

CHAPTER NINE

BUT *I* wanted to play the hero,' Ruskin complained.

'I know, my dear boy,' Corky said.

'I'd make a good hero.'

'I know you would.'

School was over for the day and Ruskin was helping Corky Pigeon sweep the playground. Ruskin's broom was so large he could barely lift it.

The playground was made of gravel that sparkled in the sunlight like crushed diamonds on black velvet.

Corky knew all about Ruskin wanting to play the hero, as he had been helping him learn the lines.

'I think you're a hero,' Corky said, wiping sweat from his forehead.

'It's no good, Corky,' Ruskin said, sighing. 'When people look at me all they see are my glasses and frizzy hair and thin arms and how small I am.'

'People are like that, my dear boy,' Corky said, sweeping some rubbish into a bin bag.

After they'd cleaned the playground, Ruskin and Corky locked the iron gates and started to walk down Lizard Street.

Ruskin jumped over cracks in the pavement.

'Tell me,' Corky said, tapping one of the cracks with his walking stick, 'do you know what made the cracks?'

'No,' Ruskin replied. 'What?'

'Well,' Corky began, 'the cracks were caused by -'

Corky was interrupted by a voice exclaiming, 'All sparkling and new!'

The voice belonged to Elvis's dad, Mr Cave.

Mr Cave (along with Mrs Cave) owned The Dragon and the Golden Penny pub. He was a small, bald, fat man who always wore a black tracksuit and always had a cigar in his mouth.

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At the moment of exclaiming 'All sparkling and new!' he was up a ladder and had just finished replacing a broken window. As he spoke, ash fell from his cigar and landed on Ruskin's head.

'Another broken window?' Corky asked.

'Elvis broke this one this morning,' Mr Cave said, coming down the ladder. 'He got Mrs Walnut's shop last night.'

'I heard,' Corky said. 'You should take that ball away from your son.'

'He means no harm,' Mr Cave said.

Above them the pub sign swung in the summer breeze.

Eeeek! went the sign.

'I must oil that sign,' Mr Cave said, puffing his cigar.

The sign had a painting of a bright green creature on it. The creature was supposed to be a dragon and it had a golden penny in its mouth.

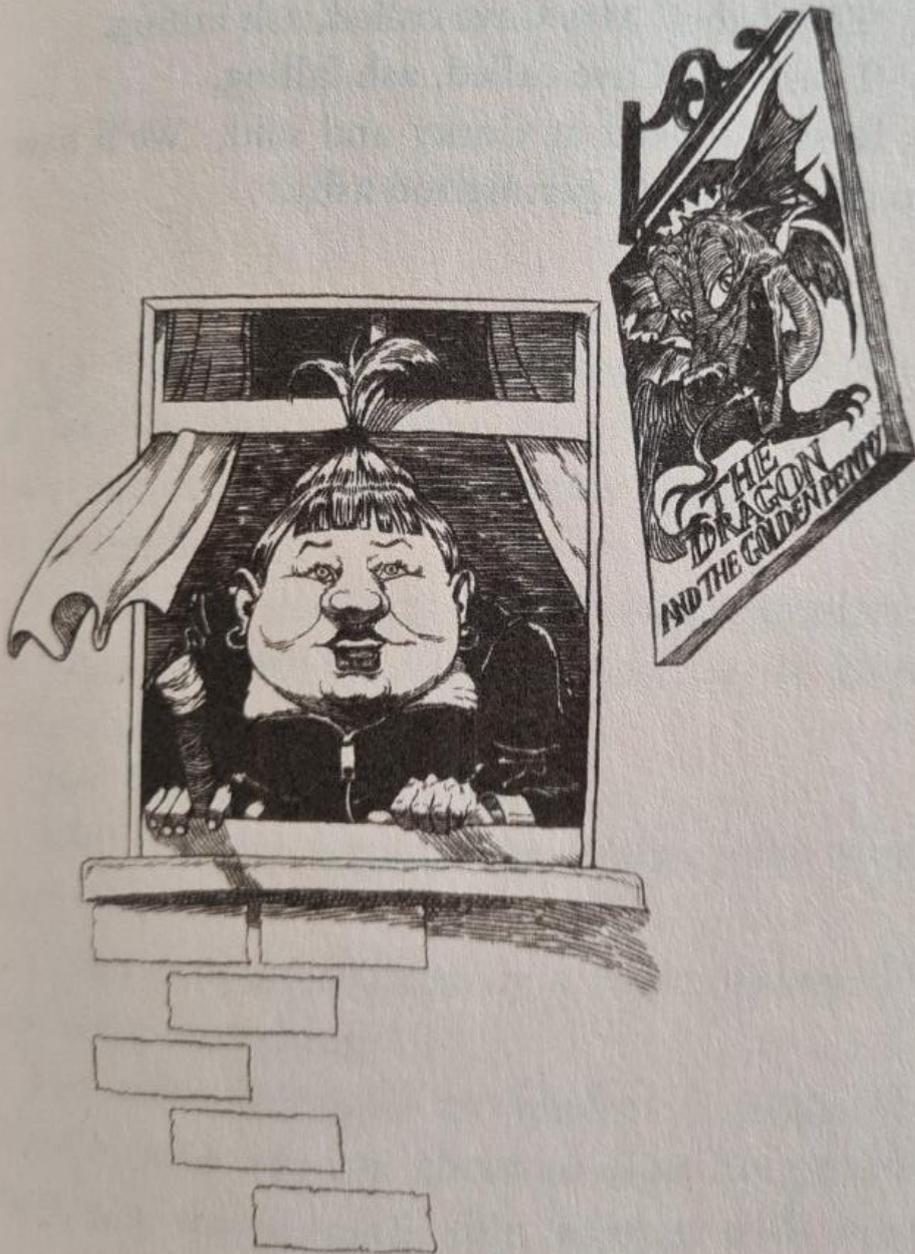
Mr Cave looked at the sign and said, 'It's so hot the paint is peeling. If we get any rain now, it'll probably wash the sign away altogether.'

A window opened above them and Mrs Cave poked her head out.

'Where's my Elvy-baby?' she asked.

Krindlekrax

Mrs Cave was small and fat and always wore a black tracksuit and always smoked cigars just like her husband. She always called Elvis her 'Elvy-baby' and thought he was the best boy in the



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world. As Mrs Cave spoke, ash fell from her cigar and landed on Ruskin's head.

'He's out playing with Sparkey, Mrs Cave,' Mr Cave said, ash falling from his cigar and landing on Ruskin's head.

'Elvy-baby!' Mrs Cave called, ash falling.

'Elvis!' Mr Cave called, ash falling.

Ruskin looked at Corky and said, 'We'll have to go. My head's getting too ashy.'

CHAPTER TEN

AS THEY walked away from Mr and Mrs Cave, Corky brushed the ash from Ruskin's hair and Ruskin ran his fingers along the dark brick beside him.

'Tell me, my dear boy,' Corky said, tapping one of the bricks with his walking stick, 'do you know what made the bricks so dark?'

'No,' Ruskin replied. 'What?'

'Well,' Corky began, 'the bricks were made dark by -'

Corky was interrupted by a voice asking, 'Do you want something?'

The voice belonged to Sparkey's mum, Mrs Walnut, who was just about to close her grocer's shop. She was a small, thin woman with short,

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curly hair, who always smelt of potatoes and wore a green apron.

'You're closing early today, Mrs Walnut,' Corky remarked.

'I know,' she said. 'But – as you see – I'm having to put in a new shop window. Didn't you hear the noise? Elvis broke my old one with that ball while he was sleepwalking last night.'

'We all sleep so very deeply on Lizard Street,' commented Corky. 'I'm afraid I didn't hear a thing.'

'Well, one day,' Mrs Walnut went on, 'we'll wake from our very deep sleeps to find all our windows smashed to smithereens, you mark my words!'

From down the street, Mrs Cave could be heard shouting, 'Elvy-baby! Elvy-baby! Time for your tea!'

Mrs Walnut looked into her shop and called, 'Elvis! Your mum's calling!'

There was a pause.

And then . . .

Da-boinggg!

Da-boinggg!

Elvis Cave came out with Sparkey.

'I want an ice lolly,' Elvis said.

‘You’ve had enough ice lollies,’ Mrs Walnut said. ‘And besides, your mum’s got your tea ready.’

‘I always have an ice lolly before tea,’ Elvis growled. ‘Don’t I, Sparkey?’

‘Yes, Sir,’ Sparkey said.

‘Oh, take one and go,’ Mrs Walnut said, sighing.

Elvis took a handful of ice lollies from the shop freezer, then walked down Lizard Street towards the pub, closely followed by Sparkey.

‘Sparkey used to be such a nice boy,’ Mrs Walnut said. ‘He’s changed completely since Elvis grew so big. Why aren’t you friends with Sparkey any more, Ruskin?’

‘I want to be,’ Ruskin replied, ‘but Sparkey doesn’t.’

Corky said, ‘Actually, I do want something from your shop before you close, Mrs Walnut. I’ll have a packet of chocolate biscuits.’

Mrs Walnut went into the shop to get the biscuits. When she returned she handed them to Corky, saying, ‘I hope the chocolate hasn’t melted. The sun’s melting everything else. If we don’t get some rain soon, the sun will melt the whole street away.’

‘I’m sure it will cool down soon,’ Corky said. ‘Nothing lasts forever. It just lasts for little whiles’

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at a time.' Then he added, 'Come on, Ruskin. Let's go and have our tea and biscuits.'

As they walked down the road, Ruskin tripped over a bump in the road.

'Tell me,' Corky said, tapping one of the bumps with his walking stick, 'do you know what made those bumps and holes?'

'No,' Ruskin replied. 'What?'

'Well,' Corky began, 'the bumps and holes were made by -'

Corky was interrupted by a voice saying, 'We've got a new film!'