

'Well, I stopped going into the sewers, true,' continued Corky, 'but I still worked for the same firm. They gave me a job in an office instead. I stayed there for . . . oh, several years. And then, one day, a worker went sick and they needed someone to go underground in his place to check a few leaks and rusty pipes.'

'And you were the one who went,' Ruskin said.

'That's right,' Corky said, his tongue covered with chocolate. 'I put my helmet on – this very helmet, with its torch – and went down into the darkness again.'

'And . . . and you saw the crocodile again?' suggested Ruskin.

'Oh, not at first,' Corky said. 'At first I didn't even think about it. I just concentrated on walking through the water without slipping over. And . . . and then I heard it.'

'What?'

'A roar. A roar like I'd never heard before. Like a million car tyres screeching all at once. It made my bones shake.'

'Were you scared?' Ruskin asked.

'Very.'

'Because you knew what it was?'

'That's right, my dear boy,' Corky said, licking the last of the chocolate from the biscuit and throwing it away. 'I knew that for all those years the baby crocodile had been

drinking the dirty water and eating the remains of food. I knew that it had been growing and growing. And I knew something else. I knew that biting my knee had given it a taste for my blood. I knew that it had been growing and waiting for me to return so it could finish me off once and for all.'

Ruskin leaned forward and squeezed Corky's hand.

'What did you do?' Ruskin asked, eyes wide.

'Well, I didn't panic, my dear boy,' Corky replied. 'That's the worse thing to do. Never panic. So . . . slowly and calmly . . . I turned round and limped towards the ladder. I tried to be as quiet as possible. The splashing of my feet in the water sounded so loud to me. And then . . . then I heard it again. That terrible roar. I knew the crocodile was getting closer.'

'Although it wasn't just a crocodile any more, was it, Corky?' Ruskin said. 'It had got another name.'

'It was Krindlekrax,' Corky said. 'I just knew that was its name. The roar of Krindlekrax filled my ears. I saw the ladder and reached out. I could hear splashing coming towards me. I knew Krindlekrax was getting closer and closer. I ran up the ladder. And, in those last few moments, I glanced down to see what was chasing after me.'

'What did it look like?' Ruskin asked.

'Huge and dark,' Corky replied, 'with pointed claws and sharp teeth and breath as hot as fire. It was the most terrible thing I had ever seen.' Corky leaned back and took his helmet off. 'When I got home that evening,' he said, 'I saw that all my hair had turned white. The sight of Krindlekrax had drained the colour from me.'