

In Her Name

A Father, A Daughter, and a Promise to Keep Going

Chapter 1

The Desert

The desert was silent in a way most people never experience.

No traffic.

No distant voices.

No hum of civilisation somewhere over the horizon.

Just wind moving slowly across an endless landscape.

I sat on an adventure box beside my pickup truck in the middle of the Gobi Desert, staring out across a horizon that seemed to stretch forever. The sky above me felt enormous, the kind of sky that makes you feel very small very quickly.

Dexter lay beside me on the sand.

He looked perfectly content, the way dogs often do when they are simply resting in the moment. Every now and then his ears twitched as the wind carried new smells across the desert floor.

Behind us sat the truck that had carried us thousands of miles to reach this place.

Dust covered most of it now.

Food was nearly gone.

Water was running low.

Fuel was running lower.

I had spent most of the previous day watching the fuel gauge more closely than the dusty track ahead of me. Out here the distances between places could be enormous, and maps did not always tell the full story about what you would actually find along the way.

The desert doesn't care about your plans.

It doesn't care how far you've travelled or why you came.

It simply exists.

Earlier that afternoon I had driven slowly across the open plains, searching for any sign of a track that might lead somewhere with fuel. But the horizon had remained empty in every direction.

Eventually I stopped the truck.

Not because I wanted to stop.

But because I needed to think.

I stepped out into the open air and sat down on one of the adventure boxes we carried for storage during the journey.

The wind brushed lightly across the sand.

Dexter wandered a few metres away, sniffing the ground before eventually lying down beside me again.

For a long time I just sat there.

When you spend enough time in places like this, something strange happens to your sense of time. Minutes stretch out in ways that feel different from the busy rhythm of everyday life.

You notice things you might normally ignore.

The sound of wind moving across sand.

The distant shapes of dunes shifting in the heat.

The weight of silence.

It was in that silence that a thought slowly began to settle into my mind.

Dexter and I might not make it out of the desert.

The realisation didn't arrive with panic.

It came quietly.

Matter-of-fact.

The way truth sometimes does when there is no point pretending otherwise.

I remember looking down at Dexter for a long moment.

Dogs don't understand things like fuel gauges or survival calculations. They don't measure risk or distance.

They simply trust the person beside them.

That trust weighed heavily on me.

After a while I stood up and walked back to the truck.

I opened one of the windows.

Not because the air inside the cab was hot.

But because of a thought that had crossed my mind.

If something happened to us out here... I didn't want Dexter trapped inside the vehicle.

The desert would eventually reclaim everything else.

But he deserved a chance.

When I closed the door again I returned to the adventure box and sat down.

The wind continued moving slowly across the sand.

For the first time since this journey began, I allowed myself to consider something honestly.

I might not survive this place.

So I picked up my phone.

For a moment I stared at the screen, unsure exactly what I was about to say.

Then I pressed record.

Part of me believed that this message might become the last thing I ever said.

If someone eventually found the truck... if someone eventually found the phone... maybe they would understand how we had ended up here.

I began speaking.

Not dramatically.

Just honestly.

But as the words left my mouth, something unexpected began to happen.

For years after my daughter died, part of me had quietly been searching for an ending.

Not by deliberately taking my own life.

But by placing myself in situations where the world might decide for me.

Standing there in the desert, closer to death than I had ever been before, I suddenly realised something.

I could not die my way back to her.

There was no road that led there.

The wind moved gently across the sand again.

Dexter shifted slightly beside me.

And sitting there in the middle of the desert, I finally understood something that had taken years to reach.

The only thing left for me to do was live.

Live in her name.

Because this story didn't really begin in the desert.

It began with a little girl called Kira.

Chapter 2

Fun, Cheeky, Adventurous

If I had to describe Kira in three words, they would be simple ones.

Fun.

Cheeky.

Adventurous.

Those three words captured her better than anything else.

She had the kind of personality that filled a room the moment she walked into it. Some children are naturally quiet, content to sit back and watch the world unfold around them. Kira was never one of those children.

She was curious about everything.

Questions came constantly. Some serious, some hilarious, and some so unexpected they left adults scrambling for an answer. But more than anything, she loved adventure.

Our weekends were rarely spent indoors. If the weather allowed it, we were outside somewhere. Hiking trails, climbing hills, pitching tents in places where the night sky stretched endlessly overhead.

During the week, when school and everyday routines returned, Kira carried the same curiosity into everything she did.

She was a Brownie and took enormous pride in it. The uniform mattered to her, but the badges mattered even more. Each one represented something she had learned or achieved, and she wore them with pride.

She also loved reading.

Books opened doors to other worlds, and Kira moved through those worlds with the same excitement she brought to the real one. Stories fascinated her, and she often came to me afterwards with questions or excited explanations about the characters she had discovered.

And then there was her favourite topic of conversation.

Sonic the Hedgehog.

Kira adored Sonic.

Not just the games or the cartoons, but the characters themselves. Sonic's loyal friend **Two-Tails** often featured heavily in these conversations too.

If you asked her a question about them, you had better be prepared for a detailed explanation.

Her enthusiasm was contagious.

Another activity we sometimes shared surprised people when they heard about it.

I was a member of a gun club and held a firearms certificate, which allowed me to store rifles and long-barrelled pistols securely at home.

Occasionally Kira would come with me to the rifle range.

To some people that might sound unusual for a young girl, but to Kira it was simply another opportunity to learn something new. She approached it with the same curiosity she brought to everything else in life.

Safety rules were always clear and strict, and she respected them completely. Once she understood how things worked, she took pride in doing things properly.

For her it was never about the equipment itself.

It was about the challenge.

The focus.

The feeling of learning something new.

Looking back now, the thing I remember most clearly about those years is the laughter.

Kira had a quick sense of humour and wasn't afraid to use it. She could be cheeky in a way that made it impossible to stay serious for very long.

One moment that has stayed with me happened after a hospital appointment later in her illness.

We had just left the hospital, and I was struggling with the weight of what the doctor had told me. He had said he would be surprised if Kira was still alive the next day.

I sat in the car, completely overwhelmed.

Tears were running down my face.

At one point I turned to her and said quietly,

“What am I going to do without you?”

Kira looked at me calmly for a moment, the way she sometimes did when she was about to say something completely unexpected.

Then she replied,

“You're going to have to grow some balls, Daddy.”

For a moment I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

That was Kira.

Even in the middle of the darkest situations, she still managed to bring humour into the moment.

Fun.

Cheeky.

Adventurous.

Those three words described the way she moved through the world every single day.

Chapter 3

The Mountains

The mountains were where some of our best memories lived.

There is something about mountains that changes the way you see the world. When you climb high enough, everyday worries begin to shrink. Roads disappear, towns fade into the distance, and all that remains is the landscape stretching out beneath you.

For Kira, the mountains were never just scenery.

They were an adventure.

Many of our weekends were spent exploring the hills and fells of the Lake District. Early mornings often began with backpacks by the door, sandwiches wrapped in foil, and the quiet excitement of knowing the day would lead somewhere new.

Kira never approached a mountain slowly.

From the moment we stepped onto the trail, she moved with energy and purpose, her small boots crunching along the path as she marched ahead. I would often find myself following several steps behind, watching her curiosity pull her from one discovery to the next.

Every few minutes she would stop to look at something.

A strange rock.

A flower growing stubbornly out of the hillside.

A sheep standing quietly beside the path.

Everything seemed interesting to her.

Sometimes she would turn around and call down the trail.

“Come on, Daddy!”

Apparently I had developed a reputation for being slow.

The truth was I often walked behind her on purpose. Watching a child experience the outdoors with that kind of enthusiasm was something worth taking in slowly.

Climbing mountains with Kira was never about reaching the top as quickly as possible.

It was about the journey along the way.

Still, reaching the summit always brought a special kind of excitement.

When we finally arrived at the top of a fell, Kira had a ritual she seemed to follow every time.

She would stand at the highest point she could find, place her hands firmly on her hips, and stare out across the landscape with a proud expression on her face.

The wind would tug gently at her hair as she looked across the valleys and lakes stretching out in every direction.

It was the expression of someone who had just achieved something important.

Sometimes she would turn to me and smile.

“We did it.”

Even though she had clearly done most of the work.

Those moments at the top of a mountain felt different from the rest of life.

Up there, the world seemed quieter.

Problems felt smaller.

Time moved at a slower pace.

We would sit together eating the sandwiches we had carried up in our backpacks, looking out across the enormous landscape.

Sometimes we talked.

Sometimes we simply sat in silence.

Either way, those moments felt complete.

The mountains became part of our lives in a way that is difficult to explain to people who have never spent time walking through them.

They were where we laughed.

Where we talked.

Where Kira felt most like herself.

Years later, those same mountains would hold a different meaning.

After Kira died, her ashes were scattered on what I affectionally know as Kira’s Mountain, but to everyone else its **Scafell Pike**, the highest peak in England.

The same mountain where we had once walked side by side.

Even now, when I stand somewhere high in those mountains, I sometimes think about those days.

About the small boots crunching ahead of me on the path.

About the voice calling back down the trail.

“Come on, Daddy.”

And for a moment, it almost feels as if she might still be just around the next bend in the path.

Chapter 4

The Diagnosis

There are moments in life when everything changes without warning.

Often, they begin like any other ordinary day.

You wake up, follow the same routines, move through the hours expecting nothing unusual. The world appears steady and predictable, the way it always has been.

And then a single conversation alters everything.

For us, that moment came in a hospital.

Before the diagnosis, life with Kira had followed a rhythm that felt familiar. School during the week. Adventures and mountains on the weekends. Conversations about books, Brownies, and **Sonic the Hedgehog** characters who seemed to occupy an important place in her imagination.

She was nine years old.

At that age, the future usually feels enormous. Childhood stretches ahead with years of discovery and possibility.

But something had begun to feel wrong.

It started with small things at first.

The kind of symptoms that could easily be explained away as tiredness or illness that would pass in a few days. Children get headaches sometimes. They feel sick occasionally. Life moves quickly enough that those moments rarely feel alarming at first.

But when the symptoms don't disappear, concern slowly replaces reassurance.

That concern eventually leads to doctors.

Doctors lead to hospitals.

Hospitals lead to tests.

And tests sometimes lead to answers you never wanted to hear.

I remember the hospital room clearly.

Hospitals have a very particular atmosphere. The air always seems slightly too still. Conversations take place in quiet voices. Everything feels carefully controlled.

When the doctor finally spoke, the words felt heavy in the room.

A brain tumour.

Two words that immediately rearranged the future.

Even now it is difficult to fully describe what it feels like to hear that diagnosis about your child. The mind tries to process it logically, but logic struggles to keep up with the emotions that follow.

Fear arrives first.

Then disbelief.

Part of you wants to believe there has been some kind of mistake, that another test will reveal something different, something easier to fix.

But the quiet certainty in the doctor's voice made it clear that this was not a misunderstanding.

Something serious had entered our lives.

The journey that followed quickly became filled with appointments, hospital corridors, and conversations with specialists who spoke carefully about treatments, possibilities, and risks.

Yet through all of it, Kira remained remarkably herself.

Children often experience illness differently from adults. Where adults imagine the future and worry about what might happen, children tend to focus on the present moment.

Kira approached the hospital environment with the same curiosity she brought to everything else.

She talked to nurses.

She asked questions.

Sometimes she even managed to make people laugh.

There were moments when I watched her interacting with doctors and staff and wondered how someone so young could carry so much strength without even realising it.

The hospital gradually became a place we knew well.

Long corridors.

Waiting rooms filled with quiet conversations.

Machines and equipment that slowly became familiar.

But no matter how routine those visits began to feel, one truth remained impossible to ignore.

Life had changed.

The mountains, the camping trips, the ordinary rhythm of childhood — they all now existed alongside something much heavier.

Something none of us had asked for.

Something none of us could easily control.

The diagnosis had drawn a line through our lives.

Everything before it belonged to one world.

Everything after it belonged to another.

Chapter 5

Hospital Life

After the diagnosis, hospitals slowly became part of everyday life.

At first they felt unfamiliar. The long corridors, the quiet conversations between doctors, the smell that seems to exist in almost every hospital building. It is a strange environment to step into when you have previously only visited occasionally.

But when illness becomes part of your life, hospitals stop being places you visit and start becoming places you know.

We learned the routines.

Waiting rooms where people sat quietly with their own worries. Corridors that seemed to stretch endlessly from one department to another. The gentle but serious tone doctors often used when explaining things that no parent ever wants to hear.

Time inside hospitals moves differently.

Sometimes hours pass slowly while you wait for tests or appointments. Other times the day disappears completely in a blur of conversations, paperwork, and quiet moments of uncertainty.

Through all of it, Kira somehow remained herself.

That was something that surprised me again and again.

Even while facing something as serious as a brain tumour, she never lost the part of her personality that brought humour into everyday situations.

She spoke easily with the nurses who cared for her. Many of them quickly discovered that conversations with Kira rarely remained serious for long.

She asked questions.

She made jokes.

Sometimes she even managed to turn the roles around, comforting the very people who were supposed to be looking after her.

Doctors often walked into the room expecting to see a frightened child. Instead they were greeted by someone who wanted to know what everything did, why certain machines worked the way they did, and whether the hospital staff knew anything about Sonic the Hedgehog.

Hospital rooms can easily become places filled with tension and fear. But Kira had a way of lifting that atmosphere.

There were moments when the staff found themselves laughing with her.

Moments when the seriousness of the situation faded for a few minutes and the room simply felt like a place where people were talking together.

It wasn't that Kira didn't understand what was happening around her.

Children often understand far more than adults realise.

But there came a moment when the doctors spoke to me privately about something I had been hoping to avoid.

They told me that Kira needed to know the truth.

Not every detail, but the reality of what was happening.

They believed that children often sense more than adults think they do, and that honesty would help her understand what lay ahead rather than leaving her confused or frightened.

It was one of the hardest things I have ever been asked to do.

How do you sit down with your nine-year-old daughter and explain that she is going to die?

For a long time I struggled with the idea.

Every instinct in me wanted to protect her from that knowledge. Parents are built that way. We try to shield our children from pain whenever we can.

But eventually I realised that the doctors were right.

Kira deserved honesty.

So one day, in a quiet moment, I sat down beside her.

The room was calm.

I tried to speak as gently as I could.

I told her that the doctors had done everything they could, but the illness inside her brain was something they could not fix.

I told her that she was going to die.

For a moment Kira cried.

Seeing her tears in that moment was incredibly difficult. Every part of me wanted to take those words back, to somehow erase the reality we were facing.

But after a short while the crying stopped.

Children sometimes process things differently than adults expect. Once the initial sadness passed, Kira became thoughtful.

Then she asked me a question.

“What’s it like in heaven?”

The question caught me slightly off guard.

I paused for a moment, thinking carefully about how to answer.

Finally I said something simple.

I told her that in heaven she could have anything she wanted.

I told her that she wouldn’t be alone there.

That people she already knew would be waiting for her.

People who loved her.

I told her that my mum — her grandmother — would be there.

Waiting to look after her.

Kira listened quietly.

The room felt calm again.

Looking back now, that conversation remains one of the most difficult and meaningful moments of my life.

It was a moment of honesty between a father and his daughter.

A moment where childhood innocence and the realities of life briefly met in the same space.

And somehow, even in the middle of that incredibly hard conversation, Kira faced it with the same quiet strength that seemed to define everything she did.

Fun.

Cheeky.

Adventurous.

Even when facing the hardest truth a child could hear.

Chapter 5.5

Will You Marry Me?

During the months when Kira was ill, there were moments when the seriousness of everything around us seemed to fade for a little while.

Children have a way of doing that.

Even when facing something enormous, they still manage to bring the conversation back to simple things.

One day Kira looked at me very seriously.

“Daddy,” she said.

“Yes?”

“Will you marry me?”

For a moment I didn’t quite know how to respond.

Children ask questions with complete sincerity, and Kira was looking at me with the same serious expression she used whenever she wanted a proper answer.

I smiled.

“Well,” I said, “you can’t marry your dad.”

She frowned slightly, thinking about this.

“Why not?”

I tried to explain in the simplest way I could.

“That’s just not how it works.”

She considered this for a moment longer, then nodded as if she had accepted the explanation.

“Okay,” she said.

Then, without missing a beat, she added something that made me laugh.

“Well... if you can’t marry me, you’re still my best friend.”

It was one of those small conversations that stayed with me long after it happened.

At the time it felt like a simple exchange between a father and his daughter.

But looking back now, I realise something else.

Kira wasn’t asking about marriage in the way adults understand it.

She was simply expressing the deepest kind of love a child knows.

The kind that believes the person who looks after you should always be close.

Always be there.

Always be part of your life.

In her own way, she was telling me something very important.

That no matter what happened, the bond between us would always remain.

Chapter 6

The Birthday

The 17th of May was my birthday.

Birthdays are usually ordinary things. A few messages from friends, perhaps a small celebration, a quiet reminder that another year has passed.

That year felt very different.

By that point the illness had progressed to a stage where the doctors needed to speak with us openly about what was coming. They came to the house that day to explain what the final stage of Kira's illness would look like.

Hospitals had already become familiar places in our lives, but that conversation didn't happen in a hospital.

It happened at home.

There is something particularly heavy about serious medical conversations taking place in the place where you normally feel safest. The living room, which had once been filled with ordinary family life, suddenly became the setting for words no parent ever wants to hear.

The doctors spoke gently.

They discussed the possibility of Kira staying at an end-of-life hospice, but I refused. Kira was to die at home being cared for by her family.

They were calm and compassionate.

But none of that made the conversation easier.

Eventually they left the house.

The front door closed behind them and the silence that followed felt enormous.

For a few moments I sat there alone, trying to process everything that had just been said. The mind struggles to accept information like that. Part of you understands it logically, but another part refuses to believe it can possibly be real.

Kira was resting in the next room.

I went to see her.

When I walked in, she looked up at me and spoke before I had even said anything.

"Sorry I'm poorly on your birthday."

Even now that moment still stays with me.

In the middle of everything she was facing, she was worried about my birthday.

I told her not to worry about that.

“It’s okay,” I said. “Everything will be fine.”

Sometimes adults say things like that because they want to offer comfort, even when they know life is about to become very difficult.

Kira watched me quietly for a moment.

Then she asked a question.

“Daddy... will you die with me so you can look after me?”

The words were spoken with complete sincerity.

There was no fear in her voice.

No drama.

Just a simple question from a child who trusted her father completely.

In her mind, it made perfect sense.

If she was going somewhere else, then the person who had always looked after her should come too.

For a moment I didn’t know how to answer.

Every instinct in me wanted to promise her anything she asked for. That is the nature of being a parent. You want to solve every problem, remove every fear, protect your child from anything that might hurt them.

But this was a promise I couldn’t make.

Not because I didn’t love her enough.

But because I feared something even worse.

If I deliberately ended my life, there was a chance that I might never reach her.

And the thought of being separated from her forever was something I could not accept.

So I told her the truth.

“I can’t do that.”

The moment passed quietly after that.

Kira didn’t argue.

She didn’t seem upset.

She simply accepted the answer in the calm way children sometimes do when they trust the person speaking to them.

At the time I didn't fully understand how deeply that conversation would stay with me.

But a week later, when I held her as she took her final breath, the question returned to my mind again and again.

“Daddy... will you die with me so you can look after me?”

It was a question that would echo through my life for years to come.

Chapter 7

The Last Week

After the conversation on my birthday, the house seemed to change.

Nothing about the rooms themselves had altered. The furniture was the same. The photographs on the walls still showed the same memories we had always looked at. The kitchen still smelled like it always had when food was cooking.

And yet something felt different.

When doctors explain how the end of a life will unfold, time suddenly becomes more visible. Every hour feels heavier than it did before. Small moments that once passed unnoticed now carry a quiet awareness that they may not happen many more times.

Kira's bed had been moved downstairs into the living room.

It made things easier for the nurses who came to help, and it meant she could remain in the centre of the house instead of being alone in an upstairs bedroom. The room where we had once watched television, talked about our days, and shared ordinary evenings slowly became a place filled with medical equipment.

There was a syringe driver beside the bed to deliver medication that kept her comfortable and allowed her to sleep. Tubes and small machines quietly did their work in the background.

Even so, the room still felt like part of the home.

We kept the lights soft. Conversations remained calm. The atmosphere was never rushed or chaotic. Everyone who came into the house seemed to understand that the most important thing was making sure Kira was peaceful.

During that final week, time seemed to move in an unusual way.

Some hours felt very long.

Others passed so quickly it was difficult to remember where they had gone.

Friends and family came to visit when they could. People spoke quietly in the room, sometimes sitting beside the bed for long stretches without saying very much at all.

Those quiet moments were often the most meaningful.

Kira spent much of the time resting.

The medication helped her sleep, and the illness had taken much of her energy. But there were still moments when she opened her eyes or stirred slightly, small reminders that she was still there with us.

I stayed close to her most of the time.

When someone you love is nearing the end of their life, an instinct takes over that is difficult to describe. You simply want to be nearby.

To make sure they are not alone.

To be there for whatever moments remain.

Outside the house, life continued in the ordinary way it always had. Cars passed on nearby roads. People went to work. The world moved forward without pausing.

Inside the house, everything felt slower.

Conversations often happened in quiet voices.

Sometimes I would sit beside Kira and simply watch her breathing. The steady rise and fall of her chest became something I paid close attention to, as if somehow observing it might help me understand how much time was left.

There were moments during that week when the weight of everything felt almost impossible to carry.

And yet there were also moments of surprising calm.

The house never felt chaotic or filled with panic. Instead there was a quiet sense of care surrounding everything that happened.

The nurses who visited treated Kira with extraordinary gentleness. They explained what they were doing and reassured us whenever something changed. Their calm presence helped create an atmosphere where fear never completely took over.

As the week moved forward, the changes the doctors had described slowly began to appear.

Kira's breathing grew softer.

Her body became weaker.

The amount of time she spent sleeping increased.

Even though we had been told what would happen, seeing those changes unfold in real time was still incredibly difficult.

Each small shift felt like a step closer to something none of us wanted to face.

But through all of it, the house remained filled with the same quiet purpose.

The goal was simple.

Make sure Kira was comfortable.

Make sure she was not afraid.

Make sure she was surrounded by love.

The final night arrived without ceremony.

There was no announcement that time had run out.

Just a gradual understanding that the moment the doctors had described was approaching.

Chapter 8

02:55

By the evening of the 24th of May, the house had grown very still.

Kira was resting on the bed downstairs in the living room. The lights were dim, and the room carried the quiet atmosphere that had slowly settled over the house during the previous days.

Her breathing had begun to change.

Anyone who has spent time around someone nearing the end of life eventually recognises that sound. It isn't something dramatic or sudden. It is simply different — uneven, slower, and sometimes interrupted by the faint sound of fluid in the chest.

Some people call it the death rattle.

Once it begins, there is a quiet understanding that the body is nearing its final stage.

The breathing continued for hours.

Fourteen hours in total.

Kira was receiving medication through a syringe driver to keep her comfortable and asleep. The small machine delivered the medication slowly and steadily, allowing her to remain free from pain.

For long stretches of time I sat beside the bed watching her breathe.

When someone you love is close to the end of their life, every movement becomes important. The rise and fall of their chest. The slight shifts in their breathing. Small details that would normally pass unnoticed suddenly become the centre of your attention.

At one point during the night I tried to gently sit Kira up a little.

The breathing sounded uncomfortable, and I hoped that changing her position might help ease it.

As I moved her, I accidentally pulled the line that fed the syringe driver.

For a moment panic rushed through me.

The last thing I wanted was for her to wake in pain.

I called the nurses immediately.

They came to the house quickly and quietly replaced the line. Their calm presence helped steady the moment. They worked with careful movements, making sure everything was functioning properly again.

When they finished, one of them looked at me and spoke gently.

There was nothing more they could do.

I remembered a letter the doctor had provided earlier. It allowed Kira to be given diamorphine to ensure she remained completely comfortable when the end was very close.

The nurses asked me if I wanted them to administer it.

I knew what it meant.

I said yes.

There was no dramatic moment after that.

No sudden change.

Just the quiet continuation of the night.

After the nurses finished, I climbed onto the bed beside Kira.

I lay next to my daughter and listened to the rhythm of her breathing.

Time seemed to move differently in that room. Minutes stretched into something longer, and the outside world felt very far away.

At 02:55 in the morning on the 25th of May, the breathing stopped.

There was no struggle.

No final words.

Just a stillness that slowly filled the room.

For a long time I stayed there beside her.

I wasn't ready to move.

The quiet in the house felt deeper than anything I had ever experienced before.

When morning began to arrive, faint light slowly appeared through the windows.

Later that day the funeral directors came and gently took Kira away.

But during those hours between her passing and their arrival, I remained beside her.

It felt like the last thing I could do for my daughter.

Chapter 9

The Quiet House

After the funeral directors left, the house felt different in a way that is difficult to describe.

For days it had been filled with people coming and going. Nurses, doctors, family members, quiet conversations in the living room, footsteps moving through the hallway. Even though the circumstances had been heartbreaking, there had still been movement and presence.

Now there was none of that.

Just silence.

The bed where Kira had been lying had been removed. The medical equipment that had slowly filled the living room during her final days was gone as well. The room had been returned to something that looked almost normal.

But nothing about it felt normal.

Grief has a strange relationship with silence. When someone you love dies, the absence of their voice becomes one of the hardest things to accept.

Children fill a house with sound without even trying.

Footsteps running across the floor.

Doors opening and closing.

Laughter echoing through rooms.

Questions shouted from somewhere down the hallway.

When those sounds disappear, the silence they leave behind feels enormous.

I walked slowly through the house that day.

Each room seemed to carry a memory.

The places where Kira had once sat reading a book.

The space near the door where hiking boots had been left after long days in the mountains.

The living room where she had watched television or talked about the latest adventures of **Sonic the Hedgehog** and his loyal friend **Two-Tails**.

Everything looked exactly the same.

And yet everything had changed.

It is often said that grief arrives like a wave, crashing suddenly and violently. But in those early hours it felt more like a heavy fog that had quietly settled over everything.

Nothing seemed clear.

Time felt uncertain.

Even simple decisions required effort.

People sometimes ask what the first day after losing someone is like.

The truth is that it doesn't feel real.

Your mind knows what has happened, but part of you still expects to hear their voice somewhere in the house. Part of you still believes they might appear around the corner at any moment.

That feeling takes time to fade.

I remember sitting in the living room later that day, looking at the space where Kira's bed had been.

Only hours earlier I had been lying beside her there.

Now the room looked empty.

The quiet seemed to stretch endlessly.

Outside, life continued in its ordinary rhythm. Cars passed along the nearby road. People went about their daily routines. Somewhere in the distance a dog barked.

The world had not stopped.

But inside the house, time felt suspended.

For the first time since the illness had entered our lives, there was nothing left to do.

No more hospital appointments.

No more medication schedules.

No more waiting for doctors to explain what might happen next.

Only the silence remained.

And in that silence, the reality of life without Kira slowly began to settle into place.

Chapter 10

Falling Apart

After Kira died, the silence in the house was not the only thing that changed.

At first I tried to keep life moving in the way people expect after a loss. There were things to organise, people to speak to, practical matters that demanded attention in the days and weeks that followed. When someone dies, the world still expects paperwork, decisions, and arrangements to be made.

But once those responsibilities faded, the real weight of the loss began to settle in.

Grief rarely arrives all at once.

Instead it spreads slowly into every part of your life.

The quiet house was only the beginning.

At night the silence felt heavier than during the day. Rooms that had once held laughter and conversation now carried an emptiness that was impossible to ignore. Memories appeared everywhere — in the places Kira had sat, the paths we had walked, the objects she had once used without a second thought.

Eventually I began drinking more than I should have.

At first it seemed like a way of quieting the noise inside my head. Alcohol can do that for a while. It softens the sharp edges of grief, blurring thoughts that otherwise return again and again.

But that relief never lasts.

What begins as something that feels like an escape quickly becomes another problem to carry.

Days began to lose their structure. Nights stretched longer. Sleep came and went unpredictably. The routines that had once organised life disappeared completely.

Financial pressures slowly built in the background.

Grief has a way of affecting everything, including the practical parts of life that rarely receive much attention when things are going well. Work becomes harder to focus on. Decisions become difficult. Problems that might once have been manageable begin to pile up.

Debt crept in quietly at first.

Then it grew.

Relationships also began to change.

Losing a child does not only affect the parent. The shockwaves of that loss spread outward, touching everyone connected to the family. Sometimes people draw closer together in those moments. Other times the strain becomes too heavy.

Some relationships slowly broke down under the weight of everything that had happened.

Conversations became harder.

Misunderstandings grew.

Eventually certain connections simply faded away.

At the same time another loss entered my life.

My sister passed away.

Grief layered itself on top of grief.

By that point the sense of isolation had become overwhelming. Friends who had once been part of everyday life gradually drifted further away. Not always intentionally, and not always through conflict. Sometimes people simply do not know how to remain close to someone whose life has changed so dramatically.

Eventually the circle of people around me became very small.

Then smaller still.

Until one day I realised something difficult to admit.

There was almost no one left.

No family close by.

No regular presence of friends.

Just the quiet house and the memories that filled it.

Looking back now, I understand that grief had not only taken my daughter.

It had slowly dismantled the structure of the life that existed around her.

Alcohol.

Debt.

Broken relationships.

Loss.

Isolation.

All of it grew out of the same place.

The unbearable absence of someone who had once filled the world with life.

Those months were some of the darkest I have ever experienced.

But they also formed part of the journey that eventually led somewhere unexpected.

Because sometimes, when everything else has fallen away, the only direction left is forward.

Chapter 11

Just in Case

After Kira died, the days that followed seemed to blur together.

People often talk about the stages of grief as if they arrive in a neat order — shock, anger, sadness, acceptance. But in reality, grief doesn't move like that. It shifts constantly, sometimes quietly, sometimes suddenly, and often in ways that are difficult to explain.

During those early months, the house still felt full of memories.

Every room held something that reminded me of Kira. A book she had been reading. A small object left on a table. A photograph where she was smiling in the middle of one of our mountain adventures.

It was as if traces of her were everywhere.

One of the things I found myself holding onto most was her phone.

It might seem like a small object to other people, but after someone dies the ordinary things they leave behind often carry enormous meaning.

The phone had once been part of Kira's everyday life.

Messages from friends.

Photos.

Games.

Conversations about the things that mattered to a ten-year-old girl who loved adventure and the fast-moving world of **Sonic the Hedgehog** and his sidekick Two-Tails.

After she died, I kept the phone with me.

At first it was simply because I didn't know what else to do with it. Putting it away somewhere felt wrong, as if I was trying to erase something that should never be erased.

So the phone stayed close.

But over time it became something else.

I kept it charged.

Always.

Wherever I went, the phone came with me.

It sat beside the bed at night.

It travelled with me during the day.

When I left the house, it was usually somewhere nearby.

Not because I truly believed it would ring.

I understood that the world doesn't work that way.

But grief has a way of creating small thoughts that logic cannot easily remove.

Somewhere deep inside me was a quiet idea that refused to disappear.

What if it did ring?

What if somehow a message appeared on the screen, and I wasn't there to see it?

The thought of missing that moment felt unbearable.

So I kept the phone close.

Most of the time the screen remained dark.

Silent.

Occasionally I would turn it on, scrolling through old messages that Kira had sent. Each one felt like a small window into a time when life had been different.

Those moments could be comforting.

They could also be incredibly painful.

Sometimes both at the same time.

But the phone remained with me for years.

Charged.

Waiting.

It became a quiet symbol of something that is difficult to describe to people who have never experienced grief.

A connection that you know has changed forever, but still feel unable to let go of completely.

Not because you believe the impossible will happen.

But because some small part of you hopes that somehow the connection still exists.

Just in case.

Chapter 12

The Edge

The months after Kira died were some of the hardest I have ever lived through.

At first there were people around. Family members, friends, and visitors who came to offer support in the way people naturally do after a loss. Their presence helped soften the shock of those first days.

But eventually life around me began returning to normal.

People had jobs to return to, families to look after, routines to continue. Slowly the visits became less frequent. Conversations moved back toward everyday topics.

The world kept moving forward.

Inside my own life, however, everything still felt paused.

Grief does not follow the same timeline as the rest of the world.

For me, the most difficult part was the quiet belief that had settled into my mind after Kira died.

The belief that I had let her down.

On my birthday she had asked me a question.

“Daddy... will you die with me so you can look after me?”

At the time I had answered honestly. I had told her that I couldn't make that promise.

Logically I still knew why.

But grief doesn't listen to logic.

Somewhere deep inside me, the question began to echo again and again.

What if she had needed me there?

What if refusing her request had been the wrong thing to do?

Those thoughts followed me everywhere.

By August, only a few months after Kira's death, the weight of those questions had grown heavier than I knew how to carry.

One evening I found myself alone in the house.

The silence felt overwhelming.

Every room seemed to hold an echo of the life that had once existed there. The places where Kira had laughed, talked, and moved through the house now felt empty.

Grief can narrow your world in ways that are difficult to explain.

The mind begins to focus on the pain so completely that everything else slowly fades into the background.

That night I reached a point where the weight of everything felt almost impossible to bear.

I reached for a long-barrelled .44 Magnum pistol that I had locked away in the gun safe. I placed a bullet in the chamber, and pulled the hammer back as I placed it against my temple.

And then something happened that I still struggle to fully explain.

In the middle of that moment, when my thoughts felt darker than they had ever been before, I heard Kira's voice in my mind.

Clear.

Firm.

The same voice I had heard countless times before when she wanted to make something absolutely certain.

“No... you can't do that, Daddy.”

The words stopped me instantly.

Not because they were loud or dramatic, but because they felt completely unmistakable.

It was the voice of my daughter.

The same little girl who had once stood on mountain summits with her hands on her hips and told me to hurry up.

The same girl who had found ways to make nurses laugh in hospital rooms.

The same girl who had told me in the car one day that I was going to have to grow some balls.

In that moment something inside me shifted.

The pain didn't disappear.

Grief doesn't work like that.

But the thought that had been pulling me toward the edge suddenly loosened its grip.

Because if Kira had been able to see me then, I knew one thing with certainty.

She would never have wanted that ending.

The love between us had never been about escaping life.

It had always been about living it together.

And somehow, hearing her voice in that moment reminded me that the bond between us had not completely disappeared.

Even in the middle of the darkness, it was still there.

Quiet.

But strong enough to pull me back.

Chapter 13

Dexter

Life after loss does not suddenly improve.

There is no clear moment when grief announces that it has finished its work. Instead it slowly changes shape over time, sometimes becoming quieter, sometimes returning unexpectedly when a memory surfaces.

During the months after Kira died, my world had grown smaller.

The house felt empty.

The routines that once filled my days had disappeared.

Even the mountains, which had once been places of adventure and laughter, carried a different feeling when I visited them alone.

Somewhere during that time, a dog entered my life.

His name was Dexter.

Dexter was an **Alaskan malamute**, a large, powerful breed built for cold climates and long journeys. With thick fur, strong legs, and an expression that often seemed both serious and curious at the same time, he had the kind of presence that immediately filled a room.

But what made Dexter's arrival feel unusual was something I discovered shortly after he was born.

Dexter had entered the world on the exact same day Kira died.

The 25th of May.

At first it simply felt like a coincidence.

Life is full of those. Dates overlap, events align in ways that seem strange for a moment before fading back into the ordinary flow of time.

Yet something about this particular coincidence stayed with me.

Perhaps it was the timing.

Perhaps it was the fact that Dexter arrived in my life during a period when I felt completely lost.

Or perhaps it was simply the quiet sense that companionship had returned when it was needed most.

Whatever the reason, Dexter quickly became a constant presence beside me.

Dogs have a remarkable ability to exist entirely in the present moment. They do not carry yesterday's pain into today, and they do not worry about what might happen tomorrow.

They simply experience the world as it is.

Dexter approached life with that kind of uncomplicated enthusiasm.

Walks became something we shared every day.

At first they were short, simple outings — just enough movement to break the silence that had settled over my life. But even those small walks began to change the rhythm of my days.

Dexter noticed everything.

Every new smell along the path.

Every sound carried by the wind.

Every movement in the distance.

Watching him explore the world with that kind of curiosity slowly reminded me of something I had almost forgotten.

Life was still happening around me.

One morning, not long after Dexter began joining me on those walks, something strange occurred.

We were out walking when another **Alaskan malamute** appeared in the distance with its owner.

The two dogs noticed each other immediately and moved toward one another with the calm interest dogs often show when meeting for the first time.

As the owner approached, we began talking in the casual way people do when their dogs decide to introduce them.

I asked the question that dog owners often ask each other.

“What’s her name?”

The owner smiled.

“Kira.”

For a moment I thought I had misheard.

I asked how it was spelled.

The answer was exactly the same spelling as my daughter’s name.

Kira.

It felt like an unusual coincidence.

Even stranger was the fact that I never saw the owner or that dog again.

Our paths simply crossed once and then separated.

Moments like that do not necessarily have explanations.

Sometimes they simply exist as small reminders that life contains patterns we don't always understand.

Dexter continued walking beside me in the months that followed.

Day after day.

Step after step.

In a quiet way, he helped me begin moving forward again.

Not quickly.

Not dramatically.

But steadily.

One walk at a time.

Chapter 14

Movement

After Kira died, stillness became one of the hardest things to live with.

The quiet house.

The empty rooms.

The routines that had once filled every day suddenly disappearing.

At first I spent a lot of time sitting with those feelings, trying to understand them. Grief has a way of pulling you inward. The mind circles the same memories and questions again and again, searching for answers that never seem to arrive.

But eventually I discovered something.

Movement helped.

Not in a dramatic way, and not in a way that removed the grief entirely. The pain remained, and the memories never left. But moving forward physically — walking, travelling, setting small goals — seemed to give my mind a place to breathe.

At first it started simply.

Long walks with Dexter.

The kind of walks where the destination didn't matter. We would leave the house and follow paths through fields and hills, sometimes walking for hours without speaking to another person.

Dexter seemed perfectly content with that arrangement.

To him, every walk was an opportunity to explore the world. New smells, new sounds, new places — he approached them all with the same enthusiasm.

Watching him move through the world so freely had a quiet effect on me.

Dogs live entirely in the present moment.

They don't replay yesterday's pain or worry about tomorrow's uncertainty. They simply experience what is happening right now.

Spending time with Dexter began to pull me gently in that direction.

The walks gradually grew longer.

Then they began to turn into journeys.

At some point I started setting challenges for myself. Small ones at first. Distances to cover. Places to reach. Each goal created something to work toward, something that pushed me out of the stillness that grief often creates.

Some of these journeys became charity challenges.

Raising money for causes connected to illness and care gave the movement an additional purpose. It allowed Kira's story to become something that might help other people, even in a small way.

Standing still with grief had felt unbearable.

But moving forward with it — carrying it into the world rather than trying to escape it — began to feel slightly different.

The journeys slowly grew larger.

Longer distances.

More ambitious routes.

More time spent away from the quiet house that still held so many memories.

Dexter remained beside me through all of it.

Whether the journey was short or long, he approached each day with the same steady loyalty. His presence became a constant reminder that I was no longer walking through the world completely alone.

Looking back now, those early steps were the beginning of something much bigger.

At the time I didn't realise where the movement would eventually lead.

I certainly didn't imagine that one day it would carry Dexter and me across continents and into one of the most remote landscapes on Earth.

But the first step had already been taken.

One walk.

Then another.

Movement had begun.

Chapter 15

The Long Road

Movement has a strange way of growing.

What begins as a short walk can slowly become something much larger. One small journey leads to another, and before long the distance between where you started and where you are now becomes difficult to measure.

For me, the walks with Dexter gradually turned into something bigger than I had originally intended.

At first it was simply about leaving the house more often. The quiet rooms had become difficult places to sit in for too long. Walking through open spaces allowed my thoughts to move in a different way. The rhythm of footsteps and fresh air seemed to loosen some of the heaviness that grief had wrapped around everything.

But the more I moved, the more I realised something else.

Movement created purpose.

Setting a destination — even a simple one — gave each day a direction. Instead of waking up and facing the emptiness that grief sometimes brings, there was now a path to follow.

Eventually those paths became roads.

Driving began to replace walking as the distances grew larger. What started as short journeys to nearby places slowly expanded into something more ambitious.

The truck became part of that new rhythm.

Behind the wheel, with the road stretching ahead, life felt slightly less confined. Landscapes changed as the miles passed. Towns appeared and disappeared. Horizons shifted in ways that reminded me how large the world actually was.

Dexter quickly adapted to life on the road.

He seemed to enjoy the constant movement, the changing scenery, the endless variety of places we passed through. Whenever the truck stopped, he was ready to jump out and investigate whatever new environment we had arrived in.

Fields.

Forests.

Open plains.

Every place held something interesting for him.

The journeys gradually became longer.

Weeks turned into months.

The road stretched further and further across the map.

Somewhere along the way the idea formed that perhaps the journey could become something even bigger. If movement helped quiet the chaos of grief, maybe a much longer journey might reveal something else entirely.

A new purpose.

A new understanding.

Or at the very least, a new perspective.

Driving across countries has a way of altering the way you see distance.

What once felt far away begins to seem reachable. Borders appear on the map as simple lines, and then disappear beneath the wheels of the truck as you cross them.

Each new landscape brought something different.

Cities filled with movement and noise.

Rural roads winding through quiet countryside.

Vast open spaces where the horizon stretched so far it almost seemed to curve with the shape of the earth.

Dexter remained beside me through all of it.

His presence turned every stop into a small exploration. While I stretched my legs or looked out across the landscape, he would wander a few metres away, nose close to the ground, investigating the endless stories carried by scent.

The road became our routine.

Wake up.

Drive.

Stop somewhere new.

Walk.

Continue.

Day after day, the world unfolded in front of us.

At the time I didn't fully understand where the journey was leading.

I simply knew that standing still no longer felt possible.

Movement had become necessary.

Eventually the road carried us further than I had ever imagined.

Across vast stretches of land.

Toward landscapes that few people ever see.

And slowly, almost without noticing it, Dexter and I found ourselves approaching one of the most remote places on Earth.

The **Gobi Desert**.

Chapter 16

Entering the Desert

The road does something strange when it approaches a desert.

Gradually, the world begins to change.

Trees become fewer. Grass grows thinner. The landscape stretches wider and emptier with every mile. The horizon slowly expands until it seems to swallow everything around it.

By the time Dexter and I began approaching the **Gobi Desert**, the feeling of isolation had already started to settle in.

The towns had grown smaller.

Then they became villages.

Eventually they disappeared altogether.

The track stretched ahead of us across a landscape that looked almost endless.

Driving into a desert is not like entering a forest or climbing into mountains. Those places feel alive with movement — trees swaying, water flowing, animals moving through the landscape.

The desert feels different.

It feels still.

Not empty exactly, but quiet in a way that demands your attention.

The sky above seemed larger than anywhere else I had travelled. Without tall buildings or thick forests to interrupt the view, the horizon stretched so far that the land and sky appeared to merge somewhere in the distance.

Dexter seemed fascinated by the change.

Whenever we stopped, he would step out of the truck and begin exploring immediately, his nose working constantly as he investigated the unfamiliar scents carried by the wind.

The sand felt different underfoot.

Softer.

Shifting slightly with each step.

Sometimes the ground appeared almost flat for miles, broken only by distant ridges or the slow rise of sand dunes forming along the horizon.

I remember stopping the truck at one point and stepping out simply to look around.

The silence was extraordinary.

No traffic.

No voices.

No distant sound of civilisation.

Just wind moving across the open landscape.

Standing there, it was easy to understand why deserts have fascinated travellers for centuries. There is a kind of raw simplicity to them. Nothing unnecessary exists there. Only land, sky, and the quiet persistence of life adapting to survive in a harsh environment.

But deserts also demand respect.

Distances between places can be enormous.

Fuel stations are rare.

Water becomes something you think about constantly.

Every decision about where to drive or when to stop carries more weight than it would in places where help is nearby.

At the time, however, the journey still felt like an adventure.

The truck was running well.

Supplies were sufficient.

And the open road stretched ahead into a landscape few people ever experience.

Dexter jumped back into the truck when I opened the door again, clearly ready to continue the journey.

I took one last look across the vast open plains.

Then I started the engine.

The wheels rolled forward, carrying us deeper into the desert.

At that moment, I had no idea how significant that decision would become.

Because somewhere ahead of us, beyond the endless horizon, the desert was waiting to teach me something I had spent years trying to understand.

Chapter 17

The Sand Dunes

The deeper we travelled into the **Gobi Desert**, the more the landscape began to change.

At first the desert had appeared as vast open plains stretching endlessly toward the horizon. The ground had been dry and uneven, but mostly flat, broken only by distant ridges and scattered rock formations.

Then the dunes began to appear.

They rose gradually from the desert floor like enormous waves frozen in time. Some were small, little more than gentle slopes of sand shaped by the wind. Others towered above the surrounding land, their curved ridges casting long shadows across the desert.

I remember the first time we stopped beside one of the larger dunes.

From a distance it had looked impressive.

Standing at its base, it felt enormous.

The sand stretched upward in a sweeping arc, the ridge at the top cutting sharply against the sky. Wind moved across its surface in soft patterns, shifting the sand grain by grain in a slow, constant motion.

Dexter jumped out of the truck as soon as I opened the door.

He stood for a moment, looking at the dune as if deciding what to make of it. Then, with the sudden burst of energy that malamutes often display, he began climbing.

The sand shifted under his paws, but that didn't seem to slow him down. He pushed forward with determination, scrambling up the slope until he reached the top.

By the time I began walking up behind him, he was already standing on the ridge, looking down at me with an expression that seemed equal parts curiosity and satisfaction.

When I finally reached the top, the view stretched endlessly in every direction.

Dunes rolled across the desert like waves on a silent ocean.

For a moment we both stood there, looking out across the vast landscape.

Then Dexter did something completely unexpected.

Instead of carefully walking down the slope the way we had climbed it, he suddenly threw himself sideways into the sand.

And rolled.

Straight down the dune.

Sand flew into the air as his large body tumbled down the slope like a furry avalanche. For a few seconds he disappeared into a cloud of dust and movement.

Then he reached the bottom, jumped to his feet, and looked up the hill as if nothing unusual had happened.

A moment later he began climbing again.

When he reached the top, he did the same thing.

He threw himself sideways.

And rolled.

Watching a huge **Alaskan malamute** repeatedly hurl himself down a desert dune in one of the most remote places on Earth was completely ridiculous.

I started laughing.

Properly laughing.

It had been a long time since laughter had come that easily.

Dexter, of course, had no idea why I was laughing. To him, he had simply discovered the largest playground imaginable.

Up the dune.

Roll down.

Repeat.

Again and again.

Standing there in the middle of the desert, watching him tumble through the sand with pure joy, I found myself thinking about Kira.

She would have loved this.

The adventure.

The absurdity of it.

The way the enormous dunes turned into something playful instead of intimidating.

Fun.

Cheeky.

Adventurous.

Those were the three words that had always described her best.

For a few minutes on that dune, the weight of everything I had been carrying seemed slightly lighter.

The desert still stretched endlessly around us.

The journey was far from over.

But in that moment, with Dexter rolling happily down the sand, the world felt a little less heavy than it had before.

Chapter 18

Running Low

The desert had felt like an adventure at first.

Wide open landscapes. Endless horizons. The quiet beauty of a place that few people ever truly experience. Driving across those vast plains had carried a sense of freedom that was difficult to find anywhere else.

But deserts have a way of reminding you very quickly that they are not designed for comfort.

They are designed for survival.

The further Dexter and I travelled into the **Gobi Desert**, the more I became aware of something that had been quietly sitting in the background since we first entered the landscape.

Distance.

In most parts of the world, distance is rarely a serious problem. Roads connect towns. Fuel stations appear regularly along highways. If something goes wrong, help is usually not very far away.

In the desert, those assumptions disappear.

Fuel stations become rare.

Water becomes precious.

And the track ahead sometimes becomes little more than a faint suggestion across open ground.

At first the fuel gauge was something I checked occasionally.

Then it became something I watched more closely.

Eventually it became something I watched constantly.

Each mile carried us further into the desert, but it also carried us further away from any place where fuel might be available. The map showed settlements somewhere ahead, but maps don't always reflect the reality of what you will find on the ground.

The same was true for food and water.

I had planned the journey carefully, carrying supplies that should have been more than enough for the distance I expected to travel. But travel in places like this rarely follows a perfect plan.

Roads take longer than expected.

Tracks disappear.

Detours become necessary.

Slowly, almost without noticing it at first, the supplies began to shrink.

Food was becoming limited.

Water needed to be measured carefully.

Fuel was running lower with every mile.

Dexter remained blissfully unaware of any of this.

Whenever we stopped, he jumped out of the truck and explored with the same curiosity he always showed. The desert was simply another fascinating place for him, filled with new smells and wide open space.

Watching him sometimes made the situation feel less serious than it actually was.

But numbers don't lie.

The fuel gauge continued moving slowly downward.

The water containers grew lighter.

The food supplies shrank.

One afternoon I stopped the truck and sat quietly for a while, studying the map again.

The desert stretched around us in every direction.

No buildings.

No roads marked by signs.

No movement anywhere on the horizon.

Just sand, rock, and sky.

For the first time since entering the desert, a thought began to settle firmly into my mind.

This situation might be more serious than I had originally believed.

Driving further might lead us to help.

Or it might carry us deeper into a landscape where help simply did not exist.

Either way, the supplies we had were becoming dangerously limited.

I started the engine again and continued forward.

There was no point turning back. The distance behind us was just as uncertain as the distance ahead.

The truck rolled slowly across the desert floor.

Dexter sat beside me, looking out the window as the endless landscape passed by.

The horizon remained empty.

And with each passing mile, the fuel gauge crept closer to empty.

Chapter 19

The Adventure Box

By the time the fuel gauge dropped close to empty, the desert had become something very different from the place we first entered.

The wide open landscapes were still beautiful in a stark, unforgiving way. The horizon still stretched endlessly in every direction. But the sense of adventure that had carried us into the desert was slowly being replaced by something far more serious.

Reality.

The numbers were no longer easy to ignore.

Fuel was almost gone.

Food had been reduced to what little remained in the back of the truck.

Water was something I now measured carefully with every drink.

The **Gobi Desert** stretched around us without offering any sign of help.

I drove for as long as I could, scanning the horizon for anything that might suggest a road, a building, or even the faint outline of another vehicle.

There was nothing.

Eventually I stopped the truck.

Not because I had reached a destination.

But because I needed to think.

The engine fell silent, and with it the faint mechanical sound that had accompanied us for so many thousands of miles. When the truck stopped, the desert returned immediately to the deep quiet that defined it.

Dexter jumped out as soon as I opened the door.

He stretched, wandered a few metres away, and began investigating the ground with the same calm curiosity he always showed.

For him, the situation had not changed.

The desert was simply another place to explore.

I walked around the truck slowly and sat down on one of the adventure storage boxes we carried during the journey.

It was the kind of rugged container travellers often use on long expeditions — strong enough to hold tools, equipment, and supplies while doubling as a seat when there are no chairs for miles in any direction.

That afternoon, it became a place to sit and face a difficult reality.

The wind moved quietly across the sand.

The sky above seemed impossibly large.

For a long time I simply sat there looking out across the desert.

When you are alone in a place like that, something strange happens to your sense of time. Without the usual sounds and distractions of everyday life, minutes stretch out in ways that feel different.

The silence allows your thoughts to grow louder.

Eventually a thought formed clearly in my mind.

Dexter and I might not make it out of the desert.

The idea did not arrive with panic.

It arrived quietly.

A calm recognition of the situation we were in.

I looked over at Dexter.

He had settled onto the sand nearby, lying comfortably with his head resting on his paws. Every now and then his ears twitched as the wind carried unfamiliar scents across the open landscape.

Dogs don't understand fuel gauges.

They don't calculate distances or worry about the next place where water might appear.

They simply trust the person beside them.

That trust weighed heavily on me.

After a while I stood up and walked back to the truck.

I opened one of the windows.

Not because the air inside the cab was warm.

But because a thought had crossed my mind.

If something happened to us out here, I didn't want Dexter trapped inside the vehicle.

If the desert eventually claimed the truck, at least he would have a chance.

I closed the door again and returned to the adventure box.

The wind continued moving softly across the sand.

For the first time since entering the desert, I allowed myself to consider something honestly.

We might die here.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out my phone.

For a moment I simply stared at the screen.

Then I pressed record.

If someone eventually found the truck...

If someone eventually found the phone...

Perhaps they would understand how we had ended up here.

I began speaking quietly into the camera.

Not dramatically.

Just honestly.

But as the words left my mouth, something unexpected happened.

For years after Kira died, part of me had quietly been searching for an ending.

Not by deliberately taking my own life.

But by pushing myself into situations where fate might decide for me.

Sitting there on that adventure box, with the desert stretching endlessly around us, I suddenly realised something.

I could not die my way back to my daughter.

There was no road that led there.

Dexter shifted slightly in the sand beside me.

The wind moved softly across the open landscape.

And in that moment, in the middle of one of the most remote places on Earth, something inside me finally became clear.

The only promise I could still keep was to live.

To keep going. In her name.

Chapter 20

Leaving the Desert

After sitting on the adventure box for what felt like a very long time, the desert remained exactly as it had been before.

Silent.

Endless.

Unmoved by the thoughts that had passed through my mind.

The realisation I had reached did not suddenly change the situation Dexter and I were in. The fuel gauge was still dangerously close to empty. Food and water were still limited. The vast landscape surrounding us still showed no immediate signs of help.

But something inside me had shifted.

For years I had carried the quiet belief that perhaps the world might eventually decide my fate for me. That if I pushed far enough into difficult places, something might happen that would bring the story to an end.

Sitting there in the middle of the **Gobi Desert**, I realised that I no longer wanted that ending.

Not for myself.

And certainly not for the dog lying beside me in the sand.

Dexter lifted his head and looked at me as I stood up.

He seemed perfectly content with the pause in our journey, but when he saw me move toward the truck he rose to his feet immediately, ready to continue wherever the road might lead.

Dogs rarely question what comes next.

They simply trust that movement will follow.

I climbed back into the driver's seat and sat there for a moment, looking out across the landscape one more time.

The desert still stretched endlessly toward the horizon.

Somewhere out there, beyond the dunes and open plains, a track would eventually lead somewhere.

A settlement.

A fuel station.

A sign of life.

The challenge was reaching it.

I started the engine.

For a brief second I held my breath, listening to the sound of the motor turning over. Then the familiar rumble of the engine returned, steady and reassuring.

Dexter jumped back into the rear passenger seat as I closed the door.

The truck rolled forward slowly across the desert floor.

Every mile now carried a different meaning.

Before that moment on the adventure box, part of me had quietly accepted the possibility that the desert might become the place where everything ended.

Now the miles felt like something else entirely.

Each one was a step away from the edge.

The landscape continued passing by outside the window.

Dunes rose and fell along the horizon.

Wind moved softly across the sand.

Dexter watched the world outside with calm interest, occasionally shifting position as the truck moved across the uneven ground.

Hours passed.

Eventually something appeared in the distance.

At first it was only a faint shape breaking the flat line of the horizon.

Then it slowly became clearer.

A road.

Further along that road, a small settlement.

The feeling that arrived in that moment was not dramatic or overwhelming.

It was quiet.

Relief, mixed with the calm understanding that the journey was not finished yet.

But we had made it through the desert.

Dexter and I continued driving.

The vast landscape that had nearly become our final destination slowly began to fall behind us.

The desert had offered many things.

Silence.

Isolation.

Danger.

But it had also given me something I had been searching for without fully understanding it.

Clarity.

And with that clarity came something else.

A simple decision that would guide the rest of my life.

Keep going.

Chapter 21

The Mountains Again

After leaving the desert behind, life slowly began to take on a different shape.

The journey had carried Dexter and me across enormous distances and through landscapes that most people only ever see in photographs. Roads had stretched endlessly ahead of us. Horizons had shifted from mountains to plains to desert and back again.

But eventually every journey returns you to something familiar.

For me, that place was the mountains.

The same mountains where Kira and I had once spent so many weekends walking together. The hills where she had raced ahead on narrow trails, stopping every so often to turn around and remind me that I was moving too slowly.

“Come on, Daddy.”

Those words had once echoed along countless paths.

After the desert, I found myself returning to the Lake District more often.

There is something about mountains that makes reflection easier. Perhaps it is the effort required to climb them, or perhaps it is simply the silence that exists at higher elevations. Either way, the landscape encourages you to slow down and think.

Dexter seemed to enjoy the mountains just as much as the desert.

Whenever we arrived at the start of a trail, he would step out of the vehicle and immediately begin exploring. His thick coat and strong build suited the cooler air far better than the dry heat of the desert.

Step by step we climbed the familiar paths.

The terrain felt different from the shifting sand we had crossed months earlier. Here the ground was firm beneath our feet, shaped by stone and earth instead of dunes that moved with the wind.

The air felt cooler too.

Fresh.

Carried across valleys that stretched between the fells.

Eventually we climbed high enough to stand once again on the slopes of **Scafell Pike**.

Standing there brought back a flood of memories.

Years earlier Kira and I had climbed mountains like this together. She had always reached the summit with the same expression of quiet triumph, standing tall and looking out across the landscape as if the entire journey had been her idea.

Now I stood there with Dexter beside me.

The wind moved gently across the summit.

Clouds drifted slowly across the sky, casting shifting shadows across the valleys below.

Somewhere on this mountain were the ashes of my daughter.

The same little girl who had once raced ahead along these trails, her small boots crunching against the path while she called back over her shoulder.

“Come on, Daddy.”

Grief changes over time.

In the beginning it feels overwhelming, like something too large to carry. Later it becomes quieter, but it never completely disappears.

Standing there on the mountain, I realised something important.

The love between Kira and me had not ended when she died.

It had simply changed form.

The memories remained.

The lessons she had unknowingly left behind remained.

Even the strength she had shown during the hardest moments of her illness still seemed to guide the way I moved through the world.

Dexter sat beside me, calmly watching the landscape below.

For a while neither of us moved.

The wind continued its quiet conversation with the mountains.

The world stretched out endlessly in every direction.

And for the first time in a long time, standing there on the summit felt like something familiar.

Not the past exactly.

But something connected to it.

The mountains again.

Chapter 22

Keep Going

Life after grief does not suddenly become simple.

There is no moment when everything returns to the way it once was. Loss changes the shape of the world permanently. The people we love leave spaces behind that can never truly be filled.

But over time, something else slowly begins to appear alongside the grief.

Understanding.

Not the kind that explains everything or makes the pain disappear, but the quiet realisation that life continues moving forward whether we feel ready for it or not.

After the journey through the desert and the return to the mountains, I began to see my life differently.

For years I had carried the question Kira asked me on my birthday.

“Daddy... will you die with me so you can look after me?”

The weight of that question had followed me across continents. It had echoed through the quiet house, through the long months of grief, and all the way into the silence of the desert.

For a long time I believed that refusing her request meant I had somehow failed her.

But sitting on that adventure box in the middle of the **Gobi Desert**, something finally became clear.

The promise she had asked for had changed shape.

I could not die with her.

But I could live in a way that honoured her.

That understanding slowly became the centre of everything that followed.

Dexter continued walking beside me through the years that came after the desert. Every day still began with movement — walks across fields, along trails, sometimes back into the mountains where Kira and I had once spent so much time together.

Life remained quieter than it had been before.

But quiet is not the same as empty.

Memories appeared in unexpected moments.

A trail that reminded me of one we had climbed together.

A joke that echoed something she might have said.

Even the wind moving across the mountains sometimes carried a feeling of familiarity.

Grief does not disappear.

It simply learns how to exist alongside the rest of life.

Sometimes people ask how you keep going after losing someone so important.

The truth is that there is no perfect answer.

You take one step.

Then another.

Sometimes the steps feel heavy.

Sometimes they feel easier.

But you keep moving forward.

Because somewhere inside those memories is the voice of the person you loved.

And when I think about what Kira would say if she could see me now, the answer feels very simple.

I can almost hear her standing somewhere behind me on a trail, hands on her hips the way she used to stand on mountain summits.

“Come on, Daddy.”

“Keep going.”

And so I do.

Every day.

In her name.

Short Story Video

<https://youtu.be/0LYFM7EacEY>

