
"Pure magic!"
LUCY STRANGE
The Time Engine
LINDSAY GALVIN
Illustrated by
KRISTINA KISTER

The Time Engine

LINDSAY GALVIN

Illustrated by
KRISTINA KISTER

Barrington Stoke

Published by Barrington Stoke
An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
1 Robroyston Gate, Glasgow, G33 1JN

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

HarperCollins*Publishers*
Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper,
Dublin 1, DO1 C9W8, Ireland

First published in 2026

Text © 2026 Lindsay Galvin
Illustrations © 2026 Kristina Kister
Cover design © 2026 HarperCollins*Publishers* Limited

The moral right of Lindsay Galvin and Kristina Kister to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

ISBN 978-0-00-872745-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

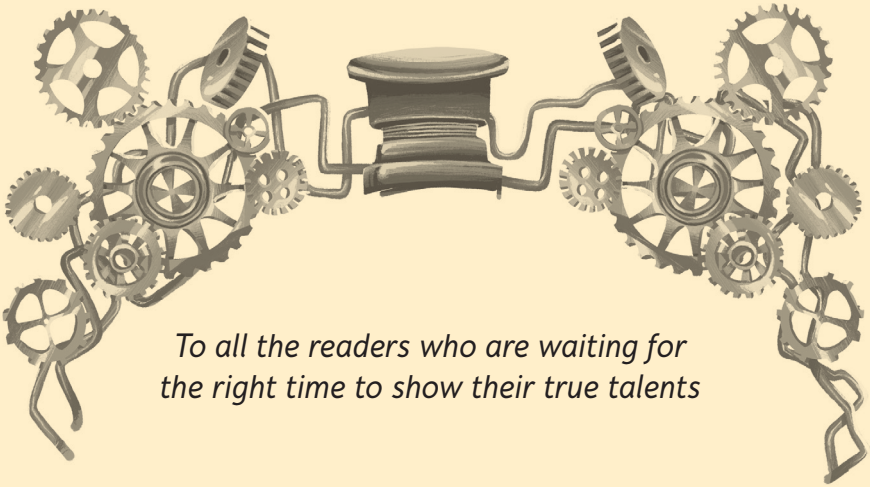
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in whole or in any part in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the publisher and copyright owners

Without limiting the exclusive rights of any author, contributor or the publisher of this publication, any unauthorised use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. HarperCollins also exercise their rights under Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive 2019/790 and expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception

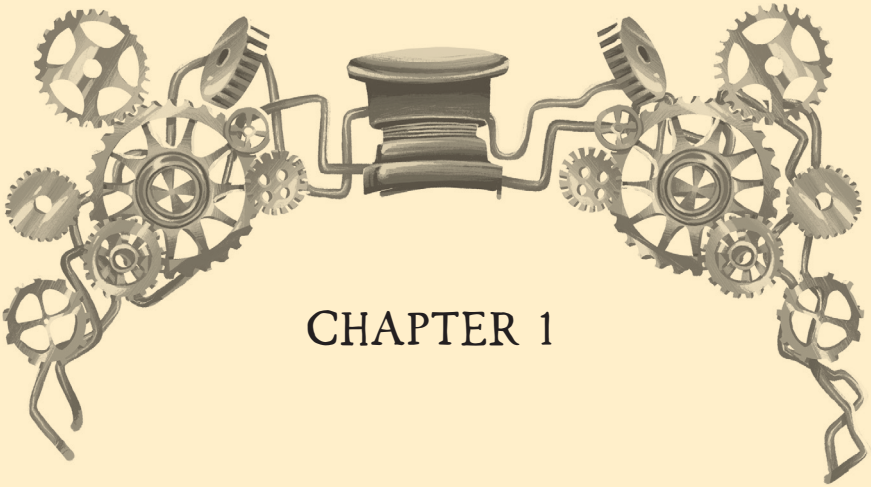
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

FPO (fsc placeholder)



To all the readers who are waiting for
the right time to show their true talents



CHAPTER 1

March 1938

The tall windows of our Cambridge University apartment let in rays of evening sun that landed on two letters on the mantelpiece. They were identical cream envelopes, and my father hadn't noticed them yet.

I ate my cottage pie quickly as Father read aloud from the newspaper and Mum listened.

"The Germans have marched into Austria," he said. "This is likely to mean war, as I predicted."

Mum and I had already heard the news, as we'd been listening to the wireless since I got home from school. My father was of an age that he might still be called up to the army, but as he was a professor, Mum said there might be other work for him to do on the home front.

I hid my swede under my spoon and gave Mum a longing look. She narrowed her eyes at me, then whisked my plate away before Father could see me wasting food.

My eyes flicked back to those two letters on the mantelpiece.

Mrs Norah Finch
Mr Herbert Finch

They couldn't be bills, as those were typed and stamped. The names on these envelopes were handwritten, and they had been hand delivered. I was confused. If someone wanted to write to both of my parents about the same thing, then why not send just one letter to both of them?

My father sometimes received correspondence from past students and colleagues from the university, but it was never hand delivered. Mum only ever received letters from her sister or two university friends, and I would recognise their handwriting.

I would have opened a letter like that right away. I didn't know how Mum could manage not to. But of course, she had waited for my father to come home. Mum didn't do anything without my father's approval.

Father's spoon finally clanked in his pudding bowl, and I could bear it no longer.

"Look, Father," I said. "Some letters came this morning for you and Mum."

My father leaned back in his chair. "Pass them over then, son."

I handed one letter to Father and placed the other in front of Mum.

Father used his penknife to slice open the envelope with his name on it.

"Aren't you going to open yours?" I said to my mother.

Mum raised a hand to her head and stared at the table, not answering me. This was how she acted if her nerves were bothering her. It mostly happened when she was about to leave the house, which was rarely. I knew Mum didn't like to go out, but I didn't see why opening a simple letter would upset her.

"Don't pester your mother, Eric," said Father, and then fixed me in a long stare.

"Sorry, Mum," I said, not sure what I was sorry for.

Father quickly scanned the letter. "I was expecting this," he said. "A couple of my colleagues have been called to meetings, and it's all very secretive."

He directed a smug smile at me. "The War Office will need the foremost minds for the war effort, on the hush-hush."



He winked, and I forced myself to smile. I often felt like I was acting a part in a play when with my father. I gave him the lines and actions expected of me. I suspected Mum felt the same.

Father covered Mum's hand with his.

"They made a mistake, dear, in sending you a meeting request too," he said. "We can't expect everyone to know about your … troubles." He tapped his head as he spoke – an unnecessary reminder of the struggles Mum had with her nerves.

Mum said nothing.

"Even if you had kept up your studies, you're needed at home here with Eric," Father continued.

"You're quite right," Mum said finally. Her voice was flat, her face expressionless.

"I've memorised my meeting date," Father said, "so you can put both of those in the hearth. That's what the letter directs, my pet."

Mum dropped both letters in the fire. She hadn't even opened hers. I watched the letters burn.