A House Called Awful End

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Eddie Dickens' parents have decided to send him away for his own good. They've both caught a disease that has made them "turn yellow, go a bit crinkly around the edges, and smell of old hot-water bottles," and lest he catch the terrible malady, they've decided to ask Mad Uncle Jack and Mad Aunt Maud to have him live at Awful End, their home. Thus begins a series of highly improbable misfortunes, culminating in an escape from an orphanage inside a giant metal cow.

A House Called Awful End positively drips with silliness. Ardagh frequently takes common phrases and twists them delightfully by taking them quite literally. For instance, when Eddie gets into the carriage with Mad Aunt Maud, he notices that she is, well, mad and takes a seat opposite her. She screams at him to put the seat back, at which point the reader realizes that Eddie has literally picked up the seat. The plot, characters, and setting are not terribly developed, but mainly serve as props for the clever writing. If you're looking for a serious and engaging story, don't read Awful End. However, if you're interested in a book that will make you guffaw out loud this might be just the one you're looking for.