



An Unbelievable Night

by Franz Hohler

Anina was ten years old, so even half asleep she could find her way from her room to the bathroom. The door to her room was usually open a crack, and the nightlight in the hallway made it light enough to get to the bathroom past the telephone stand.

One night, as she passed the telephone stand on her way to the bathroom, Anina heard something that sounded like a quiet hissing. But, because she was half asleep, she didn't really pay any attention to it. Anyway, it came from pretty far away. Not until she was on her way back to her room did she see where it came from. Under the telephone stand there was a large pile of old newspapers and magazines, and this pile now began to move. That was where the noise was coming from. All of a sudden the pile started to fall over – right, left, forwards, backwards – then there were newspapers and magazines all over the floor.

Anina could not believe her eyes as she watched a grunting and snorting crocodile come out from under the telephone stand.

Anina was frozen to the spot. Her eyes wide as saucers, she watched the crocodile crawl completely out of the newspapers and slowly look around the apartment. It seemed to have just come out of the water because its whole body was dripping wet. Wherever the crocodile stepped, the carpet under it became drenched.



The crocodile moved its head back and forth letting out a loud hissing sound. Anina swallowed hard, looking at the crocodile's snout with its terribly long row of teeth. It swung its tail slowly back and forth. Anina had read about that in "Animal Magazine"—how the crocodile whips the water with its tail to chase away or attack its enemies.

Her gaze fell on the last issue of "Animal Magazine," which had fallen from the pile and was lying at her feet. She got another shock. The cover of the magazine used to have a picture of a big crocodile on a river bank. The river bank was now empty!

Anina bent down and picked up the magazine. At that moment the crocodile whipped his tail so hard that he cracked the big vase of sunflowers on the floor and the sunflowers scattered everywhere. With a quick jump Anina was in her bedroom. She slammed the door shut, grabbed her bed and pushed it up against the door. She had built a barricade that would keep her safe from the crocodile. Relieved, she let her breath out.

But then she hesitated. What if the beast was simply hungry? Maybe to make the crocodile go away you had to give it something to eat?

Anina looked again at the animal magazine. If the crocodile could crawl out of a picture then perhaps other animals could too. Anina hastily flipped through the magazine and stopped at a swarm of flamingos in a jungle swamp. Just right, she thought. They look like a birthday cake for crocodiles.

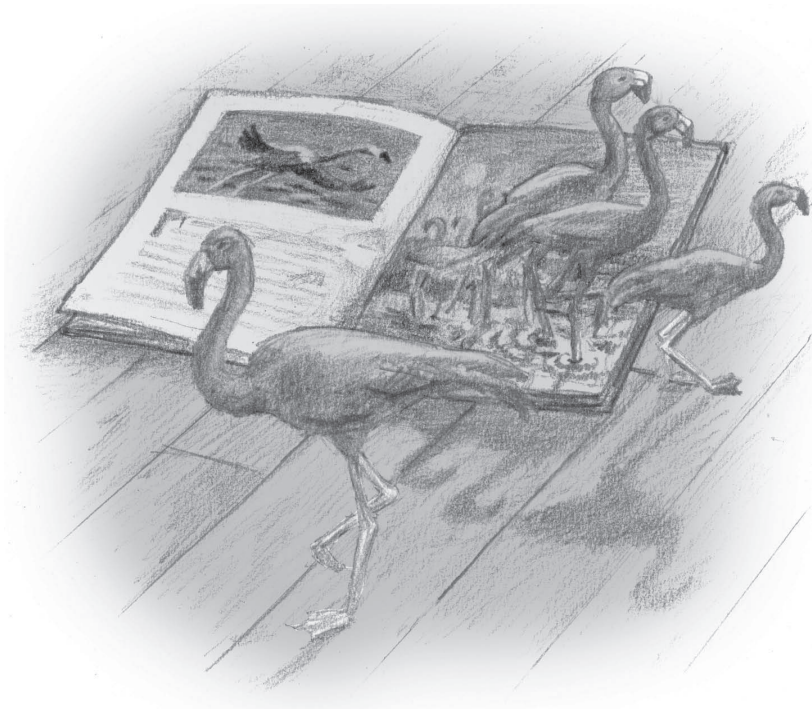
Suddenly there was a loud crack and the tip of the crocodile's tail pushed through the splintered door.

Quickly, Anina held the picture of the flamingos up to the hole in the door and called as loud as she could, "Get out of the swamp! Shoo! Shoo!" Then she threw the magazine through the hole into the hallway, clapped her hands and yelled and screamed.

She could hardly believe what happened next. The entire hallway was suddenly filled with screeching flamingos wildly flapping their wings and running around all over the place on their long, skinny legs. Anina saw one bird with a sunflower in its beak and another grabbing her mother's hat from its hook. She also saw a flamingo disappear into the crocodile's mouth. With two quick bites he swallowed the flamingo and quickly followed it with another, the one with the sunflower in its beak.

After two portions of flamingo the crocodile seemed to have had enough and lay down contentedly in the middle of the hallway. When he had closed his eyes and no longer moved,

Anina quietly opened her door and slipped through it into the hallway. She placed the empty magazine cover in front of the crocodile's nose. "Please," she whispered, "please go back home." She crept back into the bedroom and looked through the hole in the door. She saw the crocodile back on the cover of the magazine.



She now went cautiously into the living room where the flamingos were crowded around the sofa and standing on the television. Anina opened the magazine to the page with the empty picture. "Thank you," she said, "thank you very much. You may now go back to your swamp."

In the morning, it was very difficult for her to explain the giant wet spot on the floor and the broken door to her parents. They weren't convinced about the crocodile even though her mother's hat was nowhere to be found.

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