

The Sting

“I’m having an accident I don’t have accidents I’m having an accident ...”

In the split second it had taken me to observe that the bee that had dropped on my head through the sunroof was, in fact, a dead one, I glanced back to see the car careering off the road – to the left. I swerved – too sharply – and there I was careering off the road to the right instead. I slammed into the concrete conduit at the roadside with a loud crack, sailed through the air and hit the field that lay beyond, rolled twice and finally came to a halt, the car on its side.

The seat belt held me locked fast, also on my side; the fans were still blasting out air. It was an old car, well past its sell by date, so the open sun roof and fans were all that I had had against the relentless heat of a July afternoon, on the northern plains of Spain ...

I reached out and turned off the engine, very conscious of the full tank – I had refilled only a few miles back. An all consuming feeling of being immensely pissed off overwhelmed me. That was that then. My much vaunted solo jaunt through the Iberian peninsula had come to an abrupt, very rude end ...

I grabbed my bag, fumbled around, released the seat belt and managed to claw my way up to the car door – now the roof – and struggled to open it – upwards. It was very heavy. As I hauled myself up and out, the door fell back closed, pinning me by the thumb which I wrenched free; drops of blood spattered impressively everywhere. Then I made my way back up to the road side – bleeding – and hopped up and down, waving frantically to the passing traffic. It was a B road in the back of beyond, so traffic was, in fact, rather scarce – probably one of the reasons I hadn’t perished in a major collision as I lost control of that bend earlier.

The first vehicle – a lorry – sailed on past, but the next two cars both stopped to help. Fortunately my Spanish is good and I was able to describe what had happened. The police were called and duly arrived – also very concerned and solicitous. They wanted to take me to hospital and only with some difficulty was I able to persuade them that I was, in fact, (apart from the still copiously bleeding thumb) quite unhurt. Angry and pissed off certainly, but nothing more. Everyone – the two groups from the two cars and the police – all agreed it had been a ‘milagro’ – a miracle. Certainly it had!

As we waited for the ‘grua’ (the crane) to arrive and haul the wreckage of my car from the field, I engaged in the surreal scenario of calling my car insurance from the Spanish roadside back to the UK and listened with impotent frustration as the menu system and then prerecorded messages ground slowly through, and I mentally watched my bill get higher and higher. It was an old car with little reclaimable value, even with the comprehensive policy I had. I would have to wait for at least three days whilst an agent was contacted and sent out to assess the wreck and its write off value. No option ...

My solicitous roadside helpers, after reassuring themselves that I was in good (police) hands, bade me farewell and good luck and then left. The grua arrived and – eventually – my hapless car was hauled out of the field, its front wheels all awry and all shook their heads sagely and confirmed it a write off. It would be taken to a local garage and there I would be able to recover

my luggage and complete the required paper work to turn it into fodder for baked bean cans – or artichokes in this part of the world perhaps. Shame I had spent all that money just a short while back replacing battery, tyres, filter systems etc..

Later, from the hotel where the police had helpfully left me, I called my mother, starting the conversation with that always tale tell reassurance that – *really* – I was perfectly alright; however ... And later that afternoon, feeling caught in some otherworld reality – I watched the action replays of that morning's running of the bulls incident from the fiesta of San Fermin in Pamplona, when a bull had turned upon some fallen pursuers and pitch-forked one of them like a bale of straw. As I had watched, horrified, earlier in the day from my hotel in Madrid, I hadn't realized that by nightfall, it would, in a strange parallel scenario, so soon be all over for me too.

The next day, at the garage, I unloaded the car of all the goods I had brought with me on this trip – including my photographic printer, books, camera tripod – everything for an artist in transit in fact. The idea of trying to get it all back to the UK by plane was not a happy one. I eventually divvied everything into two heaps leaving one with the hotel staff – whoever wanted it could take it. The rest I would have to get back – somehow – to England, because – clearly – that was where I was now headed.

But, as I had cleared the last of the gear from the car's back seat, I came upon a poignant reminder – there, dry and brittle lay the corpse of the bee that had been my undoing – evidently dead a very long time and simply stuck somehow up in the sunroof, until finally dislodged, to fall onto my head The rest was, as they say, already history ...