



## Chapter Twelve

**N**obody noticed Ada leave the dining room. They were too busy throwing food at each other and arguing at the top of their voices.

Ada hurried up the grand staircase, her heels clicketty-clacking on the steps as she did so. When she reached Lucy Borgia's room she found her governess lying motionless on the bed.

She was wearing a black slip, and her black dress lay crumpled in the corner.

'I'm sorry, Ada,' she said weakly, 'I failed you . . . but the garlic . . . it is poison to vampires . . .'

'It was an accident,' said Ada. 'You did your best.'

'Please, take that away from here. The smell . . .'

Lucy pointed to her black dress. 'At least the garlic didn't touch my umbrella . . .'

Ada picked up the dress.

'Now I must rest,' said Lucy, closing her eyes,

'to regain my strength. I'm afraid it is up to you now, Ada. You must stop Maltravers and rescue those poor creatures!'

Ada left Lucy's room and slid down the banister. Reaching the first-floor landing, she saw a familiar, flickering glow.

'Ishmael,' she said, noting how extra see-through the ghost of a mouse looked, 'what's wrong?'

'I've just come from the broken wing,' said Ishmael, his whiskers trembling, 'where I overheard Maltravers talking to one of your father's guests.'

'Which one?' asked Ada, getting down from the banister and walking with Ishmael along the corridor to her room.

'Cruel eyes, pointy moustache, big chin . . .' said the mouse.

'I didn't like him.'

'Von Hellsung,' said Ada, entering her enormous bedroom and closing the door behind her.

Ishmael stood on the Anatolian



carpet and looked up at her with wide eyes.

'They've got it all planned out. Tomorrow night, for the indoor hunt, Maltravers has laid out a route through the broken wing that leads up to the rooftops.'

'The rooftops?' said Ada, puzzled. 'But my father wouldn't have agreed to that. He never goes up to the rooftops, not since the night my mother . . .' she paused.

'The man with the cruel eyes laughed and said that that way none of them could escape.' Ishmael shuddered. 'He said that the heads would look splendid on the wall of his hunting lodge in Bavaria\*.'

'The heads?' said Ada, sitting down on the edge of her eight-poster bed. 'This is even worse than I had imagined . . .'

'That's what I thought,' said Ishmael. 'What shall we do?'

Ada kicked off the slippers with the

Foot  
Notes

\*Rapun von Hellsung's hunting lodge, the Stinner Schloss, is located in the spooky forests of the Bavarian Alps. As well as the heads of stags, boars and bears on the walls, Von Hellsung also keeps a stuffed English hedgehog called Mrs Tiggenwinkle in a glass case by the door.



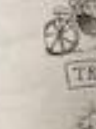
clicketty-clack heels and slipped on her black pumps.  
'There's only one thing we can do . . . ' she said thoughtfully.

'And what's that?' asked Ishmael.  
Ada's green eyes sparkled. 'Call a meeting of the Attic Club!' she said.

The next morning Ada overslept. It was Saturday, the day of the annual metaphorical bicycle race and indoor hunt. Poor Ada had been up half the night.

She climbed out of bed and went into her dressing room, where she found her Saturday clothes laid out on the Dalmatian divan. She got dressed quickly in the crimson velvet jacket with gold buttons and the white damask dress, together with the dark green cape, and picked up the pearl-handled umbrella next to it.

Ignoring her big clumpy boots, Ada put on her black leather pumps and slipped quietly out of the room as the great-uncle clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve.



Outside in the warm sunshine, the runners and riders were lining up for the start of the annual metaphorical bicycle race around the specially designed hobby-horse racecourse.

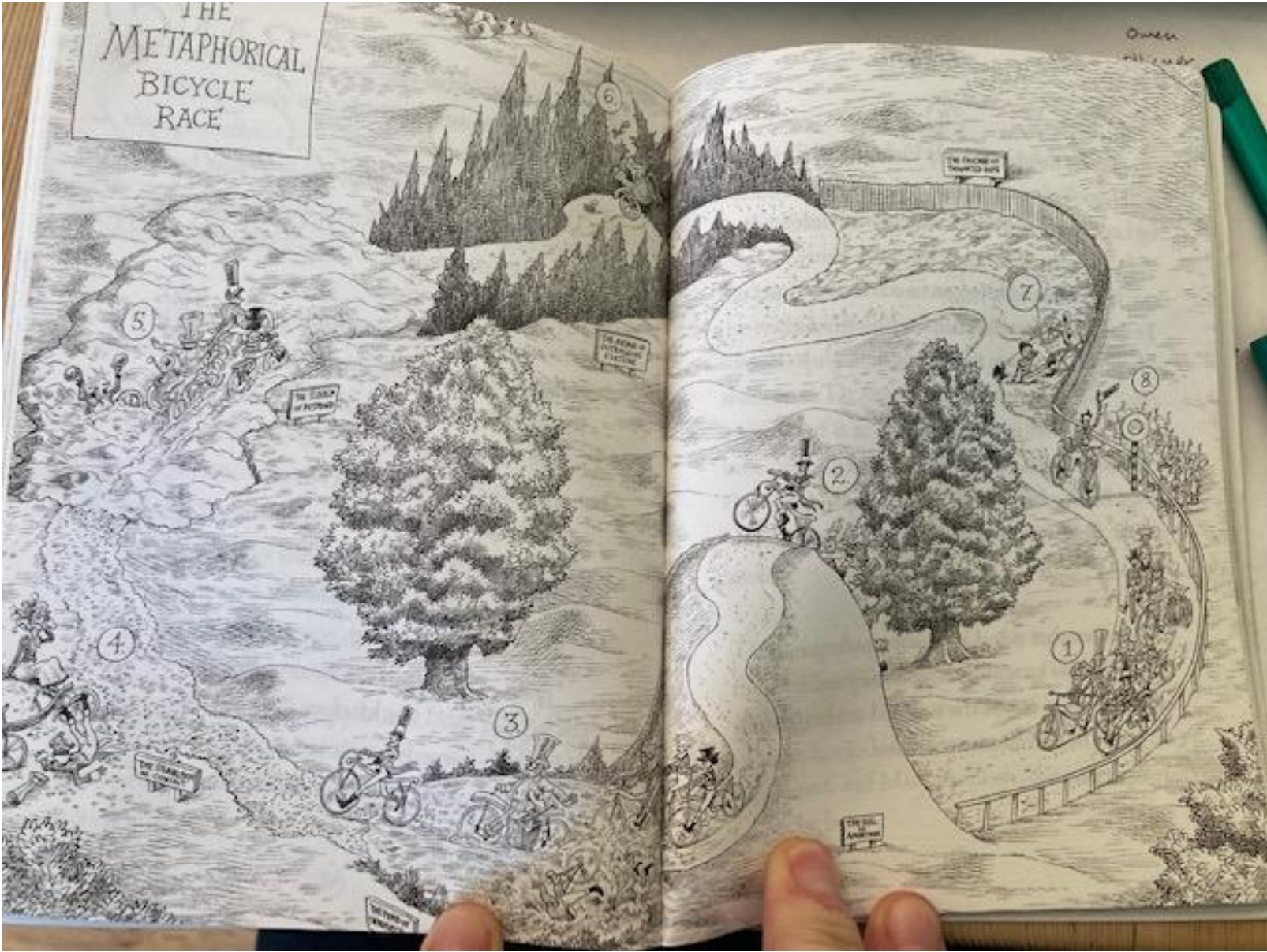
On your toes . . .  
get wet . . .

**BANG!**  
Maltravers fired the starting pistol in the air and the kitchen maids screamed as the runners and riders set off.

**BANG!**



# THE METAPHORICAL BICYCLE RACE



Owen  
2012

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THE END OF THE RACE

THE FINISH LINE

THE FINISH LINE

THE FINISH LINE

THE FINISH LINE

① Round the first bend, Lady George and Tristram on Hoity-Toit were in the lead, followed closely by Lord Goth on Pegasus, the poets Molebridge and O'Quincy on Beige Beauty and Tam O'Shanty side by side, then Dr Jensen and MacDuff on Trojan with Mary Shellfish on Jilly C., and Martin Puzzlewit on Scribble bringing up the rear.

② Up the Hill of Ambition, Hoity-Toit, Beige Beauty and Tam O'Shanty slipped back on the muddy path, and Lord Goth took the lead.

③ Down the other side, Dr Jensen rapidly gained speed, Trojan knocking Beige Beauty and Tam O'Shanty out of the way and sending the two poets head first into the Pond of Introspection.

④ On the Gravel Path of Conceit, Lady George lost a shoe and Tristram fell off the back of the tandem and tore his shirt cuff.

⑤ Racing towards the Slough of Despond, the remaining riders rapidly slowed as the wheels of their hobby horses got clogged with mud. Dr Jensen scooped up a handful and hurled it at Martin Puzzlewit behind him. With a high-pitched scream of outrage, the radical cartoonist fell off Scribble and sank up to his middle in a slurry-filled puddle.

⑥ Three riders now remained as the race reached the Avenue of Outrageous Fortune: Dr Jensen, shaking the mud from the hems of his huge tartan trousers; Lord Goth, bespattered but elegantly determined, and Mary Shellfish, clinging on to her hobby horse.

As they entered the tunnel of trees, Dr Jensen swerved across Lord Goth's path. MacDuff reached out from the basket sidecar and tried to stick his club into the spokes of Pegasus. Just in time, his legs a blur of movement, Lord Goth zigzagged away.

MacDuff's club clattered along the trunks of the trees, dislodging several squirrels, which fell into his basket. He let out a piercing shriek and leaped into Dr Jensen's lap, causing the doctor to steer into a tree with a resounding crash.

7  
Lord Goth and Mary Shellfish rounded the last bend and galloped towards the finishing post neck and neck. Suddenly, swooping down out of a clear blue sky, a large seabird swooped down and dropped a lump of ice down the neck of Mary Shellfish's Breton smock.

With an indignant yelp the distinguished lady novelist ploughed into the Chicane of Thwarted Hope and fell off her hobby horse.

8  
Raising his top hat in elegant triumph, Lord Goth and Pegasus cantered past the finishing post to be greeted by the cheers of the grooms and housemaids.

Coming from the old icehouse and rounding the corner of the west wing, Ada paused. She held a portfolio in one hand and an umbrella in the other, which she used to wave to Arthur Halford. The hobby-horse groom nodded in reply.

Then Ada turned and hurried across the Venetian terrace before disappearing through the Byzantine windows into Ghastly-Gorm Hall.

## Chapter Thirteen



As darkness fell over Ghastly-Gorm Hall a procession of villagers from the nearby hamlet of Gormless made their way in through the gates and down the drive. Flaming torches in hand, they quietly filed around the overly ornamental

fountain and trooped around the side of the west wing at the back of the house.

There, amidst the weeds and tangled undergrowth of the Back of Beyond Garden (unfinished), the crowd of villagers peered through the dusty windows of the broken wing as they waited for the indoor hunt to begin.

Meanwhile, in the main hall of Ghastly-Gorm, Lord Goth and his guests assembled on their hobby horses.



Molebridge and O'Quincy still weren't speaking to each other. Sitting astride their hobby horses, holding long-handled butterfly nets, the two poets glared at each other.

On their tandem, Hoity-Toit, Lady George and Tristram shared an extra-long-handled butterfly net and were very excited.

'I do so enjoy chasing miniature pheasant,' Lady George was saying to Lord Goth. In the saddle behind her, Tristram nodded enthusiastically.

'Maltravers has just told me he has a surprise in store for us,' said Lord Goth drily.

Although he didn't show it, Lord Goth was delighted with his victory in the metaphorical bicycle race, and had high hopes for the indoor hunt.

'As Dr Jensen says, when a man is tired of surprises, he's tired of life,' said MacDuff from his seat in the basket sidecar attached to the doctor's hobby horse.

Dr Jensen poked Martin Puzzlewit with the end of his long-handled butterfly net. The radical cartoonist gripped the handlebars of his hobby horse with his boxing-gloved fists and tried hard not to be provoked.

Next to him, Mary Shellfish patted back her carefully coiffured hair and fluttered her eyelashes at Rupert von Hellsung.

'I hope you're not still cold,' she said with a girlish giggle, as she looked at the ankle-length bearskin cape von Hellsung was wearing. 'After all, this is an indoor hunt, you know.'

'Indeed,' said von Hellsung who, much to Lord Goth's disappointment, had excused himself from the metaphorical bicycle race due to a sudden 'chill'.

'Now I am recovered, I am very much looking forward to a successful hunt,' he said, sitting forward in the saddle of his hobby horse, the Ride of the Valkyrie.

Maltravers stepped out from behind the Bruges

tapestry, a bunch of keys in one hand and a huntsman's horn in the other. He shook the keys theatrically.

'I have released this year's quarry!' he announced. 'Let the indoor hunt begin!'

Maltravers raised the horn to his mouth and blew hard.

Lord Goth and his guests leaped forward on their hobby horses, galloped though the doorway to the broken wing and clattered down the flight of stairs on the other side before charging down the dark cobwebby corridor beyond.

'Tally who?'

'Tally what?'

'Tally where?'



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The cries went up as they set about exploring the corridors, hallways and passages.

Maltravers, though, had left nothing to chance.

Daubed on the walls at helpful intervals were messages with arrows that read, 'This way', 'Turn left', 'Turn right' and 'Carry on till the next junction'.

As Lord Goth and his guests clattered along the corridors, they caught glimpses of feathered creatures fluttering ahead and heard the clatter of fleeing hooves and odd wild ape-like grunts echoing through the broken wing.

Floorboards had been pulled up and laid on the stairs to allow the hobby horses to trundle up them in pursuit of the indoor game, which fled upward just ahead of the pursuing guests. Flashes of orange fur and glimpses of bright green feathers and golden claws only served to spur the indoor hunt onward as the riders waved their butterfly

nets wildly above their heads. Outside the watching villagers cheered and waved their flaming torches as they strained to see the shadowy shapes through the filthy windows.

Higher and higher the creatures and their pursuers went, up staircases prepared for them by the indoor gamekeeper. As the indoor hunt neared the upper levels of the broken wing, Lord Goth on Pegasus fell back in dismay.

Finally the indoor hunt arrived on a landing with a large sign daubed on the wall that read, 'This way straight ahead'. Von Hellsung galloped forward and burst through the door in front of them. The others followed and found themselves on the rooftops of the broken wing. A forest of chimney stacks stretched out before them and the dome of Ghastly-Gorm Hall rose up behind, dark against the moonlit sky. Below, the torches of the watching villagers twinkled.



Lord Goth galloped through the doorway in last place and fell trembling to his knees. Pegasus clattered down on to the tiles as Lord Goth released his grip on the handlebars. His guests turned and stared at him.

When Lord Goth looked up his handsome face was wet with tears. His magnificent hair fluttered in the breeze and his brooding eyebrows knitted into a sorrowful frown.

'Parthenope,' he breathed, 'So headstrong, so wilful, so wild. That is why I fell in love with you and why I couldn't stop you from coming up here to walk the roof ridges... oh, but that night! The thunder! The lightning!... The horror, the horror...'

'There they are!' shouted Rupert von Hellsung, pointing excitedly.

Sitting on the ornamental chimneys a little way off were eight extraordinary creatures seemingly frozen in terror – a Siren, three harpies, a faun, a centaur and two great apes.

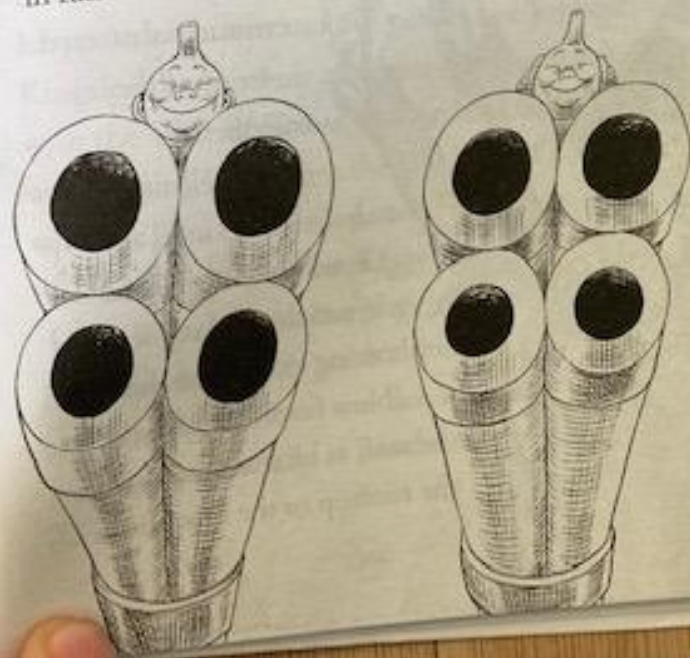




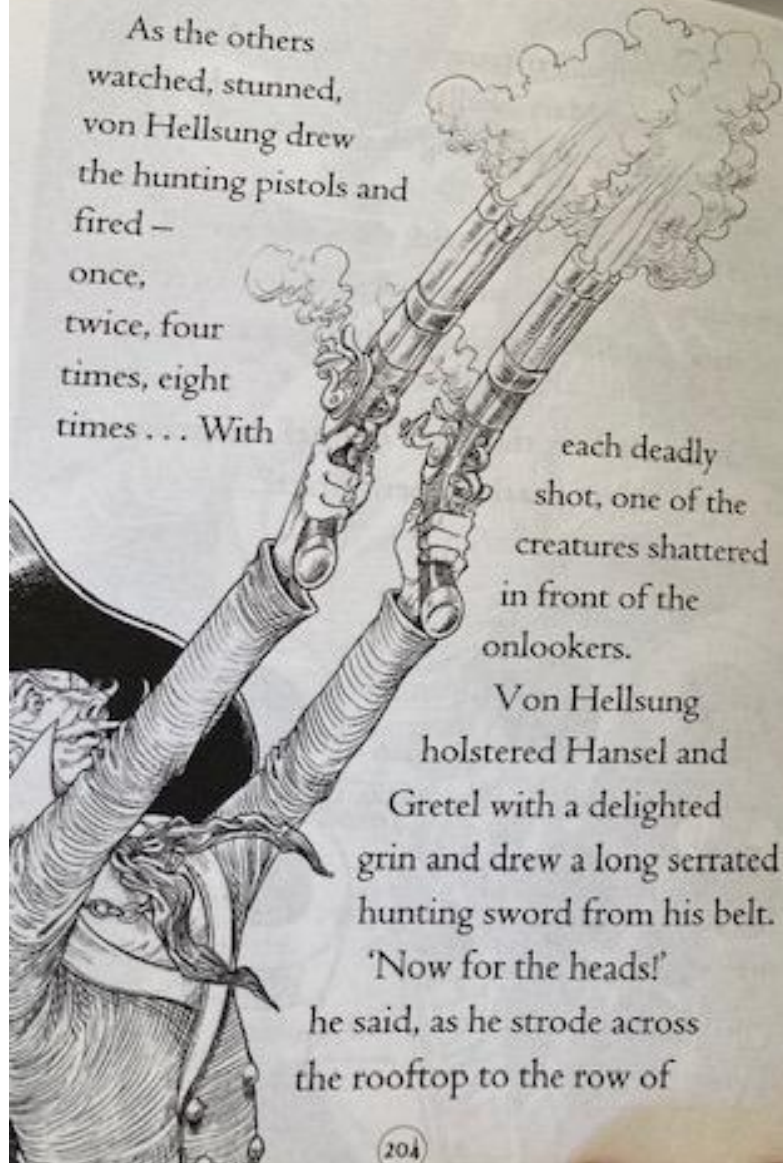
Lady George, Tristram, the poets, Dr Jensen, MacDuff and Mary Shellfish raised their butterfly nets, only for von Hellsung to push them roughly aside.

'They're mine!' he roared, throwing back his bearskin cape to reveal two quadruple-barrelled hunting pistols in calf leather holsters strapped to his belt.

On one holster the word 'Hansel' was stamped in raised letters; on the other, 'Gretel'.



As the others  
watched, stunned,  
von Hellsung drew  
the hunting pistols and  
fired –  
once,  
twice, four  
times, eight  
times . . . With



each deadly  
shot, one of the  
creatures shattered  
in front of the  
onlookers.

Von Hellsung  
holstered Hansel and  
Gretel with a delighted  
grin and drew a long serrated  
hunting sword from his belt.  
'Now for the heads!'  
he said, as he strode across  
the rooftop to the row of

chimneys but then he stopped dead in his tracks.  
'What's this?' he roared.

At his feet was a pile of broken ice.  
At that moment Ada stepped out from behind  
an ornamental chimney a little way further off.  
The Siren Sesta was by her side.

From the chimneys around her, the other  
members of the Attic Club emerged, each with a  
creature. Ruby the outer-pantry maid stood next  
to Mr Omalos the faun. Emily Cabbage had a  
harp on each arm and one perched on her head.  
Kingsley the chimney caretaker was arm in arm  
with the Wife of Barnes, and Arthur Halford  
was holding hands with the Wildman of Putney  
while William Cabbage patted Hamish the  
Shetland centaur on his shaggy head.

'I will have my trophies!' shrieked von  
Hellsung, leaping up on to a chimney pot  
and jumping across to another, swinging his  
hunting sword wildly as he advanced across  
the rooftop.



'Rupert von Hellsung, we meet at last,' came a soft lilting voice with the hint of an accent. Lucy Borgia stepped out from behind a chimney stack and raised an umbrella. The gold tip glinted in the moonlight.

'How dare you . . .!' von Hellsung began, slashing at the governess with his sword, only for Lucy Borgia to take three steps back, pirouette on top of a chimney pot and lightly but firmly nudge her assailant in the middle of his tummy with the tip of her umbrella.

Losing his balance, von Hellsung teetered for a moment before toppling like a felled fir tree down the chimney on which he'd been standing. A series of bumps and crashes followed, together with shrieks of pain and indignation getting fainter and fainter until a final muffled thump.

'He'll have landed in the Bathroom of Zeus, I reckon,' said Kingsley the chimney caretaker with a knowing glance down the chimney. 'Well played, Ada!'

Ada blushed.

'I couldn't have done it without you,' she said, 'without all of you.'

A huge figure loomed up behind her wearing a sea captain's hat and a sailcloth coat. On his shoulder was perched an albatross. The Polar

Explorer opened his wooden trunk and, moving his spare foot\* to one side, handed Emily Cabbage the watercolours she'd done of the Siren and the others.

'Thank you,' he said. 'These were a great help.'

'Your ice sculptures were beautiful,' said Emily, taking the paintings. 'I'm so sorry they had to be destroyed.'

'I'll have plenty of time to do more,' said the Polar Explorer, turning towards Mary Shellfish, who'd gone very pale and was trembling uncontrollably. 'After I've had a little chat with Mary about this so-called novel of hers...'

### Foot Note

\*The Polar Explorer's spare foot is kept in his wooden trunk and only used if absolutely necessary. At the present time, the spare foot is using the extensive knowledge of its former owner, a distinguished historian, to write footnotes to a Gothic novel.



He held up a leather-bound volume in a black-fingernailed hand.

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

'I was going to share all the proceeds with you, dear monster,' Mary Shellfish simpered. 'I just wasn't sure where you lived...'

Lord Goth got unsteadily to his feet and looked across the rooftops to where Ada and her friends were standing. His eyes met Ada's and this time they didn't fill with sadness, and he didn't look away.

'My dear brave daughter,' he said, holding his arms out wide.

Ada rushed into them and Lord Goth closed his arms around her.

'You really are like your beautiful mother!' he said. 'Brave, intrepid and graceful!'

Lord Goth turned to the creatures. 'There seems to have been an awful misunderstanding,' he said in his quiet yet elegant voice. 'I can only apologize. Please, accept my hospitality and the



hospitality of Ghastly-Gorm Hall.'

'My harpies and I would be honoured,' said Siren Sesta.

'We'd love to, wouldn't we, Hamish?' said Mr Omalos, and the Wildman of Putney and the Wife of Barnes looked at Lord Goth with a sad but grateful expression in their eyes.

Lord Goth picked up his hobby horse and turned to his guests. 'It has been an unusual hunt this year, and I'll be having words with my indoor game-keeper,' he said, then looked at his daughter and smiled. 'But a memorable indoor hunt for all that.'

The guests agreed.

In the distance, a Bavarian coach with a sooty Rupert von Hellsung inside raced through the gates of Ghastly-Gorm Hall and disappeared into the night.



week later, as a bright silver moon rose above the great dome of Ghastly-Gorm Hall, the Attic Club met for a midnight picnic against the ornamental chimney stacks. Ruby the outer-pantry maid had brought cucumber cupcakes and strawberry iced tea, while Arthur Halford demonstrated his harness for safely climbing up chimney pots. Kingsley the chimney caretaker did a tap dance at the top of the tallest chimney and everyone clapped. William blended in with the brickwork while Emily painted a watercolour of the moon over the dome.

'Now it is my turn,' said Ada. 'I've been practising, with Arthur and Kingsley's help...' She blushed. Strung between two ornamental chimneys was a rope, which Arthur had safely secured, together with a safety net. Kingsley handed Ada a pole with a chimney brush on each end and helped her on to the tightrope. Ada was



wearing her mother's tightrope-walking slippers. Slowly and carefully she walked the tightrope, balancing with the pole as she did so.

Halfway between the two chimneys she paused, silhouetted against the bright moon.

Below, on the rooftop, the Attic Club cheered. Ada took a bow.

