

Gate 24 Dreaming by Lisa Conolly

A soft electronic voice etched into his dream.

“...now boarding at Gate 27...”

A few conscious neurones registered that this was not his gate and another drowsy wave moulded him to the floor.

Air travel was designed to prevent sleep and provoke dreaming. Chairs with armrests that probed flesh. Seats that reclined only inches away from a restful position. Cold air that condensed limbs into stiff alertness. But taking you somewhere else, somewhere better than before.

He had flown only four hours from Darwin, but it was an early flight after a late night. The fishing season was over and they celebrated hard on the north edge of Australia. He was on his way back to Melbourne, to the olds' house, but he had a few dollars saved and maybe he could rent somewhere. He'd never had a place of his own.

The airport floor was in constant motion beneath him. A puddle of dreams surrounded him. Spongy dripping tentacles clutched his camera, and a large squid eye looked roundly at him. He heard the reassuring sound of his camera shutter. *Schlorck*. And again it went. *Schlorck*. The eye blinked. *Schlorck*. Tentacles danced around him. Another sound interjected. Grinding through water. *GrrRrrRrrGrrRrrRrrGrr...* it was constant and getting louder. Water wheels. He woke flinging out his arm and reaching for the air.

A woman walked past. Her heels clicked and her luggage whirled along behind her.



Gate 24 (Adelaide Airport) by Lisa Conolly

He checked his bag. His camera was still there. He had some great shots. He dreamed of writing a book about his travel adventures. The fishing story had to be told. The oceans were dying. The fishing was getting tougher. There was a war going on out there. People fought each other for fish and the fish could not fight back.

He needed water. He dug out his water bottle. Empty. He needed aspirin. The wonder drug. It would fix anything. Anything could be fixed. Somehow. He pushed the floor away from him and stood up, feeling fluid. Adelaide airport was soaked in light that turned night into day, and tossed sleep into the air. His muddled mind wandered off to find a tap and his body flowed after him, tentatively, tentacles still dancing in front of his eyes.

His bag sat there. Left behind. His thongs tossed aside, lying dormant. A bag on it's own. In an airport. Waiting. A lone bag. Left. Abandoned. Ominous.

His bare feet were cold now. He returned to find his thongs stashed neatly against the winged panel. He had not noticed the wing before. How could he have missed that? Why were his thongs standing so neatly? Had he done that? The water had balanced him, but his focus was still blurred. His bag. He hadn't picked up his bag. The bag was gone. His camera. Blast. Blast. Blast.. How could he be so stupid. Airports were not safe anymore.

He looked around, confused. A man came toward him, carrying his bag.

"here you go mate, is this your bag?"

"Er, yeah"

"you shouldn't leave it lying around. Not these days. People will think there's a bomb in it or something"

"Er, yeah"

"so I checked it out. Nice camera"

"Er, yeah"

"are you a photographer?"

"er, yeah, sorta"

"well there it is. Someone could've stolen it. Are you on the Melbourne flight?"

"er, yeah"

"well have a good trip then"

The man walked off and sat just yards away, and then took a phone out of his pocket. He glanced up and smiled.

He was an odd looking man. Ethnic. Dark and hairy, with a neatly trimmed black beard. He could be middle eastern. Something

made him look mean, even when he smiled. What was he doing with a stranger's bag? Why did he mention a bomb?

His bag felt heavier than before. A ripple of nausea passed through him. He sat down, feeling weak and tired. He felt into his bag and a jumble of objects played with his hands. Who knew what they were.

The ethnic man talked into his phone.

He found his camera and took it out. He pointed it toward the ethnic man. They smiled together. *Schlorck*.

Another picture for his travel log. Another untold story.

"Qantas wishes to advise all passengers to Melbourne on flight 234, your flight is now ready for boarding at Gate 24"

Time to go. Merrily. Life is but a dream.