The Best Bad Idea Ever

By Ben Bellamy • Illustrated by Helen Stebakov
The Banana Peeler

“Amy!” I heard my mom shout. “What do you think you’re doing?”

I gulped. I was sitting on the floor, wearing my lab coat and science goggles. They were really just my new yellow raincoat and swimming goggles, but I wore them whenever I was inventing something. A red ooze bubbled across the living room carpet.

“I was…I was…inventing,” I said. “It was
supposed to be a volcano…with lava.”

“Oh, Amy,” my mom said. She ran out of the room and came back with towels to soak up the ooze. “We’ve only lived here for a week, and already you’re trying to burn the house down.”

“I’m not!” I said. “It’s not real lava. It’s just baking soda, cola, dish soap, vinegar,
flour…” I counted off the ingredients on my hand. Then I saw that my mom was giving me a look that I called the Hairy Eyeball. “And…red food dye,” I said, looking at my feet.

My mom shook her head. “Why do all your inventions have to be like this? Why can’t you invent something useful, like a new dishwasher?”

That didn’t sound as fun as a volcano. I shrugged and said, “I’m sorry. It was an accident.”

My mom sent me outside where I couldn’t make any more messes. I dragged a stick along the low fence at the edge of our yard. I felt bad. Why did my inventions always turn out bad? I was deep in thought when a banana dropped out of the sky onto the ground right in front of me. *SPLAT!*

I jumped back and heard a voice yell,
“Oops!” I looked over the fence and saw a funny old man waving wildly at me. “Sorry about that!” he chuckled. With his beaten-up wooden cane, he poked a contraption beside him that looked like two grabby robot hands.

“My Banana Peeler needs work.”

“My Banana Peeler?” I asked.
I was too confused to say anything else.

“Oh, yes! It’s messier than doing it by hand, but much more fun. Watch!”

He reached into a pocket in his long white lab coat. Like a magician, he pulled out a banana with a grand “Ta-da!” The hands of the Banana Peeler grabbed it and squeezed hard. The banana shot out of its peel and flew out of sight over the rooftops.
The old man slapped his knee. He waggled his bushy eyebrows at me. “You see?” he said. “Oodles of fun! I invented it myself!” My eyes opened wide. “You’re an inventor?” I asked.

“I try to be!” he said. “Fopernicus Funson Faraday’s the name!” He twirled his cane and made a fancy bow. He swept his lab coat behind him like a cape and showed me the top of his bald head. Tufts of wild white hair stuck out above his ears.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Faraday!” I said. “I’m Amy. We just moved in next door.”

“Did you now?” he said, sounding curious. He peered at me. “Hmm. You’re a very blurry young lady.”

“I am?” I said.

“Ah, wait!” he cried. “Silly me!” He reached into his coat and pulled out an enormous pair of glasses. He put them on.
They made his bright, twinkling eyes look as big as dinner plates.

“That’s better! Oh yes, Amy, I like the cut of your jib.” He looked me up and down. “The coat, the goggles. Very snazzy. You must be an inventor too!”

I blushed. “I guess so,” I said. Then I looked down at the ground. “But not a real
one. My inventions always make a mess.”

“But the best inventions make a mess!” said Mr. Faraday. “Like my Banana Peeler! Like all my inventions!”

“You have others?” I asked. “Will you show them to me?”

He chuckled. His eyes sparkled at me like diamonds. “Of course I will, Amy. Anything for a fellow inventor!”
I started visiting Mr. Faraday every day after school. He was always working on a new invention. He couldn’t wait to show me each one.

“Look, Amy!” he said one day. “It’s my Toothbrush Helmet!” Six toothbrushes whizzed down from the helmet and scrubbed his teeth. They also scrubbed his bushy eyebrows, the hair round his ears, and even
the inside of his nose. We both laughed as he wiped the toothpaste off his face. “It needs work,” he said. “But I do like having a nice, minty-fresh nose!”

At home, I tried to make my own Banana Peeler and Toothbrush Helmet. But I got in trouble for getting bananas in the curtains and toothpaste in my hair.

At my new school, I told my teacher about the inventions. She just said, “That’s nice,
Amy.”

On the playground, the other kids didn’t think much of the inventions either. “Those don’t sound very good,” they all said. No one seemed to get it.

Then one day, my teacher made an announcement. “Next week, our school is having its first ever science fair,” she told my class. My ears perked up. “The best invention will win a trophy. And the inventor’s name and picture will be in the newspaper!”

I was so excited I ran all the way home after school. Then I ran through the house, and right up to the back door.

“Where are you going, Amy?” my mom asked.

“I need Mr. Faraday’s help inventing something!” I said.

My mom and dad gave me worried looks. “That’s great, honey…” said my mom.
“We just think you should have friends your own age,” said my dad.

“And Mr. Faraday’s inventions…” said my mom.

“Well, they don’t seem very…good,” said my dad.
“Oh, but they are good,” I said. “When he helps me win the science fair, you’ll see!”

I was out the door before they could say anything else.

I found Mr. Faraday in the middle of his yard, peering through his glasses at a large black cat. The cat was curled up on the ground, fast asleep in the warm sun.

I ran up to Mr. Faraday and told him all about the science fair. “You see? I need your help if I’m going to win. I need to make the best invention ever!” I said.

“Hmmm,” said Mr. Faraday. “Well, what about this?” He pointed at the cat with his cane.

I frowned. “But that’s just a cat.”

“What?” he cried. “This is Curie! She isn’t just any cat. She’s my lab partner.”

“How come I’ve never met her?” I asked. Mr. Faraday scratched the hair above his
ears. “Well, she isn’t here much. She comes and goes. Poof! Just like that! Like most cats do. Where do cats go all day? What do they do? Nobody knows! And when they are around, they just sleep and sleep and sleep. So when Curie fell asleep in my yard today, I had an idea. I decided to turn her into a Cat Clock!”

“A Cat Clock?” I asked. “What’s that?”

“I’ll show you!” he said. With his cane, he pointed at the dirt around Curie. He had scratched numbers in a circle around her, just like the numbers on a clock. “The Cat Clock tells the time with a shadow,” he said.

He pointed at the sun. “When the sun moves through the sky, Curie’s shadow moves on the ground and lines up with the numbers. Just like the hand of a clock! You see?”

“I see!” I said. “But what about when she
wakes up and moves?”

Mr. Faraday laughed. “Well, the Cat Clock needs work, like everything I invent. That’s why it’s a bad idea!”

“But you don’t have bad ideas,” I said, confused.

“Oh, but I do,” he said. “All my ideas are bad!”


Mr. Faraday let out a big belly laugh. “But of course you will!” he cried. “That’s how the best inventions start! You take a bad idea, and you work and work and work on it until you turn it into a good one! You see?”

I thought hard. “I don’t see,” I sighed. “Maybe I’m just not an inventor.”

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Faraday. “Of course
you are. You just need to learn a few things. Even the greatest inventors in history…”

Then he trailed off. He got very quiet and still. His eyes sparkled. “Amy,” he said. “I know how to help you win that science fair. I’ve just had my best bad idea ever!”

He spun around, his coat flapping. “Curie, come! We haven’t a moment to lose!”

But his cat was gone. Some numbers in the dirt were all that was left of the Cat Clock.

“Well, well,” said Mr. Faraday, scratching his wild hair and laughing. “Where does that cat go all day?”
That night, I was so excited I couldn’t sleep. Popping and banging and fizzing sounds from next door drifted in through my bedroom window. I lay awake, listening.

The next morning, I ran to see Mr. Faraday before school. I found him at the end of his yard. He was carefully inspecting a small, wooden shed.


Mr. Faraday chuckled and shook his head. “Be patient, Amy.” He tapped the shed with his cane. “It’s still a bad idea. It needs oodles of work before it’s a good one! So, no going inside until it’s ready, OK?”

He patted me on the shoulder. I sighed and said, “OK.” Then I headed off to school.

In class, my teacher asked us if we had any ideas for the science fair. I raised my hand and told her all about the Cat Clock.

“Well, that’s very creative, Amy,” my teacher responded. “But it doesn’t sound like a real invention.”

Some of the other kids started laughing. I
put my head on my desk. None of them knew anything about real inventions, I thought.

On the way home from school, I tried to think of ideas for the science fair, even bad ones. But all I could think about was Mr. Faraday’s shed. Then, a loud voice broke me out of my daydreams.

“Hey, Amy!” I knew who it was without turning around. Gavin was in my class, but he also lived on my street. He was the kind of kid who liked to catch spiders and scare people with them. He also liked to laugh at me.

“What time is it, Amy?” he asked.
“I don’t know,” I said.
“Why don’t you check your Cat Clock?” He laughed so hard he almost fell over. “You sure do have some silly ideas!”
“I do not,” I said, as calmly as I could.
“I have great ideas. I’m going to win that
science fair, just you watch.”

“So what?” said Gavin with his nose in the air. “I don’t care about that.”

“That’s just because you don’t have any good ideas yourself,” I said.

“I do, too!” said Gavin, poking his chest with his thumb. “My ideas are way better than yours. And that silly Mr. Faraday’s.”

My jaw dropped. “What?” I said. “Mr. Faraday has the best ideas in the world!”
Gavin crossed his arms. “Oh yeah?” he said. “Prove it!”

I felt like steam was coming out of my ears. “Fine, I will!” I said. “Come with me.” I stomped home, with Gavin right behind me.

My mom and dad looked happy I had made a friend my own age. I didn’t tell them that Gavin wasn’t my friend. I just led him outside.

“Mr. Faraday!” I called. “Mr. Faraday?” The yard was quiet.

Gavin yawned. “Boring!” he said.

I gave him my best Hairy Eyeball. “Be patient!” I said. And that’s when I remembered Mr. Faraday’s shed. And that gave me a really bad idea.

“Follow me,” I whispered. I jumped over the fence into Mr. Faraday’s yard and tiptoed up to the shed.
A big brass key was sticking out of the door. I could hear ticking sounds coming from inside. I wanted to go in more than ever, but it didn’t feel right after what Mr. Faraday had said. Then Gavin poked me from behind.

“Are we going in or what?” he asked.

“Give me a second!” I said. I took a deep breath. I felt the hairs on my neck stand on end. Then I turned the key, and the door creaked open. I swallowed hard and stepped inside.


Everywhere I looked there were clocks.
Big grandfather clocks and little wooden cuckoo clocks and digital alarm clocks. All of them ticked and tocked and buzzed and beeped. Gavin stepped into the shed next to me. “What is this?” he asked.

I tried to think of something. “It’s…it’s a ride!” I lied. “It’s the best ride ever.”

“It doesn’t look like much of a ride,” he said.

“Well, it is,” I said. I gave him the Hairy Eyeball again.

He gave me one right back. “Make it go, then,” he said.

I gulped. I didn’t know what to do. I looked around the shed, hoping to find a way out of my lie. That’s when I saw two big red buttons on the wall. One said “BACK,” and the other said “FORWARD.” Next to them was a sign that said in big letters “DON’T PUSH.”
I knew this was my worst idea yet, but I also wanted Gavin to stop teasing me. I walked towards the buttons. At the same time, Mr. Faraday walked into the shed.

“Amy!” he cried. “What on earth are you doing?”

I was so surprised that I jumped a foot into the air. And just then, Curie appeared out of nowhere right under my feet. I tripped over her and fell forward. I couldn’t stop myself. I fell right into the big red button that said “BACK.”

Lights flashed. Wheels turned. All the clocks started ringing. Everything started to shake. Mr. Faraday gripped his cane. “Hold on!” he shouted.

**BOOM!** Wind rushed through our hair. Stars and clouds swirled around us. It felt like we were on a roller coaster going backwards down a big drop. All the clocks
spun backwards, getting faster and faster. They spun back and back and back.

Then, *BONK.* The shed stopped. We all tumbled onto the floor, except for Curie. She stayed perfectly on her feet. She meowed. The rest of us slowly stood up, feeling wobbly and dizzy.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Faraday,” I said. “It was
an accident.” I was worried he’d be mad at me, but he wasn’t listening. He was tapping parts of the shed with his cane. The clocks quietly ticked, and the pipes quietly hissed.

“It worked,” he said softly to himself. Then he laughed and raised his arms in triumph. “It worked!”

“What worked?” Gavin asked. “Was that the ride?”

Mr. Faraday wasn’t listening to Gavin either. He was pulling a tiny gold pocket watch with a long chain out of his lab coat. He opened it up like a seashell and studied it through his big glasses.

With a shaky voice, he said, “We’ve gone back in time three thousand years.” Then he ran over to the globe in the middle of the shed. He looked at it, then back to us, then back at it, then back at us again. His eyes lit up. “We’re in ancient Egypt!” he cried.
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Ancient Egypt

“We’re in ancient Egypt?” I gasped. “But how?”

Mr. Faraday grinned and opened his arms wide. “This is my Fantastic Shed!” he said. “It’s my greatest invention ever. We can go anywhere in the world! To any time in history!” He twirled his cane. “I’m taking you on a quest, Amy, to meet all the great inventors. They’ll show you how to turn bad
ideas into good ones. They’ll help you win that science fair!”

Then he tossed his cane aside, grabbed my hands, and danced me around in a wild jig.

“You’re liars!” Gavin shouted. We stopped dancing. He pointed angrily at both of us. “Sheds can’t go back in time. Cats can’t be clocks. And that was not the best ride ever.”

I couldn’t meet Gavin’s eyes, but Mr.
Faraday smiled at him. “Well, hello, young man!” he said. “How nice of you to join us!”

He did a sweeping, fancy bow. “Faraday’s the name. What’s yours?” He reached out a friendly hand. Gavin didn’t shake it.

“I’m Gavin,” he said, “and I’m going home.” He turned on his heel, opened the door, and stepped outside.

Sand blew into his face. Bright sunlight filled the shed. Giant pointy buildings made of stone towered over us. Pyramids! In the distance, a river snaked through the desert. Gavin and I stood and stared, our mouths hanging open. We really were in ancient Egypt.

Before we knew what to say, Curie ran past us out of the shed. “Quick! Follow her!” yelled Mr. Faraday. “She knows where to go!”
Gavin and I looked at each other and shrugged. Then we ran after Curie. She led us down to a small mud hut by the river and scratched at the door. A lively old woman with wild eyes peeked out.

When she saw us, her black hair stuck straight out like an old paintbrush, and she let out a squeaky yelp. “Oh me! Oh my! You’re here! I must have the wrong time!” She grabbed Curie and ducked back inside.
Confused, Gavin and I looked to Mr. Faraday. “Come along,” he said. “You’ll like her!” He swept us into the hut with his cane.

“I’m so sorry for the mess,” the old woman muttered as we came in. “Silly me, I lost track of the time. Oh, watch your step!”

I tripped right over a sleeping cat. Then I saw that there were cats everywhere, lounging happily all over the sandy floor. The warm sound of purring filled the hut.

“Wow,” I said. “You must really love cats.”

“Oh, I do,” said the woman, petting Curie in her arms. “We Egyptians believe that cats are very special.”

“What’s so special about them?” Gavin asked.

“Why, everything!” she replied, picking up a second cat. “Cats can see in the dark. They can jump seven times their height.
They can even time travel.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Gavin, but Mr. Faraday nodded.

“That makes perfect sense!” he said. “It explains where they go all the time.”

The woman nodded and picked up a third cat. “Yes,” she said. “Curie visited me and told me you’d come.”

“Curie spoke to you?” I asked. “You can understand her?”

“Of course!” said the woman. “I speak Cat. I wouldn’t be much of an inventor if I didn’t.” Then she smiled. “My name is Amenamet, but you can call me Aunt Metta.”

Mr. Faraday bowed to Aunt Metta and put his hand on my shoulder. “This is one of the inventors I wanted you to meet,” he said.

Just then, Aunt Metta threw her hands into the air, and the three cats in her arms went flying. “The bread! I lost track of time!” she
cried as she ran out of the room.

She came back with a blackened loaf of bread. Smoke curled towards the ceiling. “It’s burnt, but it’s still all right to eat,” she said.
So we sat on the sandy floor and ate the burnt bread with Aunt Metta. Gavin didn’t like the taste. He got up and started trying to teach the cats to play fetch. He threw a stick around the hut. They weren’t dogs, so they just sat there.

I tried to ignore him so I could talk to Aunt Metta. “How do you come up with your ideas?” I asked her.

“I get them all from my cats,” she answered. “Cats are smarter than us, so they have lots of ideas.”

She told me she invented toothpaste because cats told her humans have bad breath. She invented makeup because cats said humans should look prettier. She invented the calendar because cats kept asking her what day it was.

“But there is one thing I have still not invented.” She put her head in her hands and
sighed. “A way to tell the time! That’s why I never know what time it is.”

“Don’t the cats have any good ideas?” I asked.

Aunt Metta shook her head sadly. “Cats are never on time for anything,” she said. “So all their ideas for telling time are bad. I tried everything they said! Balls of yarn, dishes of milk, even live mice.” She sighed again. “That last idea was extra bad.”

I looked around at the cats. Curie had fallen asleep in a patch of sunlight by the window. That’s when I had my own idea. “I know!” I said. “You need a Cat Clock!”

“A what?” Aunt Metta asked.

I led her to Curie. I drew numbers in the sand. Then I showed Aunt Metta how Curie’s shadow would move with the sun and tell the time.

“You see?” I said.
Aunt Metta scratched her paintbrush hair. “I’m not sure,” she said.

“Well, it’s not a very good invention yet,” I said. “It only works when Curie is sleeping.”

Just then, Gavin threw his stick across the room. It flipped through the air and landed with a THUNK right next to Curie, who bolted away. It stuck straight up in the soft sand, casting a perfect shadow.

I stared at Gavin. His stick had turned the Cat Clock from a bad idea into a good one—a real sundial!

“What?” he said.

Aunt Metta eyes went wide. “This will change everything!” she said. “No one will ever be late again! We’ll know what time to go to bed, and what time to get up. We’ll know when to feed our cats, and when to… Oh, my goodness!”

She stared at the Cat Clock. “Is that the
time? Oh me! Oh my! I’m late again!” She dashed out the door on little legs, followed by her many cats.

As we watched her leave, I sighed. “Mr. Faraday, do I need to speak Cat to be an inventor?” I asked.

Mr. Faraday laughed. “Oh, goodness, no,” he said. “There’s more to it than that.” Then he jabbed his cane into the air. “I know who you need to meet! Come on!”

He bounded back towards the shed, with Curie right behind him.
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The Great Leonardo

“We’re going to the year 1500,” proclaimed Mr. Faraday back in the shed. He pointed his cane at the globe. “To Italy! Inventors of pasta and pizza! And clocks that tick and tock!”

He waggled his eyebrows at us. “And you’re going to meet their greatest inventor: Leonardo da Vinci!”

He stretched out his cane and pressed the
FORWARD button.

*BOOM!* It felt like we were on a roller coaster again, but going forward down the drop this time. Stars swirled around us. The clocks on the walls whirred so fast that bits of them flew off.

And then *BONK*. We landed. We were all wobbly again, but we stayed on our feet this time. Marbles and bits of clocks rolled all over the floor. Steam hissed out of the pipes.

“Phew!” said Mr. Faraday. He tapped the shed with his cane. “It still works.”

We stepped out of the shed. We were inside a huge room with a high ceiling. Birds flew and tweeted in the beams above us. On desks and tables, diaries lay open. Their pages were filled with pictures of flying creatures. Strange inventions made out of wood and ropes creaked around us.

Leonardo was in the room too, snoring
loudly. Long, gray hair and a long, gray beard flowed down from his head. He was spattered with paint. He lay on a large, odd-looking bed.

Just then, a clock chimed. The birds above our heads squawked. A bucket of water swung down from the ceiling. It smashed into a big bell with a loud CLANG. The bell swung into a tall, heavy plank of wood and knocked it over. That fell onto another plank.
Which fell onto another. And another.

The planks fell like dominoes. The last one fell down onto the end of a see-saw. The other end of the see-saw slammed upward into Leonardo’s bed.

With a *SPROING*, the bed flung Leonardo across the room. He woke up in mid-air with a shout. He did a flip and started flapping his arms like a bird. But, of course, he didn’t fly. He landed flat on his face in a pile of feathers on the floor.

It was hard not to laugh, but I was also impressed. Most people use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning, or their parents get them up. But not Leonardo. He had invented a bed that woke him up all by itself.

Leonardo jumped up and brushed the feathers off himself. Two birds flew down and landed on his shoulders. He didn’t seem surprised to see us, just annoyed.
“Mr. Leonardo, sir!” said Mr. Faraday eagerly. He did an extra-fancy bow, going so low that his nose almost touched the ground. “What an honor to meet one of the best inventors of all time!”

“One of the best?” said Leonardo. “I am the best inventor of all time.” He spoke very fast, with an Italian accent.

“I am also the best painter,” he said. He pulled out a paintbrush and quickly finished one of the paintings on his wall. “And the best musician.” He pulled out a violin and played a quick song. Then he threw the violin out the window.

We gasped.

Leonardo shrugged. “I will make another one in five minutes,” he said.

Suddenly, he saw Curie and shrieked. “What is that doing here?”

“This is Curie,” I said.
“Keep her away from my birds!” he cried. 
“She wouldn’t hurt your birds,” I said. 
“Would you, Curie?”
Curie meowed.

Leonardo narrowed his eyes at us. “Who are you?” he asked. “Why do you disturb me? Can’t you see I am busy?” He turned away from us and started painting again.

“We are inventors,” said Mr. Faraday. “From the future!”

“Gavin’s not an inventor,” I said.
“I could be,” said Gavin. “I have ideas! I fixed the Cat Clock, didn’t I?”

“That was just luck,” I said. “If you have ideas, how come you’ve never told me them?”

“You’ve never asked,” he replied.
That made me think. He was right. I had never asked.

“Hush!” shouted Leonardo. He had finished
another painting. “If you are inventors, show me something you invented.”

“With pleasure, sir,” said Mr. Faraday. He led Leonardo to the Fantastic Shed. He raised his bushy eyebrows and smiled wide. “This is how we got here from the future, Mr. Leonardo, sir!”

Leonardo looked at the shed for a long time and stroked his beard. “Not bad,” he muttered. “But not as good as my inventions. Behold!”

He turned and yanked a sheet off a mad musical machine. It was a mess of strings and keys. It looked like someone had thrown a harp at a piano. “This,” he declared, “is my Plinkini Plonconi!”

Gavin burst out laughing.

“What is funny?” said Leonardo.

“Nothing!” said Gavin. “I like your piano…thing.”
“It is not a piano thing!” said Leonardo in a huff. “It is a Plinkini Plonkoni.” Curie jumped up and walked across the instrument’s keys. It did make a plinky-plonk kind of sound.

Leonardo pointed back to his special alarm-clock bed. “Well, what did you think of that?” he asked. “It is part bed, part
catapult. I call it the Bed-a-Pult!”

“It looked fun!” said Gavin. “Can we try it?”

Leonardo frowned hard, and his voice went low. “It is not a ride for kids.”

“Ooh!” I said. “What if we turned it into one? A Bed-a-Pult for kids would be the best ride ever!” I nudged Gavin. “Just like I promised you.”

Leonardo was about to tell me just what he thought of my idea when Mr. Faraday jumped in. “What is that?” he asked. He was pointing at something that looked like a strange bike with huge bat wings.

“Don’t look at that!” Leonardo shouted. He tried to hide the machine with his body, but it was much bigger than him. “It is a bad idea.”

“Oh, my favorite!” said Mr. Faraday. “We love bad ideas, don’t we, Amy?”

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I nodded.

“Not this one,” said Leonardo. “This is the worst idea of all time. Watch.”

He jumped into the seat of the machine and started pedaling. The huge paper wings started to flap. They blew pages from Leonardo’s diaries all over the room.

Leonardo pedaled harder and harder, but
the machine didn’t move. When he couldn’t pedal any longer, he slumped down. He put his head in his hands. “I will never fly!” he wailed. “I am a bad inventor!”

Mr. Faraday put a hand on his shoulder. “No, you are not,” he said. “Every great inventor has bad ideas.”

Leonardo looked like he was going to cry. I wasn’t sure if I liked him, but I did feel sorry for him.

“I can make something that flies,” said Gavin. “That’s easy!” He picked up one of Leonardo’s diary pages. It had a picture of a bird on it. He folded it into a paper airplane. Then he threw it, and it flew across the room.

Leonardo sat up. “What was that?” he asked.


Gavin folded another paper airplane and
threw it.

Leonardo’s eyes sparkled. “I have an idea!” he said.

He jumped on top of his flying machine and folded the wings so they looked more like Gavin’s paper airplane. Then, he took apart his whole Bed-a-Pult and put it all back together around the flying machine. He got into the seat again and waited.

Suddenly, the clock chimed again. The birds squawked. The hammer hit the bell. The planks fell onto the see-saw. And the see-saw catapulted Leonardo and his flying machine into the air.

It soared across the room and sailed right through a big open window. “This is a bad ideaaaaa!” Leonardo shouted.

We ran to the window just in time to see him crash into the top of a large lemon tree. The flying machine stopped dead in the
leaves with a loud *CRUNCH*.

A few quiet seconds went by. Then Leonardo climbed out of his broken machine onto a branch. He was covered in sticky pulp and lemon peels. I thought he’d be upset, but he had a big grin on his face.

“I was flying!” he cried up at us. “Did you see me? I flew!”

“He didn’t really fly. He crashed,” muttered Gavin.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Mr. Faraday. “He looked pretty good to me!”

I sighed. Leonardo wasn’t going to help me become an inventor. A broken bike with bat wings wouldn’t win the science fair.

“Never fear!” said Mr. Faraday, jabbing his cane into the air again. “I have one more inventor in mind. If he can’t help you, no one can!”
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Benjamin Franklin

We got back into the creaking shed. Parts were still dropping off the clocks. Steam was still pouring out of the pipes. I gulped. The shed looked like it was falling apart.

Mr. Faraday didn’t seem worried. He was too excited for us to meet the next great inventor. He set the shed for America in the year 1751 and pressed the FORWARD button again.
BOOM! The shed lurched forward. We held on tight as it shook and jerked. The stars and the wind swirled around us again. Then KERCHUNK. We stopped with a terrible crash, and all the lights shut off.

“What happened?” I asked, trying not to panic. “Did we make it?”

“Not to worry, not to worry!” said Mr. Faraday. He checked his watch and globe. Then he started tapping parts of the shed with his cane.

“We made it,” he said. “There’s just one teeny, tiny problem.” He took a deep breath. “Remember when I told you the shed wasn’t ready? Well, it wasn’t. Now we’re out of power. We’re stuck here unless we can get some more.”

“Out of power?” I cried.
“Stuck?” cried Gavin.
Mr. Faraday nodded sadly. I hung my
head. This was why he’d told me not to go in the shed.

Then everyone spoke at once. “It’s my fault,” we all cried.

“I came in here when I shouldn’t,” I said. “I made this silly shed,” said Mr. Faraday. “I made fun of both of you,” said Gavin.
Then Curie meowed, like it was her fault for tripping me.

We all stared at Curie. Then we laughed. We laughed until our sides hurt. When we finished, we felt much better.

“Come on, young inventors,” said Mr. Faraday. “Let’s go meet the greatest inventor of all time: Benjamin Franklin! He’ll know how to get us home!”

Curie took a careful step outside. She darted back in again. It was raining hard. The wind howled. Lightning flashed across the sky. Thunder boomed. Gavin and I paused at the door, but Mr. Faraday cheered excitedly. He led us out into the storm.

We were on a grassy hill. At the very top of the hill, flopping around on the ground like a fish, was Benjamin Franklin. On his hands he wore wooden paddles that looked like flippers. He was slapping them against
the mud, trying to get up. But he was also tangled in the long string of a kite, like a badly-wrapped Christmas present.

“Looks like he’s having a lot of bad ideas all at the same time!” Mr. Faraday observed.

“Oh, don’t mind me!” chortled Benjamin Franklin. “I’m just flying my kite!”

“Lovely weather for it!” shouted Mr. Faraday over the rain.

“That’s what I thought!” Benjamin
Franklin shouted back. “Glad you agree!”

“It doesn’t look like you’re flying anything,” said Gavin.

“And why are you wearing flippers on your hands?” I asked.

“Oh, I invented them to swim through the rain!” said Benjamin Franklin. “Bad idea. I think they’d work better on my feet!”

“What about two on your feet and two on your hands?” asked Mr. Faraday.

He helped Benjamin Franklin stand up. The two inventors started chatting excitedly about flippers. They clearly didn’t notice how wet we were all getting.

“But why are you flying a kite in the rain in the first place?” I asked.

“Oh, to fly that up into the storm!” Benjamin Franklin pointed with a flipper to a glass jar he had tied to the kite. The kite was still tangled around him. “I’m trying
to catch lightning in a jar! Then I’m going to take the lightning and put it into flies to make lightning bugs!”

“How fun!” exclaimed Mr. Faraday.

“That sounds like a bad idea,” said Gavin.

“Oh, yes, it’s a terrible idea!” shouted Benjamin Franklin. “I love terrible ideas, don’t you?”

“We do!” said Mr. Faraday. “Don’t we, Amy?”

“I don’t know about that one,” I said, unsure.

Just then, there was another flash of lightning across the sky. At the same time, I felt a flash inside my mind.

“Wait a second!” I said. “What if we turn his terrible idea into a good one?”

Through the pouring rain, I saw Mr. Faraday’s eyes sparkle. “Go on,” he said.

I turned back to the shed. “I know how we
can get power to go home!”

More lightning tore across the sky. That’s when I saw Gavin’s eyes light up too. He was having the same idea as I was.

“The lightning!” shouted Gavin. “We need to catch the lightning!”

“Yes,” I said. “But not in a jar. In the shed!”

“But how?” asked Mr. Faraday.
That’s when I decided to ask Gavin something I’d never asked him before. “Gavin,” I shouted through the rain. “Do you have any good ideas?”

He grinned. “The kite!” he said.

I grinned back at him.

“Sounds like a crazy idea to me!” Benjamin Franklin yelled happily. “My favorite kind!”

We helped him untangle himself from his kite. Then he helped us tie one end of the kite string to the shed.

“Now we need to tie something metal to the kite, to attract the lightning,” I said. I ran over to the Fantastic Shed and yanked the brass key out of the door. “Like this!”

“Great idea!” said Gavin.

Mr. Faraday and Benjamin Franklin clapped and cheered. They did a muddy jig while we tied the key to the kite.

“This is the best bad idea ever!” said
Benjamin Franklin. “I like you crazy people. I wish I could come with you!”

Mr. Faraday put his hand on Benjamin Franklin’s shoulder. “So do I, my good fellow. But you need to stay here and keep having bad ideas. Some of them will turn into great ones!”

“Plus, you have to fly the kite for us,” I said. I handed him the kite and key. “Don’t get tangled this time.”

“Oh, I won’t!” he said. Then he gave me a big, wet hug.

We said our goodbyes and ran back into the shed, dripping rainwater all over the floor. Curie curled up in a corner. Gavin and I held our hands over the FORWARD button. Mr. Faraday gripped his cane. Thunder rumbled around us like a moving train.

“Go!” I shouted.

Benjamin Franklin let go of the kite, and
the wind caught it instantly. It soared up through the pouring rain into the dark sky, whipping from side to side in the angry storm. The key jangled, but it didn’t come off. We all held our breaths.

*POW!* A bolt of lightning struck the key. Electricity zapped through the kite, down the string, and into the shed. It shot into the wheels and cogs and gears and clocks. The whole shed burst into life.

Gavin and I hit the FORWARD button at the exact same time.
7

Home

**BOOM!** We rocketed forward through the swirling fog of time. The clocks on the walls spun so fast that they broke into a thousand tiny parts. Lights exploded. Water burst from the pipes. Marbles and cogs bounced off the walls.

Then, **CRASH!** The whole shed shattered into a million pieces. We fell face down with a thump onto a bed of soft grass. Except for
Curie, who landed perfectly on her feet, of course.

I looked up from the grass. I blinked once. Twice. The Fantastic Shed lay scattered in pieces all around us. But I recognized where we were. We were in Mr. Faraday’s yard.

“What time is it?” I asked.
“What year is it?” asked Gavin.

Mr. Faraday studied his pocket watch through his big glasses. He took a deep breath. “It’s the right time.” A grin spread across his face. “We’re home!”

We cheered. We danced a jig together around the pile of broken shed bits. Gavin and I high-fived.

“You had good ideas back there!” Gavin said to me.
“You too!” I said.

Mr. Faraday clapped his hands together. “I knew you were inventors,” he said. “Both of you!”

“Thanks, Mr. Faraday,” I said. “But…I’m not a real inventor yet. I never came up with an idea for the science fair.”

“Wait,” said Gavin. “Yes, you did.”

“I did?” I said.

“Yes. Remember when you promised me the best ride ever?”

My cheeks went red, and I looked down at my feet. “I’m sorry I lied about that.”

“Don’t be sorry! You can still keep your promise!” He laughed a friendly laugh. “Leonardo’s Bed-a-Pult! You said we could turn it into a ride for kids!”

I gasped. He was right. “Gavin,” I said. “That’s the best bad idea ever!”

A week later, Gavin and I won the science
fair with our new invention: the Kid-a-Pult. It threw kids into the air and then landed them safely on a pile of feathers. Our teacher thought it was a terrible idea, but she said it was very...creative. Everyone at school thought it was the best invention of all time.

No one ever believed us about the Fantastic Shed, just like they never believed me about the Cat Clock. Gavin and I didn’t mind. They didn’t know anything about real inventions anyway.

Mr. Faraday never fixed the shed. He went back to his other inventions. And Gavin and I helped him come up with new bad ideas every day after school.

Curie liked to join us too, always just in time for her afternoon nap. We never knew where she went the rest of the time, but we could guess. When she curled up to sleep, she always had sand on her paws.
Ben Bellamy is a writer and educator from London, England. Today, you can find him in San Francisco, either running through Golden Gate Park or reading a book with Quincy, his pet cockatiel, perched on his shoulder. He hopes his work with the Institute of Reading Development continues to help children everywhere discover the joy of reading wonderful stories.
Helen Stebakov has enjoyed drawing from an early age. She lives near Toronto with her family, including her seven-year-old daughter who gives her excellent advice about her artwork.