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THE KINDHEARTED CROCODILE:

A Conversation with

Author Lucia Panzieri

and Illustrator

AntonGionata Ferrari

Author of THE KINDHEARTED CROCODILE, Lucia Panzieri:

Q: *Why do you write for children? Where do you get your inspiration?*

A: I feel that my words get magnified through children's eyes and enter a fantastic dimension. When I think about a story, images are very important to me, and that's why I prefer writing stories for picture books. My inspiration? I actually see things out of my window, especially crocodiles and lions and pumpkins. More often, ideas come from children, especially mine, with their funny declarations or questions.

Q: *What was your reaction when you saw AntonGionata's illustrations for The Kindhearted Crocodile?*

A: I was very proud AntonGionata was working on one of my stories. He's so immediate in creating characters, and when I first saw the ferocious crocodile on the first page, I simply said, "Well, thank you very much, Mr. Ferrari."

Q: *The crocodile yearns to love and be loved and be part of a family. Is family important to you?*

A: The crocodile yearns to be accepted even if he's ferocious at a first glance. I have three ferocious children, and a kindhearted husband, and I love them. That's all family is about.

Q: *In The Kindhearted Crocodile, the crocodile enters the home of the family through a picture book. What do books represent to you? What do you like to read? What did you like to read when you were a child?*

A: Books are a place where you feel free and are transformed and reshaped by stories and imagination. When I was a child, my favorite authors were Gianni Rodari and Italo Calvino. I remember we spent very amusing days with Nino Pedretti, a poet, and a family friend, who loved to invent stories and rhymes with very little children. Rhythm in writing is such an important issue to me. The book we kept rereading with my children when they were little is *Cion Cion Blu* by Pinin Carpi. At the moment, one of my favorite writers is Alice Munro.



Q: *What inspired you to write this story?*

A: Well, if your house constantly needs to be tidied up, at some time you do need a kindhearted crocodile, willing to help you during the night. . . . I wanted a story where night-time could play a very important role, and a character which deeply wanted to be loved for what he really was, deep in his heart.

Q: *Why did you pick a crocodile for the main character in this book? Were you considering other creatures to use as the protagonist in this story?*

A: I got scared watching a TV documentary about crocodiles and I spent days wondering what I would do with a crocodile in the corridor of my house.

Q: *Did you collaborate with AntonGionata on the book or did you work independently?*

A: No, we worked independently, with Renata Gorgani's help (editor in chief at Il Castoro), who had a very clear idea since the beginning, of the kind of book she wanted to offer. AntonGionata created a very menacing crocodile and perfectly conveyed the importance of the night with very black pages.

Q: *Did you two know each other before working on this project?*

A: Well, I knew AntonGionata as one of the best Italian illustrators. Since then, we became very good friends and spent a very good time together reading our book to children in libraries and bookshops all over Italy.

Q: *Will you be working on any more together?*

A: I hope so. AntonGionata's characters always offer a smiling glance at life, and I believe it is very important nowadays to be warm and sunny in picture books, without being conventional. At the moment, we're thinking about giraffes.

Q: *Will the Kindhearted Crocodile make another appearance in a follow-up or companion title?*

A: Why not? Children often ask if the kindhearted crocodile is still part of the family. . . .

Q: How would you like children to respond to this book? Is there something you'd like children to learn from it?

A: Reading this book, children learn to see beyond appearances and learn to give another chance to imagination. Many Italian children told me they keep the book open on the bedside table. . . . They hope the kindhearted crocodile will come sooner or later—and I know he will.

Illustrator of THE KINDHEARTED CROCODILE, AntonGionata Ferrari:

Q: *AntonGionata, could you tell us about your process for creating the art for this book? What medium did you use?*

A: In the beginning, I focused on the figure of the crocodile. I had to find a characterization that would make the crocodile sympathetic yet still ferocious and dangerous, with its many sharp teeth! I made many sketches before I decided upon the final one. And I think I ended up with a good one. Lucia's text helped me a lot. She vividly describes a family's everyday routines turned upside down by the arrival of the crocodile. Life becomes magical: a fairy tale where reality and fantasy converge. The illustrations are mixed media, with acrylics, watercolors, china, and papers. For the crocodile's skin I used acrylic paints on paper that butchers use for wrapping meat. It's sallow, thick, strong, and rough—just right for duplicating the texture of scales.

Q: *When did you discover that you were an artist?*

A: When my mother stopped getting mad at me for scribbling on the walls of our apartment.

Q: *You're also an animator. How is illustrating books similar to working on animation? How is it different?*

A: My experience as an animator is fundamental to my work as an illustrator. I make storyboards for my picture books as I made storyboards for animation in order to create rhythm from page to page, to create the perfect balance between characters and background, and above all, to achieve the most expressive movements and facial expressions.

Q: *How do you know when a manuscript is right for you to illustrate?*

A: My objective as an illustrator is to make the reader smile. I know that a text is right for me when I see an opportunity to inject humor into a situation, even if the topic is somewhat serious.

Q: *Do you ever turn down manuscripts because you think they are not right for you?*

A: A couple of times, actually. The publisher in one case and the author in another case wanted something very different from what I do—and from who I am.

Q: *What did you like most about **The Kindhearted Crocodile** when you read it?*

A: With its great natural humor, **The Kindhearted Crocodile** immediately conquered my soul. As I read the text for the first time, I could already imagine possible situations to illustrate. What I like about Lucia's writing is that she tells a story with great skill and efficacy and, at the same time, leaves space for interpretation and imagination.

Q: *How would you like children to respond to this book? Is there something you'd like children to learn from it?*

A: With great fear in the beginning and big smiles at the end. I would like children to understand that, as with the crocodile, there is bad and good in each of us.

