

Chapter 3

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Wendy screamed and hid behind the refrigerator.

Winston screamed and hid behind the gas cooker. 'It's not my fault!' he cried. 'It's not my fault!'

Winston was always saying 'It's not my fault.' For example, a couple of days ago when Wendy complained about how hot it was, Winston said, 'It's not my fault.' And when Ruskin said he didn't have any school-friends, when a light bulb fused, when Wendy broke a cup, when a car backfired, when a dog started barking, to these and many other things, Winston's immediate and only response was, 'It's not my fault.'

Ruskin stood on the chair, staring at the ball.

It looked like an ostrich egg in a nest of toast.

'Who said it *was* your fault?' Ruskin told his dad. 'It's Elvis's ball again, that's all.'

Winston said, 'That's the third time Elvis has broken one of our kitchen windows.'

'Not to mention all my ruined toast,' Wendy said. Then she added, 'Polly-wolly-doodle-all-the-day.'

Most people on Lizard Street were afraid of Elvis Cave. He was very tall and very strong, and always wore the clothes of an American footballer: huge padded shoulders, tight trousers and shiny black helmet with a visor. Also, his voice was so deep (for an eleven-year-old) that sometimes, when he shouted, it made the teeth in Ruskin's head vibrate.

Elvis and Ruskin were in the same class at school. Once, when they were both as small as each other, they had been friends. There had been three of them in fact: Ruskin, Elvis and Sparkey Walnut. But then Elvis became tall and big and started scaring people. He stopped being friends with Ruskin. Sparkey, who was scared, followed Elvis, and Ruskin was left without a friend. Except for Corky, the school caretaker.

There was a knocking at the front door.

'It's not my fault,' Winston gasped.

'Polly-wolly-doodle-all-the-day,' Wendy gasped.

The knocking got louder.

'G-g-give him his ball back,' Winston said.

'But you *shouldn't* give it back to him,' Ruskin insisted, stamping his foot. 'Elvis is *always* breaking our windows and we can't afford new ones. Look! Most of our kitchen windows have been replaced with newspaper. And it's not just ours. It's everyone's on Lizard Street! And no one ever says anything or complains because Elvis is tall and strong and they're all afraid of him. And they're afraid of what his mum and dad will say. Elvis even breaks windows when he sleepwalks.'

Elvis had been caught sleepwalking several times, bouncing his ball. The ball made a distinctive, liquid sound when it bounced that can only be described as 'Da-boinggg'!

The knocking at the door grew louder.

Elvis called through the letterbox, 'If you don't give me my ball back, I'll knock your door down, you silly bunch of Splinters!'

'It's not my fault,' Winston gasped.

'Polly-wolly-doodle-all-the-day,' Wendy gasped.

Ruskin picked the ball up, jumped off the chair and opened the street door.