courage. He's not a coward! Or? Nope, only very rarely.

"But right now we're going to eat this grapefruit," Juli says.

"Breakfast is important too."

Juli slices the grapefruit in half. Each of them sprinkles their half with some sugar. The sun rises. August has to pass three

tests if he wants to be the cabin boy aboard Juli's raft. Test one: swimming.

"A very useful skill," Juli observes.

"Yes," August agrees.

"So, just swim around my raft. Once all the way!"

Seriously? Easy-peasy! August thinks. He slides from his crocodile and pushes off with his feet. He's a good swimmer; he slowly but easily starts his circle along the car tires on the edge of the raft.

I hope Juli's looking this way, August thinks. Ha, I'm almost all the way around!

Taking one more long stroke, he runs into something super soft and extra flappy. He winces. Ew! Now the slime is on his belly, arm, shoulders, and butt—everywhere! It's like swimming in seaweed Jell-O.

Jellyfish. They're jellyfish. Oodles of jellyfish.



I hate jellyfish, August thinks. Don't panic, he quickly adds. Just keep swimming. After all, these aren't giant jellyfish. You have to look on the bright side.

Now he's made it all the way around. He pushes up and onto the crocodile as fast as he can. Safe! The sun feels warm. August brushes jellyfish slime out of his hair and drills his index finger into his ear to get the water out.

Juli is in the lookout. She's scanning the sea with a small set of binoculars.

"One point for you, August!" she calls. "And now, the second test. Look over there: a shipping container. Yay! We're going to go pillaging and plundering!"

August squints to see better. She's right. Something's floating out there.

"Well, if there's anything in it—maybe those things still belong to someone, and they'll be coming to pick them up later," August says.

"August! This here is a test of courage and not a little kid's birthday party."

She's right again, August thinks. Even though I know she's never been invited to one of Viveca Rautenberg's birthday parties, but that doesn't matter. He casts off the crocodile and straddles it. He paddles over to the shipping container. It takes a while. The thing is rusted red with Chinese writing on it.

We did study a little Mandarin back in preschool, August remembers. Let's see if I can figure out what it means: Pop cork. Sock gecko. Flower rattle. Yeah . . . maybe not . . .

Now he's arrived. Perched on the top edge of the container is a bedraggled seagull, staring at him.

"Hello," August says. "Go and fly away, seagull. I've come to pillage and plunder."

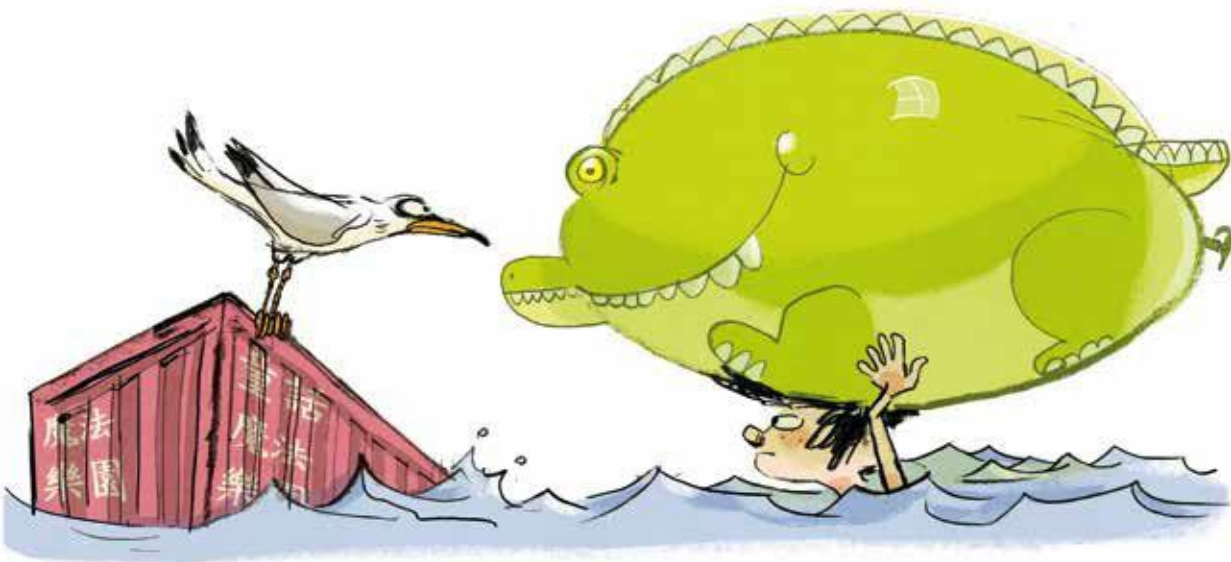
The gull flaps its wings but doesn't fly away. August tries to climb onto the container. The gull pecks at him.



Stupid seagull, August thinks unkindly. Fortunately, I've just turned brave. Maybe I could scare the seagull away with my crocodile. He slides into the water and, while treading water, blows like crazy into his crocodile so that it gets a little bigger and looks, well, scarier. Once it's nice and overinflated, he holds it over his head and approaches the gull again.

"Grr!" August yells. The seagull pecks.

POP! the crocodile says. Now August has wet, green tatters on his head. He can feel his anger slowly coming on. In a single



motion, he pulls himself atop the shipping container, and then he waves the tatters hard so they cut the air and whistle.

“Get lost!” he shouts.

The gull, gobsmacked by the noise, spreads its wings and soars away.

“Yeah!” August yells. “Get lost! Ha ha!” He catches his breath a bit, and then he returns to the water and pushes the shipping container toward the raft. He has to kick hard, but he is a hero now.

“Mission accomplished!” Juli yells as August arrives.

“Can you glue the crocodile?” August asks, now holding the edge of the raft.

“Yes, yes, later,” Juli says. “Come on—I’ll open up the container quick.”

So this is a little like a little kid’s birthday party, August thinks.

“I bet there’re fireworks inside,” August says as Juli positions the crow bar.

“Awesome!” Juli says.

“Or underwear . . .” August says from the end of the raft.

The seal cracks, and the lid flips up.

The whole container is full of marshmallows.

“Juli, what’s the third test?” August asks. He’s starting to get cold.

“Let’s see,” Juli replies. “We’ve covered jellyfish, seagulls, and marshmallows. And now—oh cool! Hey, August, look behind you!”

Not far from the raft, a whale breaches out of the sea and slaps with a glittering spray across the water. Juli and August are impressed.

“Crazy!” Juli says. “OK. August! You will be allowed to join the crew if you can tame . . .” she starts, pointing at the whale, “him for us. Swim over! Look how friendly his eyes look. Whoa, he spouted—just for us! The three of us could definitely be good buddies. The whale will be your third test of courage!” August is about to swim off, but suddenly he hesitates. He looks at the raft. He looks at the whale. It’s gradually moving toward the horizon.

“What is it?” Juli asks.

“Know what?” August replies. “This is stupid. That whale is gigantic, and I’m the opposite. I’m not doing that. Even though I really want to be the cabin boy. It’s lame it’s so hard to get on your crew.” He rubs his right eye. “But I don’t want to always be rushing to do every silly little thing just because it suddenly pops into your head.”

“No? Well, that’s too bad . . .” Juli begins. “But it might be better this way. Saying no does take courage, after all. And, so does honesty. By the way, I don’t know how to swim at all. Otherwise, I’m actually perfect, unlike you. Anyhoo . . .” Juli says, grabbing the watering can and pouring it over August’s head. “I hereby name you Cabin Boy on Juli’s Raft!”

August drips and dribbles, climbs aboard, and feels so happy. And Juli does, too.

* * *



“Dinner!” Juli yells shortly after, grabbing a pile of dry branches lying in a corner next to the feed box.

As the sun dips into the sea, a jaunty fire sizzles and crackles.

“You’re crazy to burn a fire on deck,” August says, sprawled on the tufted carpet. “And your fire is going out. But it’s OK; it’s your raft.”

“There’s a sheet of metal under it, you dope,” Juli says, switching on the string of multicolored lights hanging from the clothesline. August and Juli sit by the fire and toast marshmallows on sticks until they’re golden brown on the outside and gooey on the inside.

Then Juli and August sing the old pirate shanty:

We laugh at the thunder that booms

And sing through the squalls and the gloom!

Nothing can scare us, not even a gale!

Our raft is our home: we sleep here and sail.

We eat and keep warm all while we float,

Everything’s possible here on this boat.

Crocodiles, seagulls and jellyfish too:

These and the whales are also our crew!

Juli strums the ukulele, and August plays the harmonica. They dine on marshmallows and fruit salad. August showers under the watering can. They glue the crocodile. They dance wildly around the fire. The string of lights twinkle, and the little raft with its crew looks at their reflection in the quiet nighttime sea.

