



Chapter Three

By the time Ada had run all the way round the west wing, in through the Byzantine windows, across the central hall, up the grand staircase, along the corridor and into her enormous bedroom she was exhausted. Climbing into her eight-poster bed, she drew the curtains, flopped back on to her giant pillow and fell into a deep sleep.

When she was awoken by the sound of the great-uncle clock chiming on her mantelpiece, Ada was startled to realize it was eleven o'clock already.

She jumped out of bed and rushed over to her dressing room. Pushing open the door, she stepped inside.

There, on the Dalmatian divan, were her Wednesday clothes – Scotch bonnet, Highland shawl and black tartan frock. Ada's clothes were

chosen for her each day and evening by her lady's maid, Marylebone, who was so shy that Ada had never actually seen her. Marylebone had been Ada's mother's maid and before that she had been her mother's assistant, in charge of making all her tightrope-walking costumes.

That was just about all Ada knew about Marylebone, because she spent all her time hiding in the enormous closet in Ada's dressing room. But sometimes, if Ada didn't put on her clothes straight away, she'd hear a low growl coming from the depths of the closet.

Ada quickly got dressed and pulled on her big, clumpy boots before setting off for the short gallery, where each morning Mrs Beat'em's kitchen maids laid out breakfast on the sideboard.

She had got to the top of the grand staircase and was just contemplating whether or not to slide down the banister when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

'Why, if it isn't the young mistress herself,' said a thin, wheedling voice. 'Thought I heard



you clumping down the corridor.'

Ada turned to see the tall, thin figure of Maltravers, the indoor gamekeeper, peering down at her.

He had pale grey eyes, long white hair and smoke-coloured clothes that seemed to match his skin. Ada didn't like to admit it, but she was a little bit afraid of him. Wherever Maltravers went, he carried a big bunch of keys, attached to his waistcoat by a long chain. They jingled when he walked and Ada could usually hear him coming, as long,

that is, as she wasn't wearing her big, clumpy boots which tended to drown out other sounds.

Maltravers smelled of wet carpets and mildew and had been the indoor gamekeeper at Ghastly-Gorm Hall for as long as anyone could remember. His job was to stop crows from roosting in the ornamental chimneys, hornets from building nests in the attics, ornamental Chinese deer from chewing the tapestries and blue-tailed newts from laying eggs in the bathtubs. He used nets, fumigating powders and traps of all shapes and sizes.

And when he wasn't busy netting, poisoning and trapping things, Maltravers spent his time in the broken wing, preparing animals for the annual indoor hunt.

One year it was sooty pigeons from Rochdale, another it was long-eared rabbits from the Isle of Wight, while for three years in a row it had been miniature drawing-room pheasants that Maltravers had hatched specially.

Once they were caught in big long-handled butterfly nets, the creatures were released into the grounds, where they often thrived. The three ornamental deer* from eight years ago had done so well that there were now at least a hundred in the deer-deer park.

Ada always thought Maltravers, who had a mean, unpleasant look on his face most of the time, seemed disappointed when the creatures were freed, and more than once she'd seen him looking at Lord Goth's blunderbuss longingly.

Ada shuddered.

'I saw someone creeping about in the broken wing last night,' said Maltravers, his pale grey eyes narrowing to slits. He gave a mirthless little laugh. 'Though I'm sure it couldn't have been the young mistress, could it?'

Ada could feel herself blushing and bit her lip. 'Because she wouldn't disappoint her father by

Foot
Nets

*Ornamental deer are extremely expensive, having to be smuggled out of China in the pockets of explorers and diplomats all the way from the Emperor's Palace in the Absolutely-Forbidden-I-Won't-Tell-You-Again City.



not wearing those fine clumpy boots he gave her, now would she?

'Of course not,' said Ada, backing away.

'But just so you know,' he continued, his pale grey eyes now wide and unblinking, 'the broken wing is out of bounds until the annual hunt on Saturday night.'

Ada watched as Maltravers strode down the grand staircase, his keys jangling. He crossed the great hall to the small door behind the tapestry before disappearing through it.

'Out of bounds?' said Ada defiantly. 'We'll see about that.'

She clumped down the stairs and across the great hall, then through several smaller halls, each containing assorted marble sculptures of classical gods and goddesses, until she came to the short gallery.

Breakfast was waiting on the Jacobean sideboard*.

There was jugged hare, potted vole,

pigeon cooked eight ways and jellied moorhen, all on large silver platters beneath gleaming silver lids.



Ada ignored them and helped herself to a soft-boiled egg and four pieces of hot buttered toast that had been cut into silhouettes of Prussian grenadiers. She sat down at the table and was dipping a grenadier into her egg when the yellow wallpaper opposite rippled like the surface of a pond.

Ada dropped her toast in surprise.

A boy stepped away from the wall. He was the exact same colour and pattern of the wallpaper he has been standing against. If he hadn't moved, Ada wouldn't have seen him at all.

Foot Notes

*The Jacobean sideboard is one of the ugliest pieces of furniture in the entire Hall, but due to its huge size and weight, and the fact that it is nailed to the floor, nobody is able to move it.





'How do you do?' said Ada politely, 'I don't think we've met. I'm Lord Goth's daughter, Ada.'

The boy sat down at the table and changed colour to match the chair he was sitting on.

'I'm William Cabbage. My father, Dr Cabbage, is building a calculating machine for Lord Goth in the Chinese drawing room,' the boy explained. 'I hope I didn't startle you. I have a way of blending in with my surroundings. It's called chameleon syndrome.'

Charles Cabbage was an inventor whom Lord Goth had invited to stay at Ghastly-Gorm Hall six months ago but then had forgotten about. 'I didn't realize Dr Cabbage had a son,' said Ada.

'And a daughter,' said a voice from behind her.

Ada turned round and saw a girl about her own age emerging from behind the sideboard.



The girl had a wooden box strapped to her back, with a folding chair and a jar containing paintbrushes attached to it. Under one arm she carried a large portfolio, and on her feet she wore big, soft shoes.

'I'm William's sister, Emily,' she said. 'William! Please stop showing off and put some clothes on!' Emily told her brother.

William giggled, then got up from the table and crossed to the window, where he stepped behind the curtains.

'I didn't hear you come in,' said Ada, standing up. 'That's because I'm wearing outdoor slippers,' said Emily Cabbage. 'Father said we shouldn't bother you so we've been trying to stay out of your way. William has been blending in and I've been in the back garden painting in watercolours.' She frowned. 'Please don't tell him we bothered you.'



EMILY CABBAGE

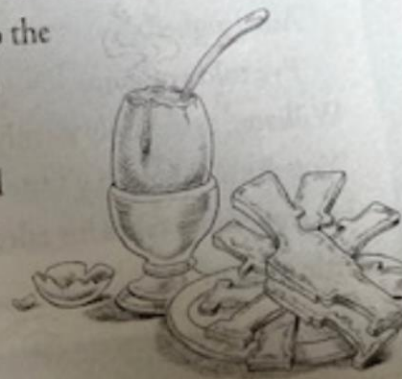
We didn't mean to. We thought you must have had breakfast ages ago, so we came in to have soft-boiled eggs and soldiers. Then we heard you clumping down the hallway in those big boots of yours ...'

Ada smiled. 'I had rather a late night,' she said, and stepped forward and took Emily's hand, 'and you're not bothering me in the slightest.'

She looked down at her clumpy boots, then back at Emily. 'I only wear these because my father says I must. He believes children should be heard and not seen.'

William stepped out from behind the curtains. He was wearing a suit of blue corduroy with yellow socks and brown boots. Above his white collar, his face matched the curtains.

Ada led Emily over to the sideboard and took two soft-boiled eggs and a plateful of hot buttered grenadiers and handed them to Emily.



'I'd be delighted if you and your brother would join me for breakfast. Boiled egg and soldiers are my favourites.'

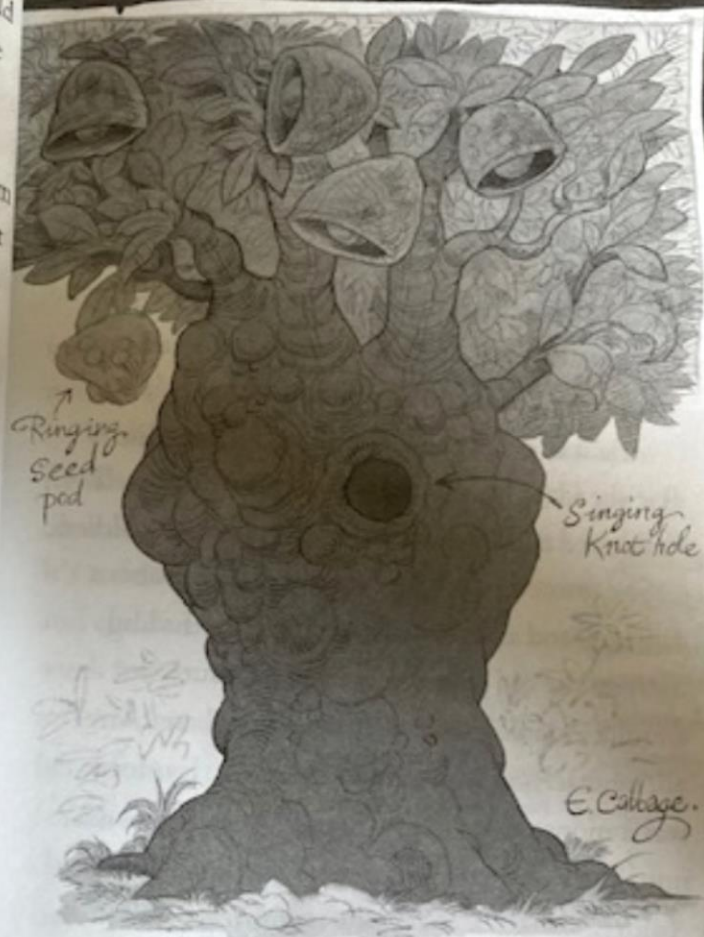
'Ours too,' said Emily.

They all sat down at the table together. William dripped egg yolk down the front of his jacket, but Emily's manners were extremely dainty. Ada was impressed.

When they had finished, Emily opened her portfolio and showed Ada her watercolours of plants and flowers she'd discovered in the Back of Beyond Garden (unfinished). Ada thought they were very good. William held up a watercolour of a purple briar rose and turned the exact same colour.

Ada laughed.

'I've told you once - stop showing off, William,' said Emily sternly. She smiled at Ada. 'You must forgive my little brother, Miss Goth. He sometimes takes his talent for blending in a little too far.'



To Singing-ringing Tree

'Please, call me Ada,' said Ada warmly. 'It's so nice to talk to someone of my own age for a change. It can get quite lonely sometimes. The kitchen maids are too frightened of Mrs Beat'em to talk to me and the only other person I see is Maltravers the indoor gamekeeper and I'm a bit afraid of him. I don't like to bother my father because he seems so busy, though I do see him once a week in the long gallery for tea . . .'

Ada was aware she was talking rather a lot. But she liked Emily. She was talented and well-mannered and liked soft-boiled eggs with soldiers.

She wanted to tell William and Emily about Ishmael, and about the Polar Explorer hiding away in the old icehouse, but wasn't sure she should. Ada didn't want to frighten them. After all, Ishmael was a ghost and the Polar Explorer was a monster. Perhaps it would be wiser to wait until she was better acquainted with the Cabbage children.

'We don't find Ghastly-Gorm Hall lonely in

the least,' said William, turning stripy to match the teacup he was holding. 'We've made some very good friends in the Attic Club and they're all about our age.'

'Ssshhh! William!' said Emily crossly, 'The Attic Club's meant to be a secret!'

'I'm good at keeping secrets,' said Ada, intrigued. 'What is the Attic Club? If I promise not to say a word, can I join it?'

'Well,' said Emily, blushing pink behind her freckles, 'the Attic Club isn't meant for the likes of you, Miss Goth (I mean, Ada).

It's a club for young servants and children of people who work for your father.' She looked down at the tips of her outdoor slippers.

'After all, you're the daughter of a lord. You have a fancy governess who came all the way from France



to teach you and one day you'll be Lady Goth ...
'Miss Delacroix caught a chill and had to leave,'
said Ada, reaching out and patting Emily's hand.
'But she did have some very interesting ideas about
knitting and cutting the heads off dolls, which
I'd love to share with you and your friends in the
Attic Club, if you'll let me.'

'And you promise not to tell a soul about us?'

said Emily, looking up.

'I promise,' said Ada.

Chapter Four

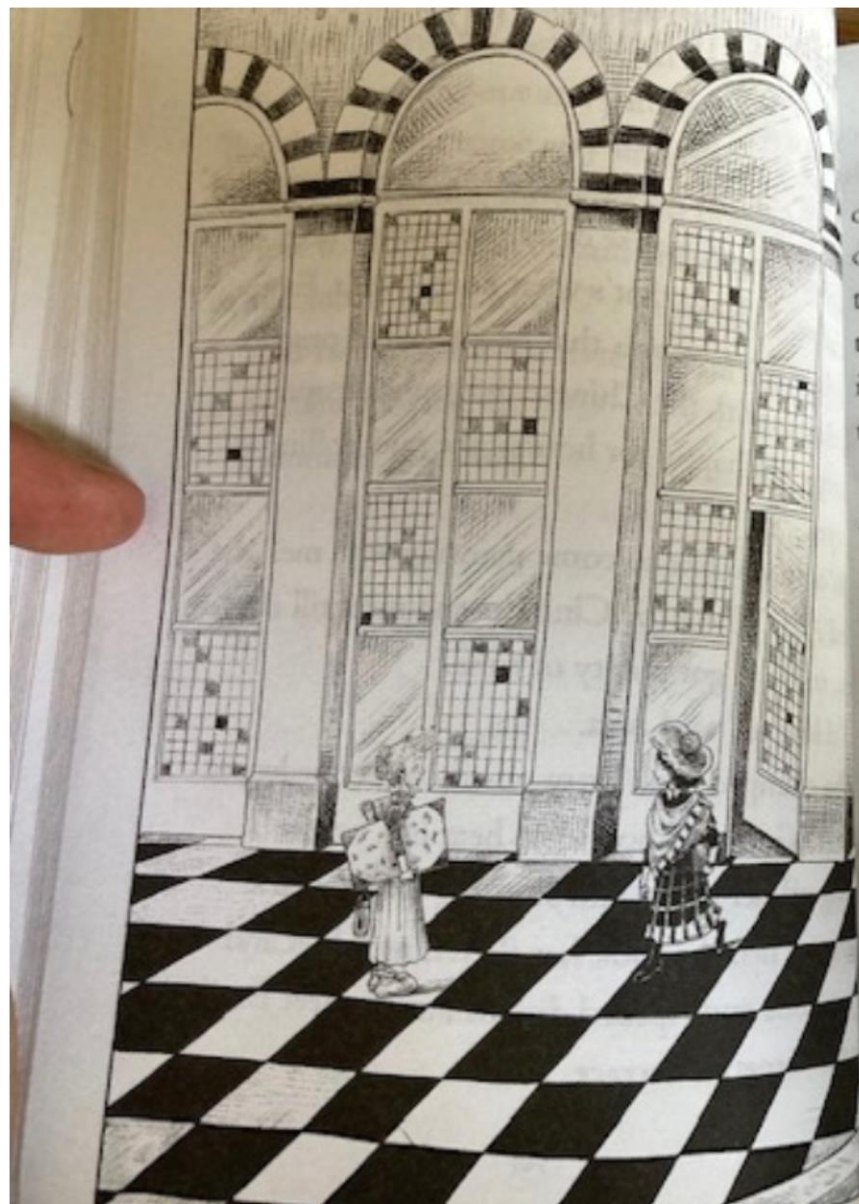


After their late breakfast, William went to the Chinese drawing room to help his father. At least, that's what he told Ada. Emily said the real reason was that he wanted to practise blending in with the Chinese dragon wallpaper. 'It keeps him happy for hours,' she said, rolling her eyes.

'Would you like to come painting with me?' she asked Ada. 'The Attic Club doesn't meet till after dark, so we've got plenty of time.'

'I'd love to,' said Ada.

She clumped back extra noisily to her bedroom so Lord Goth was bound to hear her, before taking off her boots and slipping on her black pumps. Then she took her sketching tablet and crayon box and tiptoed downstairs to meet Emily on the Venetian terrace.



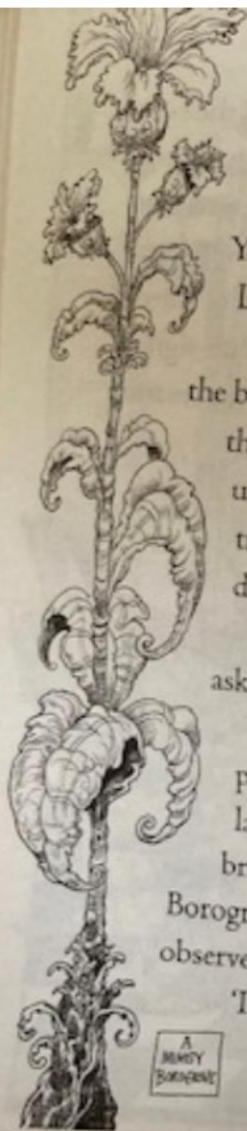
'I love your slippers,' said Emily.

Together they made their way around the side of the west wing and along the path to the Back of Beyond Garden (unfinished). Ada peered into the thick tangle of briars, hawthorn saplings and towering banks of cow parsley. The roof of the old icehouse was just visible, but there was no sign of the albatross, or the Polar Explorer for that matter.

'Let's go this way,' said Ada, leading Emily away from the icehouse to be on the safe side.

They trampled down the long grass, doing their best to avoid stinging nettles and thorny brambles. After a little while Emily stopped, took the wooden box from her back and untied the small stool and water jar. She sat down with the box on her





knees and, undoing the brass clasp, opened it. Inside there was a brass water bottle and a dazzling array of water colours with names like Naples Yellow, Alizarin Crimson, Hooker's Light Green and Payne's Grey.

Emily filled the jar with water from the brass water bottle and took a sheet of thick paper from her portfolio, then used the portfolio to lean on. Ada trampled down the grass, and sat down next to her.

'What are you going to paint?' she asked.

'That plant over there,' said Emily pointing with her paintbrush to a large shrub with yellow leaves and bright crimson flowers. 'It's a Mimsy Borogrove – beautiful specimen,' she observed.

'I'll draw a monster,' said Ada,

opening her crayon box. 'From my imagination,' she added quickly.

She drew a picture of the Polar Explorer in his big sailcloth cloak, with a white face and pale eyes and black lips and fingernails. She finished by drawing the albatross sitting on his shoulder in white chalk.

'You've got an excellent imagination,' said Emily.

'Imagine someone looking like that.'

'You're very talented,' said Ada, hastily changing the subject.

When Emily's painting had dried, she put it in her portfolio and packed everything up.

They were making their way back towards the house when Emily tripped on something in the undergrowth that sent her sprawling. Ada helped her back to her feet and then parted the long grass.





There, poking up from a half-hidden stretch of gravel, was one of Metaphorical Smith's little wooden signs. 'The Secret Garden Path', it read.

'The path is rather overgrown,' said Ada, 'but if you look really carefully, you can just make it out...'

'How exciting! Let's follow it!' said Emily.

They took it in turns to lead the way, ducking under low branches and jumping over trailing brambles, and following the path deeper and deeper into the Back of Beyond Garden



(unfinished).

Eventually they came to a high wall with a small wooden door in it. On the door was a battered brass plate, with the words 'The Secret Garden' engraved on it. Ada pushed the door, which slowly swung open on squeaky, rusty hinges.

She took Emily's hand and they stepped inside. The Secret Garden was a mess.

The grass was as tall as Ada and Emily. Weeds of every shape and size crowded in from the flower beds, and old, gnarled trees with twisting, curling branches reaching down to the ground competed with each other for space.

Ada and Emily followed the path, hand in hand. After a few maze-like twists and turns, they came to another wall, even higher than the first, with a wooden door that was even smaller.

On the door was another brass plate. This one read 'The Even-More-Secret Garden'.

Emily pushed at the door.

Then Ada pushed at the door.

Then they pushed at the door together, but it was no good: it wouldn't budge.



'How disappointing!' said Emily. 'I'd love to go inside.'

Ada stepped back and noticed a keyhole. 'It's locked,' she said. 'And I wouldn't be surprised if Maltravers has the key . . . Oh no, I almost forgot! Today she suddenly exclaimed. 'It's Wednesday! Today is the day I take tea with my father in the long gallery! I'd better go back and change! We'll have to investigate this another time.'

Foot
Notes

The great-uncle clock on Ada's mantelpiece was a present to Lord Goth from his grandfather's brother, Little Ben, an amateur clock maker who trained mice to run up his clocks and wind them up.



'If you still want to join the Attic Club,' said Emily, when they got back to the Venetian terrace, 'meet William and me at the top of the grand staircase at ten o'clock tonight.'

'I'll see you there!' said Ada breathlessly, and dashed off in the direction of her dressing room. When she got there she found her Wednesday-evening clothes waiting for her. She put on the Hungarian frock and jacket and then changed her black pumps for the big, clumpy boots. The great-uncle clock

on the bedroom mantelpiece struck five.

'Mustn't be late,' Ada muttered to herself as she dashed out of her bedroom and down the corridor as noisily as possible. When she got to the entrance to the long gallery she stamped her feet extra hard. 'Come in, daughter,' said Lord Goth in a quiet yet elegant voice.

Ada marched into the room, her footsteps making the teacups rattle.

'Yes, yes,' said Lord Goth. 'You can stop stamping – I can see you now.' He avoided looking at her directly, she noticed. 'Come and pour the tea.'

Sitting in one of two wing chairs by a tall window, he was wearing riding boots and breeches and a pale blue tailcoat with silver fur collar and cuffs and one of the magnificent silk cravats that he had made fashionable; they were known as Gothkerchiefs in his honour. He put down the blunderbuss he had been idly polishing and crossed his legs.



Ada gave a little curtsy and noticed Lord Goth twitch uneasily when their eyes met.

He looked away and gazed up at the portraits on the wall opposite while Ada poured two cups of China tea from the silver teapot on the table. She handed one cup to her father and then, taking the other, sat down on the other chair.

For a while neither of them spoke. Ada didn't mind though. Lord Goth was the most famous poet in England and she was very proud that he was her father. She sipped her China tea.

Lord Goth looked out of the tall window at the rolling green grass of the dear-deer park beyond. In the distance, the extremely expensive herd of ornamental Chinese deer were grazing peacefully in the early-evening sun.

Next, Lord Goth placed his teacup on the table and gazed thoughtfully at the magnificent plaster ceiling of the long gallery.

'Maltravers tells me that his favourite trap is missing,' he said quietly and elegantly. 'I don't

suppose you know anything about that?
Ada stared into her teacup.

'I don't like Maltravers,' she said in a small voice.

'Nobody likes Maltravers,' said Lord Goth, 'but he has been at the Hall for as long as anyone can remember and besides . . .' he continued, still avoiding Ada's glance, 'I need him for the indoor hunt. So, no more creeping about outside the Bathroom of Zeus.'

'The Bathroom of Zeus?' said Ada, her green eyes sparkling. She was intrigued.

'In the broken wing,' said Lord Goth, turning a long last to look at his daughter, 'It was built for the 3rd Lady Goth. It is where Maltravers hatches the miniature pheasants . . .'

Lord Goth paused and Ada saw a familiar look of pain and sorrow cross her father's face.

He rose to his feet and, picking up the blunderbuss, he turned to the tall window.

'Since Miss Delacroix left us, you've had too

much time on your hands, Ada,' he said quietly. 'I think it is high time we considered engaging another governess . . .'

Ada sighed and put her teacup down on the table.

'Now, if you'll excuse me,' said Lord Goth bleakly, 'I have a sudden need to shoot at gnomes.'

Ada left the long gallery and returned to her room, where she found her supper waiting for her.

She lifted the big silver lid covering the tray.

Underneath was a smellywich (two slices of bread with a piece of Blue Gormly between them), an apple from the kitchen garden and a glass of elderflower cordial.



'I bet that smells delicious,' said a little voice close by.

Ada looked down and saw Ishmael twinkling palely from the middle of the Anatolian carpet.

'But being a ghost, I don't seem to have a sense of smell, or an appetite for that matter,' he added sadly.

'Where did you disappear to?' she asked.

Ishmael shrugged. 'Oh, here and there,' he said vaguely. 'Though I always end up back here because, it seems, you're the only one who can see or hear me.' He paused and gave a small see-through shrug. 'For some reason I don't understand, I appear to be haunting you.'

'That's fine by me,' said Ada, who had developed an affection for Ishmael. 'You can haunt me for as long as you like if it'll make you feel better.'

The ghost of a mouse sighed. 'You're very kind,' he said mournfully.

While Ada sat on her chaise short and ate her



supper, Ishmael told her all about his life. He'd left home as a young mouse, escaped to sea and had all sorts of adventures.

'... Then I made very good friends with two parrots and a toucan ...' Ishmael was saying when the great-uncle clock on the mantelpiece struck ten.

'Is that the time!' exclaimed Ada jumping up and rushing over to the foot of the eight poster bed where she hid her black leather pumps, 'I must be going. I'm meeting some friends in the attic. I don't suppose,' she said turning to Ishmael, 'you'd like to come with me?'

'I'd be delighted' said Ishmael, twinkling, 'and don't worry, I'll be as quiet as a mouse.'



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