

A Q&A with Caleb Krisp

1. What was your favourite book when you were a child?

My favourite childhood book concerned four children, a country house and a wardrobe. It featured a majestic talking lion and a large quantity of turkish delight. I spend many happy hours lost inside its pages - and I still venture there from time to time.

2. Who is your favourite hero in a book?

My favourite hero is from a novel without a hero. Her name is Becky Sharp and she lives in the pages of a book called Vanity Fair. Becky Sharp is a strange creature. She does as she pleases. She flounces around making mischief and a certain amount of misery. And she is utterly and delightfully herself. Rather like Ivy Pocket.

3. Who is your favourite villain in a book?

This is a monstrously difficult question! Villains are one of the great delights of storytelling, it seems to me. In the end, I have settled on three. Quilp from The Old Curiosity Shop, Madame De La Rougierre from Uncle Silas and Count Fosco from The Woman in White.

4. If you could be a character from a book who would you be?

Colin, from The Secret Garden. He's bedridden, has a phantom hump on his back, is wondrously melodramatic and the heir to a gloriously grim gothic estate (complete with secret garden). What could be better?

5. If you could recommend just one book for everyone to read what would it be?

The one collecting dust in a far flung corner of your room. Don't you know it's been lying there all this time - just waiting for you to open the cover and step inside?

6. Who or what was your biggest influence in deciding to become a writer?

Each and every book I read on my journey to adulthood influence my vocation as a writer. Those books - perhaps hundreds if you added them all up - transported me to other times and other places. They were worlds of endless possibility, heart-stopping danger and infinite wonder. Grand houses, quaint cottages, whole villages, cities and countries were built in the landscape of my imagination, thanks to those books. It is to this wonderland that I travel whenever I am in search of my next story. I always seem find new characters there, in some forgotten room or dim attic, just waiting to tell me their tales.

7. What inspired you to write your latest book?

I wanted to write about a girl who was unlike many of the heroines I read about in middle grade fiction. A girl who was plucky and optimistic, yes, but also incorrigible, delusional, loose with the truth, infuriating and utterly bonkers. Ivy Pocket turned up fully formed as I started to write the book - I heard her voice in my head, clear as church bells, and I hurried to write it all down before she went away.

8. Do you have any abandoned stories in you 'bottom drawer' that you would like to revisit?

A great many. Most are terrible. But a few are worth revisiting. One day, when the adventures of Ivy Pocket are but a memory, I might just dig them out, dust off and see if they have a story worth telling.