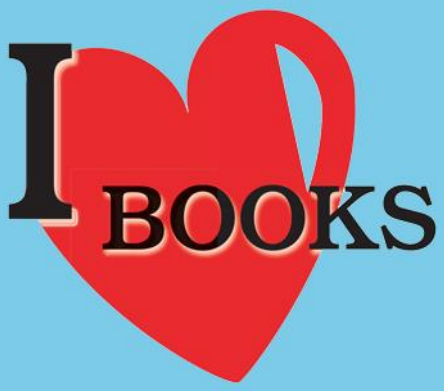

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Written by

Wendy Meddour

Illustrated by

Sam Usher

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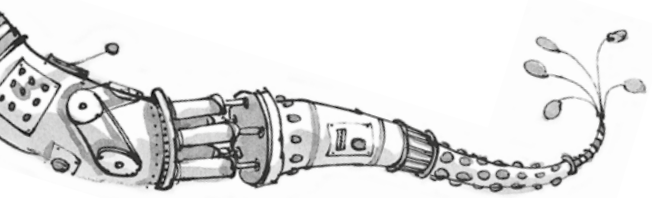

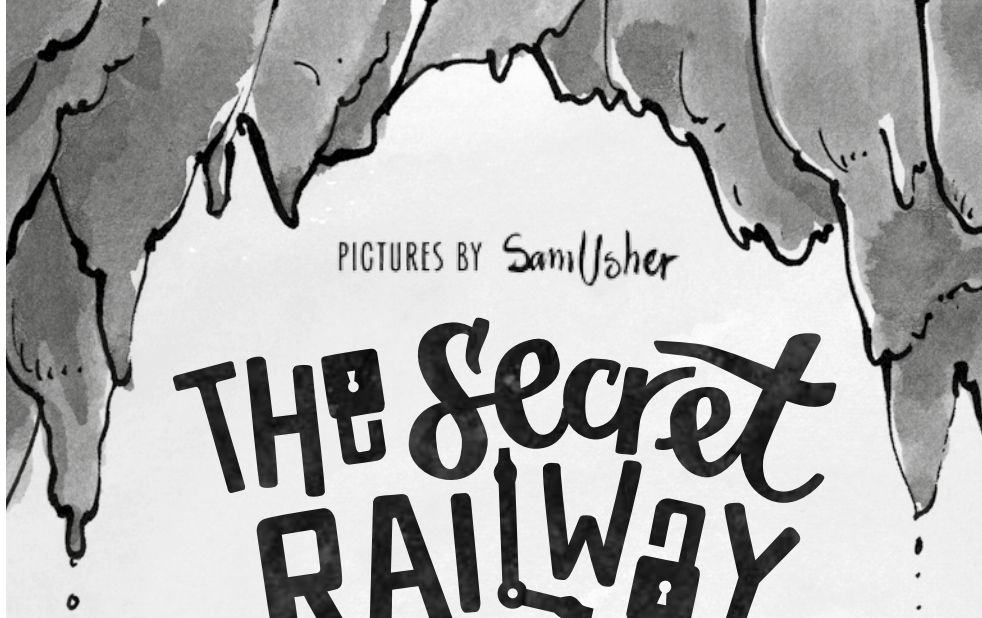

PICTURES BY Sam Usher

The Secret Railway and the Crystal Caves

WENDY MEDDOUR

OXFORD
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If you've been to Izzambard once, you'll want to go again. And again. And again. You'll be annoyed if you can't. That's why Ella and Leo were feeling a bit gloomy. They wanted more adventures. They wanted to go back and see their friends, Prince Bartholomew Buckle and Cogg the robot. They didn't want to just 'brush their teeth', 'tidy their bedrooms', and 'go to the park'.

'What's the matter with you two?' Mr

Leggit asked. He was carrying a hammer and some picture frames. 'You both look like a wet weekend.'

Leo groaned.

Ella groaned, too.

'We thought you liked our new house?' Mrs Leggit said.

'We do,' Leo replied.

'Yeah. We LOVE it,' Ella said.

'Then what's up?'

Ella sniffed. 'The Sleeping Key isn't working. So we can't get back into the Kingdom of Izzambard. And we promised that we would. And . . . oh, it's just awful.'

Mr and Mrs Leggit looked at Leo. Leo shrugged. He knew they didn't believe them. They'd laughed when he'd shown



them the Sleeping Key. It hadn't done anything. Not even yawned. It had just looked like an ordinary key. So he wasn't going to do that again. Mr and Mrs Leggit thought they'd made the whole thing up. To be honest, he was beginning to think so, too.

Mrs Leggit put her hands on her hips and sighed. 'Well, if you two can't find something to put a smile on your faces indoors, then you'd better go out. Go on. Off with you. Outside.' She shooed them out of the front door like they were a couple of pigeons.

'But what about my coat?' Ella asked.

'You don't need a coat,' Mrs Leggit said. 'It's nice out. In fact, you don't really need that big old red hat.'

Ella grabbed her hat with both hands and held it on tight. No one was going to



take her hat away. Ever.

'Come on, Ella.' Leo took her hand. 'Let's go back to the workshop and give the door one more try.'



PLATFORM TWO

· HAMMERS AND DOORS ·

The inside of the workshop was dusty like a museum. It was full of exciting things, and I'd like to be able to tell you that Leo and Ella were excited. Tingling with anticipation. Full of happiness and 'Gosh!'

But they weren't.

That's because they'd tried to open the door to Izzambard lots of times and the magical Sleeping Key hadn't worked. In fact, they were beginning to think that

the Sleeping Key was no use at all. It wouldn't so much as wriggle.

'This really is the last time,' Leo warned, taking the Sleeping Key out of his pocket. He stroked it. He patted it. He even nibbled it. No. Nothing. It wouldn't wake up!

Ella was getting desperate. 'Throw it. Jump on it. Drop it on the floor.'

'I can't do that! I might kill it!'

'You've already nibbled it,' Ella said. 'And anyway, you can't kill keys.'

'Not normal ones,' Leo agreed. 'But the Sleeping Key isn't normal. It yawns. And it sniffs. And it wriggles and sighs. So I don't want to kill it by accident.'

Ella nodded. Leo was right. Again. 'Try the numbers in the lock.'

'We've tried that loads. 11.61 just doesn't open the door like it did last time.

Not when the time on the clock doesn't match.' Leo shook the key. 'And this useless thing just won't move.'

'Leo. We've got to think of something. We need to get back to Izzambard. What if Griselda is destroying more Old Magic and hurting our friends?'

Leo felt panic in his tummy. Ella was right. The Clockmaker was wicked and out of control. They needed to get back. Fast. Leo stared at the clock hopefully. But it just said 4.35p.m. Normal time. Not a weird Izzambardian time like before.

'I'm good at finding things. Perhaps I'll find another magical object in here.' Ella started grabbing some of the things lying about the workshop and banging them on the floor. A bucket of coal. An iron spade. A golden birdcage.

CLANG. CLATTER. BASH.

'Careful!' Leo shouted. 'You'll break them!'

BANG. WALLOP. CRASH.

'Ella! Stop it!'

Ella stopped. Wait—she could hear a noise.

TAP. TAP. TAP.
TAPPETY TAP.

'What is that?' Leo asked.

'A tapping noise,' Ella answered.

'I know that. But where did it come from?'

Ella jumped up onto the boxes, trying to find it.

'Get down!' Leo said. 'You'll hurt yourself.'

'But I can hear it! It's so close!'

TAP. TAP. TAP. TAPPETY TAP.

'It's in there!' Ella pointed. It was coming from the trunk labelled '**LOST**'.

Leo took a deep breath. Anything could be inside. A spider. A rat. An enormous mechanical spider! An enormous mechanical spider sitting on top of a mechanical rat! Absolutely anything! But big brothers can't show fear. (It's one of the 'big brother' rules.) So Leo didn't. He knelt down and opened the lid.

Inside, was . . .

Just another box!

TAP. TAP. TAP.

Leo paused. He felt sick.

'Can I open it? Can I?' Ella asked.

Leo looked at Ella. Then, he remembered the second 'big brother' rule: 'Always let your little sister do the things you don't want to do.'

'Sure,' he said, getting up and standing aside.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

Ella pushed the brim of her hat out of her eyes and opened the lid of the smaller box. A flash of sunlight made her turn away. Only, it wasn't a flash of sunlight—it was the tappetty thing inside the box inside the box.



'It's a tiny, shiny hammer!'

TAP TAP TAP BLINKETTY BLINK TAP TAP TAP

It was a beautiful, glistening hammer. Just like the one Mr Leggit was using back at the house. Actually, what am I talking about? It was NOTHING like the one Mr Leggit was using back at the house. It was much, much smaller. And prettier. And full of light. And MOVING! Yes. How could you not notice that it was moving? Tapping against the side of the box (inside the box), all on its own!

Ella picked it up—it was no bigger than the palm of her hand. And remember, Ella's hand was only eight years old, so not really very big.

'DON'T TOUCH IT!' Leo shouted.

'Why not?'

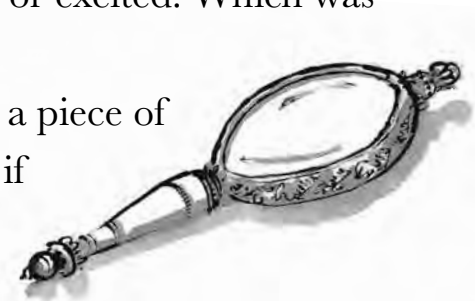
'Because you don't know what it is!'

'It's a hammer,' Ella said. The hammer stopped moving. 'Aw. Look. I think it likes me.'

'Hammers don't "like" people, Ella.'

'They do if they're from Izzambard,' said Ella.

Leo remembered the Snarkifying Glass from their last adventure. He wasn't sure if the magical magnifying glass had liked him, but it had definitely 'hummed' more when it was cross or excited. Which was most of the time.



Ella had found a piece of old string. 'Look, if I wrap the top of the hammer with this string, I can wear it like a pretty necklace. It will go ever so nicely with my red hat.'

Ella hooked it around her neck.

'What if it's a dangerous object?' Leo asked.

Ella waved her hand in a 'don't be silly' way. 'Of course it isn't dangerous. It's a magical object, Leo. Prince Barty told us about them. It won't hurt us but we've got to return it to Izzambard.'

'Yes. You're probably right.' Leo still looked doubtful. 'But how can we when we can't open the door to the railway platform? The code and the clock still don't match.'



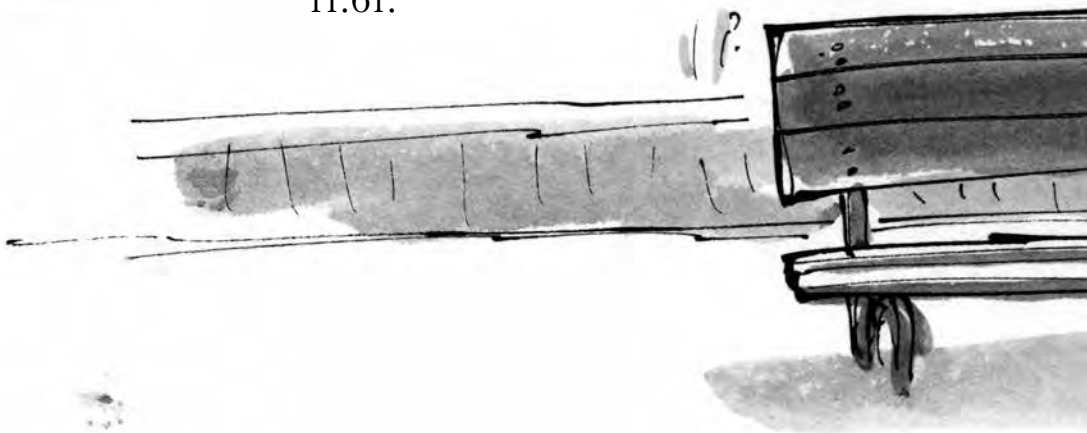
TAP TAP TAP
BLINKETTY FLASH
TAP TAP TAP

'Ouch! The hammer thing is moving!' Suddenly, Ella had an idea. She pointed the tip of the hammer directly at the clock, and a huge beam of light burst out of it.

'Look!' Leo pointed at the hands whizzing round. Suddenly, they both stopped.

11.61.





‘Yes! The clock and the code match!’ Leo said. ‘It must work now!’

A little flash of light flickered out of the hammer as they ran towards the door. Leo twiddled with the combination lock and put in the numbers.

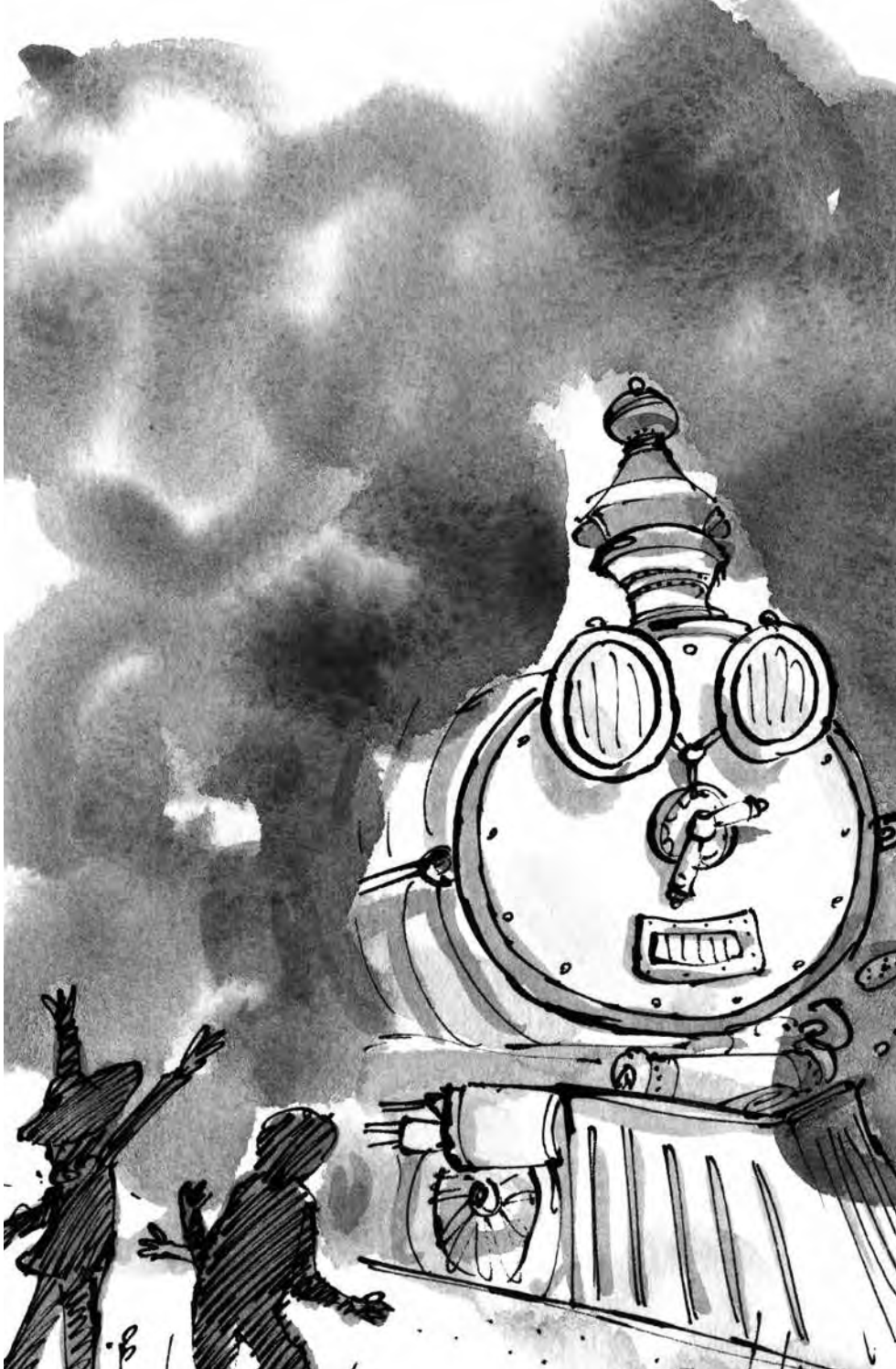
11:61

It worked! **PING!** The rusty lock sprang open. And so did the workshop’s back door! The children tumbled onto the platform.

‘Thank you, hammer,’ Ella said, politely. The hammer flashed three times.

‘Looks like we’re right on time!’ Leo said. For there it was, puffing through the steam: Prince Barty on his squirrel-powered, plum-coloured, Izzambardian train!

CHOOOOOOO CHOOOOOOOO!

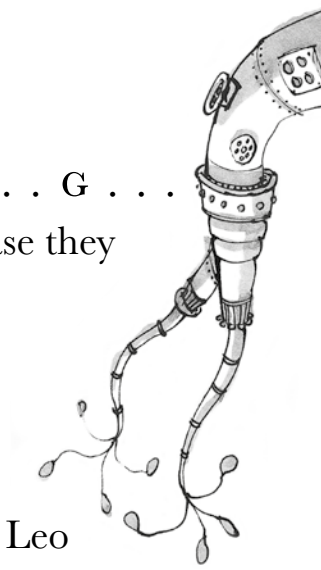


PLATFORM THREE

· THE INCREDIBLE CRYSTALLATOR ·

'THE TRAIN NOW ARRIVING AT PLATFORM ONE IS THE 11.61 IZZAMBARD EXPRESS. STOPPING AT SNARKSVILLE, GOBLINORA BRIDGE, THE CRYSTAL CAVES . . . ' The voice suddenly stopped. Prince Bartholomew, or Barty as he preferred to be called, had just spotted his Warm Heart friends on the platform! He leapt back into the main carriage and shouted out of the window: 'Leo! Ella! You're back! Quick. Hop on

board. And be careful of G . . . G . . . Griselda's creeping vines in case they trap you!'



CREEEEAAK

The glistening metal vines that clung to the edges of the platform had started to move. Leo and Ella took one look at them, and quickly jumped on board the train.

'Full Steam Ahead!' Barty shouted. The train started to gain in speed and Leo knew that the two noble waistcoated squirrels, Lord and Lady Asquith, must be working hard to stoke the engine. Leo peered out of the window.

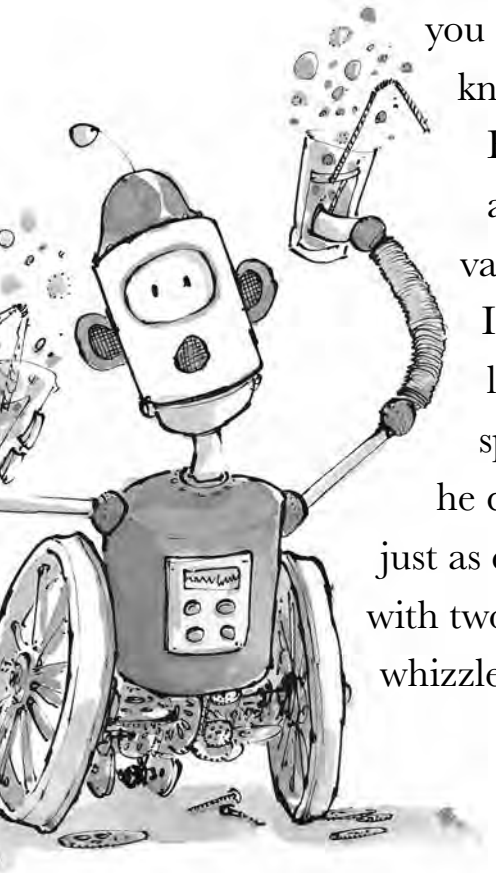
'We've beaten the vines. They've given up.' Leo grinned as the metal creepers collapsed back onto the platform.

'Well, I must say you haven't been gone very long!' said Barty, wiping his forehead

with his hankie. 'We th . . . th . . . thought you'd be an age.'

'We were,' Ella replied.

'No you weren't!' Barty smiled. 'Cogg! Be so k . . . k . . . kind as to bring some whizzle-ade.' A strange-looking vacuum cleaner with wheels, cogs, and a sunroof wobbled into the carriage. (For those of you that don't already know, Cogg was Barty's loyal friend and the only talking vacuum cleaner in Izzambard.) His lights flashed and he spun around. Then he disappeared, and just as quickly, reappeared with two bottles of whizzle-ade with straws.



Leo had forgotten just how good it tasted.

Now, even though he was mostly clockwork and wasn't supposed to have Warm Heart feelings, Cogg had really missed the children and started to lightly vacuum Leo's cheek.

Leo knew Cogg meant well so tried his very best not to mind.

'But *slurp* we really *slurp* have been *slurp* ages,' Ella insisted.

'Weeks, in fact,' said Leo, pulling Cogg's nozzle off his face. 'We thought you'd be



worried. In trouble, perhaps?'

'Trouble? We've b . . . b . . . barely had time to wash our socks!' Barty exclaimed.

'Socks?' Cogg was confused. 'I don't wear socks.'

'Nor do I,' said Barty, wriggling his toes. 'But I'm trying to speak Other World. Anyway, you've only b . . . b . . . been gone a day but I know what must have happened. Other World time stops when you come here. But our time stops or slows down when you go home. I think. Unless G . . . G . . . Griselda's been playing about with time in Izzambard again? Oh dear. Maybe that's it? One never really knows.'

'It doesn't matter,' Ella said. 'I don't understand time, anyway. Even when it does what it's supposed to do. But I do understand hammers. Look! It's full of light.' She waved her little hammer necklace at them all.

Barty gasped. 'Well, blow me down and call me a will-o'-the-wisp! It's the Incredible Crystallator! Wherever did you find it?'

Leo blinked. 'The what?'

'Incredible Crystallator.' Ella beamed at the hammer with pride. 'We found it in our workshop at home. In a box inside a box.'



'Look. Never mind about that,' Leo said. 'What I want to know is if the hammer is dangerous.'

'No. Well, n . . . n . . . not in the right hands.' Barty adjusted his train guard's cap and looked thoughtful.

'Are my hands the right hands?' Ella asked, looking at her fingers.

'Definitely.' Barty sighed. 'But the Incredible Crystallator would be dangerous in G . . . G . . . Griselda's hands. She would use its powers to destroy all the Old Magic in the Kingdom. That's all I meant. It should be in the hands of Gripendulum, the High Chief Hob Goblin of the Crystal Caves.'

'Gripendulum must be very small,' said Leo, looking at the tiny hammer.

'Of course he's not "very small". He's the High Chief of the Hob Goblins!'

'Well, his hammer is very small.' Leo looked at the shining object dangling around Ella's neck. A tiny blue clockwork butterfly fluttered past.



'Shhh! G . . . G . . . Griselda's spies!' Barty leant closer and whispered, 'Things aren't always what they seem, Leo. This is Izzambard, remember.' Barty's voice rose to a normal pitch. 'Cogg. Would you be so kind as to debutterfly the carriage?'

'Of course, Your Highness.' Cogg swivelled a nozzle and blew out a huge stream of blue air. The butterfly clattered to the floor. Then, it flew out of the window dizzily. 'Debutterflying complete,' said Cogg. But Barty had disappeared.