

## Chapter Nine

**A**da looked up. The dark shape stepped lightly off the banister and on to the landing.

Ada's new governess held out a white hand which Ada shook. It felt ice cold.

'Pleased to meet you,' said Ada.

'You can call me Lucy,' said the governess. 'I'd like us to be friends.'

Ada smiled uncertainly and wondered how long this particular governess would stay at Ghastly-Gorm Hall.

LUCY BORGIA



'Come up to the schoolroom,' said Lucy, 'and we can get acquainted.'  
'Isn't it a little late?' asked Ada. The sun was setting and the shadows were lengthening outside.

'It's never too late to get acquainted,' said Lucy in a lilting voice. She climbed back on to the banister and held out an ice-cold hand to Ada.

'Besides, when you get to know me, you'll realize that I'm more of a night person.'

Ada took Lucy's hand and climbed up on to the banister next to her. Lucy tapped the banister with the sharp-tipped black umbrella she was carrying in her other hand and they began to slide upwards.

'How did you do that?' asked Ada, astonished, as they got to the top of the grand staircase.

'It's an old governess trick,' said Lucy, with a smile that reminded Ada of an old painting she'd once seen. 'And I'm a very old governess.'

'You are?' said Ada, intrigued.



THE ANNA LUCY

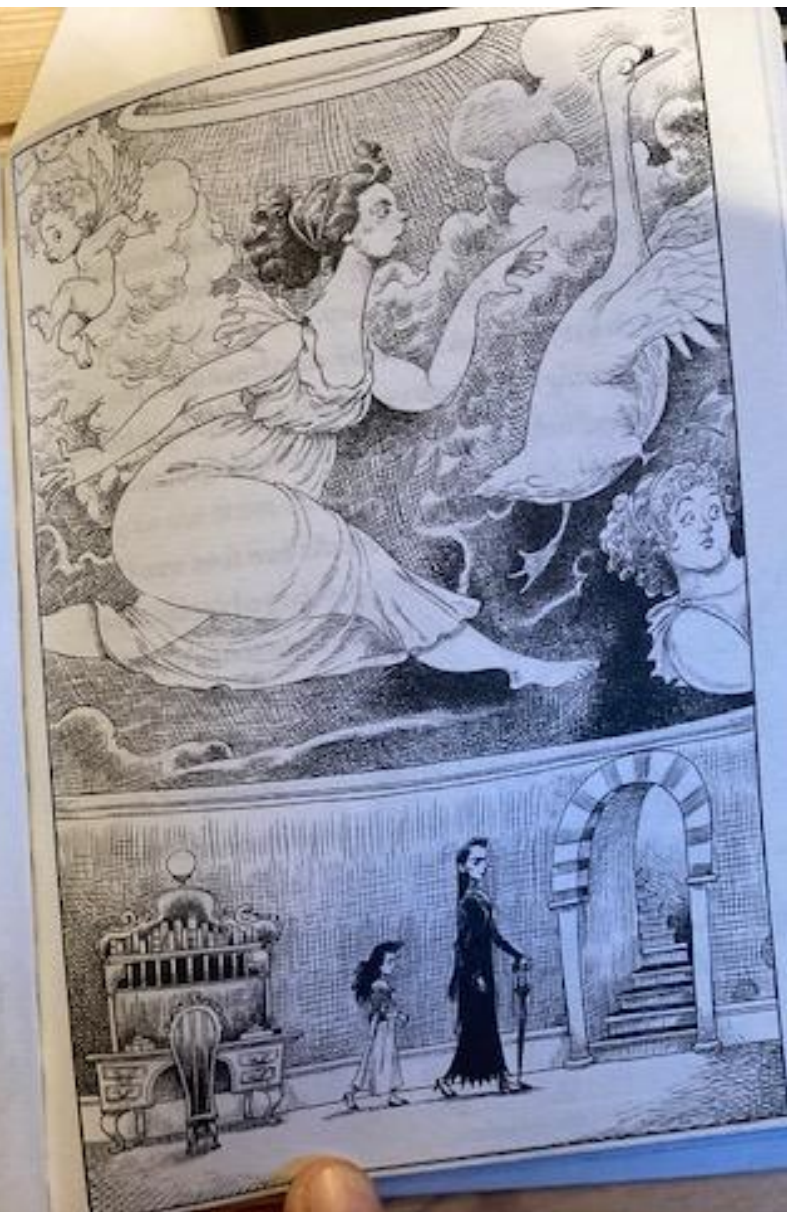
They got down from the banister and entered the schoolroom.

'Yes,' said Lucy. 'I'm over three hundred years old!'

The school room was in the dome of Ghastly-

Gorm Hall and was big and circular with an opening in the middle. The ceiling was covered in pictures of fat babies with wings, plump ladies in flowing robes and an angry-looking man who appeared to be chasing a swan. On one side of the dome was Ada's school desk and on the opposite side was the desk of the governess. They both faced the wall, but sound carried so well there that all one of them had to do was whisper and the other could hear her perfectly.

Ada followed Lucy through a small door and up



the stone steps of a spiral staircase. Opening the door at the top, Lucy was about to usher Ada inside when a startled looking ornamental deer darted out of the room and clip-clopped down the stairs.

'Come in, Ada,' said Lucy. 'Please, sit down.'

Ada sat on a low chair by the dressing table. On the dressing table was a mirror covered by a black handkerchief, a hatpin and what looked like a glass of blood.

Lucy sat down on the bed. At her feet was the large black carpet bag that Ada had seen her carrying the night before.

'Perhaps I'd better explain,' said Lucy.

Outside, a pale white moon had risen above Ghastly-



Gorm Hall, bathing the rooftops in a silvery light. 'You see, I am a vampire.'

Ada nodded even though she wasn't quite sure what a vampire was.

'I was once an Italian princess in the beautiful hill town of Cortona. I spent a lot of my time sitting on a balcony with a needle and thread, mending tights while young men played lute and sang to me from the courtyard below.

'Every so often one of the young men would try to climb up to the balcony and would ladder his tights, and I would feel obliged to mend them for him.'

Lucy smiled and a faraway look came into her eyes as she gazed out of the window at the full moon.

'Happy days,' she said softly.

Then she frowned. 'One day, a handsome Hungarian count came to visit my father. He brought with him



a strange instrument that he played with a horsehair bow and which made a noise like a sobbing cat. I must admit I was caught off guard by this dashing nobleman.


'So one moonlit night, very much like this one, I let Count Vlad the fiddler climb up to my balcony after he had played to me. I was young and foolish and he wore chainmail leggings that protected his tights, so I let him take me in his arms.

'It was a fatal mistake. You see, he was a vampire\* and, instead of kissing me, he bit me on the neck and turned me into a vampire like himself.'

'Did it hurt?' said Ada, wide-eyed.

'No, not really,' said Lucy. 'Just sort of

**Fast Facts**  
Vampires are notoriously difficult to kill - a stake through the heart will turn a vampire to dust, a sharpened stick through the heart will turn him to pebble-sized rubble, while a really sharp pencil through the heart will turn him to recyclable cardboard.



tickled, although I think that was mainly his moustache . . . Anyway I was so cross I pushed him off the balcony and he landed on a wooden rose trellis below and crumbled to dust. Like a stake through the heart but more decorative.' She smiled ruefully.

'Well, I soon found out how awkward it is being a vampire - staying out of daylight, only drinking blood, wearing black all the time . . .'

'Black suits you,' said Ada. Being a vampire didn't sound like much fun, she thought, but Lucy Borgia seemed quite matter-of-fact about it.

'Thank you,' said Lucy. 'But after what happened to me I wouldn't dream of drinking human blood, so I feed on animals mostly and the occasional . . .'



flightless bird. I don't harm them, of course,' she added, then pointed to the glass on the dressing table. 'Would you mind?'

'Not at all,' said Ada, passing the glass to the governess.

Lucy took a sip and closed her eyes.

'Ornamental deer's blood – delicious!' she put the glass back down and kicked off her slippers. 'So I took a gap century – a hundred years or so of wandering around trying to think of something to do. Finally I decided that what I really wanted to do was teach. So I became a governess. A duelling governess, to be precise.'

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'A duelling governess?' said Ada, who thought this sounded even more exciting than being a three-hundred-year-old vampire.

'Here, I'll show you,' said Lucy, jumping lightly to her feet and opening her carpet bag. Inside were rows of velvet trays which folded out on silver hinges, like the inside of a jewellery box. Cushioned on the velvet was a glittering array of beautiful umbrella tips. Lucy reached over and picked up her umbrella. She turned it over in her hand, expertly unscrewed the tip and selected a replacement. She twisted the new tip into place with a flick of her wrist and held the umbrella up.

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'Sterling silver,' she said,  
'perfect for duelling with a  
werewolf.'

She twirled the umbrella  
skilfully and replaced the  
tip with another.

'Polished

bronze,' she told Ada,  
'ideal for fencing with a  
minotaur.'

The umbrella whirred  
in her hand again.

'Ancient amethyst –  
just the thing for crossing



swords with a  
mummified pharaoh, and my  
personal favourite ...'

She selected a long thin  
spike from a velvet tray  
and fixed it to the end of  
her umbrella.



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'... polished driftwood for deterring a sabre-  
rattling vampire pirate.'

Lucy sprang back and forth on tiptoe, the  
umbrella held out before her in one outstretched  
hand, the other on her hip.

'With the right umbrella,'  
she told Ada, 'you can  
fight off any threat,

confront any danger  
and ...' she flicked the  
handle and the umbrella  
opened, 'stay dry at the  
same time!'

Ada's eyes sparkled  
as she looked at the  
umbrella and the velvet  
trays.

'I don't suppose,' she  
said, 'you've got anything  
for dealing with an  
indoor gamekeeper?'



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## Chapter Ten



**I**t felt good to talk to Lucy Borgia and tell her all about Maltravers, and when at last Ada slid down the banister and tiptoed back to her room she was feeling much happier.

Climbing into bed, Ada was just about to blow out the candle when she heard a familiar little sigh. Ishmael, the ghost of a mouse, was standing in the middle of the Anatolian carpet twinkling palely in the candle light.



'It isn't much fun,' he said sadly, 'drifting about aimlessly, appearing and disappearing in the middle of the night like this . . . I don't seem to have any control over my own movements.'

'You poor thing,' said Ada sympathetically. She realized guiltily that she hadn't thought about Ishmael all day.

He shook his head. 'I was a mouse of action, you see. I'm just not suited to being a ghost, floating and haunting, appearing and disappearing . . .'

Ishmael floated over to the eight-poster bed and looked up at Ada.

'This evening, when I appeared, the sun was just going down and the sunset was so beautiful I just wanted to float off into it and go towards the light . . .'

'Why didn't you?' asked Ada. She hated to see Ishmael so sad.

He shrugged. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I just couldn't. It's as if something was holding me back . . . keeping me here . . .'

'Why don't you tell me one of your tales?' said Ada. She was pleased to see Ishmael brighten and become less transparent.

'Well, I could tell you about my voyage to the

land of the Lilliputbugs ...' he began.

Ada lay back against her gigantic pillow and closed her eyes.

When she woke, a thin shaft of sunlight was shining through a chink in the curtains and the great-uncle clock on the mantelpiece was chiming half past eight. Ada climbed out of bed and went into her

dressing room. Her Friday clothes were a Somerset bonnet, a Wessex shawl and a Norfolk frock with an embroidered meadow-

flower hem. Ada was careful to put on her big clumpy boots to please her father. Then she went to the short gallery to meet Emily and William for breakfast.



'There aren't any soft boiled eggs or soldiers,' said William looking at the embroidered flowers on Ada's frock. 'Ruby says Mrs Beat'em has got everyone working on the grand dinner this evening.'

'That's just what I want to tell you about,' said Ada, ignoring the three trays of rolled herring in marmalade sauce. 'My new governess ...'

'You've got a new governess?' exclaimed Emily. Her face fell. 'Does that mean you won't be able to spend time with us now?'

'That's just it,' said Ada, taking Emily's hand and squeezing it. 'Lucy Borgia is a night person - our lessons will be after dark - so we can still sketch and explore during the day.'

'Did you tell your father about Maltravers and those poor creatures?' asked Emily.

'I tried but he wouldn't listen,' said Ada. 'Tonight is Friday, and the guests for the bicycle race and indoor hunt will be arriving this afternoon. But it's going to be all right,' she

...ed brightly, 'because Lucy promised that she would speak to him herself, at the grand dinner tonight. She said that what Maltravers has done is cruel and dishonest and that she isn't the least bit afraid of him. Lucy Borgia is a duelling governess, you know.'

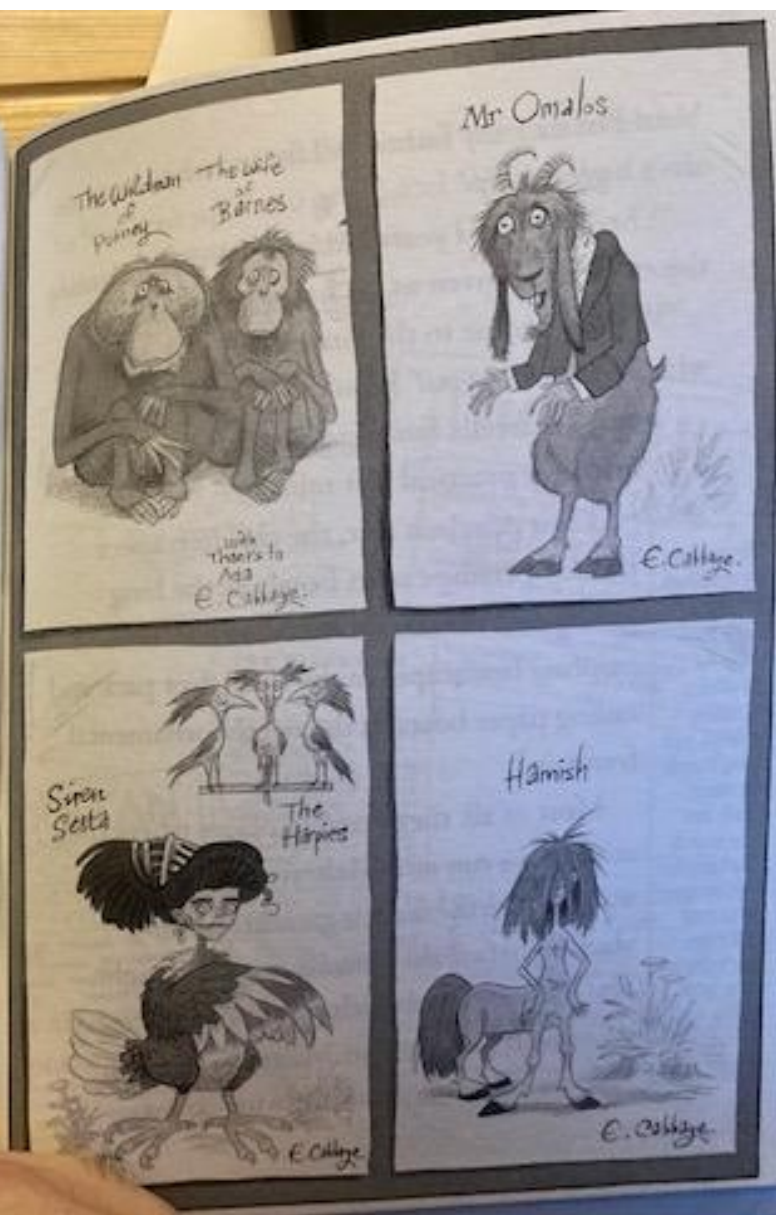
'A duelling governess!' said William, turning cornflower-blue. He sounded impressed. 'What's a duelling governess?'

So, over breakfast of cold lettuce toast, Ada told William and Emily all about Lucy Borgia.

When she had finished, Emily closed the portfolio. She'd been looking through the watercolours of the creatures she'd painted as Ada talked.

'Well, I must say, that is quite a relief,' she said. 'I don't think a beautiful creature like a Siren should be used in an indoor hunt, even if she is released afterwards,' she went on. 'And that goes for the other creatures as well.'

'That's just what Lucy said,' Ada told Emily.





...travellers has gone to a lot of trouble,' said William, as his paper boat sank in the overly ornamental fountain for the third time. 'He must have wanted this year's indoor hunt to be extra special.'

'Probably just showing off,' said Emily, dipping her water jar in the water.

'I'm not so sure,' said Ada, thinking of those five-pound notes, 'But the important thing is that Lucy Borgia's going to tell my father and he'll put a stop to it,' she said firmly. 'After all, if word got out that the guests of Ghastly-Gorm Hall were being chained up and imprisoned, then nobody would come to his country house parties ever again.'

Just then there was the sound of carriage wheels scrunching on gravel, and Ada, Emily and William looked up to see a line of grand carriages coming through the gates and approaching the house down the drive.



'Speaking of guests,' said William, turning the colour of a ridiculously rococo stone mermaid—that is to say, very pale, 'here they come now!'

The carriages swept past the overly ornate fountain and drew up in front of the portico steps. The front door of Ghastly-Gorm Hall opened and Lord Goth stepped out, followed by Maltravers.

In the first carriage, an elegant four-seater, was Lady George, the Duchess of Devon, and her companion Tristram Shandygentleman. They were Lord Goth's oldest friends and came to his house party every year.

Lord Goth greeted them warmly and



LADY GEORGE, THE DUCHESS OF DEVON

TRISTRAM SHANDYGENTLEMAN

ushered them inside together with the three portly Dalmatians that had been riding with them in their carriage.

The next vehicle, a scruffy-looking buggy with holes in the roof, contained the party poets, Molebridge and O'Quincy. They argued with each other all the time but they never missed a country house party.



THE POETS  
MOLEBRIDGE & O'QUINCY

Lord Goth shook them both by the hand, only for the poets to get into a heated discussion about who should go after whom through the door. Behind the party poets' carriage was an open-topped cart pulled by two shire horses. It contained

Dr Jensen, the cleverest man in England, and his biographer, MacDuff.

Ada had never heard Dr Jensen say a word. He wore dark spectacles and enormous tartan trousers. MacDuff was extremely skinny and did all the talking. He carried a long-handled club with him at all times because of his morbid fear of red squirrels.

With great effort Dr Jensen climbed down out of the cart and brushed straw from his enormous trousers before silently shaking Lord Goth's hand.

MacDuff followed, telling Lord Goth something very clever



DR JENSEN & MACDUFF

Dr Jensen had just said to him. When they had gone inside Lord Goth came down the steps to greet the occupant of the next carriage.

This was a single-seater donkey trap belonging to Martin Puzzlewit, the radical cartoonist. He had white hair and a frown and always wore boxing gloves, even when he was drawing, so that he'd always be ready for a fight.

Fortunately this was seldom necessary because no one could ever understand his cartoons well enough to take offence. Lord Goth tried to shake hands but found it impossible, so patted the radical cartoonist on the back instead before turning to the last carriage, which had just drawn up.



MARTIN  
PUZZLEWIT  
THE RADICAL  
CARTOONIST

This was a magnificent coach of Bavarian pine, with a pair of stag's antlers mounted at the front and back. It was pulled by a team of six prancing Austrian show ponies in crimson livery. The door to the coach opened and a set of crimson velvet steps descended to the ground. A slender arm reached out, and Lord Goth gallantly took



the black-gloved hand that appeared before him and kissed it. There was a girlish giggle from inside the coach and a slim, elegant young woman stepped out. She was dressed in a black jacket with a lace ruff-collar and a black striped skirt.

'Mary Shellfish, lady novelist,' she said, 'I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Lord Goth – I'm a great admirer of your poetry.'

Lord Goth let go of Mary Shellfish's hand and gave a small bow.

MARY  
SHELLFISH  
THE LADY  
NOVELIST

'The pleasure is all mine,' he said in a quiet yet elegant voice. Mary Shellfish held up a leather-bound book.

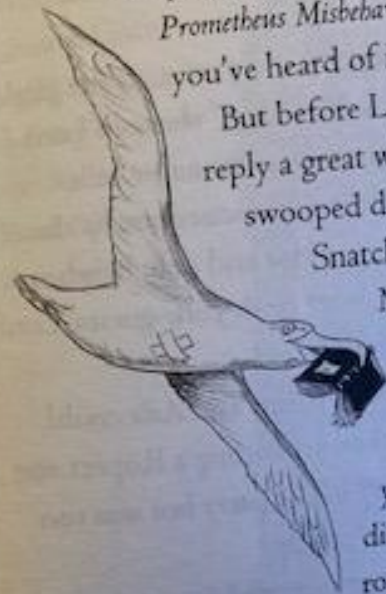
'This is a copy of my bestselling novel,' she simpered, 'entitled *The Monster, or, Prometheus Misbehaves*. Perhaps you've heard of it.'

But before Lord Goth could reply a great white seabird swooped down from the sky.

Snatching the book from

Mary Shellfish's hand, the seabird flew off with it in its long yellow beak and disappeared over the rooftops.

'You told me your novel was popular,' said a deep voice from the depths of the coach, 'but this is ridiculous.'



Moments later a tall figure in a broad-brimmed hat and a black bearskin cape emerged from the coach. He had blue eyes the colour of ice, a long thin moustache that was waxed to needle points at its ends and a large jaw that jutted out when he spoke.

Mary Shellfish blushed and gave a girlish giggle.

'This is Rupert von Hellsung,' she told Lord Goth. 'My carriage broke a spoke a few miles back and Herr von Hellsung rescued me by the roadside. Imagine my surprise and delight when we discovered that we were both your guests, Lord Goth.'

Lord Goth raised an eyebrow and Ada could tell that he didn't remember inviting a Rupert von Hellsung to his country house party but was too polite to say so.

Behind him, Maltravers stepped forward.

'I believe Herr von Hellsung is the hobby-horse champion of Munich, my lord,' he said in his thin, wheedling voice.

'Indeed?' said Lord Goth, with an elegant smile. 'Welcome to Ghastly-Gorm Hall,' he said, shaking Rupert von Hellsung's hand. 'Dinner is at eight.'

