

Chapter Eleven



Ada clumped up the stairs and along the corridor to her room. She hoped her father could hear her, because she had hated disappointing him by not wearing the big, clumpy boots the day before. But everything was going to be all right, she told herself as she pushed open her bedroom door. Lucy Borgia would see to that. Ada had only known her for one day, but already she was beginning to think she might be the best governess she'd ever had.

Dinner was at eight and Ada knew that she would be expected to sit quietly at the end of the steam-engine dining table and listen to the brilliant conversation of Lord Goth's distinguished guests. None of the guests ever talked to Ada though, because she was just a child and couldn't possibly have anything interesting to

say, and besides, they were too busy thinking up brilliant things to say themselves. Ada wished that Emily and William had been invited to the grand dinner.

Ada went into her dressing room and found her Friday-evening clothes laid out on the Dalmatian divan. There was a satin gown of midnight blue, a pair of black elbow-length gloves embroidered with stars and a crescent-moon tiara with a swan-feather clasp.

Ada put on the gown and gloves and then pinned up her hair and put on the tiara. She looked down. On the floor next to the divan, instead of her big clumpy boots, there was a pair of elegant black slippers with clicketty-clack heels.

Ada smiled.

On special occasions Ada was allowed to wear less noisy shoes, and the grand dinner before the metaphorical bicycle race and indoor hunt was a special occasion.

Ada put on the slippers and did a little twirl

in front of the big looking glass. An appreciative growl came from the depths of the closet.

Ada gave a little curtsy and went down to dinner.

The dining room of Ghastly-Gorm Hall was in the east wing. It had tall windows with fine views over the dear-deer park along one side. Along the other wall was an indoor viaduct, which led from a Corinthian serving hatch by the door to the long dining-room table in the centre of the room and back again.

A model railway track led out of the serving hatch, along the viaduct and around the table. The track came from the kitchens of Ghastly-Gorm Hall, and a small steam engine called the Gravy Rocket* ran along it. On special occasions this was used to carry Mrs Beat'em's dishes up to the guests, who could help themselves to whatever caught their fancy as the steam engine chugged slowly past. After completing a circuit of

Foot Note

*The Gravy Rocket is a miniature version of the famous steam engine the Salad Rocket, which was used to transport carrots and cabbages from Norfolk to London until it crashed into the Mayonnaise Express just outside the little town of Coleslaw.



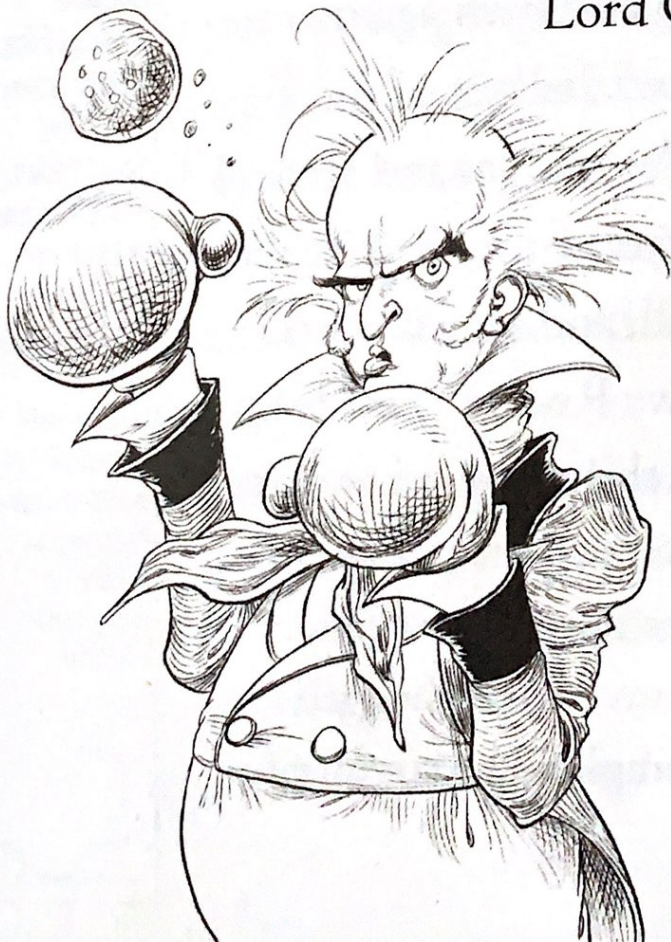
the table the Gravy Rocket would trundle back to the kitchens to be refilled by the waiting kitchen maids, ready for the next course.

When Ada got to the dining room, the Gravy Rocket's whistle could be heard in the kitchen and Lord Goth's guests were taking their places at the table. Ada sat down at her place at the end.

Dr Jensen was throwing bread rolls at Martin Puzzlewit, who was angrily knocking them away with his boxing gloves. At the head of the table

Lord Goth smiled quietly

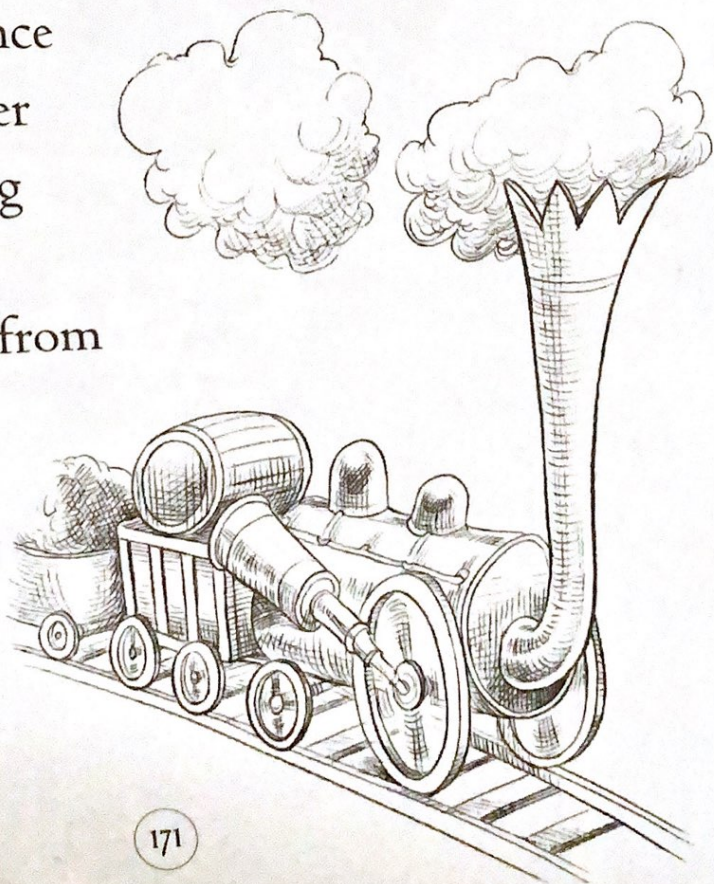
and elegantly and pulled the bell rope beside his chair. A few moments later the steam engine, which had been designed and built for Lord Goth by the son




of an engineer called Stephenson, came chugging through the Corinthian serving hatch by the door and along the indoor viaduct.

As Ada watched, Stephenson's son's Gravy Rocket rounded a bend and wobbled past her on to the dining-room table. Everyone served themselves as it went past.

The steam engine trundled back on to the viaduct and headed towards the Corinthian serving hatch. The sounds of chugging and rattling faded briefly into the distance before growing louder again. With a tooting whistle the Gravy Rocket re-emerged from the hatch and rattled towards the table, its carriages refilled with steaming dishes.





Tristan and I have quite a surprise for you tomorrow, my dear Lord Both...

As Dr Jensen says, when a man is tired of throwing bread rolls he is tired of life...

You must come and visit my hunting lodge in Bavaria. The walls are covered with trophy heads. I talk to them all the time and they have no choice but to listen!



I wandered lonely
as a cloud...

No, I wandered
lonely as a cloud!

I'm going to draw a
satirical cartoon attacking
bread and promoting the
eating of cake!

Of course to be a
good novelist you have
to be a good listener...

As it rolled by, Dr Jensen threw a rhubarb and duck flan at Martin Puzzlewit, which hit him on the forehead.

'As Dr Jensen says, when a man's tired of rhubarb, he's tired of life . . .' said MacDuff as the cartoonist shook his gloved fist at him.

'I might not be good at drawing hands, but I can draw really big noses!' Puzzlewit raged. 'You just wait and see . . .'

Ada sank down in her seat. This was a typical dinner, with food fights and arguments and nobody listening to anyone else.

She looked out through one of the tall windows. The sun had set and the full moon was shining down on the dear-deer park. The ornamental Chinese deer cast moon shadows in the silvery light.



Ada looked over her shoulder at the door to the dining room.

Where was Lucy Borgia? she thought anxiously.

Lord Goth was sitting back in his chair with a bored expression on his face as the Duchess of Devon told a story about one of her overweight Dalmatian hounds using her carriage to chase cats. The steam engine rattled past and headed back to the kitchen.

Just then, the door opened and Lucy Borgia entered the room.



Dr Jensen was flicking spoonfuls of apple-and-bacon trifle at Martin Puzzlewit, who was swinging at him with his boxing gloves while MacDuff told Mary Shellfish and Tristram Shandygentleman what Dr Jensen had said about lobsters.

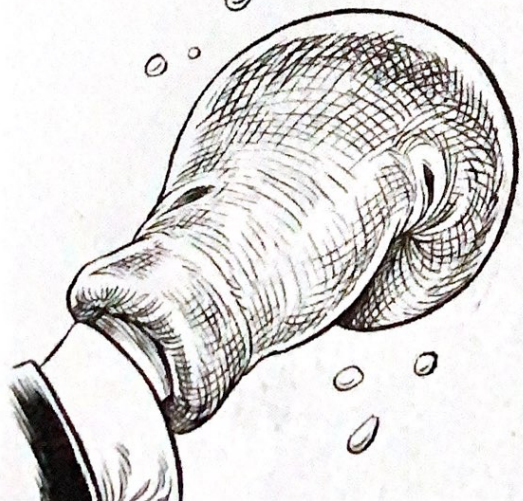
None of the guests paid any attention to the white-faced woman dressed in black as she strode up to Lord Goth. Stopping by his chair, she tapped him lightly on the shoulder with her umbrella.

At that moment, the Gravy Rocket returned fully laden from the kitchen. It steamed along the indoor viaduct and set off across the table.

Ada sat up in her chair.

'Lord Goth, there is something I must tell you . . . ' Lucy Borgia said in a clear voice.

At that moment Martin Puzzlewit swung his fist at Dr Jensen on the other side of the table and hit a carriage carrying a generous



pile of snails steamed in their shells and a large sauce boat. The snails went everywhere, while the sauce boat flew through the air, splattering the guests with warm pungent butter as it did so.

As Ada watched the sauce hit Lucy Borgia, who recoiled in horror.

'No-o-o-o-o!' she screamed as she turned and fled from the room.

For a moment nobody spoke.

MacDuff picked up a napkin and wiped his face.

'As Dr Jensen says, when a man is tired of garlic butter, he is tired of life.'

