

## **Are You Sure?**

**2000 words**

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I inherited some bucks, bought a weekend place at Stinson Beach, got lucky with the timing.

My other stuff didn't go as well. Guy I met at a skate rink snack bar talks me into partnering up with him. We brokered house cleaning and maintenance services to high-priced neighborhoods. There were back-end perks.

It was sweet there for a while and then we got fancy and tried to expand too quick and others figured out how to do it better and we went belly-up.

My Mill Valley house got foreclosed. Half-way up Mount Tam, what a spot unfortunately. The woodsy dampness of the redwoods, bay laurels in the backyard, that licorice smell of anise bushes. Not a lot of views, just a sliver where you caught San Francisco Bay, but that was enough.

So I moved into the Stinson Beach place full time. The house was small and rough around the edges, it was unrenovated, but there was a fenced-in patio where you

could hear the waves and sit in the hot tub. There was a path to the beach.

I got to know most of the full-timers. You had artists and writers and surf bums and a few old hippies mixed in with telecommuters.

One of the old hippies made a good suggestion, said if you get in a jam and need cash rent the place out and camp somewhere.

I tried it on a a 3-day weekend, didn't camp but visited my sister in Carmel Valley and it went fine. After that I listed it when I felt like, for as long as a week. I never had a problem renting the place and no one whittled me down on the price even though I was waiting for them to.

I developed my go-to camping spots. Samuel Taylor Park was great if it wasn't booked. Doran Beach in Bodega Bay, and Ocean Cove near Jenner.

I met a woman named Peg. She wasn't quite full-time at Stinson, she spent three days and two nights down at Google in Mountain View, but when she was around we walked on the beach and she sometimes came back for cocktails and stayed over.

And vice-versa, when I had my house rented and I didn't feel like camping I'd sometimes crash at her place.

Which is where I'm waking up one Saturday morning and Peg's already been out and she hands me a steaming cup of coffee.

'Plenty of stand-up paddleboarders in the water,' she said. 'Are you *sure* you don't want to try it?' Peg is athletic, she owns a paddleboard and even surfs a bit.

'Nah since that one time I got spun around bad bodysurfing,' I said, 'I'm not the same out there. I told you about that.'

'Yes you mentioned it like 10 times. Why not get past it? We have one of the most perfect beaches on the west coast.'

'Come here,' I said.

'Also,' she said, 'there were the *cutest* little babies gamboling on the sand. Kevin had so much fun playing with them.' Kevin was Peg's mutt dog, didn't typically like humans.

'Okay don't make me look up words. And Gee, good for Kevin.'

‘You’re being sarcastic. The babies were dogs obviously. Black labs, young frisky ones. Off leash unfortunately.’

‘That’s not good,’ I said. ‘Did you tell the people?’

‘No. Everyone was having such a good time. I didn’t want to be the bad guy.’

‘Yeah well someone should say something.’ Stinson was strict, citations were running 300 bucks and it didn’t matter if you were here for the first time and weren’t aware of the rules.

‘Happy to go with you,’ Peg said. ‘*Such* a glorious morning.’

So we took the coffee along and there they were, fifty yards to the right toward Seadrift . . . and the dogs *were* cute, they greeted me and jumped up, tails wagging like nobody’s business.

‘They’re the best breed,’ I said to the man and woman. ‘Them and the Golden Retrievers.’

‘Thanks,’ the guy said.

‘And just as a courtesy heads-up,’ I said, ‘you wanna keep them on the leash, at least this part of the beach.’

‘Otherwise you do risk a situation,’ Peg chimed in.

The guy ignored Peg and took a good look at me. ‘What are you . . . Ranger Rick?’ he said. ‘Is that how you get your rocks off?’

‘Sheesh. I’m sorry man, I’m not looking for any trouble. Good day to you folks.’

But we lingered just a little too long. The woman had bent down to leash up the dogs and was showing a significant amount of cleavage. I waited for her to straighten up.

She was about 6 feet, taller than the dude, skinny, not particularly attractive features. I thought of a woman I knew once in Philadelphia, the opposite, way overweight but similarly walking around low-cut to show off *her* cleavage, apparently the one asset she was proud of.

‘Agnes what are *you* looking at?’ the guy said, me pretty sure I’m Agnes.

‘Baby, easy,’ the woman said.

Before I could answer the guy he said, ‘You’re a perv now too? You’re a regular comedian, you know that?’

And something I didn’t see coming at all, he clocked me in the side of the head. And I went down.

My first thought was wow, he must have hit me with the fleshy part of a balled up fist, from out of my field of

vision. There was a self defense demo once, where the instructor said that's your best bet in a street fight, you don't break any bones in your hand and you get the job done.

And the guy and the woman and now-leashed dogs proceeded down the beach toward the Bolinas Lagoon like nothing happened.

Peg was in a bit of shock and offered me a sip of her coffee since mine had gone flying.

I was pretty sure I could get up unassisted, but why rush it, and I sat there a while. A guy came up to me, said he saw what happened, that was utterly atrocious, and was I going to press charges?

Peg said, 'Dale that's a valid question. I believe you should.'

The guy handed me a card, said he'd offer witness testimony, that a person like that should pay for randomly assaulting folks. I thanked him and Peg and I headed back.

I had the ice bag on my face. I said, 'A, I'm not of fan of whining to the authorities. B, I sort of deserved it I guess. Didn't I?'

'You do stare at women,' Peg said.

'And I don't mean to, necessarily.'

‘They’re just inserted in the way then.’

‘Possibly. More important, I almost forgot, I need to handle the transition. What time you got?’

‘It’s 9:48’

‘Fine. I’m okay till 11. . . Did I look bad out there? Anyone else see?’

‘Anyone you know? I think you’re safe in that department.’

‘My vulnerability is intact,’ I said. ‘Does it bother you when you’re with a guy who doesn’t fight back?’

‘At one time it did,’ Peg said. ‘We were at a concert once, one of those where everyone’s pressed up together? I was grabbed a few times. My boyfriend said something and he got laughed at and the grabber kept grabbing. We had to leave.’

‘The whole concert?’

‘No, just move.’

‘So your friend tried, what did you want him to do?’

‘Something more. Though it wasn’t as blatant as you getting knocked down on your fanny.’

‘Yours sounds worse honestly.’

‘Your opinion.’

We didn't communicate much more and after a while I felt better and microwaved something and walked over to my place.

I had it rented back to back which I was never crazy about but again you couldn't argue with the money. I had to check the first people out, be there for the cleaning service, then greet the new folks at 2.

Everything was smooth until the new renters pull up--and it's the people from the beach this morning.

'Interesting to run into you again,' I said. What could you say?

'Buddy I'm not *believing* this,' the guy said. 'Listen, you want to call the whole thing off, or what?'

'Yes, we'll manage fine,' the woman said, and of course I tried to minimize looking her way.

I said no I'm a believer in keeping one's obligations, and I'm okay with starting fresh if they are.

The guy said in that case he appreciated it, since it wasn't easy to find a place that took dogs.

I gave them the keys and waited to see if they had any questions which they didn't.

Wednesday I get a call from the guy. He says they're having an outstanding week, they love the



accommodations . . . and if we let bygones alone why not come over for a drink?

It feels weird but okay whatever and I bring Peg.

Peg and the woman hit it off and they go out and put their feet in the hot tub.

The guy tells me he's a writer and he's been having trouble finding inspiration but he's found some here.

'Writers go around hitting people?' I said. I couldn't help it.

'I never used to,' he said, 'and I used to be more polite.'

'I took a class and tried writing something once,' I said. 'When you're up against it, you can take on the uneven personality of a character, I'll admit.'

'Whajew write?'

'I had a guy--guy's a writer, what a surprise--who discovers when he writes something down it can come true. Not just in his book-writing but something he might lay off on a scrap of paper.'

'So how does he utilize it?'

'I butchered that part, I didn't give him a good enough gimmick. It turned into a comedy.'

'So re-write it. It's not totally original, but I like the set-up.'

‘Where it fell apart on me, he envisions what his life is like after his step-brother he never liked is no longer around. When he’s on his way to the lawyer’s office it just got silly, I said what am I doing.’

‘The lawyer’s office . . . to draw up paperwork?’

‘I think so. For post-the step-brother.’

‘And by doing so he makes it come true.’

‘I think so. At least some of the time things come true. It’s like throwing mud against the wall, he writes enough down he may get what he needs . . . See what I’m saying? Silly.’

‘Well,’ the guy said, ‘yours is in the ballpark of something I’m wrestling with now.’

‘Oh. But *real* life, everything solid?’

‘You know. You?’

‘It’s workable. She’s a good sport. Can’t quite pinpoint it, but may be on the exit ramp since you clocked me.’

‘Sorry to hear that. Or should I be?’

The women were back and the low-cut gal made dinner. Pretty dang good curry chicken. Maybe it was the lighting, she was more attractive now than on the beach.

We ate and thanked them and left.

‘Think they wanted us to stick around longer?’ I asked Peg on the way back to her place.

‘Well Jill and I had fun, so probably.’

‘Was I ogling her again, in your estimation?’

‘You were.’

‘Ah well. The dude and I, we came to a meeting of the minds. Some common ground.’

‘So you thought it would be okay.’

‘Plus not sure she’s entirely floating his boat.’

‘He did give you that one look. It was scary.’

‘In there?’

‘Unh-huh.’

Gee. Missed that one.

By the time we got to Peg’s I had it figured out. Let them finish their week uneventfully and settle up. Then--not criminal charges, that won’t benefit you--but sue their sorry ass up the creek and then some.

Start with you haven’t been hearing great out of the right ear since the incident and it’s not going to improve. Okay maybe criminal too, what the hay. Tell *me* where I can look.