

Different Families

“Seems to me there is enough of you, Grace,” said Nana. “Plenty to go around. And remember, families are what you make them.”

Soon it was their last evening and there was a big farewell party at the compound. Grace and Nana wore their African clothes and Grace ate twice as much benachin as everyone else. “Now you really might burst,” said Nana.

On their last morning Papa took Grace to see some real crocodiles. “This is a special holy place,” he said. “The crocodiles are so tame you can stroke them.”

“Not like the one in Peter Pan!” said Grace.

“No. These are so special, you can make a wish on them,” said Papa.

Grace closed her eyes and made a wish, but she wouldn't say what it was.

Later at the compound, Grace asked Nana, “Why aren't there any stories about families like mine, that don't live together?”

“Well, at least you've stopped thinking that it's your family that's wrong,” said Nana. “Now, until we get back home and find some books about families like yours, you'll just have to make up a new story of your own.”

“I'll do that,” said Grace, “and when we're home again, I'll write it down and send it to Jatou to read to Neneh and Bakary.”

The whole family came to see them off at the airport. Grace was sorry to say goodbye to her new brother and sister and even to her stepmother. But leaving Papa was hardest of all.

Waiting for the plane, Nana asked Grace if she had thought any more about her story.

“Yes, but I can't think of the right ending,” said Grace, “because they are still going on.”

“How about they lived happily ever after?” asked Nana.

“That's a good one,” said Grace. “Or they lived happily ever after, though not all at the same place?”

“Stories are what you make them,” said Nana.

“Just like families,” said Grace.