

## **Benny's Old Banger.**

Benny Golan lives in a village in Israel near the border with Gaza. He has a nice house, a sweet wife, a modest job nearby, and is generally considered to be a model citizen. However, he is a little eccentric in one respect. Every Saturday he polishes his car - twice. It's not because it's a new car - on the contrary - this car is very old and nobody is quite sure what make it is. Benny rarely takes it out for a drive. Yet, every Saturday there he is, sleeves rolled up, scrubbing and then polishing the bodywork until it gleams so brightly it almost hurts the eyes.. His neighbours often come out to watch him and smile indulgently as he vigorously polishes what they call 'his old banger'. They particularly enjoy watching him when he has finished. Because then he gets in the car and drives it to the end of his field, quite close to the border. And there he leaves it all week long. His neighbours shout 'Hey, Benny! Watch out! A rocket might hit it!' But Benny just smiles to himself.

During the week, Benny will often sit on his porch, looking down to the end of the garden as though he were guarding his old banger. His wife sits alongside him, knitting something complicated. To see them sitting there so comfortable you would think that there were no guys on the other side of the border with nothing better to do than tinker with rockets and fire them. On the porch, Benny likes to listen to the Army Radio music programmes and also the news. His ears always prick up when there is a report of rockets being fired from over the border.

Although his neighbours may think Benny is a little eccentric, in fact this is far from the case. There is a reason for all his scrubbing and polishing. He actually wants one of those rockets to explode on his car. That is why he parks it every week at the very end of his garden as near to the border as possible. But, so far, no rockets have come within a mile of it. Why does Benny want his car to be hit by a rocket? Because the State reimburses any damage done by rockets launched into Israel. Any damage - totally refunded. Think of that! If a rocket were to hit Benny's old banger, nicely polished as it is, he would be paid a sum of money probably enough to buy a small Ford. And that is his ambition - to own a small Ford. And Benny reckons his wife would be very happy to go for drives, into the interior on the weekend, in a small Ford. It may not be totally logical to expect a rocket to be fired at something so close to the border, but Benny is hoping that the gleaming bodywork of his old banger might attract the aim of one of those would-be marksmen over the other side.

And Benny is rewarded. All his scrubbing and polishing pays off. Out of the sky, one fine sunny day, comes a rocket, whistling down towards Benny's garden, trailing smoke, glinting in the sun. Benny grabs his wife and they run to their safety room. An alarm howls, babies cry, dogs bark, old ladies wave fists in the air. Everybody listens from their safety rooms. The whistling noise comes close and, suddenly, there is a huge 'Kerrump!' and a rending of metal nearby. Then silence. Benny leaves his safety room, goes to his front door and looks out. 'Don't go out!' 'Wait for the explosion!' shout his neighbours, who are also peering out. But Benny cannot wait. He steps out and runs

down his field. He starts shouting and laughing and dancing about like a madman. 'Look!' he shouts. 'It hit my car!' 'It hit my car!' The neighbours tumble out and stand amazed. It's true. The rocket has landed right on top of Benny's old banger, flattening the roof completely. Benny is jumping for joy. At last, all his scrubbing and polishing has paid off. 'It didn't explode', says the oldest man in their street. 'So what?'; says Benny, still laughing, 'It hit my car!' The neighbours smile and shake their heads in wonder at his happiness. Benny runs indoors to telephone the Rocket Disposal Unit at the nearby Army camp. Within ten minutes a jeep and a Humvee shriek to a halt outside Benny's house. In the jeep is an earnest-looking, young female officer and in the Humvees are a group of young bored soldiers. The officer gives her orders. The soldiers jump out. They herd the neighbours out of the way. They hammer thin metal sticks into the ground around the broken car and attach yellow tape to them. The officer strides purposefully towards the rocket, carrying a small case, looking almost like a doctor on her rounds. She arrives at the car. From the small case she takes a pair of protective glasses and a stethoscope. She studies the rocket. It is one of the smaller rockets. She applies the stethoscope to it and listens. Then she leans down towards it and slowly unscrews the end. She pulls out the works and lays them carefully on the ground. There is a collective sigh from the neighbours. The soldiers light up cigarettes. The officer turns and walks back to the house. The soldiers pick up the pieces of the rocket and wander back to their vehicle. 'Are you the owner of the car?' the officer asks Benny. 'I am,' he replies proudly. 'Well, you'll have to fill in this report if you want the state payment,' says the officer. 'Won't be much, I'm afraid, but it'll be something.' Benny looks aghast. 'What do you mean,' he splutters, 'it won't be much?' The officer looks at him pityingly. 'The rocket didn't explode, did it?' 'And it's an old car. You can get a new roof paid for, but that's all.' And she jumps into her jeep and revs off, followed by the Humvee with the bored soldiers.

Benny sits on the ground, completely overcome by the injustice of it all. His wife puts her hand to his cheek and comforts him. 'It's alright, Benny,' she says, 'You can get it repaired and try again.' 'But I wanted to take you out in a new car,' he explains, sorrowfully. 'Oh, who cares about that,' she replies. 'Perhaps there's a rocket over there now, destined to hit your car, as soon as it's back from the garage.' 'Come on,' she says, 'Let's go in. Come and see what I knitted for you.'