

WEDNESDAY WEEKS

and the Tower of Shadows



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 **LOTHIAN**
Children's Books



CHAPTER 1

I hold my breath as Alfie's robot zips across the classroom floor. Wheels spinning, it races into the maze and takes the first corner without slowing down. Left! Right! Right! Left! The little purple robot navigates the wooden block corridors with reckless speed.

When it reaches the exit it beeps twice, flashes its lights and does a triumphant bunny hop over the finish line. Then, whistling a cheery tune, it buzzes around Mrs Glock's desk, rockets past the line of fire extinguishers, dodges an attempt by Colin Murphy to catch it in a wastepaper basket, and finishes with a victory lap around our class model of the Harbour Bridge.

Alfie picks up the robot and gives it a pat. 'Great work, Alfie Junior! That was totally molten!' He turns to me and grins like he's just won a lifetime supply of chocolate. 'See, Wednesday? I told you it was easy.'

I roll my eyes. ‘Alfie, you know I love you, right?’

And before you start, I don’t mean it like *that*. Obviously.

Alfie knows what I mean. ‘Of course you do,’ he says, spreading his arms wide. His white school shirt is buttoned all the way to the top, he has a hankie folded in his top pocket, and his black hair sticks up like the bristles on a brush. ‘What’s not to love?’

Alfie’s my best friend – okay, technically my only friend – and I know it’s not his fault he’s a genius. But sometimes – especially times like now, when my whole future is on the line and I’m trying to concentrate – I wish he could dial it back a little. That’s all. You know, just a smidge.

I just don’t know how to tell him without coming across like a total grouch.

I let out a sigh. ‘Never mind.’

I look down at my own blue robot, sitting motionless on the carpet. Apart from the colour, it’s identical to Alfie Junior – like a rectangular grapefruit with eyes and four-wheel-drive tyres. I know I’ll never be able to get my robot to perform like Alfie’s, but that’s okay. I don’t need it to do anything fancy. All I need to do is get it through the maze. Or, at least, past the second corner. Mrs Glock told us everyone who gets past the second corner will pass the assessment.

‘Well done, Alfie,’ Mrs Glock says in her singsong voice. ‘Perfect, as always.’

‘Yeah, perfect,’ Colin Murphy mutters. ‘A perfect dork.’

Allie Crenshaw sniggers, but Mrs Glock doesn’t even look up. She’s busy making a note on her shiny black tablet – probably giving Alfie an A-triple-plus with extra credit. Again.

I turn and give Colin one of my special glares – the kind that makes people nervously check their hair, just to make sure it’s not on fire. He’s a tough-looking kid with buzz-cut hair and a nose that’s about half a size bigger than the rest of his face. He prides himself on not being afraid of anything, but in the face of my blazing-hot glare of death he flinches and looks away.

Mrs Glock looks up from her tablet. ‘And last but not least . . .’ Her eyes land on me and her lips pinch tight. ‘Ah, yes. Wednesday.’

I take a deep breath. This is it. My absolute final chance, especially after last week. We were studying chemical reactions. All I had to do was mix bicarb and vinegar to bubble up enough carbon dioxide to extinguish a candle. Instead, my candle shot up like a rocket and set fire to the ceiling.

If I don’t pass robotics, I’ll flunk science. And that means I’ll flunk Year Six. And no way am I repeating the whole ‘weird girl tries to fit in’ routine with a new year group.

I sneak a peek at the coding app on my laptop where I've been assembling the coloured code blocks that tell my robot what to do. But instead of coloured blocks, the screen is filled with dancing monkeys, flying puppies and what appears to be a portrait of Elvis drinking coffee.

Not again. The bottom drops from my stomach and I hit the button to blank the screen before Mrs Glock can see. Every piece of technology I touch turns to some sort of nightmare, and Mrs Glock knows it. She just doesn't know why.

'All set,' I say, forcing a smile onto my face.

Mrs Glock eyes my screen with suspicion. 'Actually, Wednesday, it's nearly lunchtime,' she says, though the bell is still fifteen minutes away. 'I was thinking it might be best if you skip today's assessment.' She gives me a chilly smile of her own. 'For your own safety, of course.'

My own safety. Yeah, right.

Mrs Glock might act like she's on my side, but I know she's just itching for an excuse to dump me out of her class and send me back to Year Five. Actually, after that whole eyebrow thing last term, I'm pretty sure she'd send me back to kindergarten if she could.

I imagine Mum and Dad's faces if Mrs Glock calls them in for yet another chat. My parents are great – really, they are. But the strain of raising a child with constant fireball issues is starting to get to them.

Luckily, I have a cunning plan.

I'm going to beg.

'Please, Mrs Glock?' I beg. '*Pleeease?* Just give me one more chance. This won't be like the last time, I promise.'

Mrs Glock arches a carefully pencilled eyebrow. 'Like the last seven times, you mean?'

Uh-oh. My cunning plan is running into some early resistance. I push my face into an expression of innocent surprise. 'Seven? Are you sure?'

Mrs Glock's not buying it. 'Quite sure.'

'Hmm.' I frown and start racking my brain for a new plan. 'That seems kind of high.'

'No, Wednesday,' Alfie says helpfully, 'it's definitely seven. Remember?'

I stifle a groan. I should have known this would happen – Alfie's a complete sucker for anything involving numbers. He starts ticking off my list of robot-related disasters on his fingers.

'You've had three blackouts, two meltdowns, one spontaneous electrical discharge and one, um . . . inexplicable rain of fireballs.' Alfie smiles and shakes his head. 'Boy, remember that one?'

Mrs Glock's face twitches and her hand makes an involuntary movement towards the large red fire extinguisher sitting on the corner of her desk. 'I remember,' she says in a voice like ice.

I glare at Alfie, then quickly look away before *his* hair catches on fire.

‘Yes, well,’ I say, trying desperately to regroup. ‘My point is, this time won’t be anything like those times.’

‘Oh?’ Mrs Glock looks unconvinced. ‘And why is that?’

‘Um . . .’ I reach up to touch my own hair, feeling for the special ice-blue streak that seems to have a mind of its own. The rest of my hair is dark brown and totally ordinary, but that streak? It’s more like an early warning system than actual hair. Right now it’s sitting flat on my head, which is a good sign. ‘Because this time I’ll be extra, extra careful?’

Mrs Glock shakes her head. She doesn’t understand about my hair. ‘I’m sorry, Wednesday. Not today.’

My heart sinks into my boots. Kindergarten, here I come.

But then Alfie pipes up again. And this time – amazingly – he’s actually being helpful. ‘Come on, Mrs G,’ he says. ‘It’s not Wednesday’s fault. She’s just . . .’

‘Careless?’ Mrs Glock prompts.

Alfie thinks about it, then shakes his head. ‘No.’

‘Thoughtless?’

‘No.’

‘Impulsive?’

‘No.’

‘Hey!’ I protest. ‘I’m sitting right here.’

They both ignore me.

Alfie’s face lights up as he finds the right words. ‘Technologically challenged.’

‘Yes, well.’ Mrs Glock looks like she’s been chewing lemons. ‘She certainly is that. Which is why I think it would be best if—’

‘Please, Mrs G.’ Alfie hits Mrs Glock with the full force of his gigawatt smile. ‘I’ll keep an eye on her. And if anything gets fried, I’ll patch it right up.’

You gotta love Alfie. I mean, here’s a kid who lives in a super-busy house with his mum, his dad, his nani, and about a million brothers, sisters and pets. Which means he has totally perfected the art of Getting Adult Attention. And, okay, so he actually has just one brother, two sisters, three cats and a dog, but compared to my zero siblings and one cranky lizard named Spike, it may as well be a million.

In the face of Alfie’s relentless enthusiasm, Mrs Glock is helpless. She throws up her hands. ‘Oh, all right.’

‘Thanks, Mrs G,’ Alfie says. ‘You’re the best! Isn’t she, Wednesday?’

I somehow manage to prevent my eyes from rolling so far back in my head that I can see my own brain.

‘Yeah, right,’ I mutter. ‘The best.’

Mrs Glock returns to perch on the edge of her desk – a position which gives her a clear view of the maze and, coincidentally, puts her within easy reach of at least four fire extinguishers.

‘Well, go ahead, Wednesday,’ she says. ‘Let’s get this over with.’

Yeah, thanks, Mrs G. Great pep talk.

I take a deep breath and check my laptop. The screen's normal again – no dancing monkeys, no flying puppies, no caffeinated Elvis. Just the coding app, and the sequence of coloured blocks to tell my robot what to do. A blue block to drive forward. An orange block to stop at a corner. Another set of blocks to decide which way to turn. And one more to keep repeating the whole thing until it reaches the exit. A robotic recipe for navigating a maze.

Simple, right? I cross my fingers and click the *Go* button.

For a second, nothing happens. Then my robot lurches into motion. Slowly at first, then more confidently, it trundles forward and enters the maze.

I hold my breath.

My robot reaches the first corner.

It stops.

Waits.

And then . . .

After what seems like an eternity, my robot turns left and starts moving forward again, heading for the second corner.

A warm feeling washes over me. It's working. I'm actually going to pass science. I won't have to—

Out of the corner of my eye, I spot Colin Murphy. He's sneaking up behind Alfie, and he has the wastepaper basket in his hands.

‘Hey!’ Anger spikes my gut. ‘Back off!’

The words are out before I know it. I clamp my lips, but it’s too late.

With an ear-splitting electronic squawk, my robot slams into reverse. It accelerates backwards across the floor, then launches into the air like a cruise missile – straight at Colin Murphy’s head.

Luckily for Colin, his reflexes are the quickest thing about him. He jams the bin on Alfie’s head, then dives for cover. The robot skims his buzz cut, ricochets off the ceiling, and cannons into the Harbour Bridge at about half the speed of light.



CHAPTER 2

It took our class a whole term to build that bridge. It takes half a second for my robot to destroy it. Stripy plastic straws and paperclips explode everywhere. The wreckage falls to the floor around the robot, lies still for a moment, and then quietly bursts into flames.

Thanks to last week's chemistry lesson, I know exactly what's required. Bicarb and vinegar, right? But Mrs Glock goes straight for the big guns. She snatches up the nearest fire extinguisher and kills the blaze with a short, sharp blast of carbon dioxide.

A few seconds tick by in stunned silence. Then Allie Crenshaw uncorks her epic laugh – the one that sounds like a donkey going through a woodchipper – and suddenly everyone's laughing and talking at once.

Well, almost everyone. Colin Murphy picks himself up like a shell-shocked soldier. Alfie has the dented

wire wastepaper basket jammed on top of his head like a medieval helmet, but he doesn't seem to notice. He's staring at the melted mess of blue plastic that used to be my robot.

Mrs Glock fixes me with an icy glare, then makes a note on her tablet.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out what it says. I think I'm going to cry.

But then something happens that turns my misery to exasperation.

The lights flicker and a sudden chill fills the air. Every screen in the room goes black. Behind me, I sense a familiar but unwelcome presence.

He's here.

I mean, of course he is. He's been here for almost every other humiliating disaster of the last three years. Why not this one as well?

I turn around.

A tall, shadowy figure stands at the back of the room. Shocked silence spreads through the class like ripples in a pond.

Mrs Glock straightens up like she's been electrocuted. 'Excuse me!' She glares at the cloaked and hooded figure, like she does every time this happens. 'Who are you? And what are you doing in my classroom?'

The figure lowers its hood, revealing a stern face with a pointy grey beard and dark, piercing eyes. 'Forgive

the intrusion,' he says in a voice as smooth as chocolate sauce. 'I have come for my apprentice.'

Mrs Glock frowns. 'Apprentice?'

The man flings out a jewelled finger, pointing across the room in a gesture that makes his cloak go all billowy and mysterious.

I mean, seriously. This is the kind of stuff I have to put up with.

Mrs Glock follows the man's finger with her eyes. You can see the moment when she realises he's pointing at me. Her lips go all tight and pinched – it's like her signature move – and her eyes turn hard as marbles.

'Well,' she says. 'I should have known *Wednesday* would be mixed up in this. But *who* are *you*?'

The man's lips curl into a faint smile and he bows. 'As ever, dear lady, I am Abraham Mordecai Weeks, Protector of the Realms, Master of the Seven Transformations, Custodian of the Five Ungovernable Charms, Arch-Excellency Order Enchanter, Wonder Warlock, and Black Belt Magician to the Queen's Royal Order.' He turns to me and beckons. 'Come, Apprentice. We have work to do.'

I fold my arms. I'm pretty sure at least two of his fancy titles are made up. And I'm a hundred per cent not keen on mine.

'Grandpa,' I say. 'Do we have to do this every time?'

Alfie pushes his way to the front of the mystified crowd. He's still wearing the wastepaper basket, pushed

back on his head at a rather jaunty angle, and he looks like he's about to burst. 'Molten! You're Wednesday's grandpa? She's told me about you.'

The truth is, Alfie and Grandpa have already met, loads of times. Same goes for Mrs Glock, and for everyone else in my class. They just don't remember.

Grandpa fixes Alfie with an intimidating stare. 'Has she, indeed?' He doesn't seem to notice anything unusual about Alfie's choice of headgear, but then again, post-seventeenth-century fashion isn't really his thing.

Alfie nods, not intimidated in the slightest. He never is. 'Oh, yeah. Like how you're all into magic and stuff? Oh!' His eyes go wide and he takes a coin out of his pocket. 'I've been practising. Here, watch, watch, watch!'

Alfie does a magic trick with the coin, making it disappear from one hand, and then pulling it out of Colin Murphy's ear with the other.

Colin tries to slap Alfie's hand away, but his heart doesn't seem to be in it.

'Bazinga!' Alfie says with a grin.

The class groans. To be fair, it's not a bad trick, but Alfie's been working on it for ages, and we've all seen it a million times.

'Most impressive, young man,' Grandpa says. 'But true magic is more than mere sleight of hand. True magic comes from the heart.' He reaches for the coin. 'Allow me.'

With a flourish, he tosses the coin into the air. It spins upwards and then stops, hovering like a UFO. Grandpa claps his hands and the coin disappears in a shower of golden sparkles. The class *oobs* and *aabs* in amazement.

‘Where’d it go?’ Alfie asks.

Grandpa gestures at Colin. ‘If you’d care to check your associate’s ear once more . . .’

Alfie reaches for Colin’s ear, but before he can get there, Grandpa mutters a word. Colin’s eyes bug out as thousands of coins start pouring out of his ear. The class goes nuts, cheering and clapping and diving forward to scoop up the money.

I shake my head. Grandpa’s such a show-off. There was so little magic in the spells he just cast, I could barely feel them. A simple levitation charm, a disappearing spell, and a drop of winkleberry juice is all it took to have the whole class eating out of his hand.

He turns to me with a smug expression. ‘I’d like to see one of your electrified adding machines do *that*, Apprentice.’

Yeah, I tried to explain computers to Grandpa once. So there’s an hour of my life I’ll never get back. Not to mention a perfectly good laptop.

Mrs Glock steps forward, slipping and sliding on the torrent of coins still pouring out of Colin’s ear. ‘Mr Weeks! Please! I really must insist that you—’

‘Enough of this foolishness.’ Grandpa waves his hand.

This time I can feel it. The spell ripples through the air, freezing Mrs Glock and the rest of the class, and suddenly Grandpa and I are standing in a room full of statues.

‘Grandpa!’ I scramble over the coins to stand in front of him. ‘What are you doing here? I’m trying to pass science. Seriously, you could not have picked a worse time.’

Grandpa gives me a lofty smile. ‘Time is immaterial, my young apprentice.’

I prop my hands on my hips. ‘Firstly, I’m not your apprentice.’

If my defiance bothers him, he doesn’t show it. ‘And yet, you are. Destined to—’

‘And secondly, if time is so immaterial, then why can’t you—’

‘Also,’ Grandpa interrupts regally, ‘when in public, you should address me as Master.’

‘*Master?*’ I fold my arms and glare at him as the lunch bell starts to ring. ‘No, nope. Forget it.’

Grandpa shrugs and closes his eyes. The enormous ruby ring on his right hand starts to glow. He gestures with his right arm, as if opening a curtain, and suddenly an inky black void appears, floating in mid-air like a doorway into a black hole.

‘Time to depart,’ he says. ‘Come along, Apprentice Protector.’

He steps into the void and disappears.

I look around with a sigh. The only thing I want to protect is my social life. Despite the bell, Mrs Glock and the rest of the class are still frozen like statues. But they won't stay that way much longer. When the spell wears off, the coins will be gone, lunchtime will be nearly over, and nobody will remember Grandpa's visit at all.

Of course, with my luck, Mrs Glock will still remember to give me a final science grade, and considering the destroyed bridge and melted robot, it will almost certainly be an F.

I trudge through the doorway and into the void.