Isabella Bolt’s hair was on fire again. And so were her eyebrows. ‘Amazing,’ she murmured, before realising her head felt a bit hotter than usual.Grabbing a glass of water she sloshed it right over herself.Burnt brown curls stuck to her cheeks like seaweed. Great globs of grease dribbled down her grubby dungarees. Isabella’s eyes gleamed with triumph.

Now to you and me, it might look as if 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 Isabella was convinced that she was creating the world’s first ever REMOVERATOR! An incredible machine to make really horrible things disappear! Like wasps and cabbage and -

‘Uncle Luther!’ she cried, turning to find a dark figure looming over her. (She could never understand how he’d silently appear out of nowhere, just like chickenpox.)He was razor-thin and extremely tall, which made it easy for him to look down his nose at people. His head was bald and his expression was so sour it could make lemons cry.

‘Just what do you think you are doing *this* time?’ he said.

‘Um... making toast?’ Isabella tried to hide the lump of twisted metal and burnt wires in front of her. An awkward silence clattered about the room.

‘Why is my deluxe toaster in a thousand little pieces?’

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

‘A thingamy? What’s a thingamy?’ he snapped. ‘Have you completed this morning’s homework?’

‘Erm no, not yet.’

‘How about the extra hard sums I asked you to finish?’

‘Um nearly... sort of –’

‘What about that essay on the theory of absolutely *everything*?’

‘It’s in my head... somewhere... I- I just need to write it down.’

‘I knew it!’

*Uh-oh,*thought Isabella, 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 can’t just spend all day breaking my things and making an almighty mess! How many times have I told you? You need to study and work and then study some more if you’re ever going to get anywhere!’

‘I *do* study,’ Isabella insisted. ‘All day, absolutely, I really do - ’

‘Well clearly not hard enough. 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 smoking rubbish?’

Isabella shrugged and stared at her shoes. ‘I- I guess 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 one by one,jabbing a bony finger in her face.

Isabella 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. It took expert blinking to stop them spilling over, but she’d had plenty of practice. *She would never, ever let him see them.*

(Isabella The Secret Inventor by Lucy Brandt)