

'Now then,' Mr Lace continued, looking at Elvis and sucking his pencil, 'are you sure you'll be able to learn all the lines?'

'Sure,' Elvis said. 'Easy.'

Ruskin thought, I know all the words already.

But he didn't say anything.

'You know,' Elvis said, 'I can't wait to be in a play. It'll make me feel like Shakespeare.'

As soon as Elvis said, 'Shakespeare', Mr Lace's eyes filled with tears.

'Oh, the wondrous Bard!' Mr Lace cried. 'The joyous wordsmith who started it all.'

'Sure,' Elvis continued. 'I really like ...' and then he said the name as loudly as he could, '... SHAKESPEARE!'

'Oh, the Bard! The Bard!' Mr Lace cried, clutching his hair. 'The magnificent master of all our imaginations.'

Making Mr Lace cry at hearing Shakespeare's name was Elvis's favourite game. It had been Ruskin who had discovered Mr Lace's weakness, years ago, when Ruskin, Sparkey and Elvis had first gone to St George's School. But now Elvis was the only one who tormented the schoolteacher in this way. He'd even given it a name: 'Shakespearling Mr Lace.'

'Oh yes,' persisted Elvis, bouncing the ball, 'I've always admired ... SHAKESPEARE!'

'The wizard of all beauty,' wept Mr Lace.

The class started to laugh.

Da-boinggg!

'SHAKESPEARE!' Elvis said.

'Oh, no, no, no, no!' Mr Lace cried, falling to his knees.

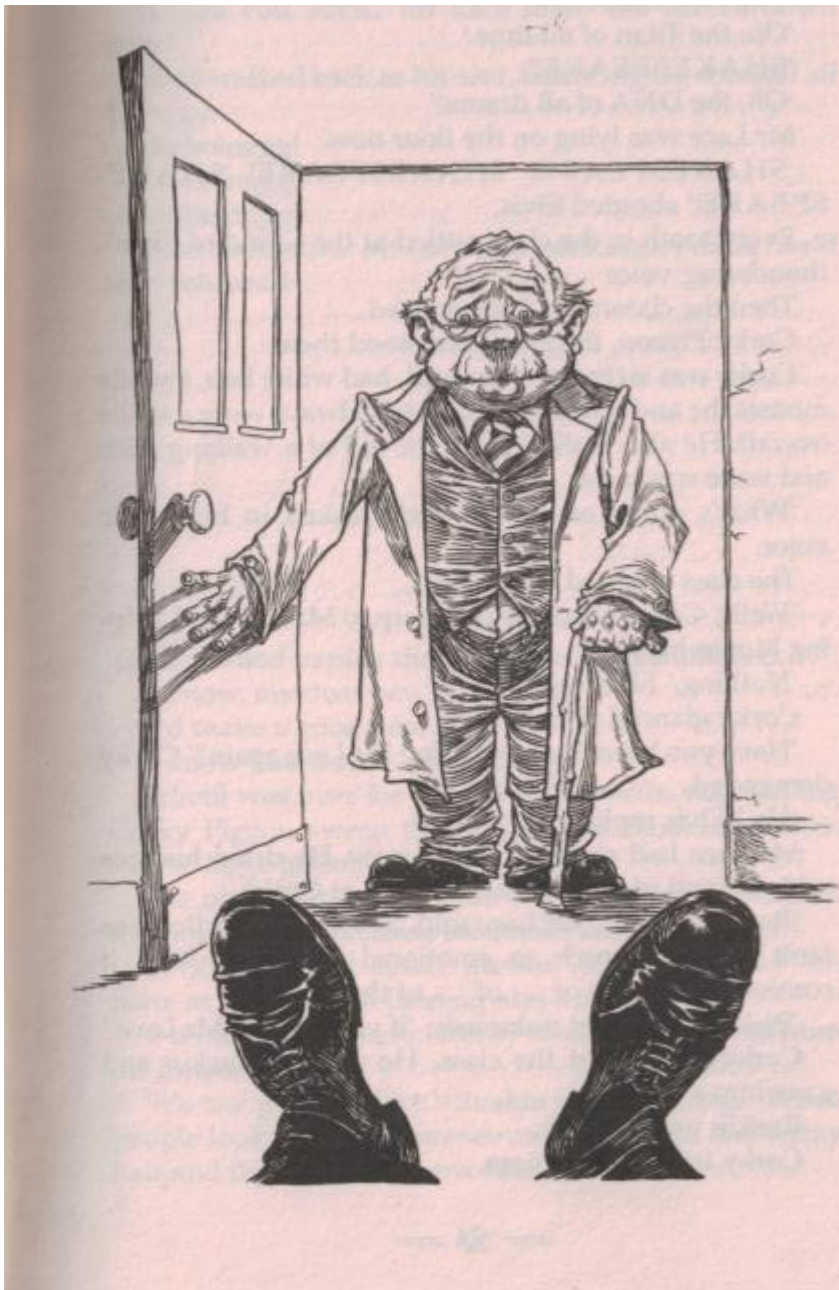
'SHAKESPEARE!' Elvis said.

'Oh, the wonderful Bard! The Saint of Stratford! The emotion wells up in me. Down my heart! Down! Down!'

Mr Lace was crying so much he could barely catch his breath. But Elvis still continued with the game.

'SHAKESPEARE!' Elvis said.

'Oh, the wondrous!' Mr Lace cried.





'SHAKESPEARE!'

'Oh, the Titan of all time.'

'SHAKESPEARE!'

'Oh, the DNA of all drama!'

Mr Lace was lying on the floor now.

'SHAKESPEARE! SHAKESPEARE! SHAKE-SPEARE!' shouted Elvis.

Every tooth in the class rattled at the sound of Elvis's thundering voice.

Then the classroom door opened.

Corky Pigeon, the caretaker, stood there.

Corky was sixty-five years old, had white hair, a white moustache and a wrinkled face and always wore a white overall. He also walked with the aid of a walking stick and wore spectacles.

'What's going on here?' Corky asked in his gentle voice.

The class stopped laughing.

'Well?' Corky asked, walking up to Mr Lace and helping him to his feet.

'Nothing,' Elvis said.

Corky glanced at Elvis.

'Have you been Shakespearing Mr Lace again?' Corky demanded.

'No,' Elvis replied.

Mr Lace had stopped crying now. He dried his face with the end of his scarf and smiled at Corky.

'It was nothing,' Mr Lace said. 'It's my own ridiculous fault for being such an emotional silly-billy when it comes to the name of . . . of . . . of the Bard.'

'Well,' Corky said dubiously, 'if you're *sure*, Mr Lace.'

Corky glanced at the class. He noticed Ruskin and gave him a wink.

Ruskin winked back.

Corky left the classroom.

'Thank you, Elvis,' Mr Lace said. 'You can sit down now.'

Elvis walked back to his seat, bouncing the football all the way.

Da-boinggg!

Da-boinggg!

Da-boinggg!

'And tomorrow,' Mr Lace said, sucking a pencil, 'we'll start rehearsals.'