

Chapter 5

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Ruskin's dad was sitting on the bed, surrounded by model animals. Some of them were made of fluffy material, some plastic. There were all kinds of creatures: penguins, snakes, bats, elephants, lions, tigers, giraffes, bears, seals, dolphins. Every time Winston got fed up, he would sit on his bed and talk to them.

Ruskin put the slice of toast on the bedside cabinet and sat next to his dad on the bed.

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'How are the animals today?' Ruskin asked.

'Fine,' Winston replied.

'The fluff's coming off the penguins,' Ruskin noticed.

'It's not my fault,' Winston replied.

Years ago, before Ruskin was born, Winston had worked in a zoo. He wore a baggy, dark-green uniform with shiny buttons, and a cap that wouldn't fit over his frizzy hair. Winston had been very happy when he was a zookeeper. He loved all the animals and looked after them carefully. And then, one day, he got the sack and he didn't have a job any more.

Winston missed all the animals; their snorts and howls and grunts and barks, their feathers and fur and fins, their distinctive smells, the way they recognized him, nuzzling him with snouts or pecking him with beaks.

So Winston started to buy little toy animals to look after. He threw imaginary fish to the fluffy penguins, and imaginary steaks to the plastic lions and tigers.

'You didn't finish your breakfast,' Ruskin said.

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

Ruskin asked, 'Dad? Why did you get the sack from the zoo?'

'I've told you before.'

'No you haven't.'

'Yes I have,' insisted Winston. 'And I don't want to talk about it any more. Now go to school and stop bothering me.'

