



DEMELZA

& the
SPECTRE DETECTORS

Holly Rivers

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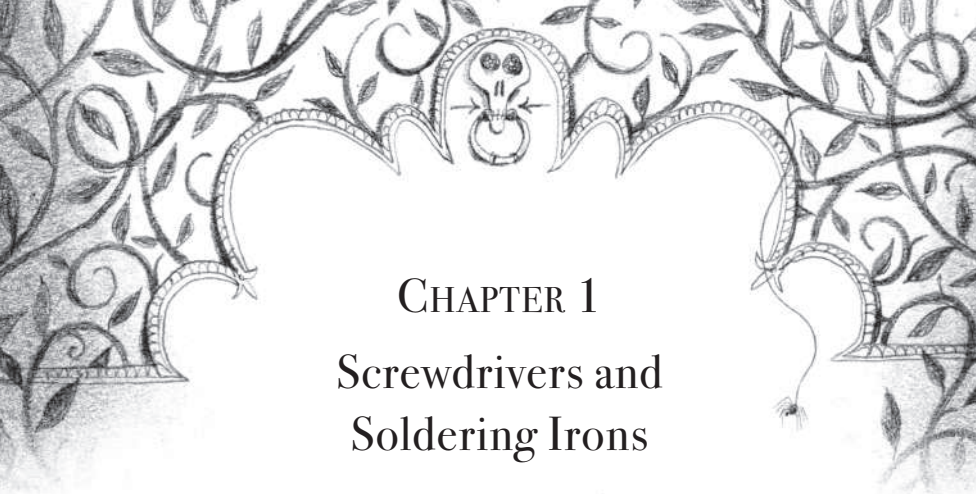
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*For Grandma, Mamgu
and magnificent grandmothers everywhere.*



CHAPTER 1

Screwdrivers and Soldering Irons

‘Lights out, Demelza!’ called Grandma Maeve from the bottom of the attic stairs. ‘And no sneakin’ out of bed to work on your inventions again tonight, d’ya hear me?’

Under her patchwork quilt, with soldering iron in hand and fully dressed in her lab coat, Demelza grinned. ‘Yes, Grandma!’ she called back. ‘I promise!’

‘And that means no stayin’ up late reading them big science books of yours either, you understand?’

‘Yes, Grandma! See you in the morning!’

Demelza switched off her bedside lamp, and through the darkness listened to the creak of the landing floorboards below as Grandma Maeve hobbled back to her own bedroom. There was the rustle of curtains being drawn followed by the thud of slippers being kicked off, and

before long the purring of the old woman's snores was echoing through Bladderwrack Cottage.

Demelza pushed back her quilt and reached for the torch she kept hidden beneath her mattress. *I'm sorry, Grandma*, she thought to herself, clicking it on. *But nothing's going to stand between me and my inventions. Especially something as unnecessary as sleep!*

Wasting no time, Demelza hopped out of bed and replaced her normal glasses with a pair of Inspection-Spex, from which a series of magnifying lenses hung down over her eyes like jam jars. Her thinking cap came next. Having once read that all inventors owned one, Demelza never sat down to invent without her bottle-green deerstalker, which she felt gave her the look of a true professional. (She'd quite fancied growing a moustache similar to that of her hero, Professor Humbert Heinsteene, to complete the look, but being an eleven-year-old schoolgirl, it had so far proved trickier than she'd hoped.)

Night-time was Demelza's favourite time to invent, when everyone else was asleep and she could let her imagination run free under the cover of silent darkness. As she tiptoed across the attic, her torch cast a dim yellow light over the walls. The shelves were lined with antique microscopes, spindles of copper wire and tools of all shapes and

sizes. Bottles of chemicals were alphabetically arranged from aluminium to zinc, and jars of nuts and bolts glimmered brightly like colonies of metallic beetles. Under the window a telescope pointed towards the stars, in anticipation of any exciting astronomical activity.

‘Right,’ said Demelza, sitting down at her desk and flicking on her little lamp. ‘First things first.’ She opened up one of her desk drawers and pulled out a lunchbox of cheddar and peanut butter sandwiches – cut into perfect isosceles triangles, of course. The ideal brain food for the long night ahead!

From the shelf above she pulled down a notebook which was labelled *Demelza Clock: Inventor*. She flicked through the pages of notes before stopping at a sheet of calculations scrawled in jet-black ink. At their centre was a technical drawing of a large robotic hand, its jointed fingers outstretched like a bunch of metal bananas. Beneath it was written:

Are you fed up of writing lines in detention?
Sick and tired of wasting time doing homework?
If yes, then you need Dr Demelza Clock's

REMARKABLE ROBOTIC HAND
FOR HOMEWORK HATERS.

This revolutionary device can be programmed to write out any assignment set by your teacher, and ensures perfectly forged handwriting, every time.

Its remote-controlled technology also means that you needn't lift a finger to retrieve your pencil case, refill your ink or sharpen your pencils. Simply use the control pad on the device's wrist to eject the hand and navigate it through the air.

Demelza grinned as she reread her words, her left knee jerking up and down the way it always did when a good plan was coming together. She'd come up with the idea for the invention after her headmistress, Ms Cardinal, had given her detention for smuggling her pet mouse Archimedes into class the previous week. 'Rodents have no place in a school,' Ms Cardinal had hissed, holding the trembling creature by his tail. 'They belong in a cage, or better still, decapitated in a trap! You will write out 1,000 lines of "Stricton Academy is a school, not a zoo" by the end of the day!'

For the next hour Demelza worked solidly, sparks flying as she sawed through tubes of copper piping and welded together metal sheets. She'd been interested in inventing

for as long as she could remember. Her first contraption had been the Magnificent Belly Button Cleaning Machine she'd made from an electric whisk when she was just four years old. The wonderful feeling she got from seeing a design coming to life was only equalled by that of solving a tricky scientific equation.

It was gone midnight by the time Demelza put down her tools. The robotic hand was almost complete – a miscellany of clock cogs, engine parts and kitchen utensils, all held together with blobs of solder and bits of sticky tape. Under the moonlight it glimmered like a strange alien creature, and a bolt of excitement coursed through Demelza's body. It felt as if each and every one of her freckles were tingling.

'Right, I just need to tighten the kinetic valve,' she said, coiling a strand of auburn hair around her finger in thought, 'then recharge the battery pack. After that, I think I'll nearly be ready to—'

'DEMELZA CLOCK! WHAT'S GOING ON UP THERE?'

A sudden shout from downstairs jolted Demelza from her thoughts and she jumped back from her desk, sending her wrench torpedoing through the air. 'Nose-diving neutrons!' she gasped. 'Grandma Maeve's woken up!'

The staircase began to creak and there was an approaching *tap-tap* of footsteps on wood. Panicked, Demelza frantically tried to waft away the smell of molten solder before flinging an old dust sheet over her desk. Grandma Maeve wasn't strict, but she was a stickler for bedtimes, and a sleep-deprived Grandma was not the kind of Grandma that would make you boiled egg and soldiers for breakfast.

Without a moment to lose, Demelza leapt back into bed, pulled her patchwork quilt over her shoulders and began to let out some loud and zealous pretend snores.

The attic door flung open.

'Demelza Clock, I know you ain't sleepin'!' Grandma Maeve's voice was cracked and brittle, but its volume was on par with that of a foghorn. 'Those fake snores don't fool me!'

Demelza slowly opened her eyes. Grandma Maeve was standing in the doorway, her wrinkled face illuminated by a lantern. A shock of grey hair hung to her waist, and even though her skin was thin and papery, her eyes were as bright as cogs.

'Oh, Grandma, it's *you*,' stuttered Demelza, rubbing her eyes with the theatrics of a well-rehearsed actress. 'I-I thought I was dreaming.'

'Nice try, young lady!' snapped Grandma Maeve,

hobbling over to the bed. ‘But since when did you sleep wearing this, *hmm?*’ She whipped away Demelza’s thinking cap, which was still perched atop her head, and waved it in the air. ‘You’ve been inventing again when you should’ve been sleeping, haven’t you?’

‘N-no,’ Demelza gulped, desperately trying to come up with a convincing excuse. ‘I was busy doing some . . . erm . . . homework, Grandma.’

‘Ha! *You?* Doing homework? I’ll believe that when I see it! How many letters have I had from Ms Cardinal this term, hmmm? How many detentions has she given you for daydreamin’ in class?’

Demelza groaned as she pictured the cantankerous old headmistress. ‘Urghh, but the things we learn at school are so boring, Grandma! Why can’t Ms Cardinal teach us something useful? Like how to build a spaceship . . . or breed our own fungus?’

There was a second of tense silence before Grandma Maeve’s frown curved upwards into a forgiving smirk. ‘You cheeky little grub,’ she said, pinching her granddaughter’s cheek. A shiny crimson scar ran along the length of her hand. ‘It’s lucky that I love you so much, ain’t it? I don’t know how many other grandmas would put up with living under the same roof as such a mad professor.’

'Inventor, Grandma,' said Demelza with a tut. *'I'm an inventor!'*

Grandma Maeve sighed. *'I'm serious though, Demelza, it ain't good for you to spend so much time up here alone inventing. Why don't you invite a friend from school over one day? Spend some time out in the garden?'*

'Because I don't have any friends from school, Grandma,' replied Demelza curtly. *'No one in my class can hold a decent conversation on electromagnetic induction or atomic energy. The most advanced debate they've ever had was about which coloured crayon tastes the nicest!'*

'Well, why don't you ask that nice lad who lives at the bottom of the hill over for dinner one night this week, eh? I thought you'd become quite chummy with him. What's his name again?'

'Percy?'

'Yeah, that's the one. He ain't lived here all that long and he could probably do with bein' brought out of his shell, especially with his ma not bein' around and all. I could make your favourite chicken pie?'

'I've already told you, Grandma, he's not allowed to go to other people's houses. It's to do with all the allergies he has. He's not even allowed to go to school and he has to take special medicine instead of food.'

‘Shame,’ said Grandma Maeve. ‘He could do with a bit of fattenin’ up. He’s far too pale and skinny, poor thing.’

‘The way his dad mollycoddles him, you’d think that he had the bubonic plague!’

‘Well, I’m sure his pa knows best.’ Grandma Maeve tucked Demelza in and stroked her head. ‘Right, off to the Land of Nod with you, young lady. You want a story to help you drift off? How about the one where I wrestle the three-legged sloth in Patagonia?’ She clawed her wrinkled hands as if grappling with an imaginary creature in front of her.

‘Grandma, come on.’ Demelza scowled. ‘How many times do I have to tell you? I’m too old for silly stories.’

‘All right, all right, just asking . . .’ Grandma Maeve bent down and gave her granddaughter a whiskery kiss on the forehead. She smelt of lavender, cough drops and something musky that Demelza could never quite place. ‘Goodnight, my darlin’. Love you more than teapots.’

‘Love you more than circuit boards,’ answered Demelza, snuggling down. She looked to the framed photo of Humbert Heinsteene on her bedside table and sighed. ‘Sorry, Professor, but scientific progress will just have to wait until tomorrow.’