

It was the day for choosing a hero.

All the week before, Ruskin Splinter's school – St George's – had been casting its end-of-year play and only the role of hero remained. Ruskin wanted to play this part more than anything. 'I was born to be a hero,' he had told his teacher, Mr Lace. 'Don't you think so?'

'I'm not sure,' Mr Lace had replied, sucking a pencil. 'We'll decide next Monday.'

And now it was the day for deciding.

As soon as Ruskin woke up he stared at the photographs of famous actors that were stuck on his walls (Ruskin wanted to be a famous actor when he grew up) and started rehearsing lines from the play.

'I am brave and wise and wonderful,' Ruskin said, getting dressed and going to the bathroom to clean his teeth.

He looked at his reflection in the mirror above the sink.

'What a hero you are!' he said to himself, the toothpaste frothing in his mouth.

Ruskin was eleven years old, extremely thin, with a

'Good morning, Lizard Street,' he said in his squeaky whisper of a voice.

Ruskin always said good morning to the Street. He loved the dark brick of the houses, the cracked pavements, and the cobbled road with its bumps and holes.

At the other end of Lizard Street, Ruskin could see his school, St George's. The school had turrets and was surrounded by iron railings with spikes on top. The school was so old that Ruskin's mum, Wendy, had gone there when she was a girl.

'One day,' Ruskin said, 'I'll be the hero of Lizard Street.'