

By faith and fortitude

By David Elliott



Adela Capel sat on the great-staircase; her fingers tracing the pineapple finials as she carried out a mental arithmetic. “Ninety-four; I’ve counted them all. After all, what’s a girl to do; it’s lashing down outside.”

Ravenhill her once Nanny, promoted ladies-maid, looked over her embroidery and shook her head.

“It’s alright Ravenhill, I’ve got a plan,” Adela took a sideways glance at the portrait hung on the stairs, “Grandmama always said there were ninety-five rooms. But for the life of me; I’ve been round the house three times and every time, come up one short.”

“Ma’am, you’re not thinking of hide-and-seek. Remember the kitchen pantry?”

“Look Ravenhill, every room... apart from the pantry, faces outwards; we are going to put one of those golden pineapple cut-outs; left over from the floricultural show in the park, into every window. Then we’ll circumnavigate the house to see which window lacks. Al shazam, we’ll conjure up Grandmama’s missing room.”

Clenching umbrellas, Adela and Ravenhill were chased round the house by the rain as they spotted the tropical sunshine that emanated from each casement.

“Look Ravenhill; no pineapple.” Adela pointed up, to under the battlements and counted along. “Got you.”

Damp footprints trailed up the grand-staircase, in search of more important pineapples.

Adela tallied and expended windowpanes, ending in the state bedroom.

“Are you sure Ma’am? Queen Victoria’s staying here next month. Miss Adela, the sooner we get you married off the better, this is no engagement for a lady.”

Adela held up her hand, then pushed, prodded and poked around the oak panelling behind the four-poster bed. “It has to be here somewhere, Grandmama’s secret chamber. Maybe a forgotten Turner?”

With a click, then a dusty cough, a hidden door magically opened.

“Look, it’s Grandmama’s dressing room. All her brushes, lotions and her wardrobe.”

On the far wall, a picture of a young girl caught Adela’s attention. Her beauty stark even in the gloom and dust.

“Goodness; that’s you Ma’am.” Ravenhill sneezed.

“Gesundheit. There is a family likeness, but no, it’s a young Grandmama. Alas no Turner, but Ravenhill... all these taffeta dresses.”