

CHAPTER FOUR

ELVIS stood on the doorstep, glaring down at Ruskin.

Behind Elvis stood Sparkey Walnut.

Sparkey was Ruskin's height, had a face full of freckles, crew-cut hair, and always wore the clothes of an American baseball player (including a black cap).

'Give me my ball, you useless Splinter,' Elvis growled.

Ruskin handed the ball back to him. Lumps of marmalade were still stuck to it.

'You've made it all . . . sticky,' Elvis complained. 'Right, Sparkey?'

'Yes, Sir,' Sparkey said.

Sparkey responded with 'Yes, Sir' to everything Elvis said.

'Clean it!' Elvis demanded, thrusting the ball into Ruskin's chest.

'Why should I?' Ruskin asked. 'It's your fault it's got our breakfast on it. You shouldn't have smashed it through our window. Besides, it was my ball in the first place. You stole it from me -'

Ruskin stopped speaking as Elvis grabbed his frizzy hair and picked him up. Elvis stared into Ruskin's eyes (or rather his thick-lensed glasses).

'What a thin, weak, ugly little Splinter you are,' Elvis said. 'Right, Sparkey?'

'Yes, Sir,' Sparkey said.

'Now,' Elvis continued, 'when I put you down, I want you to pick every bit of stickiness from my - repeat: MY! - football. Understand?'

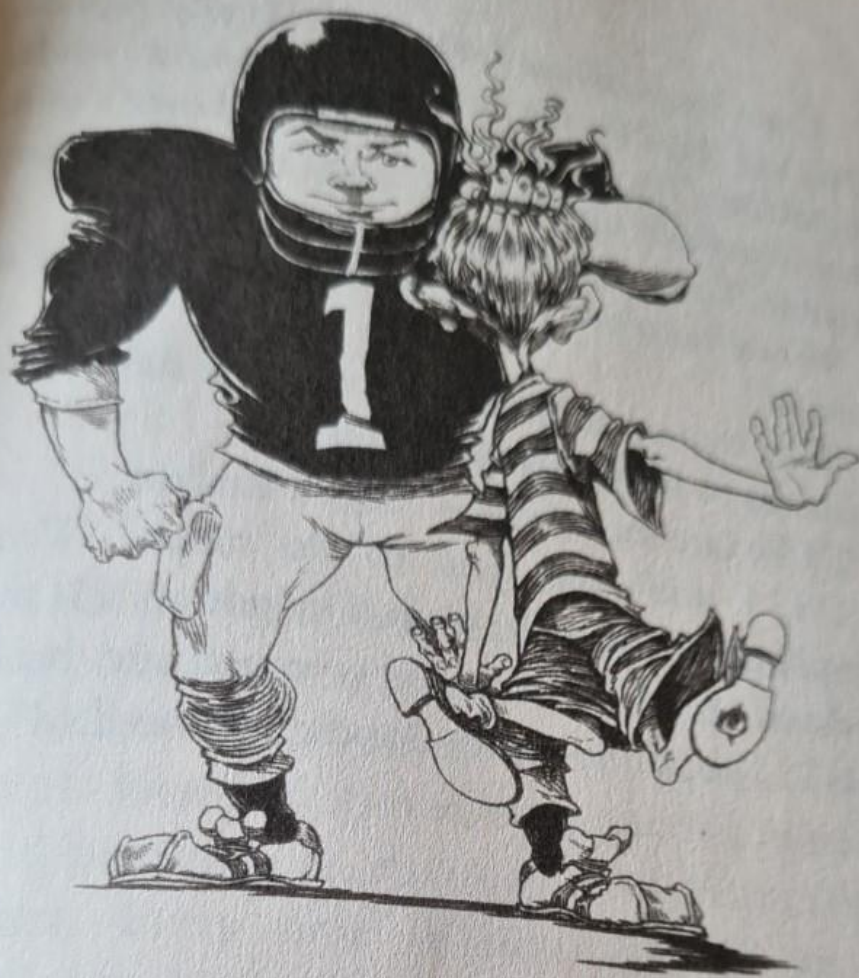
It was very uncomfortable to be held by the hair, so Ruskin said, 'All right.'

Elvis put him down.

Ruskin wiped the marmalade from the football. 'Good little Splinter,' Elvis said, taking the ball back.

Elvis walked away down Lizard Street, followed by Sparkey.

Da-boinggg . . . ! Da-boinggg . . . ! went the ball as Elvis bounced it.



Ruskin closed the door and returned to the kitchen.

'What nasty boys your old friends have turned into,' Wendy said.

'It's only Elvis,' Ruskin said. 'Sparkey's just afraid of him.' Then he looked around and asked, 'Where's Dad?'

Philip Ridley

'Gone back to our bedroom,' Wendy replied. 'He hid behind the gas cooker for a while, mumbling "It's not my fault" over and over again, then sneaked upstairs in case there was any trouble. You know what he's like.'

Wendy buttered a slice of toast and gave it to Ruskin.

'Take this up to him,' she said. 'He didn't have a chance to finish his breakfast.'

'I'll be late for school -' began Ruskin.

'Oh, I don't ask you to do much,' Wendy complained. 'Just take it up. I've got all this mess to clear up. All I can see is toast and broken glass . . . oh, polly-wolly-doodle-all-the-day!'