

## A story incorporating the words: Desert, Motorcycle, Switchblade

### Kismet

My mother was the epitome of a lady.

I was the result of a single encounter, or possibly one night's encounters, with my father. They were married in a registry office the afternoon before he departed up north, never to return.

But there was a freakish side to the creature. I once overheard a conversation between her and a friend who had asked her why she had never remarried or never even had a male companion. Her reply etched itself into my brain, "If that was what the much vaunted cock is all about, I don't much care for it."

Freakish, but prescient too.

I was single again, sixty and about to embark on a long anticipated adventure. As my last remaining relative I wanted to pop around and tell her where I was going.

As I was about leave she handed me a switchblade, "Son, take this with you, you never know when you might need it."

"Hey this is exquisite, where did you get it?"

"It was amongst your Dad's possessions which they sent back after he was killed in Italy."

It was the most beautifully crafted instrument, an Italian Switchblade.

"Mom, do you realise that this kind of knife is illegal in most countries."

"Oh tosh. Politicians make stupid laws they know nothing about. It's a handy instrument to have in an emergency and it takes up little space."

I examined it in detail, working the smooth mechanism a few times, awed by the quality.

Memory triggers are strange things. My mind flashed back a few years. The blade was almost as long - and the shape of - of the double edged fighting knife that we were issued with and that Sarge Miller of the Parabats had taught us to use so effectively once we had been selected for specialist SAS training.

Coming back to the present I closed the knife and slipped it into my pocket.

"No, not there," she admonished, "Put it in the inside of your riding boot. There it's safe and no one will discover it."

Freakish, prescient, as well as canny; something I'd witnessed on more than one occasion.

I kidded her, as I always did, but obeyed her instruction. "Thanks Mom," I said, as it slipped easily into the inside of my left boot.

I gave her a peck on the cheek and said, "I'm off."

She smiled somewhat wanly as she said, "Goodbye son," with what sounded like an odd finality. The thought briefly flitted across my mind, *would she be alive when I returned*. Her family had a long history of premonitions so, although I dismissed the feeling, it did leave me a little disturbed.

However, that feeling soon disappeared as I took off on my brand new mount with an unnecessary but flamboyant wheelie. I'd figured if Mark Como could win the Dakar on this type of motorcycle then the red dunes of the Kalahari Desert would be a cinch.

My route took me through Ceres and onto the dirt road that led to Calvinia. My first stop was the Tankwa National Park where I overnighted at some pretty basic accommodation

The next day I headed for Upington via Brandvlei and Kenhardt.

It was a wonderful experience riding on roads where meeting another vehicle was an occasion to celebrate with a wave.

I had decided to treat myself to a night of luxury in the River Bank Lodge before heading off to a week of roughing it in the desert.

The following morning it was a strange, cloudy day as I set off to the border post at Tweerivieren. My mind went back to that disturbing impression of a couple of days ago.

But it soon faded as I was bewitched by the passing show - a different world with a lean and sparse beauty all its own.

It had been a particularly dry season and I half hoped it would rain but the clouds soon dissipated. I passed many dry waterholes and the scarce game I saw all seemed somewhat emaciated.

Once in the real sandy part of the desert I had a thoroughly enjoyable time ploughing through the red dunes, though making slow progress till they ended at the edge of a long flat grassland that stretched way into the distance. According to my GPS this is where I wanted to be. It was a pretty remote area where visitors never ventured and was just what I'd wanted to experience - the unspoiled loneliness where man never, or hardly ever, ventured.

With a feeling of freedom and exuberance I headed off into the plain, opening up the bike and standing up in the saddle.

There was no way I could have seen the hole in amongst the dense, short grass.

The bike's front wheel virtually went from whatever speed I'd been doing to zero in a microsecond.

The incredible jolt I felt was followed by a sense of flying in slow motion. I tried to swivel my body in an attempt to land on my feet but got it horribly wrong. My head hit the ground at a funny angle and everything went black.

As consciousness slowly drifted back I became aware of a pain my neck. When I tried to sit up I could not move my lower body. It took a little while to realise that I was paralysed from the waist down.

The bike and my equipment were lying some distance from me and when I tried to propel myself towards it with my arms I realised that my left arm was broken and useless.

By this time dusk was approaching and to my horror the first signs of life were about half a dozen circling hyenas, silently watching me. Food was scarce and it was rather humbling to realise that here I was merely a part of the food chain.

I knew that, when night came, emboldened by a nagging hunger, they would overcome any fear of man that they may or may not have, and that they would dart in and attack as is the wont of their species.

I'd eschewed buying a satellite phone. However, in my situation it would have been useless as, firstly, I couldn't reach it as it would have been on the bike, and secondly, by the time help arrived I'd probably already been distributed down the various alimentary canals of a cackle of hyenas.

The idea of being eaten alive was not the most appealing thing that I had ever imagined. But what the hell were my options?

Then I remembered Mom's insistence, "Put in in your boot."

The switchblade.

This discovery raised my options from a purely unitary one to that of a simple binary nature.

Fortunately my right arm and hand were in sound working order and I managed to extract the switchblade from my boot. I flicked it open. Somehow, in my dire straits, that blade looked strangely comforting.

*So this is it.*

I stared at the blade for a long time, all the while recalling Sarge Miller's thorough training as I placed the blade in the recommended position.

Then I closed my eyes and said a heartfelt thank you to my freakish, prescient Mom, and thrust the switchblade.

