

DENIS KIRBY'S
VENTURE THEE?

The Author

Denis Kirby is an Australian writer who has picked up the pen later in life. This is his first novel. He is working on the next two, *Master of the Fletching* and *A Plait of Tales*. 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 perhaps 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.’

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Venture Thee?

The old utility lay on its side, engine stopped, and uppermost front wheel still spinning. One dislodged spotlight was illuminating the top of some track-side trees.

A dazed Lindsay looked up...into the drooling jaws of a huge, rabid animal. Its teeth were tearing at the protective steel mesh in a frenzy to get at him. The mesh was coming loose.....

...But we must go back, for this tale begins some 9000 miles distant in another country.

Adam Kirby was hanging on the end of a sun-heated crowbar, digging for opals at Lightning Ridge, Australia, when told of his inheritance. It was a country property in Ireland with an old, neglected mansion left to him by a grandfather he never knew existed. It was a gift out of the blue and should have been good news.

It did not turn out that way.

There was something strange about the old house; a theme of mystery seemed to hang over this place, a pervasion of some strange influence.

The mansion held treasures, waiting to be discovered, but there were guardians that lurked...there ...and thereabouts.

Determined to settle in this new country, Adam and his newly found love, together with Irish friends, must overcome the perilous challenges that arise if they are to survive and build their future.

Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. If you believe you or anyone else is portrayed herein, I say unto you “Tough Tits”. What follows is from my imagination with a mix of places and as such, any character herein bearing resemblance to one living or has passed on, is coincidental. Enjoy as you come with me into this, my first tale.

Acknowledgements

Before we begin I must say that getting this novel to this stage has taken considerable effort. If it had not been for the help, support and encouragement of the following people, my road would have been much harder.

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Venture Three?

I of Part One

The flight attendant smiled at the man in seat 74D as she approached the rear of the Jumbo 747 aircraft. It was the normal, welcoming expression to all passengers.

She noticed the way his smile in return seemed a bit strained. Glancing at his hands that gripped the armrests of the seat so that his knuckles showed white through the tanned skin, she let the smile linger longer than normal as she paused.

“Everything okay sir?” she asked.

“It’ll do thanks.” he replied but as he looked at her, his pale blue eyes gave it away. The attendant had seen many a first time flyer and this one was typical of the breed. He had what was called ‘white knuckle fever’.

“Please fasten your seat belt sir. We will be taking off shortly.” The phrase ‘leaving the ground’ was to be always avoided in their repertoire. As she spoke, the plane began to move. She walked up the aisle.

This indeed was Adam Kirby’s first flight and as the whine of the engines came to his attention, he wanted to be anywhere else but here.

As the plane sat on the runway and the whine from great engines increased with an accompanying slight vibration, his grip on the armrests became severe and a thought landed suddenly in his mind *for Christ’s sake settle down...don’t hit the panic button!*

Adam glanced at other passengers nearby. The bloke wearing a grey suit in the seat next to him put his reading papers into a briefcase and stowed it under the seat in front. He then clipped his seat belt with a loud professional click and adjusted his seat to the upright. The efficiency of the movements had a slightly annoying effect on Adam. *Smart arse* came to mind.

He peered up the aisle towards the front of the plane and apart from three flight attendants taking their seats after final checks on seatbelts and luggage lockers, everyone but him seemed calm. Some passengers were chatting in a relaxed way. A few seats in front, a woman laughed at an aside comment.

His mood changed for the worse when the noise of the engines increased and the craft began to move at an incredible rate down the runway. As the nose of the Jumbo lifted into the air he felt as if the armrests might come off in his hands *Don't shit yourself... ..clench those cheeks together...* The idea persisted, so he did just that for what seemed an indeterminable minute or two until the effort overrode some of his trepidation and he began to calm.

As the aircraft attained its predetermined altitude of 36,000 feet, it leveled out and the engines settled to a steady almost reassuring tone.

The attendants began their duties again. From behind Adam came the woman he met prior to take-off. She paused and smiled.

“First time traveller?” she asked in a low voice.

“It shows does it?” Adam said as he made a conscious effort to signal his hands to ease upon the armrests.

“A little.” The smile held.

“Would you care for some refreshment sir, or a magazine?”

“I reckon I can handle a beer thanks.”

She made an attempt to ask the same question of the man seated next to Adam, but was met with a curt shake of the head halfway through the words.

Adam started to relax while feeling that his middle finger on the right hand ached from its wrestle with the armrest. *Old injury* he recalled.

The attendant returned from the rear galley with a can of Fosters and a plastic beaker on a tray. Adam refused the beaker.

As he drank, almost sipping from the can, he watched her progress up and down her obviously allotted length of aisle. He liked the look of her. *Of course the sway of the arse and grooming is part of the package...but they do pick the good ones for the job don't they?*

Adam caught her attention on one of her returns to the galley and asked for another beer.

“There you are sir.” the attendant said.

“Thanks..but....lets drop the sir, from what they tell me, this is going to be a long trip and I reckon I can handle a few of these.” Adam nodded to the can as he lifted it from the tray, and then added “I don’t need the formality if that’s okay?”

“Yes s..,”

“Adam!”

“Okay then Adam. Enjoy the flight.”

As she turned away he asked “Well I’ve told you mine....what’s yours?”

She did a slow turn. “Isabel.” she said with a bemused look.

Adam raised his can in some sort of toasting gesture while holding her gaze “Nice to meet you Isabel.”

His arm-side passenger let out a small grunt as he reached down for his briefcase.

Adam was starting to feel good. Even *Mister silent* in the seat next door was of no consequence. *Who cares?*

He had to suppress a chuckle as he looked again along the aisle and watched a not overly tall flight attendant make his way towards the rear with a short-stepping mincing walk. He had a lively step to the purpose and his rimless glasses caught flashing reflections from the interior lighting. The empty serving tray held upon the fingertips of his right hand was superbly balanced.

“Douglass?” Adam heard Isabel ask.

“Princess I must really have more colas for up front. They just go and go and I’ve run out, I mean completely out my sweet!”

Adam watched Doug go back up the aisle with those quick little steps. He smiled and had to give the attendant credit for the balancing act with half a dozen cans on the tray. *Each to his own* he thought, and then *I’ve heard they’re of a lot better temperament than some of the bastards I’ve met.*

Over the many hours, Adam spent his time browsing through the in-flight magazines, dozing on and off and stretching his legs along the aisle every now and then. He was bored at times and thought of the open air and country he had not long ago left. Not like this artificial cocoon with its lights, seats and carpet. And yet he was

now quite relaxed, even complacent, with having overcome his earlier trepidations as to the concept of flight. Earlier thoughts of an *aircraft being a heap of spare parts flying in close formation* had now faded.

The trip due to a complementary tail wind was twenty-five minutes ahead of schedule.

“We will be landing in around thirty minutes ... Adam, another drink before I close the galley?”

“No thanks Isabel. Been a great trip so far....er..do you know of a good place to stay overnight in London?”

“There are many.”

“I guess so.”

“You are going further?”

“Ireland, down near the city of Cork.” Then he added in a slightly raised voice for the benefit of his next-seated neighbour “I’ve been left a substantial holding there and thought I should drop by and check it out.”

“Lucky you!” Isabel said in mild surprise.

“Yeah! A lot of acres and a big ol’ mansion I believe.”

“Really! That’s the stuff they make films about. Let’s hope it’s not haunted.” she lightheartedly quipped with a smile.

“Well I won’t know ‘till I get there.” Adam returned the smile and thought he noticed some intrigue in her eyes.

As she went to turn away Isabel remembered and said “Oh! The accommodation! You might try the Paddington. Any taxi driver knows it. It’s pretty central to everything and quite comfortable.”

Before leaving the airport Adam confirmed his passage next morning on Aerlingus Airlines to Cork. All travel arrangements had been advised to the novice traveller Adam, as organized by ‘involved legal people’ in Australia.

A taxi journey later, he found himself outside The Paddington. It was an impressive building he thought but a bit too staid for his liking *and too bloody formal looking.*

After a long awaited shower and a welcome change of clothing, he felt on better terms with the accommodation. The room was spacious, not too Spartan, although the bed looked like a slab of grey rock. He checked the blankets and *yes, the sheets underneath would need to be prised up using both arms so I can get into the damn bed when the time comes.* He had often wondered about this thing in hotels and motels he had stayed in back home. Was it part of some training course that bed-makers go through or are the kind-hearted old dears unaware of their own strength? While knowing that his big feet had a fair grip on *Terra Firma* at any time, did he have to risk breaking his toes when he turned over through the night?

Adam grabbed a beer from the small fridge and moved to the window. *Stop whingeing* he thought, *you sound like a Pom.*

He sipped and stared out of the second story window over this part of good ol’ London town. *What was that about whingeing?...no it was whining! That’s it...how do you know that the plane just landed in Australia is full of Pommies?.....you can hear the whining after the engines have stopped!*

Adam knew he had a set on the English, even though he came from that line in a round about way. His father was born in Ireland but left its shores at the age of twenty-five and took up citizenship in England, to then travel to Australia. He never told Adam why.

The resentment of the English was not born in him but rather grew as he read accounts of Australian soldiers needlessly dying under British Commanders in the conflict of wars. Such resentment

was not only borne by him but had shown its face during those times by the Australian soldiers. These men did not respect officers who were granted Officer Status by way of heritage. This was in sharp contrast to their allegiance to Australian Commanders who had ‘come up to the mark through the ranks’.

Such thoughts over the years merged with the occasional tale, whether true or not, from some old returned and bitter Diggers. The like of which was that after the fucked-up ‘Winston Churchill inspired’ campaigns at Gallipoli and in Greece, Churchill never visited Australia. This presumption was passed down, rumour or not, to many in the younger generations and some of this bitter shit sticks in one’s mind.

And the raping of Australia’s resources in the 1800’s, that saw three million ounces of gold from diggings at Ballarrat and Bendigo go back to good old Mother E together with 120,000 tons of Australian Teak gathered from the Tweed Heads region in Queensland alone, were but samples that had nurtured his bitterness over the years towards the English. The feeling that such things were not common knowledge also piqued him and he often felt that he was the only silly bastard who was saddened by such facts.

The thought of the legal commandeering of thousands of these trees 150 feet high and 5 feet through was stunning to his mind. Adam considered it theft coupled with a total disregard of the new country and its future, to then be mixed with the self adopted superiority over others that the English prided, and still do, themselves on.

He knew he carried the grudge and he accepted that it gnawed away at him to the detriment of his own character towards the race. He had tried to wave it off over the years and indeed met a few English blokes that seemed alright but things he discovered in literature as the years passed, kept the fire alight...recorded events such as at the end of World War Two, the Australian soldiers were not allowed to march past Buckingham Palace because they were considered as too unruly.... cowboys and larrikins if you like, labeled thus despite the thousands of good, young souls that lay, having clutched with all hope gone, the stock or barrel of .303 Lee Enfield rifle, on foreign soil to then die under the command of

English Overlords. These lost lives were a serious depletion of a small, fledgeling population that would take decades to adjust.

After all they were but Colonials were they not?

The New Zealanders could parade past the Palace however, and did. Despite the ANZAC brotherhood, Adam could never understand why the New Zealanders had not told the powers that were ‘If the Aussies can’t march past the bloody thing then we won’t either, so stick it up your arse!’

Such thoughts got in the way of any softening of Adam’s attitude towards any Pom, even more so than any from that island showing any form of snobbery.

The things he discovered and his growing dislike for the breed had occurred mainly after his dad had passed away. He was never sure that he could ever have confronted his father with them together with his resentment of the English, in any case.

Snapping back now from such thoughts, Adam turned from the window and decided that this morose mood could be lightened by a walk and perhaps a meal somewhere.

As he descended the stairs to the foyer he saw Isabel at the reception desk.

And immediately felt a little guilty with his first assumptions of a dressed up Barbie doll in an airline uniform. She was a woman in her own right. Sure the airline uniform gave grace to the figure...but as she turned from the counter, the sparkling surprise in her eyes as she saw him did something to his chest.

“Well G’day!” was all his bumbling out-back country boy mind could summon up in that split second.

“Ah! The Lord of the manor! Good afternoon.”

The uniformed reception clerk stopped whatever he was doing and stared at Adam.

Adam was sort of stuck for something to say but managed a meek “And also to you.”

“I see you have booked in.”

“Er..yes!..I was just on my way out to find a place to eat and stretch the legs a bit.” He held her gaze. “All that cramped thirty odd hours you know.”

“Know what you mean.” Isabel offered. “Two blocks down Dorset Street here is a nice little pub that has a real atmosphere.....and great meals. It’s the Kent.

Again he was struggling for response and could feel his face getting warm *you’re starting to blush you big wacker.*

“What say I join you there in...say an hour?” she toyed and pointed “it’s down that way.’

Adam knew that the surprise registered on his face. He could not stop it. Her smile beamed in recognition. Isabel walked towards the stairs as he took a breath and almost stammered “Great!”

The reception man followed Isabel with his eyes as she went up the staircase, and then flicked back to Adam in a wondering of the ‘Lord of the Manor’ scenario.

The meal at the Kent was indeed superb, albeit the better for the companionship of Isabel. Adam had to discipline himself to the etiquette of eating small mouthfuls of food, the protocol of such had been neglected for many of his years in outback Australia where home-cooked meals in a pub were shoveled in as fast as one could chew and swallow.

There had only been small talk exchanged during the course of dinner. Isabel had been with the airline for eleven years, the first six of which she spent in an office environment followed by a transfer to flight attendant duties. Her home was in Newcastle, Australia where her parents resided and yes she loved the travel opportunities that her career offered. No, she was not married or in any serious relationship.

On Adam’s part, Isabel learned that he had worked around Australia mainly in jobs that seemed to be away from major centres. He had no written qualifications to speak of but she gathered that he was able to turn his hand to most practical applications. Isabel had always considered that higher education did not necessarily mean higher intelligence. As he spoke about things she could see that he was not a footloose or shallow-rooted gypsy but rather someone in search of... something?

“Did you ever marry, Adam?” she ventured to ask in a casual way.

“No. I never sort of had a reason to. There was always the work to do and I guess I didn’t run into the right person in my travels.”

“Your parents?”

“Both deceased.” he replied with an ‘it happens’ look on his face.

“I am sorry to hear that, you must miss them?”

“Yeah I do at times...but then I’d left to do my roaming thing so we were often a thousand miles apart for lengthy periods.”

Seeing her attentiveness to his words, he continued “They were doing what they wanted to do and enjoying it. The annual camel race in Alice Springs held particular fascination for them. They attended that for many years....the last being in nineteen ninety five when the light plane they were in went down in the Simpson Desert.....all fourteen aboard were lost.”

Isabel could only say softly “What a tragedy.” as she slowly shook her head and looked in sorrow at the man opposite. She could now perhaps understand his nervousness in the aircraft at their first meeting.

They strolled through Hyde Park enjoying the evening, stopping here and there to marvel at a tree or a floral garden layout that caught the eye.

It was near dark when they returned to the Paddington. Adam escorted her to the door of her room.

“Well, it’s been great.... thanks.” he said with slight floundering for words. He did not know how to end these things. He really was a novice, and a very inexperienced one at that.

Isabel lent back against the wood panelling on the wall and looked into his eyes trying not to smile too much at his uneasiness.

“Yes it has been a very pleasant evening Adam and it is I who must thank you. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.” Isabel emphasized the last word.

She had not broached the obvious subject of the old mansion in Ireland during dinner. From what she gathered it was the only reason for him being here at this place at this time. But she was intrigued, even excited with this could-be fairytale event.

“When do you leave for Cork?”

“Nine in the morning.” He sensed her interest and added “Why don’t you come?”

“Love to...really! But I’m on duty tomorrow. Flying back to good old Oz late afternoon. But I must tell you that I would love to see the place that you’ve inherited.” Isabel fumbled in her purse and resurrecting a small notepad, then finding a pencil stub, wrote on the small page and tore it free. “This is my telephone number in Newcastle, give me a ring when things work out, I have some leave coming up in the near future, and perhaps we could see each other again. I would love to see the old mansion at that time if at all possible. Oh, by the way, my surname is Cassidy.”

Adam looked at the note in his hand and then at her “Mine is Kirby.”

Isabel came off the wall and kissed him with a slight lingering, full on the mouth. Before his lips could respond to the soft warm assault she broke off and unlocked her door. She turned back to him and smiled “Thanks Adam Kirby, it *has* been great.”

Then she was gone.

He stood in the sudden confusion of the *see ya later roast potata* kind of dismissal; his bottom lip still tingled from the kiss. Adam nodded his head in acceptance and made his way to his room.