

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CORKY dunked a chocolate biscuit in his tea and licked it thoughtfully. He licked it until all the chocolate had gone, then threw the biscuit away and took another from the packet.

'What's . . . Krindlekrax?' Ruskin asked.

'To tell the story properly,' Corky said, 'I'll have to go back eleven years.'

'Eleven years!' Ruskin said. 'That's when I was born.'

'That's right,' Corky said, wiping chocolate from his lips. 'And eleven years ago a lot of things were different.'

'What things?'

'Well,' Corky said, 'the pavements weren't cracked, for one thing. And the brickwork

wasn't dark and the road didn't have bumps and holes in.'

'Because . . . because Krindlekrax wasn't around then?' suggested Ruskin.

'That's right,' Corky said, taking another biscuit from the packet. 'And I wasn't caretaker of St George's School then either.'

'You weren't!'

'Oh, I know what you'd like to think,' Corky chuckled, dunking the biscuit in his tea and starting to lick the chocolate. 'You'd like to think I've *always* been a caretaker and I've always worn a white overall and had white hair and walked with a walking stick. But, of course, that's not true. Eleven years ago, my hair was . . . well, darker. And I walked without a limp. And I didn't work at St George's School.'

'So where did you work?' Ruskin asked, sipping his tea.

'In the sewers,' Corky replied.

'The sewers!' Ruskin exclaimed, nearly dropping his cup.

'Yes, my dear boy. The sewers. Underground, where all the dirty water is. In the smelly dark. At least, that's how most people think of it. But I never thought of it like that. For me it was beautiful. The

walls are bright green and the water makes a gentle trickling noise. There are chambers big as cathedrals, and waterfalls so high you can't see the top. And when you speak, your voice echoes around you a million times until your ears ring and you get giddy. It's another world down there and I loved everything about it. I felt like an explorer. Being down there was a true adventure for me, my dear boy.'

'If it was dark,' Ruskin said, 'how did you see?'
'I'll show you!'

Corky got up and went over to a wardrobe. He opened the door, removed something wrapped in newspaper, then returned to the table.

'What's that?' Ruskin asked.

'Open it and see,' Corky said, handing it to him.

The newspaper was very old and had turned yellow. It smelt of damp and dust.

Carefully, Ruskin peeled away the paper, like peeling an onion, and inside he found a tin helmet with a torch stuck on the front.

'I wonder if it still works,' Corky said. And he reached over and flicked a switch on top of the torch.

The torch lit up.

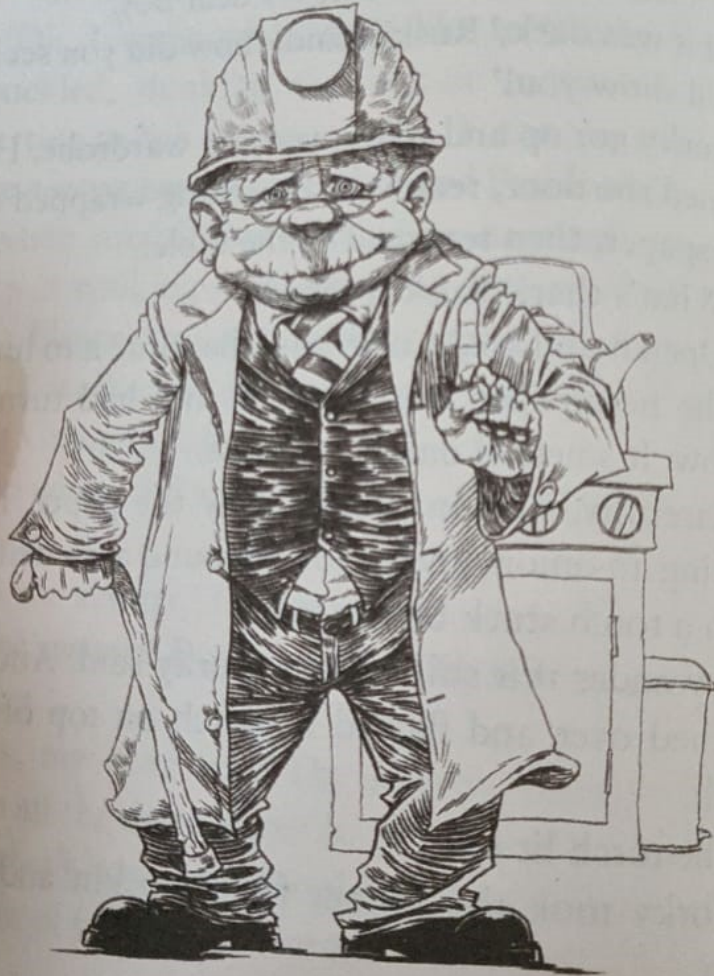
Corky took the helmet from Ruskin and put it on.

Philip Ridley

The torch gleamed like a brilliant third eye.
'How do I look?' Corky asked.

'Wonderful,' Ruskin said.

'That's how I looked in those days,' Corky said,
sighing. 'I was younger and I was wonderful and
I felt like an explorer in the underground world of
green cathedrals and majestic waterfalls.'



Krindlekrax

'So why did you leave?' Corky asked. 'Why did you stop being an explorer and become a caretaker?'

'Because,' Corky replied, 'I was the one who found Krindlekrax.'