

The next morning in school, rehearsals started on the play, *Young Hal Oaktree* (Hal Oaktree is the name of the hero).

Elvis, holding a plastic sword and shield (and clutching his football under his arm) stood in front of the cardboard-and-chicken-wire dragon.

Mr Lace watched from behind the piano.

'All right,' Mr Lace said. 'Begin your speech, Elvis.'

Elvis took a deep breath.

'Oh, you terrible monster,' Elvis began in a voice that, despite being loud and thunderous, was flat and emotionless. 'You scary thing of . . . you scary thing of . . . the . . . the . . . ' Elvis had forgotten his lines.

'Dark,' prompted Mr Lace.

'Dark!' Elvis exclaimed. 'You scary thing of the dark. You will scare us no . . . no . . . no . . . ' Elvis had forgotten his lines again.

'No more,' Mr Lace prompted.

'No more!' Elvis exclaimed. 'You will scare us no more. I am not . . . not . . . '

'Afraid,' Mr Lace prompted.

'Afraid!' Elvis exclaimed. 'I am not afraid. I . . . I . . . ' Elvis's voice trailed into silence.

Mr Lace came out from behind the piano.

'Oh well,' he said to Elvis. 'You'll be all right once you've learned the lines, I suppose.'



Elvis put down his sword and shield and started bouncing the ball.

Da-boinggg!

Da-boinggg!

'I'm going to be the best actor in the world,' Elvis said.

'Yes,' Mr Lace said, sucking a pencil. 'The whole class thinks that. Don't we class?'

Everyone in the class said, 'Yes, Mr Lace.'

Everyone except Ruskin, that is.

'Ruskin didn't say "yes",' Elvis said.

Mr Lace looked at Ruskin.

'Oh, but I'm sure he meant to say "yes",' Mr Lace said.

'Didn't you mean to say "yes", Ruskin?'

'No,' Ruskin replied. 'I didn't.'

'You didn't?' Mr Lace said.

'No,' Ruskin said. 'I think Elvis is the worst actor I've ever seen. He's just saying the words, but he's not feeling anything. I didn't believe a word of it.'

Silence.

Mr Lace stared at Ruskin.

Elvis bounced the ball.

Da-boinggg!

'What's more,' Ruskin continued, 'he doesn't know how to hold a shield and sword properly.'

'Oh dear,' Mr Lace said.

Da-boinggg!

'And he doesn't know how to breathe properly,' Ruskin continued.

'Oh dear,' said Mr Lace.

Elvis was trembling with anger now.

Da-boinggg!

Da-boinggg!

'And he doesn't speak properly,' Ruskin said.

The sound of the bouncing ball got louder and louder.

DA-BOINGGG!

DA-BOINGGG!

'And,' Ruskin continued, 'he wouldn't know good acting if it wore a taffeta dress and stood on a desk, screaming "I'M GOOD ACTING".'

DA-BOINGGG!

The ball bounced up to the ceiling, struck a light bulb, and went straight through a window.

SMASH! went the window.

Elvis pointed at Ruskin and growled. 'You're not going to get away with that, you silly little Splinter. I'm going to smash your living-room windows, your bathroom windows, your hallway windows. I'm even going to smash the glass in your silly glasses. I'm going to smash so much glass around you, you're not going to be able to walk without crunching.'

'Now now,' said Mr Lace, trying to calm Elvis down. 'No need to get offensive -'

'SHAKESPEARE!' Elvis snapped.

Tears came into Mr Lace's eyes.

'Oh, that wondrous name,' Mr Lace said. 'The Bard of all time.'

'SHAKESPEARE!' said Elvis.

Mr Lace fell to his knees.

'Oh, the joy of the thought,' he said, wiping tears from his eyes. 'The fountains of emotion contained in that single name.'

'SHAKESPEARE! SHAKESPEARE! SHAKESPEARE!' Elvis continued.

Mr Lace was lying on his back on the floor now, weeping so much his scarf became soggy with tears.

'I'm going to get my football now,' Elvis said, suddenly tired of tormenting Mr Lace.

Elvis left the classroom.