

Krindlekrax

Chapter Fifty-five

Krindlekrax saw the golden medal and stopped shaking.

It sniffed the medal.

Ruskin jumped off Krindlekrax's back and rushed over to Elvis.

"Oh please wake up," pleaded Ruskin, shaking Elvis. "You've got to go to bed. It's not safe out here tonight."

But Elvis continued to sleep, snoring slightly, and reaching out for the ball. Elvis found the ball and gripped it tightly. He got to his feet and started to bounce it.

Da-boinggg!

Da-boinggg!

Krindlekrax heard the bouncing and, losing interest in the medal, roared at Ruskin and Elvis. What can I do? thought Ruskin panicking now. There must be a way to tame the monster. I just don't know what it is.

And then Ruskin heard something.

Eeeek! went the noise.

It was the pub sign.

Ruskin looked up and, as he did so, the torch of his helmet illuminated the painting of the baby crocodile with a penny in its mouth.

If only I had a golden penny! thought Ruskin.

BUT I DO HAVE ONE!

The medal! Of course!

Corky's golden medal!

Chapter Fifty-six

IMMEDIATELY Ruskin reached out, grabbed hold of the medal and hurled it into the crocodile's mouth.

The medal stuck at the back of Krindlekrax's throat. Krindlekrax closed its jaws and stared at Ruskin.

It didn't move.

Ruskin got to his feet.

It had started to rain now and there was the sound of distant thunder. Raindrops landed in Krindlekrax's eyes, giving the impression of tears. Although, of course, the medal was very small in Krindlekrax's throat, it was obviously causing a lot of discomfort.

Krindlekrax started to cough, trying to dislodge it. Ruskin stood in front of Krindlekrax and tapped it on the nose with his walking stick.

"Don't you like the medal in your throat?" asked Ruskin.

Krindlekrax just stared.

"Open your mouth," Ruskin said. "Open your mouth and I will take the medal away."

Slowly, Krindlekrax opened its mouth.

Chapter Fifty-seven

"Listen to me first, Krindlekrax," continued Ruskin. "If I do this, you must never

Krindlekrax slowly nodded.

Ruskin stepped over the bottom row of Krindlekrax's teeth, and crawled into the soft, pink mouth.

It was like entering a cave full of steam, like when Wendy left the kettle boiling and the kitchen got hot and damp.

Slime dripped from the roof of the mouth and trickled down Ruskin's neck. The slime was thick and very sticky, like marmalade.

Despite the sticky slime and slippery tongue, Ruskin found it oddly comforting in the mouth of Krindlekrax. It smelt of toast and reminded him of home.

Ruskin dislodged the medal from Krindlekrax's throat and crawled back out of the mouth, clutching the medal in his hands.

"Now go back to the sewer!" exclaimed Ruskin. "Lizard Street is full of my friends and I don't want you threatening them."



Chapter Fifty-eight

SLOWLY, Krindlekrax turned around and started to walk back down Lizard Street towards the drain.

Ruskin watched it go, saying, "Mr Lace is my friend because he gave me coloured pencils."

Krindlekrax started to climb down the drain. Its head disappeared.

Ruskin said, "Mrs Walnut is my friend because she gave me chocolate biscuits."

The front legs of Krindlekrax disappeared.

"Dr Flowers is my friend," said Ruskin, "because he gave me a handkerchief."

The belly of Krindlekrax disappeared.

"Mr Flick is my friend," said Ruskin, "because he gave me a photograph."

The back legs of Krindlekrax disappeared.

"Mr and Mrs Cave are my friends," said Ruskin, "because they gave me some cherryade."

The tail of Krindlekrax disappeared.

"And Elvis and Sparkey are my friends," said Ruskin, "even if they don't want to be."

Chapter Fifty-nine

THE STREET was empty except for Ruskin and Elvis.

There was a crack of thunder and lightning, and the rain suddenly poured down.

It felt cool and refreshing and Ruskin stared up at the sky and let the rain splash over his face. Then Ruskin looked at the pub sign.

Eeeek!

"And Corky is my friend," said Ruskin, rain bubbling between his lips, "even if he's not here anymore."

Chapter Sixty

AND, As Ruskin said this, so the rain washed away the peeling paint of the sign, erasing the baby crocodile.

Ruskin glanced at Elvis.

"You can stay out in the rain," he said. "I'm going to bed."

Ruskin put the drain cover back on the drain, then went into his house and up to his bedroom.

He got into bed and closed his eyes.

The last thing he heard before he fell asleep was Elvis trying to bounce his football in the rain.

Da-splash-boinggg!

Da-splash-boinggg!

Da-splash-boinggg!

Chapter Sixty-one

"WAKE up!"

Ruskin opened his eyes to see Wendy standing beside his bed with a plate of toast and a cup of tea.

"I've been trying to wake you for ages," Wendy said, putting the tea and toast on Ruskin's bedside table. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine, thank you," replied Ruskin, eating the toast.

"You're not going to stay in bed again?" his mum asked.

"Certainly not," Ruskin said, jumping out of bed. "It's a beautiful day."

"Yes," said Wendy. "It rained during the night and it's a lot cooler now."



Ruskin sipped some tea, then said, "Besides, it's the school play today. I want to see how Elvis plays the hero. You know, Elvis I still my friend, even though he doesn't want to be."

"That's what you were saying in your sleep," Wendy said. "You were saying Elvis is your friend and Mr Flick is your friend and..."

She was interrupted by someone knocking on the door.

"Who can that be?" asked Wendy nervously. Then added, "Polly-wolly-doodle-all-the-day."

Winston poked his head round the bedroom door.

"We've got a visitor," he said.

"They're knocking on the door very loudly," Wendy said nervously.

"It's not my fault," said Winston.

"Oh, stop it, you two!" cried Ruskin, pushing past them and rushing down the stairs. "Why are you so nervous about everything?"

Ruskin opened the street door and found Mr Lace on the doorstep.

"Oh, a tragedy beyond words!" exclaimed Mr Lace, running his fingers through his hair and sucking a pencil.

"What's happened?" asked Ruskin.

"Elvis was sleepwalking in the rain last night," cried Mr Lace. "He's caught a terrible cold and can't do the play anymore. You're the only person who knows the lines!" Mr Lace grabbed Ruskin's hands and squeezed them tightly. "Please play the part," he begged. "We need you."

"I'd love to," said Ruskin casually. Then, looking back at Wendy and Winston who were hiding at the top of the stairs, called, "Get dressed, you two! You're coming to school to see me do a bit of acting."

"Oh, polly-wolly –" began Wendy.

"Stop saying that," interrupted Ruskin firmly.

"It's not my..." began Winston.

"Stop saying that," interrupted Ruskin even more firmly. "Just get to school, I'm going to be a hero."

Chapter Sixty-two

THE WHOLE of Lizard Street came to St George's Main Hall to see the school play. Ruskin and Mr Lace stood behind the makeshift stage curtain at the front of the hall and peered through a crack at the assembled crowd.

Ruskin was holding a plastic shield and sword.

"Are you nervous?" asked Mr Lace, sucking a pencil.

"No," replied Ruskin.

"Not at all?"

"No," Ruskin said. "Why should I be? I told you before. I was born to be a hero."

Mr Lace put an arm around Ruskin's shoulder and squeezed.

"I think you're right," said Mr Lace.

Beside Ruskin was the cardboard-and-chicken-wire dragon. Ruskin looked up into the red milk-bottle tops of its eyes.

"Let's do battles!" he said.

Mr Lace rushed to the side of the stage and pulled open the curtains.

A few people in the audience gasped when they saw Ruskin dressed as the hero. One or two of them were even tempted to laugh. But as soon as Ruskin spoke, all that changed.

As soon as he started his performance, everyone believed he was a hero. There was no doubt in anyone's mind. They sat there, eyes wide, mouths open, totally captivated by the magnificence of Ruskin's acting.

At the part in the play when Ruskin jumped on the back of the dragon and cried out, "Oh, you terrible monster. You scary thing of the dark. You will scare us no more. I am not afraid. I have tamed you and now I am your master," people in the audience clapped and cheered.

Chapter Sixty-three

WHEN THE play was over, Ruskin was given a standing ovation. Mr Lace lifted Ruskin into the air and cried, "A hero!"

Everyone patted Ruskin on the back and said how wonderful he was.

People came up to Wendy and Winston and spoke to them.

"Your son is such a good actor," said Mrs Walnut. "I don't think anymore could have done it better."

"Certainly not," agreed Mr Flick. "He's our little star."

"A star absolutely," said Dr Flowers. "I never knew he... TISHOO!... had it in him."



Even Mr and Mrs Cave came over and remarked how good Ruskin was.

"You must come to the pub and have a chat," said Mr Cave, putting his arm around Winston's shoulders. "We don't see enough of you."

Mrs Cave said, "You must be proud of your son."

"We are!" said Wendy. "He's wants to be an actor and act in plays by Shakesp—"

"Oh, don't say that name!" cried Mr Lace, tears springing to his eyes.

Everyone laughed and vowed they would try not to say "Shakespeare" in the presence of Mr Lace again.

Ruskin watched everyone talking and laughing and having a good time when —

"Ruskin!" said a voice.

Ruskin turned to see Sparkey Walnut standing beside him. Sparkey looked very bashful and shuffled from side to side.

"Hello, Sparkey," Ruskin said. "How have you been?"

"Very well," replied Sparkey, staring at the floor. "I'm glad you're out of bed."

"Yes," said Ruskin. "I felt ill for a while, but everything's alright now."

"Your acting was brilliant," remarked Sparkey. "I was excited when you were fighting the monster. I cheered and clapped along with all the others."

"Thank you," said Ruskin.

"Do you think...?" began Sparkey, and then his voice broke off and he looked away.

"Say it," said Ruskin.

"Do you think we could be friends again?" asked Sparkey.

"We never stopped being friends," said Ruskin.

Suddenly everyone in the hall heard a noise.

Da-boinggg!

Smash!

Da-boinggg!

SMAAAASH!

People stopped talking and looked out of the window.

Elvis was in Lizard Street. He was smashing every window in sight and screaming, "I WANTED TO BE THE HERO! I WANTED TO BE THE HERO!"

Ruskin stamped his foot.

"I'm going to stop this smashing once and for all," said Ruskin.

Chapter Sixty-four

RUSKIN marched out of the hall, down the stairs, across the playground and into Lizard Street.

Wendy and Winston and all the other people of Lizard Street stayed in the hall. They knew how dangerous Elvis could be when he was in one of his window-smashing moods.

Ruskin marched up to Elvis.

Elvis was wearing his pyjamas with the padded shoulders and his helmet with a visor. His nose was very red because of his cold and he smelt of medicine.

"You!" cried Elvis, pointing at Ruskin. "You stole my part! You take everything from me." And he bounced the ball.

Da-boinggg!

It smashed Mr Lace's window, landing in his living room, bounced out through another window, and landed in Elvis's hands.

"There's not going to be any glass left in Lizard Street by the time I'm finished," growled Elvis. "I'm going to break Mr Lace's windows and Mrs Walnut's windows and – "

"No you're not," said Ruskin calmly.

Elvis glared at him. "You silly little Splinter," he growled. "You can't stop me. I'm big and you're small. I've got muscles and you've got none. My voice is deep like thunder and yours is—" "Oh be quiet," said Ruskin. "I'm fed up with you. You're so . . . wild. Too much wildness is boring. I'm going to tame you and make you interesting again."

And, with that, Ruskin snatched the ball from Elvis's hands.

Chapter Sixty-five

THE PEOPLE of Lizard Street – who were still watching from the school-hall window – gasped.

Ruskin took the pin that had been attached to Corky's medal from his pocket, raised it in the air, then stuck it into the ball.

Air gushed from the puncture. The ball whizzed out of Ruskin's hands and flew round Lizard Street in circles.

It whizzed up into the air.

Whizzed past the people at the school-hall window.

Past the pub.

Past Mrs Walnut's shop.

Past Dr Flower's house.

Past Mr Flick's cinema.

Past Corky's old house.

Past Mr Lace's house.

Then it hovered in front of Ruskin's house for a while, before falling into the drain and out of sight.

The people at the window cheered.

Elvis stared at the drain.

He listened to the people of Lizard Street cheering.

Then he looked at Ruskin. "I had a dream last night. I . . . I remember now. And, in this dream, you . . . you saved me somehow. Saved me from . . . something. I don't remember how or what . . . but . . ." And his voice began to quiver and break. "No one likes me," he said softly. "No one . . . no one . . ."

Then he fell to his knees and started to cry.



Chapter Sixty-six

"I ... I NEVER wanted to grow this tall," wept Elvis. "I hate it. Why did it have to happen? All I wanted was to stay small like you and Sparkey. Why did things have to change? I don't want these muscles, I don't want a voice like thunder. I want to play on the swings and eat lots of ice cream and ... and have people tell me how cute I am. But they don't. They ... think I'm grown up. But ... but I'm not. And I don't want to be."

Elvis was crying so much he could barely speak now. "And I wanted to be friends with Corky. But he liked you ... more than he liked me ... and he ... he bought you a ball ... He bought it for you —"

"No, Elvis!" interrupted Ruskin. "He might have *given* it to me, but it was meant for *all* of us. Corky wanted all of us to play together. But you ... you got jealous! When Corky spoke to me, you ... you stormed off."

"You were talking about theatre stuff," sobbed Elvis.

"So?"

"I don't know anything about that."

"You didn't try, Elvis. Did you?"

"... No."

"So you stole the ball."

"... Yes," said Elvis softly. Then he added, "I'm ... I'm sorry, Ruskin."

Chapter Sixty-seven

THE PEOPLE of Lizard Street had left the school by now and were standing round Ruskin.

They all stared at Elvis.

"I miss Corky," said Elvis, wiping tears from his face. "I miss hearing his broom sweep the playground."

Ruskin helped Elvis to his feet.

"We all miss him," said Ruskin "But we don't have to break glass."

"Can we... be friends again?" asked Elvis.

"We always have been," replied Ruskin.

Elvis and Ruskin hugged each other.

The people of Lizard Street cheered.

Ruskin looked at them and said, "I used to think that Lizard Street was the cracked pavement and the dark bricks and the road with holes in. But it's not! Lizard Street is me, and my mum, and my dad, and Elvis, and Sparkey, and Dr Flowers, and Mr Lace, and Mr Flick, and Mrs Walnut, and Mr and Mrs Cave, and- even though he's not here - Corky Pigeon." And then, in the loudest voice he could muster, he cried, "I LOVE YOU, LIZARD STREET! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!"

