

JURASSIC GIRL

By Vanna Vinci

Vannina is a nice, well-behaved girl.

She sits up properly at the table, doesn't speak with her mouth full, goes to bed without a fuss and absolutely never puts her finger up her nose.

[poke, poke]

[her best friend Dino]

Or almost never...

At school, the teachers are all very happy with her.

She's easy-going and hard-working and does her homework without throwing tantrums or throwing herself down on the floor in a fit of rage, foaming at the mouth, like other children.

At school, she listens attentively without yawning or dropping off.

[serious face]

[glasses]

[pleats]

No one knows about her secret weapon, though, one she's been using since nursery school.

Her “good girl” face!

“Oh, what a good girl!” her grandmother’s friends always say.

“Oh, you should see her when I tell her my stories, like the time I died my hair bright blue! Or when we went to a restaurant and I snapped my fingers and shouted “Ossobuco!” and the waiter rushed out with two plates for starters. Do you remember Vannina?”

[the good girl]

[Aunt Pupa]

[Aunt Masina]

The truth is, Vannina puts on her good girl face for one reason only: to look like she's listening and understanding what everyone is saying, while she's actually thinking about something completely different.

[I wonder what ossobuco is?!]

[biscuit number 40]

What is Vannina usually thinking?

About her one, great love: dinosaurs!

Vannina only reads dinosaur books.

On the tv, she only watches dinosaur documentaries, she only draws dinosaurs or landscapes showing dinosaurs in their natural habitat.

Even her best friend is a dinosaur: Dino, a feathered velociraptor from the Cretaceous period... and soft toy.

At Carnival time, she even dressed up as tyrannosaurus.

“How do I look?” she asked, standing stiffly.

“You look like a monster!” her mum replied, who would much rather Vannina dressed up as folk singer.

“Wow, thanks for the compliment!” Vannina said.

[Giusi, Vannina’s mum]

[T-rex]

[Dino]

She had fun grunting and roaring to scare the smaller children.

She tried to bite one child, re-enacting a prehistoric hunting scene she'd seen in her favourite book, "Once upon the Jurassic..."

[Guurglee]

[Grrrr]

...the young child screamed and ran away.

In other words, she was having a lot of fun, until some other children came along and, instead of being scared of Vannina, they began to tease her and shout out loud...

YOU'RE EXTINCT

YOU'RE EXTINCT

It made Vannina feel bad.

Hearing that horrible word, “Extinct”, nearly made her cry, but she managed to hold back the tears. T-Rex wouldn’t start snivelling. She put on her sleepy Brachiosaurus face until Mum came to take her home.

At dinner that night, Vannina was down in the dumps. She eventually told her mum what had happened.

“Oh Vannina, don’t let it bother you! They have no imagination. Let them talk...”

They don’t know we have a dinosaur at home, do they Dino?”

[fluffy sabre-tooth tiger]

Lying in bed, Vannina looked at the pictures in her new book, "In search of the lost Jurassic."

A flaming rock falls from the sky, a dead dinosaur in the swamp, lots of dinosaur bones buried underground...and even though she can't read that well yet, she recognizes the word, "ex-tinc-tion" right away.

"Extinction!"

How was she going to sleep now?

The dark was even scarier.

Vannina pulled Dino tight and whispered under her breath, "I don't like that dinosaurs became extinct. Maybe if I think hard enough, I can make one come back, even just a tiny one..."

I need a magic word...like the one grandma shouted to the
waiter when she snapped her fingers...

OSSOBUCO!!!

Oh oh... it must be a very powerful magic word... Because
it works! It really works!

There are too many now.

At that time of night, there was only one thing to do, and
that was to get out of bed, put her slippers on,

and scream her usual request from the hallway, “Mum,
can I come and sleep in the big bed?”

The next day, the world had changed.

“Good morning Jurassic!”

Vannina knows how to make all the dinosaurs she wants appear. Even ones with horns like Triceratops, or with bony plates on their backs, like Stegosaurus.

At grandma's house, she took out her sketchbook and pencils and began to draw tyrannosaurus and two small velociraptors. Then archaeopteryx and a giant diplodocus. To make them look more realistic, Vannina drew in some coprolites (otherwise known as dino poop.)

Making up coprolites made her laugh out loud. She made them all different shapes, depending on the dinosaur that had done them.

Then she shouted, “Ossobuco!!” and “Pop!” dinosaurs invaded her kitchen. Luckily, grandma was busy cooking and didn’t notice.

“Vannina, how about some minestrone soup for dinner?”

“Grandma, tyrannosaurus doesn’t eat minestrone!”

“No? So what would tyrannosaurus like to order?”

“A mortadella sandwich!”

“But weren’t some dinosaurs herbivorous?” grandma asked with a cheeky smile.

“Oh, alright. A plate of minestrone soup for brontosaurus and a mortadella sandwich for tyrannosaurus!”

“Mum, can you run a hot bath?”

“Oh, that’s new! A few days ago I had to force you into the bath, now you want one every night?!”

“Of course, don’t you know that dinosaurs love rolling around in Jurassic swamps?”

They all splashed around together until the water went cold.

Then Vannina asked, "Is there an extra-extra-extra large bathrobe for Diplodocus? He might catch cold otherwise."

Things got much better at school. At breaktime, the same group of boys was hanging around in the corridor, annoying all the shy children and the girls wearing glasses.

But as soon as she saw them, Vannina thought,

OSSOBUCO

and straight away, a pack of ferocious dinosaurs appeared.

One of them was a giant and very nasty Allosaurus with its jaws wide open, rows of sharp teeth, and frothing at the mouth. Disgusting! The big bullies who'd been behaving like they ruled the school cleared off, terrified.

The nastiest one had regularly forced Vannina to hand over her snack at breaktime, wolfing it all down and not leaving her a crumb.

But when Allosaurus gave him a five-hundred fang smile and blew its foul breath on the boy's nose, the coward almost wet his trousers in fright.

[nasty Mario]

Obviously, it wasn't easy keeping Allosaurus in check under her desk for the entire duration of the maths lesson, but it was well worth the effort.

The truth is that Vannina is much more confident since she learned to make dinosaurs appear.

Take the dentist, for example, where her knees had always knocked together when Dr. Rossi started poking about in her mouth. With her dinosaur friends there with her now, she feels a lot braver and could almost laugh sometimes.

[decayed fang]

Then, should the dentist hurt her, she just gives him a bite “KRAK!” like a dinosaur would.

“Ahhhh! You nearly took my thumb off! What’s got into you Vannina??”

“I didn’t mean it! It was the T-Rex inside me.”

[dental hygiene]

[wisdom tooth]

Her greatest success was getting over her fear of deep water.

Vannina's mum had signed her up for swimming lessons but Vannina always made up excuses to get out of it.

"I can't! My costume's ripped."

"I wonder how that happened, it looks awfully like a scissor cut," her mum said, suspecting she was being fooled.

"You know how it is, you just can't get the quality these days," Vannina replied.

Or the other classic excuse...

“I’ve got a sore tummy, I have to go.”

“Why is it that it always happens when we’re about to go to swimming lessons?”

When Mum’s patience starts to wear thin, that’s when Vannina emerges from the bathroom.

“I’m much better now! I have an appetite like a tyrannosaurus. Can I have a mortadella sandwich?”

Sometimes her mum refuses to fall for it and drags Vannina to the swimming pool anyway.

But Vannina still makes lots of scenes before she eventually gets into the deep end where the water is so cold, you can't even drink it.

"Rosanna, I don't think it's safe. I believe I saw a shark fin in the adult lane," she tells the instructor.

"I can assure you there are no sharks. There's nothing to worry about, you can get in," Rosanna replies, seeing through Vannina.

“Hmm, I had a lot to eat yesterday and I don’t think I’ll be able to float without a life ring...”

“Alright then, Vannina, just this once! But you can’t keep on like this, you need to believe in yourself!”

Rosanna is happy now, seeing Vannina over her fears.

Although she was more than a little surprised at Vannina's diving technique, unaware that it was the same one as little plesiosaurus.

Vannina splashes around happily in the deep water now because she has her dinosaur friends with her. Ready to lift her onto their rounded backs, support her on their long tails and protect her from sharks.

She has learned to float on her own now, even swimming on her back. “Hey, chicken! Go on, jump!” she says to the little velociraptor who’s scared stiff.

Vannina goes to bed happy now and is no longer afraid of the dark.

She and Dino are not alone, the room is full of dinosaurs.

Brontosaurus is lying, spread out, on the carpet,
pterodactyl is perched on the headboard, while the little
velociraptors snuggle at Vannina's feet.

It's not easy to drop off with T-Rex lying on its back,
snoring like a tractor, but Vannina eventually switches off
the light and she and Dino fall fast asleep.

RING, RING!

The alarm goes off and Vannina opens her eyes. She looks around but the only dinosaur she can see is Dino, still fast asleep under the covers.

All the others have disappeared.

She snaps her fingers, and snaps again, shouting:

OSSOBUCO!

But nothing happens.

It was just a lovely, Jurassic dream.

Vannina is so sad at breakfast, huge tears roll down her face and drop into her chocolate milk.

“Oh Vannina, maybe it’s better this way. Think what it would be like if dinosaurs hadn’t become extinct. Imagine the huge poops on the pavement?” her mum says to console her.

“But I would’ve loved to see all the coprolites!”

[sniff sniff]

[Jurassic disappointment]

Reluctantly, Vannina went back to her old, pre-Jurassic life. Even though she missed her dinosaur friends a lot, she had grown braver and stopped being scared of everything. But she hadn't given up completely!

Because one nice day, in the garden,

[snap]

Vanna Vinci was born in Cagliari.

When she was nine years old, she saw the skeleton of an enormous dinosaur in London and it was love at first sight.

She wanted more than anything to become a palaeontologist and uncover a whole diplodocus. But then she started writing and drawing cartoon strips and her books were published by big Italian and international publishers, including Mondadori, Feltrinelli, 24 Ore Cultura, Rizzoli, Prestel, Hachette, Dargaud, Planeta, Bao Publishing.

But she's never forgotten her first love and hopes she might find even just a T-Rex tooth one day.

