

Two Worlds Meet

The Namaqualand karoo is probably the most uninhabited and inhospitable area in South Africa. Not a place you would like to find yourself stranded.

Well, this is precisely what happened to Dominee Schalk Venter.

Schalk was returning from a farm burial when, literally in the middle of nowhere, his car's engine gave up the ghost.

Not a man to pay attention to the dials on his dashboard, he didn't notice the inexorable creeping of the engine temperature gauge, rising in sync with the slowly leaking radiator.

Rough as these roads are, they are also monotonous and monotony can easily lull you into a dreamy, unobservant trance.

His thoughts were on the coming Sunday's sermon when the car jerked in rhythm with a clanging sound of the engine.

The clanging and jerking discombobulated him for a moment. As he sat there in the silence, trying to make sense of what had just happened, one noise broke the sudden intense silence, the creaking of the overheated engine.

Panic set in. Followed swiftly by naked fear.

He had no provisions, no water. The nearest civilisation of any sort was at least forty kilometres away, or so he surmised.

It is in times like these that people, especially a man of The Cloth turn to their maker. He knelt next to the car and prayed earnestly for some guidance, assistance, anything.

His prayer was interrupted by a sound.

Unnerved by the fact that it could be a wild animal, he jumped into the car and slammed the door.

Winding down the window he listened. The sound seemed to come from all directions at once – a common occurrence in this sparse countryside. It was a rhythmic noise. His mind raced through the wildest fantasies as he saw something beginning to appear over the hillock ahead.

The donkey's ears appeared first.

Jackal thought Schalk in a panic, which subsided as the donkey's head came into view.

Old Vlenters Dominee was on his annual trek to the nearest dorp in his donkey kar to do those things that only Kaspas and his ilk do.

Needlessly, Schalk leapt into the road and held up a hand.

The donkey kar rolled to a stop.

It is difficult to know who was more surprised by this chance meeting but we know who was the more grateful.

Sckalk walked up to the driver and held out his hand, "Dominee Venter," he offered by way of greeting.

"Vlenters Dominee," replied Kaspas, taking the proffered hand.

Now, dear reader, use your imagination. We have two men, one, a Dominee by trade, and another, with the surname of Dominee.

"Wat is jou van?"

"Dominee."

Ek het gevra wat jou van is."

"Dominee."

It took a while to clarify the situation but left both men amused – dour as they both were.

"Klim op, Dominee, ons sal nou-nou daar wees," he said with the wry humour of the folk who live and travel in these arid regions.

Night was approaching fast and with it the sudden drop in temperature.

After the sun had disappeared behind the western horizon Kaspas produced an opaque, label-less bottle and asked, "Wil Dominee 'n slukkie he?"

"Nee dankie," replied the Dominee.

They rode on in silence, the Dominee beginning to feel the cold more than Vlenters who was used to these climes.

The sky darkened and the stars brightened.

Schalk stared at the stars which, even in his dorp, were dimmed by the lighting. Here there was nothing but darkness. It seemed he could reach out and touch Sirius. He knew all about Sirius. The leader of his local Voortrekker group (the Afrikaans equivalent of the Boy Scouts) had proudly pointed out and explained the stars when the Dominee attended their annual overnight camp at the local sports ground.

Yes, and that must be Orion, those three stars. He felt proud of himself.

His reverie was broken by, “Wil Dominee nie ‘n slukkie hê nie?”

“Nee dankie.” He replied and was suddenly more aware of the encroaching cold.

To take his mind off this he turned his attention back to the stars.

From the corner of his eye, he saw it, a brilliant white trail, steaking across the sky before bursting into a white ball as it exploded in the atmosphere far to the West.

“Dominee, dis ‘n teken van geluk,” offered Vlenters, “Ons glo dat dit ‘n teken is dat ons voorvaders met ons tevrede is.”

Schalk had never before heard of anything of this nature before but he reckoned if these folk regarded it as a good sign . . . then he shivered from the cold, and maybe something else.

That voice again, “Wil Dominee ‘n slukkie hê?”

The cold, the shivering that the meteor had sent down his spine combined to break his resolve, “Ja, asseblief.”

He took the proffered bottle gratefully and took a long sip. Then he jerked it from his mouth, turned his head to the side of the donkey car and spat out the contents exclaiming, “Sies, koffie!”

Alexander Morecourt

Translations:

“Wat is jou van?” (What is your surname?)

Ek het gevra wat jou van is.” (I asked what your surname is?)

“Wil Dominee ‘n slukkie he?” (Does Dominee want a sip?)

“Ons glo dat dit ‘n teken is dat ons voorvaders met ons tevrede is.” (This is a sign of good fortune. We believe that our ancestors are happy with us)