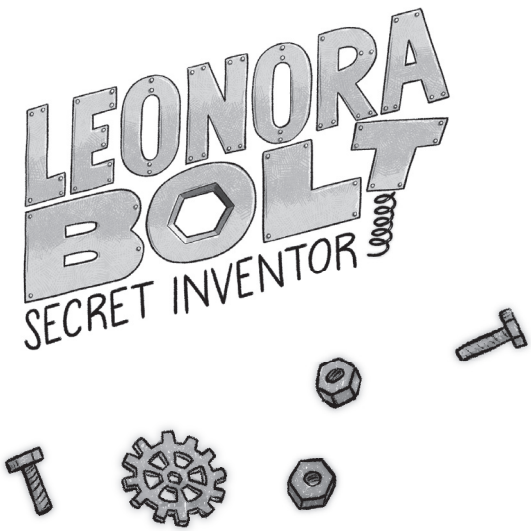
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Lucy grew up in Derbyshire and now lives in sunny Brighton with her husband and two children. When she's not writing, she loves cajoling her family into walks across the Sussex countryside, or swimming in the sea.

Lucy also likes inventing new words and trying to sneak them into conversation. You'll need to listen out for that.

Follow Lucy on Twitter and Instagram
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First published 2022

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Text design by Ken de Silva
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–43676–9

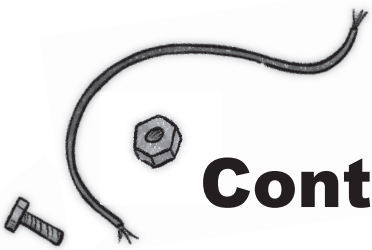
All correspondence to:
Puffin Books, Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Garden's, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW



For Charlie and Maggie







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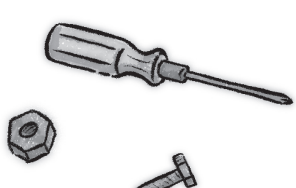


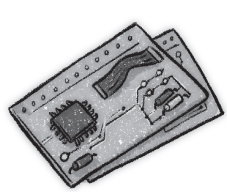


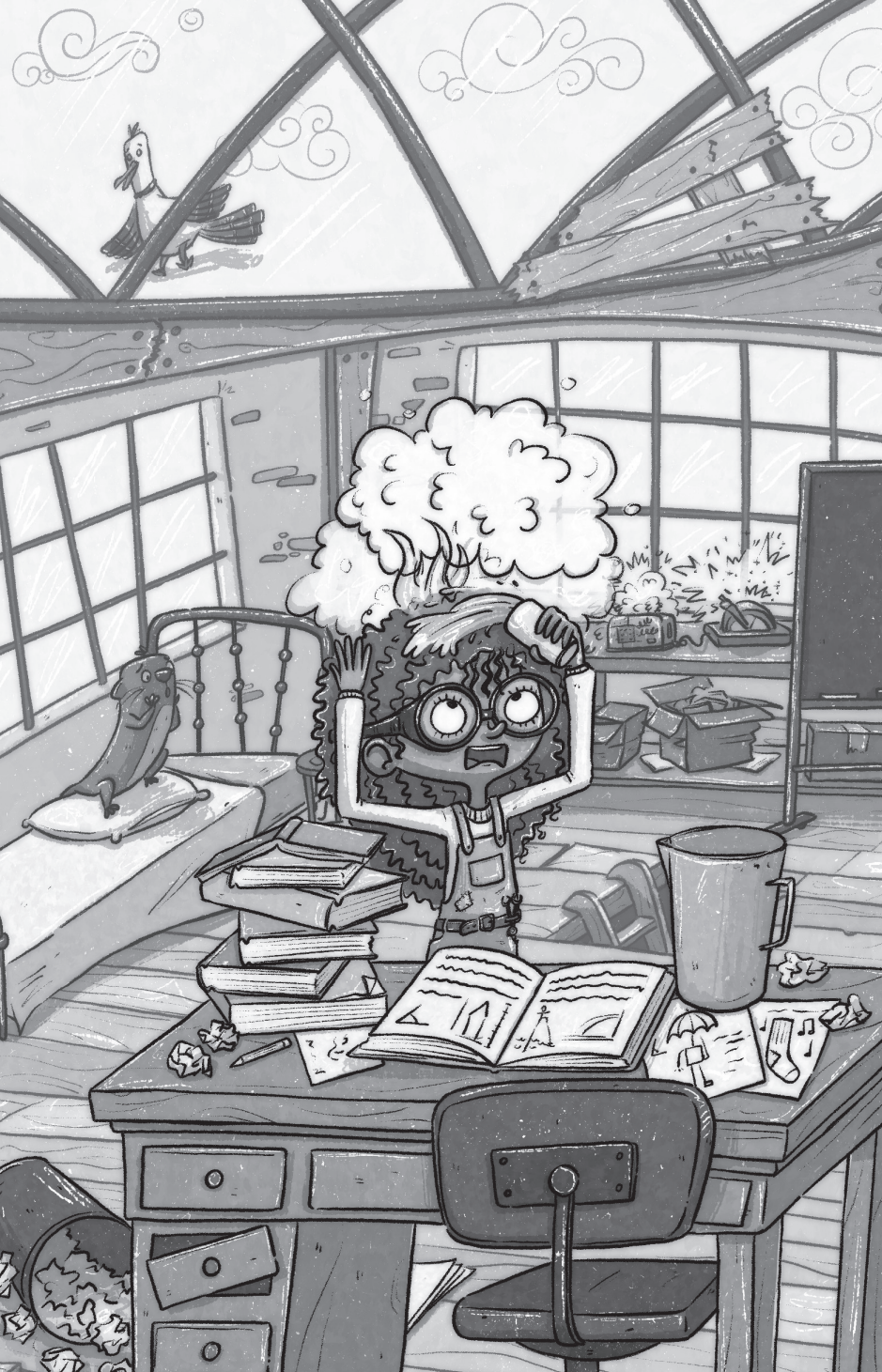


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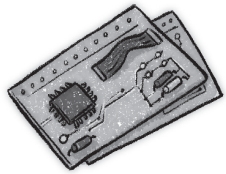












1
Silly Little Mess




FNIZZLE, THWOOOSH, KABLOOM! Leonora Bolt's hair was on fire again. And so were her eyebrows. 'Amazing,' she murmured, before realizing her head felt a bit hotter than usual. Grabbing a glass of water, she sloshed it right over herself. SIZZLESIZZLE-FIIIZZZZZ! Burnt brown curls stuck to her cheeks like seaweed. Great globs of grease dribbled down her grubby dungarees. And Leonora's dark eyes gleamed with triumph.

Now, to you and me it might look like she'd just taken a toaster to bits with a knife and fork. (DO NOT try this at home –



your parents will go completely bananas.) But Leonora was sure she was creating another awesome machine, a device to defy the laws of space and time, just like her last greatest invention. She'd call this one a **Removerator** and it would make horrible things disappear. Like wasps and cabbage and –

'Uncle Luther!' she cried, turning to find a shadowy figure looming over her. (She never could understand how he'd silently appear out of nowhere, just like chickenpox.) He was pale, razor-thin and extremely tall, which made it easy for him to look down his nose at



people. His head was nearly bald, and his face was so sour that Leonora had actually seen it make lemons cry.



'Just what do you think you're doing *this* time?' he said.

'Um . . . making toast?' Leonora tried to hide the lump of twisted metal and burnt wires in front of her. An awkward silence tiptoed around the room.

'Why is my toaster in a thousand pieces?'

'I'm sorry, uncle. I was just making a new thingamy. It's designed to –'

'A thingamy? What's a thingamy?' he snapped. 'Is *this* what you've been wasting your time on?'

'I, um, just thought that –'

'You didn't *think* – you were too busy playing around!'



Uh-oh, thought Leonora, here comes the absolutely ginormous telling-off.

'I hate to tell you off! I only have your best interests at heart,' he said, with all the warmth of a man whose own heart had been swapped for a snowball. 'You need to work much harder if you're ever going to get anywhere!'

'I *do* work hard,' Leonora insisted. 'All day, I honestly do –'

'Really? When was the last time you used that pea brain of yours and invented something useful? Designed something intelligent, something worthwhile instead of this – this pile of *rubbish*?'

Leonora shrugged and stared at her toes. *The last thing I built was my best invention ever! He wouldn't call that one rubbish if he knew about it*.

'I – I guess it has potential. It could be useful?'

'No, it couldn't. It's totally hopeless. Just



look at it! And just look at you. You're a silly – little – mess.' He spat the words out, jabbing a bony finger in her face.

Leonora tried to follow his instructions and look at herself. But it was tricky because tears were starting to prickle at the corners of her eyes. She would never, ever let him see them.

'You're right, uncle, it's hopeless,' she mumbled. Imagine his awestruck, spluttering apologies if he knew about her finest work! But she wasn't going to show him *that*. There was another painfully long pause, then she asked, 'Are you going to the mainland today? Can I come with you?'

He stopped circling the room and glared at her with ice-cube eyes. 'Of course not! I'm far too busy with my academic work. A true innovator, a *genius* like myself, simply cannot be distracted.'





'But I would love to see the mainland. Just *once*. I promise I won't get in the way or anything.'

'You? Come to work with me?' He started what could be described as 'laughing'. It was a wretched, metallic noise that sounded to Leonora like engine gears crunching together. She wished it would stop.

'Oh, how amusing,' he said at last. 'Perhaps if you weren't so idle and ridiculous, I could take you along – show you something of the outside world! Alas, it's not to be. You're not going *anywhere*.'

'But –'

'No buts. Get back to work. And tidy up this dreadful mess!' Before Leonora could protest, he'd spun around on his gangly legs and marched for the door.

Leonora sighed. She surveyed her chaotic room, which was large and round and



topped with a great glass roof. Beside her, a metal workbench was buried beneath a landslide of tools and dismantled household appliances. Against the opposite wall stood a mahogany desk swamped with her sketches and drawings. And between them was a thin bed where her pet otter, Twitchy Nibbles, lay trembling on top of his velvet cushion.

'Hey, don't worry, Twitch,' she said, coaxing him out and stroking his rich, glossy fur. 'I've got a plan – a machine to get us to the mainland . . . *one day*. He won't be able to stop us!'

She gave him an affectionate nose-boop, then turned to the window to watch Uncle Luther striding along the beach far below. He was wearing his brown suit and tie and carrying a brown briefcase stuffed with yellow papers. He clambered into a speedboat and started



the engine. It splut, splut, spluttered into life and away he sped.

She was left alone once more.

