

2. Bear in a Barrel

Ted likes to tell people that he was adopted, or even recruited, but in fact Kristin *bought* him for £12.99 in a duty-free shop in London Gatwick airport, and then brought him without any documentation back to the U.S. in the luggage bin of a DC10. That is why Ted found himself in the difficult position of being a non-human illegal alien.

Kristin's job as a Sleep Object was not a very good job – it paid very little, and the only worthwhile fringe benefit besides room and board was proximity to her magnificent boobs – but Ted was not in a position to be fussy.

The astute reader might wonder how it came to pass that an exceptional bear such as Ted was up for sale. The events that led up to this unfortunate state of affairs are easy to explain. Ted's mother Brenda got fed up with life in Holland, and more specifically she was very angry when she found out that the prostitutes' union had species restrictions and she could not join. She decided to move to London and ply her trade in a cheap hotel near King's Cross station, reasoning (incorrectly, as it turned out) that things there couldn't be any worse than in Amsterdam. Obviously she had never eaten English pub food before. Her business was not good and ultimately she signed up with an agency (Bearly Legal) that featured prostitutes from non-human species. Unfortunately the police, acting on the basest of speciesist motives, decided to crack down on the non-human sex trade and Brenda was duly arrested, charged and convicted. This was a shock to her because, coming from Amsterdam, she had no idea that prostitution could be illegal. She was sentenced to 30 days in a zoo, and her two sons (Ted and Edgar, both teddy bears) were declared wards of the court.

The court decided to put Ted and Edgar up for adoption. Adoption for teddy bears is not quite what it is for humans, at least in the developed world, since they were sold at auction as part of a large lot of adoptable (i.e. surplus) bears. The company that bought the bears then sorted them according to cuteness. You don't want to think about what happened to the less cute ones, but the cute ones, like Ted, were then wholesaled to the duty free shop in the Gatwick South Terminal and put into a large barrel located near the checkout counter. Next to the barrel was a sign that read:

Teddy Bears £2.99

(with £15 purchase. £12.99 without purchase)

Ted started out in the bottom of the barrel and moved up only when a bear above him was sold. Virtually every purchaser just took a bear from the top of the barrel, and no one paid more than £2.99. Many of the purchasers smelled of cigarettes, cheap whiskey or overly strong perfume, which presumably explained why they were in the duty free shop. Some of them had children with them, and Ted was smart enough to know that the worst thing that can happen to a teddy bear is to be given to a child. (What happens to the bear when the child grows up?? In England, they usually end up in the dust bin, which Ted later learned is called the trash in America, but in either country it is a sad end.)

While Ted bided his time working his way up in the barrel, he considered his predicament. Because he had listened to a CD that his mother had ordered from the Harvard Business School, he knew that he should be pro-active and have a business plan. When the bears were let out of the barrel late at night to use the bathroom, and most of the other bears spent their time in the bar cadging drinks from the passengers stranded overnight, Ted observed and thought. He learned that Gatwick airport is London's

second-rate airport (Heathrow is classier) and that the South Terminal is Gatwick's second-rate terminal (the North Terminal has most of the interesting flights, and all of the British Airways flights). Many of the passengers also had a second-rate look to them, which he would later learn had nothing to do with Gatwick or the South Terminal, but rather to the mind-numbing and body-weariness effects of travel in economy class. These were dispirited people in a dispirited terminal in a dispirited airport, going to dispirited places like Tivat, Accra, Minsk, Kos, Dalaman, Agadir, the Isle of Man, Belfast City and Glasgow. In short, they were *not* the sort of people he would care to belong to, or to be employed by, or even to have dinner with, unless they were buying the drinks.

However, Ted discovered that Northwest Airlines had flights to Minneapolis that left from the South Terminal, and he set his mind to being chosen by an American going to Minneapolis. Minneapolis had a reputation as a clean and prosperous city. It was cold there, but cool summer days are desirable when you are permanently covered in fur, and cold winter days (and nights) are good hibernating weather. Most of its bridges do not collapse. It's a politically moderate state. Lots of bears live nearby. All in all, Ted thought, it would be a good place to call home.

Ted knew that, when he got to the top of the barrel, he would have to move quickly, and he did. The two bears above him were sold and he and Edgar found themselves on top, looking out. Almost immediately he saw a pair of obviously British adults with a girl of about five, their shopping basket full of well over £15 worth of merchandise, considering whether to buy him or Edgar. The girl reached for Ted, and quick as a wink he transformed out of stuffed mode, bit her on the finger, and transformed back. "Mummy," she yelled, "that bear bit me!" Mummy obviously did not

believe that a stuffed bear could bite, and Daddy was too busy checking out an incredibly beautiful woman who had just come into view to have paid any attention, so Mummy just said, “Well, pick the other bear, then.” The girl did, and that is how Edgar came to live in Peterborough, and take his vacations in Weston- super-Mare, Blackpool, and even less interesting places.

And then Ted followed Daddy’s glance and saw Kristin. She was walking quickly across the terminal, oblivious to the lustful stares of the male passengers and the envious and/or resentful stares of the females. She was covered in pearls, diamonds, and little else – her little black dress went half way up her thighs and half way down her chest – and her magnificent body was there for all to see. Behind her, struggling with several obviously heavy carryons, followed a very muscular, not very intelligent looking person with a bulging chest and bulging eyes. Ted thought he looked like a Bulgarian weightlifter, and indeed that is what Piotr had been before he met Kristin.

Ted decided instantly (and correctly) that Kristin was American, even though she was not fat. Because she had blond hair and vaguely Scandanavian features, he also decided (incorrectly) that she was going to Minneapolis. So he fluffed his fur, aligned his ears properly, and winked at her.

Ted had two things going for him at this point. First, Kristin had never before been winked at by a teddy bear, so it got her attention. Second, her previous teddy bear had, only a few months before, had a heart attack and died on the treadmill (too much exercise is not good for any species), so she was in need of a Sleep Object. She marched over to the barrel, read the sign, said, “Piotr! Do you have any pounds left?”, and proceeded to buy Ted for the full price of £12.99 without a second’s hesitation.

Ted was disappointed to discover that he was headed for Detroit, not Minneapolis. He was also surprised to discover that he would be travelling economy class. This would be Ted's only flight ever in economy class, but the discomfort was somewhat mitigated by the fact that he spent the flight stretched out in the overhead luggage bin, which is plenty roomy for a small bear. Also he was able to open one of the carry-on bags that Piotr had been struggling with and help himself to some of the liquor that was in it. When they got to Detroit, Kristin cautioned him to stay in stuffed mode until they got through customs and immigration, since he had no documentation, and then they were off to Kristin and Piotr's condo in the somewhat depressing outer suburb of Ann Arbor.

While Ann Arbor is not necessarily a more pleasant or interesting place than Peterborough, it is true that Ted was destined to travel a lot more than Edgar, and to considerably more interesting places. Indeed the only real advantage to Ann Arbor, besides it being the site of Kristin's job as a Professor of Statistics at the University of Michigan, is that it is close to the Detroit airport. In 1999, the year of Ted's purchase, you could travel nonstop from Detroit to Amsterdam, Paris, London, Frankfurt, Tokyo, Osaka, Seoul, Beijing, and of course many, many domestic destinations, some of which (e.g. Syracuse, Moline, Louisville) admittedly are not more interesting than Weston-super-Mare. Ted would discover the world! And, while summer days are less cool in Michigan than in Minnesota, and there are less wild bears nearby, the Michigan winters would also provide good hibernating weather.