

'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 track suit and always had a cigar in his mouth.

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.

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