

Denis Kirby's

Master of the Fletching

*It begins with the thrum of the string
When its offspring is upon you, it is but a whisper
...if you even hear it.*

About the author

Denis Kirby picked up the pen after a 32 year career with a major Telecommunications Authority in Australia. When he left, he recalls “I sat in front of a blank sheet of paper and thought *what can I do? Then it came to me...what I can dream up in my mind, no one else can, so...I added further chapters to my life.* This is his second book after the initial ‘Venture Thee?’ His main ambition is to share his thoughts, characters and some situations drawn from his own experiences, mixed with imagination, with readers to then bring some enjoyment and relief from the hum-drum and strife that life throws at us. Perhaps this is best said with his words ‘This book is but a window, a wonderful window with a wonderful view of another time and place, its characters and events. Come with me now, relax, watch and enjoy.’

Also by the author

Venture Thee?

A Plaiting of Tales (due 2014) - Mary-Anne Regrets

- Biped

- Ol’ Morse

- Treasure Lost

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Author: Kirby, Denis.

Title: Master of the Fletching / Denis Kirby.

ISBN: 9780987242211 (pbk.)

Dewey Number: A823.4

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Melisia Fletcher's hobby is researching her family tree but she has come to a full stop.

A trip to England is needed to further her quest.

In an old monastery she reads an ancient biography, by a man of humble beginnings and his family a long time ago.

He was born with only half a name, Alun, but it was of no import to him. In his time he strove to feel life, to understand it, he was loved and had loved, hunted and been hunted. Life in those years threw many things at him, adventure, joy and its counterpart, sorrow.

As chance would have it 'Fletcher' became attached to his name.

The tale entralls Melisia to the point where she must trace and follow the footsteps of this possible forefather, with its frustrating confusions, its hopes and its dangers. Can she follow the trail some 700 years old with an untold and surprising fortune at its end with its twists and turns? And its perils?

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation to my wife Glenys, Lynne Fouracre and Barbara Maslen for their editing, encouragement and tolerance.

Also to Jim Pearce whose bookshop I walked into one day without a clue in the world as to how to begin?... And if?..... Without their help you would not be reading this.

Disclaimer

All events and characters in this tale are fictional. Some places do exist; I have taken the liberty of moving the dates of their being a little.

To the best person I have ever met, my wife Glenys
Giving of herself at any time for others

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Melbourne, Australia 2011

Steve Harrington stood behind and slightly to one side of the two women in the gallery.

“Yes! You can see this is from Gordon’s impressionable years.” said the rather matronly one. Steve glanced at her and noted the tied back hair bun, plain attire and spectacles.

“Yes, I agree,” answered the shorter woman “but I also read a little rebellion in the bold, vivid red slashes!”

“Mmm.....I see what you mean.....but then, of course, Gordon was a bit of a rebel.”

Silence.

“That was until he was killed!”

“How?” asked the shorter one with surprise, obviously not knowing that to hit the big time one had to be dead to be appreciated.

“Oh! The report as to the event was very sad.” The woman paused then continued “He was run over crossing Bourke Street, here in Melbourne, by a horse drawn carriage in eighteen ninety eight.”

“How terrible!”

“Yes.” She turned to the other, leaned down a little and whispered “One horse knocked him down and trod over him...and if that was not enough, the steel rimmed wheels of the carriage ran over him.”

Aghast, the smaller one stared at the painting and mumbled something. Without taking a breath, the other said softly “Cut his head off.”

Steve had picked all this up and as the women moved away, he thought *he probably resembled his painting*.

Standing there leaning his head from side to side and taking a step forward then back, he tried to make some sense of the splashes and slashes of paint on the canvas. He closed one eye and then the other, lifted one foot and leaned as far as he could without falling sideways and still couldn't see anything to lock onto. *Still beauty is in the eye of the beholder* he thought. Steve's mind then ran back to his visit to the maternity hospital where his niece had just given birth to a boy. He had been given a ticket with the baby's surname on it. He approached the viewing area, a room of babies in cribs; the marker ticket on each crib was either blue for a boy or pink for a girl, separated from the public area by a large glass window. He had been told to place the ticket, name side in, against the glass and the attendant nurse would wheel the baby to the front for your viewing. Two older women in winter coats were taking up their fair share of space oohing and ahhhing at a baby. “I can see Jack's eyes and his hair is dark, just like Alice's.” “Oh! And his nose is just like my Fred's”

They still had their ticket pressed to the glass and the nurse looked at them, shook her head then brought the right baby to the front. The pair carried on as though nothing untoward had happened.

Steve had chuckled a little then, as he did now in front of the painting.

He then turned and softly bumped into a woman. “Ah! I'm sorry.” he apologized.

“Quite alright.” Melisia Fletcher said softly, “I should not have been standing so close...but I was a little intrigued by your amusing antics in this sort of staid place.” She smiled.

“Well, yes. Something came over me and I had to go with it.”

“About the painting?”

“Oh! That...no. I find some canvas scrawling quite bizarre....that particular one anyway.”

Melisia was attractive, about up to his shoulder in height with fair towards blond hair almost to her shoulders; it gleamed in the overhead lighting. Her eyes sort of sparkled as she looked at him. She had a straight nose and high, smooth cheekbones.

About twenty-five I reckon, past the air-head stage of late teens Steve thought.

“Really?” she questioned.

“Yeah, that type of stuff doesn’t grab me. Mostly I think that artists that make a mess on canvas like *that* are really only giving vent to their confused mind and trying to express their inner torments.”

Melisia smiled with an amused stare.

“And,” he continued “a lot of them never could draw. The works of Picasso look like someone has run over a cat or people with eyes and faces going any which way.”

“Really?” Melisia said again. “And I presume you could do better?”

“No!” was the blunt answer. “But I can make better pictures.”

“How?”

“I take photographs. And right now, I would like to take yours, and a pretty picture it will make.”

She thought for but a second “No thanks, I have to be going.”

“You can spare a few moments ...surely to give me the picture of a lifetime, I’m renowned in my field....I’ll give you a copy...”

“Okay. Okay, you have...”

“And then I’ll shout you to a cup of coffee so you can relax.”

They sat at a table in the open, bustling court of the Melbourne Central complex. Shoppers and tourists of all sizes, genders and nationalities trooped through the wide and colourful area of shops and attractions. The mall was dominated by the awesome presence of the old shot tower which stood central and commanding attention from the hundreds there. One could not ignore it.

“That is big!” Melisia exclaimed as she looked up to take in its height.

“There’s a tour to the top if you like?”

“Ah!...no I don’t think so.”

“All the steps up, and of course down, are on the inside so you can’t fall off.”

“No thanks, I feel fine sitting right here.”

“Not a thrill seeker then?”

“No.” she smiled and almost giggled like a schoolgirl.

Melisia was not entirely at ease here with a man she had just met. Oh, he seemed pleasant enough but she was a little out of her comfort zone. It was almost two years since that bastard Bret shit on her and she had been taking pains to not get involved with the male of the species since. All of that ‘since’ time with its sadness and disappointment and self questioning, not to mention loneliness, Melisia had been plagued by efforts of close friends Louise and Josie with their helpful advice. *Why do those secure in a marriage or relationship always try to match you up with someone?* she had often thought. It became that if Melisia was invited to a barbecue or some other outing, she would bet that there was a ‘prince charming?’ organized to appear.

And yet here she sat with a bloke, trying to make friendly conversation *at least it was my decision.*

“So you are a photographer?”

“Yes.” he nodded.

“Your main studies?”

“Ah...whatever takes my fancy...such as this,” he gestured at the tower “and many others.”

“There are more of these chimney stacks?”

“Yes,” he smiled “they aren’t chimneys, they’re shot towers.” Judging by Melisia’s expression Steve could tell she didn’t have any idea of what he was talking about so he continued “These things were built in many countries to make lead balls for muskets etcetera when that was the sort of ammo in use. To make the bullets round, moulds to cool molten lead into balls were used but this process was slow and with a war or two here and there things needed to be sped up.” here he paused “Boring?”

“On the contrary.”

Steve ordered two more coffees and went on. “In the eighteenth century a man, William Watts in the UK, got the idea that if molten lead was dropped from a height it would, under its own surface tension, turn from a teardrop shape into a ball, which it does if the tower is high enough. Incidentally we have all seen raindrops depicted in books, cartoons and the like as teardrop shaped, but in fact they are round when they hit the ground.”

“God! How big were the drops?”

“Whatever was wanted. The molten lead was poured through a copper screen with holes of the size required. That process is not used now; shotgun pellets and such are made by less messy and faster methods.”

“Fascinating.” Melisia urged so as to seem intrigued, which she was, but not all that much.

“I have photographed many of the towers, mostly in Australia and America, over the last year or so, there are three in the UK that I want to get to in the near future. You should come up and see my collection.”

“Is that a let me show you my etchings type of invitation?”

“More or less.”

They both laughed.

“So you travel a bit?” Melisia asked.

“Yeah, when I get the opportunity.”

“And may I ask, is it a hobby or business?”

“Bit of both. I take a lot of shots for travel agencies, you know, for brochures and things. If say, I’m going to Japan, I take many photographs of attractions here and approach agencies over there, while I’m there, I film many places which we are unaware of and bring the prints back here. It’s a contra-deal. Countries, like the US of A, have millions of people who don’t even know of Australia, some get it confused with Austria. Some states there don’t know what is going on in other states. All the media, unless it’s an America-shattering event, seem to concentrate on news within that state. A bit like Queensland here, they think Australia grew as an appendage on it instead of the other way round, same as Texas thinking.”

“My!”

“And now, what about you?”

“Hobbies?....not a lot. I read a fair bit, novels mainly but sometimes the occasional autobiography. I work at my father’s warehousing business out north of Tullamarine way, flying a desk. I enjoy the work, it’s pretty busy and believe me, being the boss’s daughter doesn’t get you any special considerations, in fact I get more work thrown at me to prove that.”

Steve ventured a little by asking with a sort of hesitant smile “Are you seeing anybody?”

Melisia looked directly into his eyes and saw the same steady look coming her way. “Not at the moment.” She took a sip from the almost empty coffee cup.

Silence.

“Well then, perhaps we can meet again for, say dinner somewhere soon?”

“I’d like that.”

“Good! When?”

Melisia chuckled a little “You don’t waste time do you?”