

Winner of the
Costa Children's Book Award

Goth Girl

and the Ghost of a Mouse



CHRIS
RIDDELL

Children's Laureate 2015-2017



To class 6 B,
Best wishes,
Chris
Riddell





Goth Girl

and the Ghost of a Mouse

CHRIS RIDDELL

MACMILLAN
CHILDREN'S BOOKS



Chapter One

Ada Goth sat up in her eight-poster bed and peered into the inky blackness.

There it was again.

A sigh, soft and sad and ending in a little squeak.

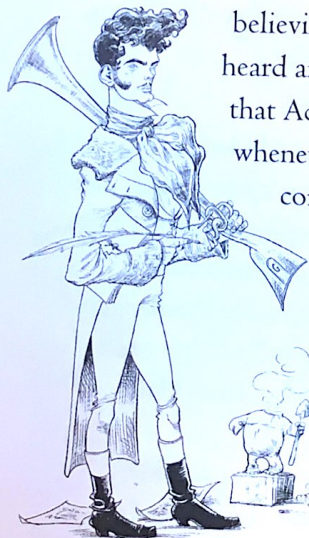
Ada looked across the bedroom as she held up the candle and stepped out of bed.

'Who's there?' she whispered.

Ada was the only child of Lord Goth of Ghastly-Gorm Hall, the famous cycling poet. Her mother had been a beautiful tightrope walker from Thessalonika, whom Lord Goth had met and married on his travels. Unfortunately Parthenope had been killed when Ada was still a baby, while practising on the roof of Ghastly-Gorm Hall during a thunderstorm.

Lord Goth never talked about that terrible night. Instead he stayed at home in his huge house.

shut away in his study writing extremely long poems. When he wasn't writing, Lord Goth spent his time riding his hobby horse Pegasus, around the grounds and taking potshots at the garden ornaments with a blunderbuss. Before long he had acquired a reputation for being mad, bad and dangerous to gnomes.



LORD GOTH

Since the accident, Lord Goth had taken to believing that children should be heard and not seen. He insisted that Ada wear big, clumpy boots whenever she walked down the corridors and passageways of Ghastly-Gorm Hall. That way, he could hear her footsteps approaching and avoid seeing her by ducking into his study where he wasn't to be disturbed.

2

This meant that Ada didn't see much of her father, which sometimes made her sad, but she understood. Once a week, when she took tea with him in the long gallery, Ada would see Lord Goth's expression change whenever their eyes met. His look of intense sadness was enough to tell Ada that he was being reminded of her mother, Parthenope, the beautiful tightrope walker, and the terrible tragedy that had occurred. With her black curly hair and green eyes, Ada looked just like her. (Ada knew this because she had inherited a locket with a miniature portrait of Parthenope inside.)

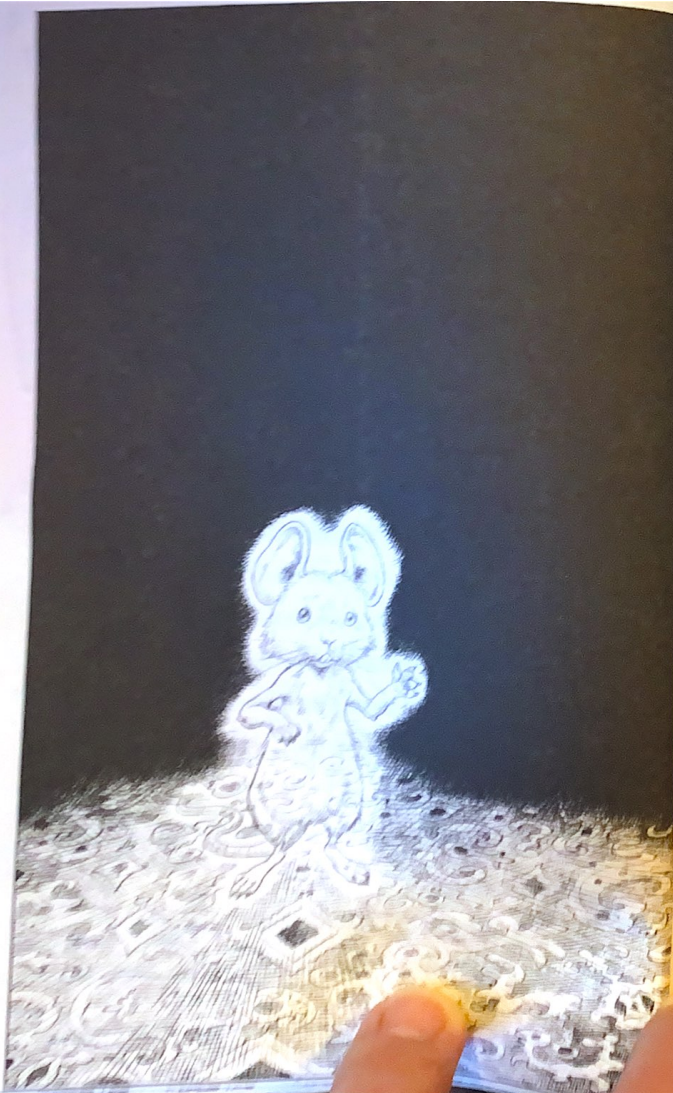


'Who's there?' Ada whispered, a little more loudly this time.

'Only me,' came a small voice from somewhere in the shadows.

Ada slipped her feet into the black leather pumps beside the bed. They were her mother's

3



tightrope-walking slippers, a little big but very comfortable and, most importantly of all, very quiet. Ada liked to wear them to creep around Ghastly-Gorm Hall. Exploring was her favourite thing to do, especially at night when everyone else was sleeping. Because, even though Ada had lived there all her life, the Hall was so big there were still rooms she had never been into and outbuildings hidden in overgrown parts of the grounds that she had yet to explore.

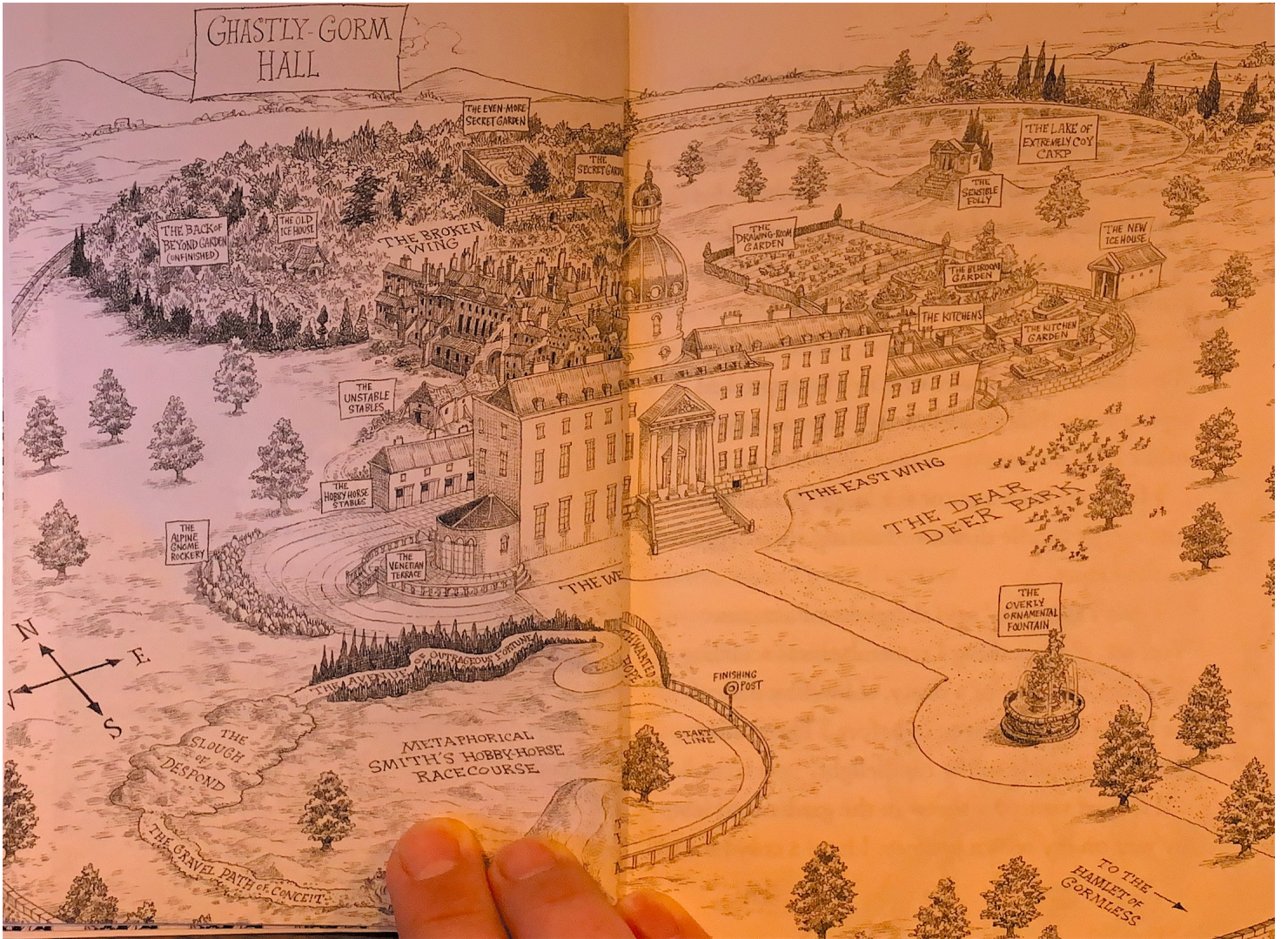
Ada stepped on to the faded Anatolian carpet, holding the candle out in front of her. There, just visible on a faded patch in the centre, was a small figure, white and shimmering and slightly see-through.

Ada's eyes opened wide.

'You're a mouse!' she exclaimed.

The mouse shimmered palely and gave another sigh that ended with a soft squeak.

'I used to be,' it said with a shake of the head, 'but now I'm the ghost of a mouse.'



GHASTLY-GORM HALL

THE EVEN MORE SECRET GARDEN

THE SECRET GARDEN

THE LAKE OF EXTREMELY COY CARP

THE BACK OF BEYOND GARDEN (UNFINISHED)

THE OLD ICEHOUSE

THE BROKEN WING

THE DRAWING ROOM GARDEN

THE SENSIBLE FOLLY

THE NEW ICEHOUSE

THE UNSTABLE STABLES

THE BLEEDING GARDEN

THE KITCHENS

THE KITCHEN GARDEN

THE HOBBY HORSE STABLES

THE EAST WING

THE DEAR DEER PARK

THE ALPINE ENGINE ROCKERY

THE VENETIAN TERRACE

THE OVERLY ORNAMENTAL FOUNTAIN



THE AVENUE OF OUTRAGEOUS OPIUM

FINISHING POST

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

METAPHORICAL SMITH'S HOBBY HORSE RACECOURSE

START LINE

THE GRAVEL PATH OF CONCEIT

TO THE HAMLET OF GORMLESS

Being so old and so big, Ghastly-Gorm Hall was home to quite a few ghosts. There was the white nun who sometimes appeared in the long gallery on moonlit nights, the black monk who occasionally haunted the short gallery and the beige curate who slid down the banisters of the grand staircase on the first Tuesday of each month. They usually mumbled, wailed softly or, in the case of the curate, sang in a high-pitched lispng voice, but they never actually *said* anything, unlike this mouse.

'Have you been a ghost for long?' Ada asked, putting the candle down and sitting cross-legged on the carpet.

'I don't think so,' said the ghost of a mouse. 'You see, the last thing I remember was scuttling along the corridor of a dusty, cobwebby part of the house I'd never been in before.' The mouse shimmered palely in the candlelight.

'I'd been visiting a shrew in the garden and lost my way on my return journey. I have a cosy mouse

hole in the skirting board of your father's study – at least, I did have ...'

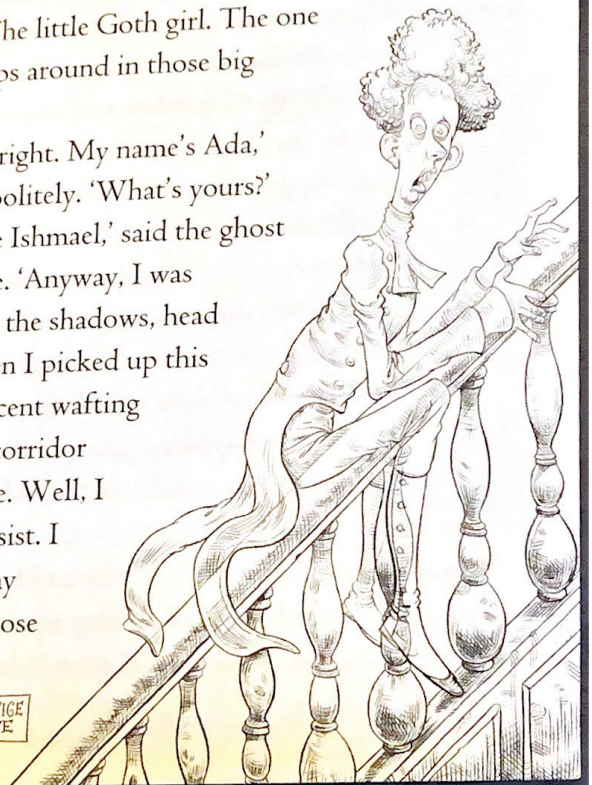
The mouse paused and let out another little sigh before changing the subject.

'You must be the daughter,' it said, looking up at Ada. 'The little Goth girl. The one that stomps around in those big boots.'

'That's right. My name's Ada,' said Ada politely. 'What's yours?'

'Call me Ishmael,' said the ghost of a mouse. 'Anyway, I was keeping to the shadows, head down, when I picked up this delicious scent wafting down the corridor towards me. Well, I couldn't resist. I followed my quivering nose and it led

THE BEIGE
CURATE



me to this lump of cheese – yellow with bluish bits and a smell like a stable boy's socks . . .'

Foot Note

*Blue Gormly is one of the lesser-known cheeses of England. Together with Somerset Stink, Mouldy Bishop and Cheddar not-so-Gorgeous, it is also considered one of the stinkiest. Personally I think it smells fine.



Ishmael closed his eyes and his entire body flickered appreciatively.

'Sounds like Blue Gormly*,' said Ada.

There were several truckles in the kitchen larder the last time Ada looked. Not that she went to the kitchen very often. It was run by Mrs Beat'em, who was very large and very loud and far scarier than any ghost. She spent her time inventing recipes and writing them down in an enormous book while shouting at her kitchen maids and making them cry. Her food was extremely complicated and often difficult to eat, needing twenty-three different knives, forks and spoons at breakfast and lunch. Even more cutlery was required at dinner. Her rhinoceros-foot jelly and baked sea-otter pie in a reduction of scullery maid's tears was Lord Goth's favourite dish, though Ada preferred

a soft-boiled egg and soldiers herself.

'Blue Gormly?' said Ishmael. 'It smelled delicious, whatever it was. I reached out to take it when . . . SNAP!

Everything went black.' He gave a little shudder.

'The next thing I know, I'm white and see-through and hovering in the air looking down at myself caught in a horrible mouse-trap.'



'How awful!' said Ada.

'I couldn't bear to look,' said Ishmael sadly, 'so I floated away and, I don't know why, but something drew me here, to your room . . .'

'Perhaps I can help,' said Ada, although she wasn't exactly sure what she could do.

Ishmael shrugged and said, 'I don't see how –' he paused – 'unless . . .'

'Unless what?' said Ada.

'Unless you came with me and collected the trap,' the ghost of a mouse said, his whiskers quivering.

'Before any more innocent mice get hurt.'

'That's a good idea,' said Ada.

Tiptoeing silently in her tightrope-walking slippers, Ada followed Ishmael as he led her out of her bedroom, down the corridor and through the long gallery towards the top of the grand staircase. Moonlight flooded through the tall windows, illuminating the portraits on the walls. There was no sign of the white nun, Ada noted, but the eyes of the portraits seemed to follow her as she tiptoed past.

There was the 1st Lord Goth, with a pudding-bowl haircut and a lacy ruff, and the 3rd Lord Goth, with a painted-on beauty spot. The 5th Lord Goth had a lopsided powdered wig and a big belly and seemed to be in a bad mood.

'This way,' said Ishmael, floating down the stairs.

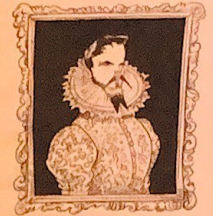
Ada looked around. There was no sign of the beige curate, so she climbed on to the banister and slid to the foot of the staircase with a big *whoosh*.

At the bottom of the stairs Ishmael was waiting for her.

'The corridor was somewhere over there,' he said, pointing. Ada felt a flutter in the pit of her stomach.

'The broken wing!' she breathed.

Ada's home was enormous. There



THE 1ST LORD GOTH



THE 2ND LORD GOTH



THE 3RD LORD GOTH



THE 4TH LORD GOTH

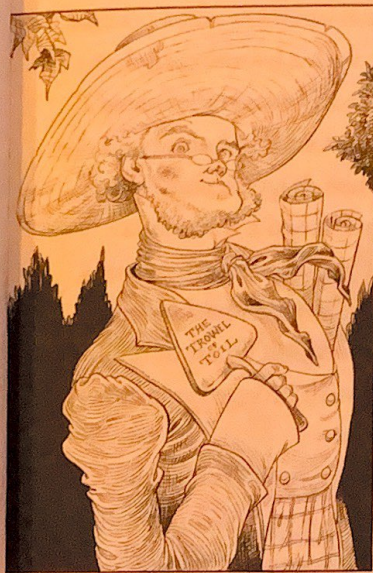


THE 5TH LORD GOTH

was an east wing, a central hall with a magnificent dome, a west wing and, at the back of the house, the oldest part of Ghastly-Gorm, the broken wing.

It was called the broken wing because it was in need of repair. But it was out of sight and was such a jumble of overlooked rooms, abandoned bathrooms and neglected hallways that each Lord Goth had forgotten about it and concentrated instead on building new bits on to the other, more visible, parts of the house.

The 4th Lord Goth had added the dome and over four hundred ornamental chimneys, while the 5th Lord Goth had built the magnificent portico at the front of the house and the new kitchens in the east wing. Ada's father was the 6th Lord Goth, and he had concentrated on the west wing, adding drawing rooms and libraries and a stable block for his hobby horses. He had employed the finest landscape architect of the age, Metaphorical Smith, to lay out the gardens of Ghastly-Gorm Hall with many fashionable features, such as a



METAPHORICAL SMITH

rockery featuring a thousand Alpine gnomes, the overly ornamental fountain and a fashionable hobby-horse racecourse.

Ada and Ishmael made their way across the huge hall beneath the magnificent dome and through a small doorway half hidden by a thick tapestry.

The corridors were long and dark and cobwebby, with dozens of doors lining the walls. Most of the rooms were empty, with peeling wallpaper and crumbling plaster ceilings, but a few were filled with old, forgotten things – the sorts of things Ada liked best.



In one room there was a portrait of a lady with a haunting smile.

Another room was full of vases decorated with pictures of Chinese dragons, and a third room housed a statue of a beautiful goddess with no arms.

Eventually Ishmael stopped and pointed at a pair of double doors with bronze hoops for handles.

'There!' he said excitedly.

Ada looked. In front of the doors was a mousetrap with a piece of Blue Gormly attached to it. Gently Ada nudged the mousetrap with the tip of a toe.

Snap!

The vicious trap sprang shut.

Ada bent down and picked it up. Just then, from the other side of the doors, Ada heard a

familiar and unwelcome voice. 'Got another one!' it wheezed.

The doors began to creak open, but not before Ada had turned and bolted.



Chapter Two



Ada wasn't sure how long she had been running, but it seemed like an awfully long time.

When she finally stopped and looked around Ishmael was nowhere to be seen. She found herself in a small passageway that opened on to a courtyard and stepped out into the moonlight.

She was at the back of the house where the gardens were wild and untended. There were big curling brambles and briars, overgrown shrubs and bushes of enormous size. A small wooden sign read 'The Back of Beyond Garden (unfinished)'.

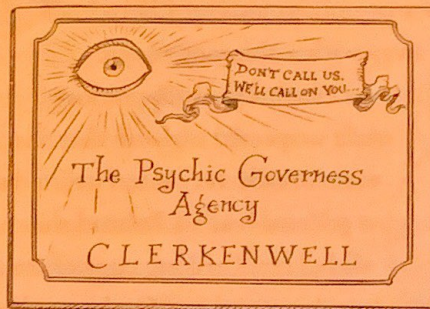
Ada had been meaning to explore this garden for ages but had been distracted by governess trouble.

Not that Ada got into trouble with the governesses, in fact she usually liked them, and

tried to be as well behaved and helpful as she could.

No, it was the governesses themselves that were the problem.

They came from the 'Psychic Governess Agency of Clerkenwell' and seemed to arrive completely out of the blue, usually appearing a minute or two after Lord Goth had made a casual comment about Ada needing a proper education.



The first governess was Morag Macbee. She came from Scotland and had a single tooth and a large wart on the end of her nose of which she seemed very proud.



When it turned out that Ada wasn't a difficult child and rarely got into trouble, Morag Macbee was so disappointed that she developed a severe skin rash and had to go back to Inverness to recover.

Next was Hebe Poppins. She walked like a penguin and was always bursting into song. Ada liked her, but when Hebe discovered that Ada wasn't shy or unhappy she got bored and ran away with a chimney sweep.



Jane Ear was even more disappointing.



Ada suspected early on that she wasn't really very interested in being a governess at all. Instead she spent all her time making cups of tea and knocking on Lord Goth's study door.

Lord Goth had to send her away when she tried to burn down the west wing.

After that, Nanny Darling turned up. She was in fact a sheepdog who thought she was a human.



Nanny Darling kept barking at Ada because she was convinced that Ada was about to fly away to some place called Never-Ever Land. Lord Goth eventually gave her a mutton bone and she left.

Becky Blunt was even worse.



She had had problems in her past, and when she tried to steal the silver Mrs Beat'em chased her from Ghastly-Gorm Hall and out of the grounds with a soup ladle.

Finally Marianne Delacroix had arrived one stormy night. She came from Paris and called herself a revolutionary.



Ada had learned a lot from her. She taught her several rousing songs in French, how to knit and how to construct a sturdy barricade. They were just working on an interesting woodwork project involving a contraption for slicing the heads off dolls when Marianne went out in a skimpy blouse one day, caught a terrible chill and had to leave.

Since then Lord Goth seemed to have forgotten all about Ada's education, which was just as well because Ada had had quite enough of governesses for the time being.

The full moon shone down on the Back of Beyond Garden (unfinished) and Ada made a mental note to come back and explore it properly in the daylight. Turning away, she was just about to take the path that led round to the front of the west wing and let herself in through the Byzantine windows of the Venetian terrace when she heard a piercing squawk.

Ada looked up.

Swooping down out of the night sky came an enormous white bird with a curved yellow beak and a sticking-plaster cross on its belly. It glided over Ada's head and landed on the roof of a tumbledown stone building half hidden by undergrowth. As Ada watched, the bird disappeared through a hole in the tiled roof.

'Well, I never!' said a little voice, and, looking



down, Ada saw that Ishmael had appeared at her feet.

'Unless I'm very much mistaken, that bird is an ocean-going albatross,' he said. 'And I should know,' he continued wistfully, 'because I used to be a seafaring mouse . . .'

'Really?' said Ada, intrigued.

'It's all in my memoirs,' said Ishmael, small and silvery in the moonlight. 'I had just finished writing them when –' his eyes fixed on the mousetrap Ada was still clutching – '*That* happened.'

Ada drew back her arm and flung the mousetrap as far as she could into the tangle of the Back of Beyond Garden (unfinished).

'Thank you,' said Ishmael. 'Now let's find out what an albatross is doing in the old icehouse.'

'That's the old icehouse?' said Ada.

The new icehouse was in the kitchen garden beside the west wing. Lord Goth had had it built to house the finest ice, which he had shipped from

Walden Pond* in New England. Mrs Beat'em used the ice in her leaning ice creams of Pisa and her penguin-tongue sorbet.

'Yes. My friend the shrew lives in a water butt next door,' said Ishmael. 'She enjoys the peace and quiet.'

Ada crept quietly as she could through the tall grass and cow parsley towards the old icehouse. When she got to the door, she found it ajar. Ishmael slipped inside and Ada followed.

It took a little while for Ada's eyes to adjust to the gloom.

When they did, she could see that the inside of the old icehouse was one enormous room with a sunken stone floor piled high with large blocks of ice, each one the size of a packing crate. Sitting on top of the highest stack of ice blocks was a huge figure in a sailcloth coat adorned with ship's rigging. On its head it wore the bicorn hat of a sea captain and strapped to its feet were two planks of wood from the deck of a ship, while on

Foot
Note

*Walden Pond is in fact a very large lake in North America that is crowded with holiday cabins and lake houses belonging to poets, philosophers and thinkers who 'just want to get away from it all'.

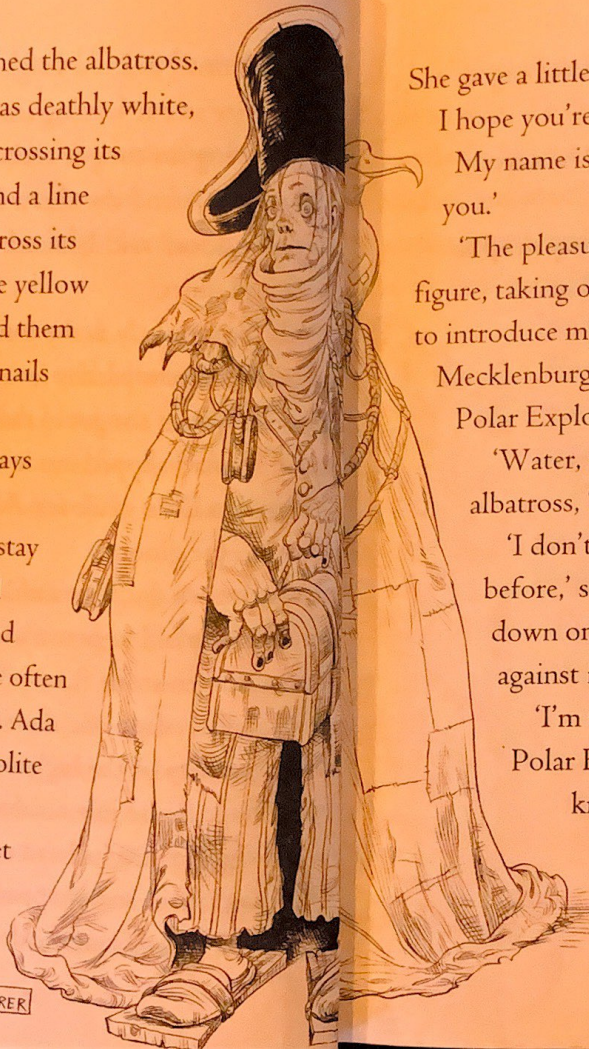


its shoulder was perched the albatross.

The figure's face was deathly white, with blue veins criss-crossing its temples and cheeks and a line of stitches running across its forehead. Its eyes were yellow with blue rings around them and its lips and fingernails were black.

Lord Goth was always inviting strange and interesting visitors to stay at Ghastly-Gorm Hall and was so preoccupied with his poetry that he often forgot who he'd asked. Ada always tried to be as polite and welcoming as she could whenever she met one of Lord Goth's forgotten guests.

THE POLAR EXPLORER



She gave a little curtsy and said, 'Good evening, I hope you're having a comfortable stay. My name is Ada – very pleased to meet you.'

'The pleasure is all mine,' said the figure, taking off its bicorn hat, 'Allow me to introduce myself. I am the Monster of Mecklenburg, but my friends call me The Polar Explorer.'

'Water, water everywhere,' squawked the albatross, 'nor any drop to drink!'

'I don't think I've ever met a monster before,' said Ada, thinking about sitting down on a block of ice but deciding against it.

'I'm not at all surprised,' said the Polar Explorer. 'We're quite rare, you know. There's me, and my ex-girlfriend and . . . well, that's it really. You see, I was stitched together by a brilliant young

student at the University of Mecklenburg as part of his mad science project . . .'

Ada suspected he hadn't talked to anyone for quite some time.

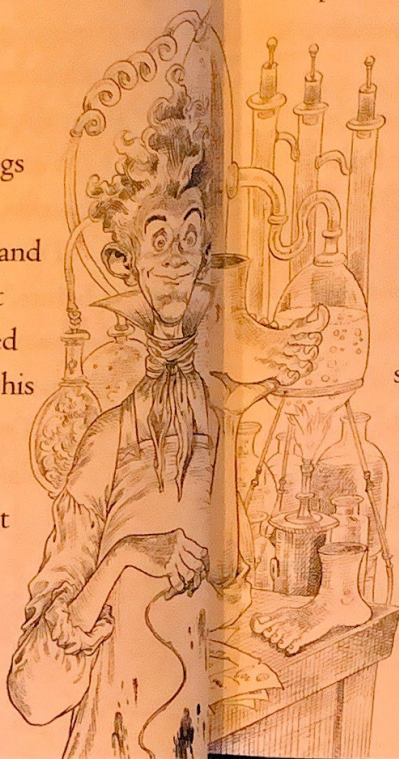
'Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink!' squawked the albatross again.

The Polar Explorer ignored it.

'He made me from bits left on the battlefield of Baden-Baden-Württemberg-Baden. I have the legs of a trumpet major, the arms of a grenadier, the body of a brigadier and the head of a pioneer sergeant first class.' The Polar Explorer smoothed down his lank, lifeless hair and put his bicorn hat back on his head.

'Marinated for a month in a tub of glue I was, and then brought to life by a lightning storm.'

He smiled, revealing seaweed-green teeth.



'Unfortunately, things didn't get off to a good start,' he continued, shaking his head. 'A butcher's dog ran off with my left foot and the student was absolutely furious. He was a bit of a perfectionist. Said he couldn't possibly hand me in to his professor like that and stormed off to class.'

He was ashamed of me, you see . . .'

The Polar Explorer looked suddenly sad and his yellow eyes filled with tears.

'When his professor asked, the student said that a dog ate his homework.'

'You poor thing,' said Ada, sympathetically.

'I learned my lesson though,' said the Polar Explorer, patting a wooden trunk. 'Now I always carry a spare.'

He looked down at the ground.

'Well, after that things went from bad to worse until finally I just had to get away from it all.' The Polar Explorer wiped his eyes and smiled at Ada. 'So I borrowed a ship and went to the North Pole. Lovely place – beautiful scenery. But not very many people to talk to—'

'Icebergs, icebergs everywhere, nor any drop to drink!' squawked the albatross.

'So how do you know my father, Lord Goth?' asked Ada, trying to stifle a yawn. The Polar Explorer was fascinating, but it was so late it was beginning to be early.

'Oh, I don't know Lord Goth personally,' admitted the Polar Explorer, 'But I do know Mary Shellfish, the distinguished lady novelist – a very good listener, just like you, Miss Goth.'

'Please, call me Ada,' said Ada.

'Well, Ada,' said the Polar Explorer, as he patted the albatross perched on his shoulder, 'Coleridge here found this copy of the *Literary Review* on a deserted sailing ship last month.'

THE LITERARY REVIEW

OR
THE ARTISTIC, CULTURAL, BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL JOURNAL

AUGUST 1799

NUMB. LXXXII

MARY SHELLFISH

DISTINGUISHED LADY NOVELIST TO ATTEND

LORDGOTH'S GRAND COUNTRY-HOUSE PARTY
AND THERE, TO WIT, WITH OTHER EMINENT GUESTS TO TAKE PART IN

THE METAPHORICAL BICYCLE RACE

AN EVENT OVER HALF A MILE NAVIGATED ON THE SADDLES OF VARIOUS HOBBY HORSES
AND

THE INDOOR HUNT

CONDUCTED THROUGH THE DELAPIDATED QUARTERS OF THE BROKEN WING OF
GHASTLY-GORM HALL AND NAVIGATED ON THE SELF-SAME HOBBY HORSES AN
EVENT WITNESSED BY THE GOOD FOLK OF THE NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE OF GORMLESS
IN THE COUNTY OF GHASTLYSHIRE, ENGLAND AND CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT THE LAND

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

RADICAL CARTOONIST MARTIN PUZZLEWIT'S LATEST SERIES
OF SATIRICAL PRINTS ON THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT METAPHORICAL SMITH, ENTITLED

A GARDEN RAKE'S PROGRESS

PRINTED FOR TRISTRAM SHANDGENTLEMAN AT THE DOLPHIN IN LITTLE BRITAIN,
AND SOLD BY DR JENSEN IN WARWICK LANE, WHERE ADVERTISEMENTS ARE TAKEN IN,
AS ALSO BY FABERCHROMBIE AND ITCH, RADICAL WEST LONDON WEAVERS OF PUTNEY

The Polar Explorer reached into his sailcloth cloak and pulled out a tattered journal. He pointed to the cover with a black-nailed finger.

'It says here that Mary Shellfish will be one of the guests at your father's grand house party and will be taking part in the Metaphorical bicycle race followed by the annual indoor hunt . . .' The Polar Explorer gave a green-toothed smile, 'and I thought I'd surprise her.'

Ada frowned.

She didn't look forward to Lord Goth's grand house parties. Each year, lords, ladies, poets, painters and deranged cartoonists arrived and turned Ghastly-Gorm Hall upside down. Mrs Beat'em got into an awful state preparing the banquet and Ada was expected to be heard and not seen more than ever. The bicycle race could be quite fun, but Ada never liked the indoor hunt, which involved the guests chasing small creatures through the broken wing with butterfly nets. Even though they released them outside afterwards, Ada

thought it was cruel. Unfortunately the indoor hunt was very popular, and each year the villagers of the little hamlet of Gormless marched up the drive holding flaming torches and gathered outside to watch it through the windows.

Just then the gong sounded in the kitchens of the west wing. It was four o'clock and the kitchen maids were getting up.

'I've got to go,' said Ada.

The Polar Explorer nodded and put a black-nailed finger to his black lips.

'Not a word,' he whispered with a wink.

