

## THE MAD INVENTOR

“What do you want this time of night, then?” demanded the gate-keeper.

A man stood before the Pearly Gates, looking extremely sorry for himself. He was startled at the rude welcome.

“Well, um—”, he stuttered nervously. “It’s just that I’ve just – well, you know... passed on. And I’m not sure what the normal procedure is, so...” His voice tailed off.

The gate-keeper looked him up and down slowly. “You mean, you’ve died and you just thought you’d come up here and wangle your way in, eh?!” The gate-keeper acted as one who was wise to the ways of the afterworld. “Well, my friend, it isn’t that easy.” He reached for a pile of forms – blue ones, pink ones, an extremely thick pale green one – and licked his pencil in anticipation. “There’s some paperwork to go through and then we’ll see whether we let you in, or –” The gate-keeper gave a flick of his thumb in the general direction of the Other Premises, and smirked.

“I see, St Peter—” mumbled the weary traveller.

“And don’t you Saint Peter me!” snapped the gate-keeper. “He’s gone off on his holidays, ain’t he? So I’m from the agency, ain’t I? Standing in for a few days – at short notice, as it so happens. And of course I have to end up on the night-shift. Ain’t right, at my age. So don’t you ‘Saint Peter’ me. You just call me ‘Sir’ and we’ll get along just fine.” He licked the end of his pencil again. “Right, then: name?”

“Samuel Bentor.”

“B – E – N – T – O – R. Bentor. Profession?”

“Scientist,” said the man apologetically. “I hope that doesn’t...”

“Samuel Bentor the Mad Inventor!” laughed the gate-keeper uproariously. “That’s a good one. Must remember to tell that to the wife tomorrow. Samuel Bentor the Mad Inventor! Ha-ha!”

“Well, not exactly—”

“Never mind! We haven’t got all night. Age?”

“Seventy-seven.”

“That’s about right. Won’t have any complaints there, eh? Right, that deals with registration. Just sign here and we’ll move right along to the tricky bits – and there. And there. And there. And the date here, if you will. Now then, let’s see what’s next... Right!” The temporary Guardian of Paradise cleared his throat. “First question on this sheet: ‘What do you consider to

be your major achievements on Earth? Please list in chronological order.’ OK, let’s put down something – anything you can think of? Anything at all?”

The traveller sighed and put down his overnight bag. “Let me see...”

“Come on, come on, I’m getting cold standing out here. And there’s bound to be a few more turning up tonight. I don’t like a queue! Looks bad.”

“Well, the first thing I invented was the Elasto-Plane which was an aeroplane which was launched using a gigantic elastic band, and allowed people to be flown from country to country without any fuel.”

“Hm? Sounds interesting. And was it successful?”

“Well, it was at first. But then one day there was a disaster when the rubber-band snapped and it bounced all over the countryside, knocking over farmers in the fields and snapping trees until it finally came to rest in the centre of Paris. You must understand it was a very large rubber-band and something like that could easily have killed someone.”

“What a shame. Next?”

“Well the next thing I invented was a small vacuum-cleaner, powered by snores, which automatically cleaned your house as you slept.”

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