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Opening extract from

Goth Girl and the Fete Worse Than Death

Written by

Chris Riddell

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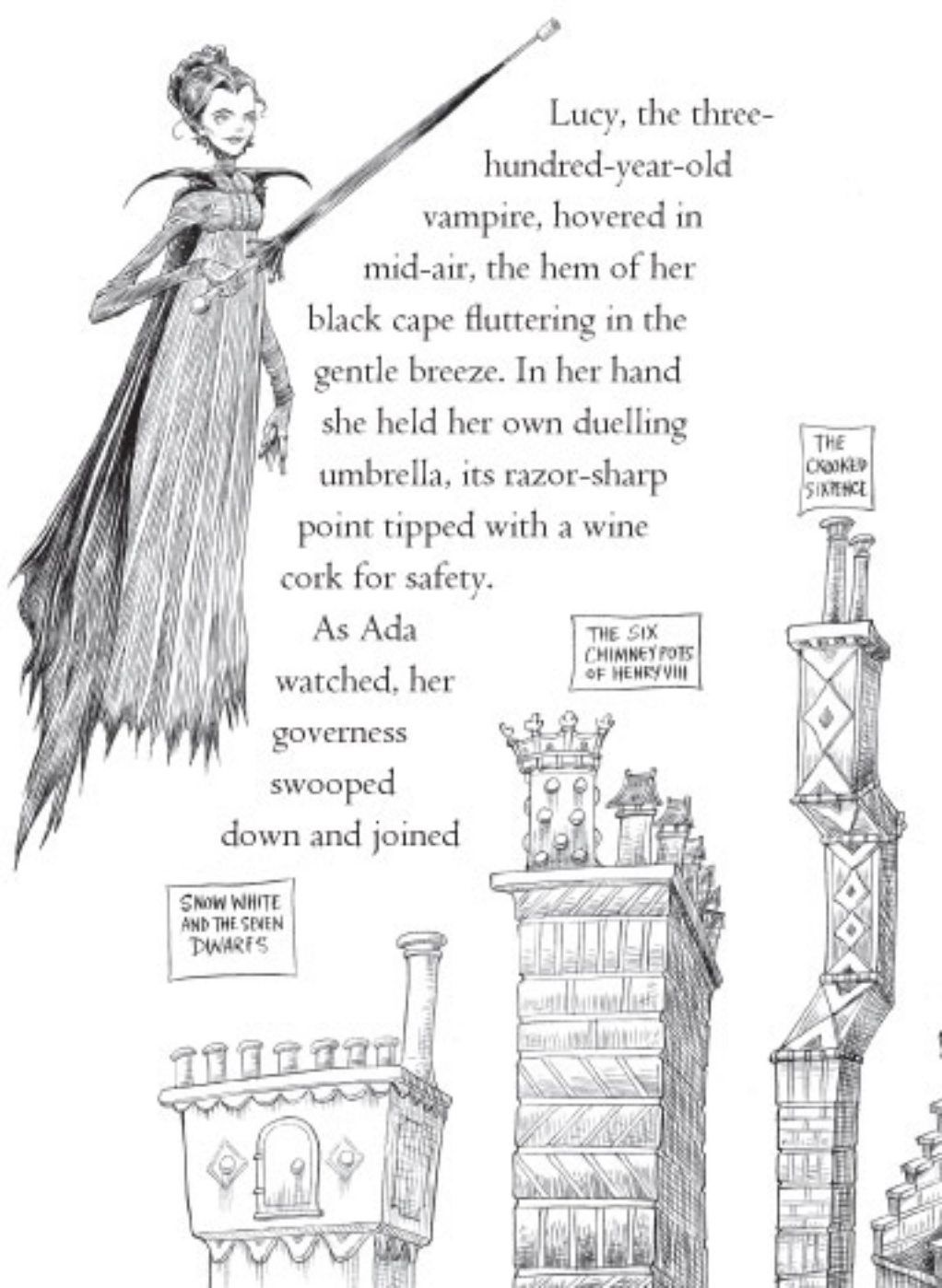
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Chapter One

da skipped lightly over the seven little chimney pots in her elegant black tightrope-walking slippers. She paused for a moment to regain her balance, then stepped up on to the tall white marble chimney pot at the end of the row.

A silver napkin ring sailed through the night sky, the moonlight glinting off its polished surface. Balancing on one foot, Ada leaned forward and expertly caught the napkin ring on the tip of her duelling umbrella. Three more napkin rings flew through the air and, dancing back along the row of chimney pots, Ada caught each one in turn, before giving a bow.

'Excellent work, my dear,' said her governess, Lucy Borgia, in a soft lilting voice with just a trace of an accent. 'I see you have been doing your homework.'



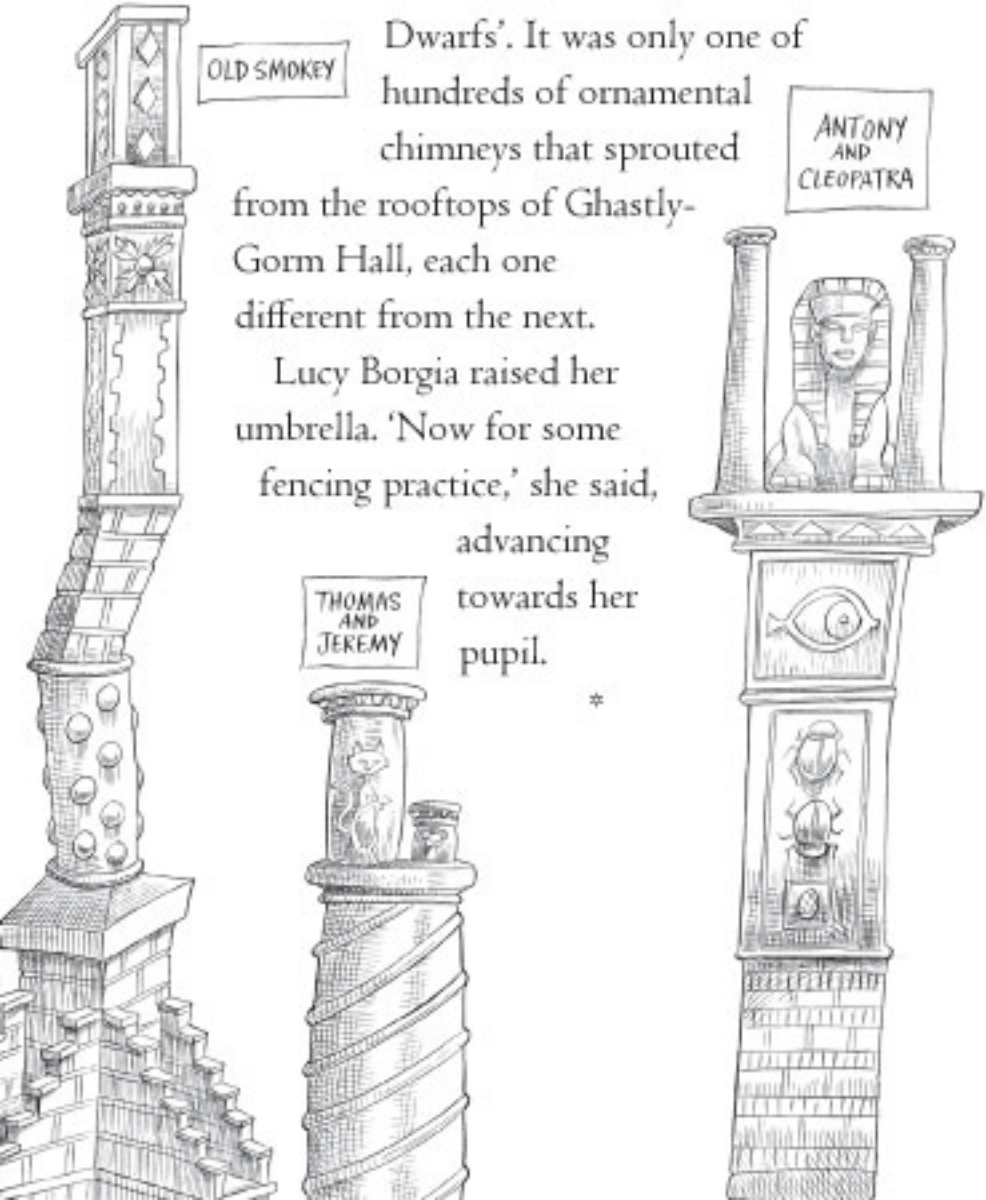
Lucy, the three-hundred-year-old vampire, hovered in mid-air, the hem of her black cape fluttering in the gentle breeze. In her hand she held her own duelling umbrella, its razor-sharp point tipped with a wine cork for safety.

As Ada watched, her governess swooped down and joined

her on the ornamental chimney stack known as 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'. It was only one of hundreds of ornamental chimneys that sprouted from the rooftops of Ghastly-Gorm Hall, each one different from the next.

Lucy Borgia raised her umbrella. 'Now for some fencing practice,' she said, advancing towards her pupil.

*



Ada Goth was the only daughter of Lord Goth, England's foremost cycling poet. Although she was still quite young (her birthday was next week), Ada had already been taught by six governesses . . .















Lucy was the seventh and by far her favourite. As well as sliding up banisters and only giving lessons after dark, Lucy Borgia was an expert at umbrella fencing and was teaching Ada everything she knew.

The tips of their fencing umbrellas touched and Ada took a step forward, trying a sideways stab which her governess flicked away.



'Precision . . .' said Lucy Borgia, with a sweep of her umbrella that forced Ada back along the row of chimney pots.

'Balance . . .' she continued, brushing aside a lunge from Ada's umbrella and prodding her pupil lightly in the tummy with her own. Ada jumped down on to the rooftop.

'And above all . . .' said Lucy, with a twist of a wrist that whisked Ada's umbrella out of her hand and up into the air, 'elegance!'

Lucy reached out and caught Ada's umbrella as it fell back down. She handed it to her.

'You have a most promising pupil there, Miss Borgia,' said a smooth, polished voice. It was coming from behind a stout brick chimney topped by six thin chimney pots.

Lucy Borgia drew Ada into the folds of her black cape with one hand and eased the wine cork off the tip of her umbrella with the other. A tall figure in an even taller hat and a dark frock coat stepped out from behind 'The Six



Chimney pots of Henry VIII'.

Lucy's eyes narrowed. 'I don't believe we've been introduced,' she said quietly.

'Lord Sydney Whimsy, at your service,' said the figure taking a couple of steps towards them, only for Lucy to raise her umbrella.

'Forgive my intrusion, my dear lady,' said Lord Sydney, taking off his hat to reveal fashionably styled silvery-blond hair.

As he looked up at them, the moonlight glinted on his monocle. 'I am an old university friend of Lord Goth's,' he said. 'He's kindly agreed that I can organize the Full-Moon Fete this year.' He removed his monocle and polished it thoughtfully with the end of his cravat. Ada noticed that his eyebrows and moustache were as neatly styled as his hair.

It was surprising to Ada that such a fashionable gentleman would be interested in the Full-Moon Fete, which was generally quite a dull affair. Each year the inhabitants of the little hamlet of

Gormless would troop up the drive to the Hall holding flaming torches and then stand around singing midsummer carols tunelessly. They also painted their faces blue, wore straw skirts and did a strange dance beneath the full moon that involved hitting each other with pillowcases. Nobody was quite sure why. 'Such happy days . . . racing punts on the river, playing top-hat cricket* and hobby-horse croquet . . . Goth, Simon and me – they called us the Two and a Half Amigos . . .'

'Two and a half?' said Ada, peering back at him from the folds of Lucy's cape.

'Simon was very short,' explained Lord Sydney. He replaced the monocle and looked at Ada.

'You know, I haven't seen you since you were a baby, Ada,' he said with a smile. 'Not since . . .'

Lord Sydney Whimsy paused, then cleared his throat. 'Not since that terrible night.'

Webbed Foot Notes

*Top-hat cricket was invented as an excuse to drink tea and eat cake and sandwiches. The fielders use their top hats to catch cricket balls hit by batsmen who wear 'tea cosies' – knitted hats for keeping teapots warm.



Ada knew the night Lord Sydney meant. It was the night that her mother, Parthenope, the beautiful tightrope walker, had fallen to her death during a sudden thunderstorm while practising on the rooftops of Ghastly-Gorm Hall.



For most of Ada's childhood since then, Lord Goth had shut himself away in his study writing extremely sad poems. But recently, following Ada's adventures with Ishmael Whiskers, the ghost of a mouse, Lord Goth had been a changed man. He no longer moped about in his study but got out



and about more. In fact, at that very moment Lord Goth was on a tour of the Lake District to promote his latest volume of courtly ramblers' verse called *She Walks in Beauty Like a Knight.*

Lucy Borgia let go of Ada and looked deep into Lord Sydney's eyes.

'I'm afraid my father isn't here,' said Ada after a rather awkward silence.

Lord Sydney, who had been looking equally deeply into Lucy Borgia's eyes, glanced down at Ada. 'What? . . . Oh, yes, quite so,' he said. 'He's on a book tour.' He smiled. 'As we speak he is sharing a supper of mutton stew with three shepherds in a hut on Langdale Pike.'

'How do you know that?' said Ada, impressed.

