

## The Invention

Max Harrison had always been curious.

While other twelve-year-olds spent their Saturdays playing football or video games, Max preferred to disappear into the cluttered shed at the bottom of his garden. Every shelf overflowed with tangled wires, rusty gears, cracked circuit boards and mysterious gadgets rescued from jumble sales. His mother called it *a health hazard*. Max preferred *research headquarters*.

On the wall above his workbench hung a hand-painted sign:

Mistakes Are Just Discoveries Wearing Disguises.

It was a phrase his grandfather had often repeated before he passed away, and Max had never forgotten it.

Most of Max's inventions were harmless—if slightly ridiculous.

He had built a toothbrush that sang opera.

A lunchbox that warmed sandwiches but accidentally melted chocolate bars.

A pair of self-tying shoelaces that tied everyone's shoes together instead.

His inventions rarely worked exactly as planned.

But that had never stopped him.

One rainy Saturday morning, Max was searching through an old toolbox when he discovered a dusty brass compass. It was beautifully engraved with tiny symbols that looked almost like stars.

Inside the lid, someone had scratched a short message:

"For those brave enough to imagine differently."

Curious, Max examined it more closely.

The compass needle didn't point north.

Instead, it spun wildly before settling on his half-finished machine in the corner of the shed.

"That's odd," Max muttered.

The machine had no name yet.

It consisted of an old bicycle dynamo, several computer fans, a microwave timer, dozens of colourful wires and an antique radio valve he had bought for fifty pence at a market.

Originally, it had been designed to organise his bedroom by attracting misplaced objects using magnetic pulses.

So far, it had only managed to attract cutlery.

Lots of cutlery.

Max placed the compass beside the machine.

Instantly, the needle began glowing with a soft silver light.

The lights on the machine flickered.

The fans started spinning.

The radio valve hummed.

Then...

*CLICK.*

A brilliant blue pulse rippled through the workshop before disappearing without a sound.

Everything fell silent.

Max blinked.

"Well..."

He looked around.

"That was disappointing."

Nothing appeared to have happened.

The first clue arrived an hour later.

His mother stood at the bottom of the stairs.

"Max?"

"Yes?"

"Why is the television floating?"

"...What?"

Sure enough, the television was hovering gently two feet above the carpet.

Not falling.

Not flying.

Simply... floating.

Before Max could answer, the family cat drifted lazily past the living-room window, looking surprisingly relaxed.

By lunchtime, the entire neighbourhood had descended into bewilderment.

Bicycles refused to stay on the ground.

Garden gnomes marched slowly across flowerbeds.

Letters folded themselves into paper aeroplanes before soaring through the streets.

Traffic lights flashed rainbow colours instead of red, amber and green.

Even umbrellas floated gently above their owners like obedient balloons.

The local news described it as:

"A sequence of highly unusual and entirely unexplained events."

Max felt his stomach tighten.

Somehow...

It had to be his machine.

He rushed back to the shed.

The compass was glowing brighter than ever.

The machine now displayed a single sentence across its tiny digital screen.

IMAGINATION FIELD ACTIVE

"What does that even mean?"

Max frantically searched through his notebook.

Halfway through, he discovered a page filled with scribbled calculations he barely remembered writing.

At the bottom was a sentence circled three times.

Objects behave according to expectation rather than physical law.

His heart skipped.

The machine wasn't changing gravity.

It wasn't producing magnetism.

It was changing reality itself.

Things were behaving the way people imagined they should.

Children believed balloons never wanted to come down.

Now they didn't.

People joked that toast always landed butter-side down.

Now it always did.

His little cousin had once declared that homework multiplied overnight.

Max suddenly wondered...

His phone buzzed.

It was his best friend, Ava.

"Max!"

"What?"

"My little brother imagined our sofa was a pirate ship!"

"...And?"

"It just sailed through next door's fence!"

The town became increasingly chaotic.

Teachers found classrooms filling with talking chalk.

Dogs chased invisible squirrels.

Clouds rearranged themselves into giant smiley faces.

One particularly enthusiastic toddler imagined puddles were made of jelly.

For twenty minutes...

They were.

Max knew he had to stop it.

But how?

He stared once more at the mysterious compass.

Then he noticed something he had missed before.

Around its edge was another tiny inscription.

Every creation follows its creator.

He thought carefully.

The machine was responding to imagination.

Perhaps...

It would also respond to certainty.

He switched it back on.

The humming returned.

The compass glowed intensely.

Max took a deep breath.

Then, as clearly and confidently as he could, he said,

"The world belongs to reality."

Nothing happened.

He tried again.

"The laws of nature matter."

Still nothing.

Outside, three wheelie bins floated gracefully over the rooftops.

Then he remembered Grandpa's favourite advice.

*"Machines don't listen to clever people."*

*"They listen to patient ones."*

Max closed his eyes.

Instead of fighting the chaos, he pictured the town exactly as it should be.

Children cycling safely.

Birds flying.

Cars driving.

Flowers growing.

People smiling.

Everything ordinary.

Everything peaceful.

The image became clearer and clearer.

The machine's humming softened.

The compass needle slowed.

The silver glow faded.

With a gentle *click*, everything stopped.

Outside, bicycles settled onto the pavement.

The cat landed elegantly on a garden wall as though nothing unusual had happened.

Traffic lights returned to normal.

A disappointed toddler poked an ordinary puddle.

The following morning, scientists, engineers and journalists arrived from across the country.

Everyone wanted answers.

No one found any.

Max had already dismantled the machine.

Every screw.

Every wire.

Every circuit.

The mysterious compass had vanished too.

Only an empty space remained on the workbench.

Sometimes, Max wondered whether he had imagined the whole adventure.

Until he found one final note tucked inside his notebook.

The handwriting wasn't his own.

It simply read:

The greatest inventions are not the ones that change the world.

They are the ones that teach us how carefully the world should be changed.

Max smiled.

Then he reached for a fresh notebook.

After all...

Every inventor knows that one mistake often leads to the next remarkable discovery.