

**SLIGHTLY AWKWARD
ADVENTURES**

Going to California

By, Dai

I found myself sitting on a white beach in a white bikini top and blue shorts watching the sun slowly set in the west into the water. In my mind, I can hear the sun sizzle as it hits the water. I can see why people pay such prices to live here. The San Diego housing market is insane compared to what it is back home. The house we finally found would have been around fifty thousand or so back home, but here its nearly four hundred thousand. My flight back is set for the morning, and I can't miss it. I must finish school before college and spring break is ending on Monday. My last few months in the jail that is high school will fly by just not fast enough. I will be coming back to California soon.

Spring break was coming, and I had plans. That is, I had plans to do absolutely nothing. That was when my sister came into the picture. My family wanted my sister and brother-in-law not to have any worries when he came back, and they settle in San Diego. Derik reenlisted and was being assigned to Camp Pendleton in San Diego as some sort of instructor. Lacey was a nurse's assistant and was going back to school to earn her bachelor's degree in the science of nursing. My grandparents came up with one-hundred thousand dollars, so did my parents, Derik's parents, and his grandparents. They will have four-hundred thousand dollars to buy a house, and even if they eventually move, the house's value will give them a nice payment toward another house or anything that they will need. Lacey found out about the money when she was already out in California in the tiny house she and Derik built.

As a project for school Derik built a tiny house. He involved his girlfriend at the time, and it became his and Lacey's first house. Tiny doesn't even describe the size of a house that was around one-hundred square feet counting the sleeping loft. It's also funny to think about the big tough marine sleeping in a fluffy pink nightmare of my sister's devising. And now I have the image of them going at it in my head. Yuck. Eventually, they married, and they planned to use the tiny house to go from posting to posting as Derik made his Marine career. For some people, living with the essentials would be livable. That is for some people just not my sister. She has one hundred pairs of shoes and let's not go into the purses. She plans to rent a storage locker or one of those portable ones. The money made this plan unnecessary.

After a few days of searching, Lacey called home and said she wanted a little help to find a house that both she and Derik would feel at home in. She asked me to come to California and help her find her inner man. So, what, because I'm not all pink and brain dead I'm not a girl? OK, that's not fair. We are very different, and from her perspective, I guess I could be less feminine than what she thinks femininity should be. It's been a few weeks, and I can't believe I'm saying this, but I miss my sister. Also, a trip to a sunny, warm place with a beach doesn't sound that bad. I guess I never said it before, but we live in Hudson Ohio south of Cleveland and north of Akron. Most of the time the village is a nice place to live that is until winter. This winter was snowy, cold and somehow had less snow than what the meteorologist say is average. With all that in mind, I'm going to California.

The plane ride was a little creepy with the extra security, but it's the world we live in. I packed light predicting a warm-weather destination, and for some reason, I was picked for a random search. I'm starting to think that the scanners can see what a person looks like naked and that's how they choose. I thought this as I saw the other random people being searched were all younger looking and blonde. I was letting my hair grow out and undyed so I can donate it to charity, so I was the typical straight-haired blonde with what most people say was a good body. I don't know about that I think my mom and sister won in the chest games and pictures of my grandmother at nineteen showed she had an ass that would have given her a job in the hip-hop industry. They searched my bag, my carryon and then me. Two women searched me and my clothes as I stripped. After a strange petting session, I was on my plane and on the way to California. To add to the strangeness one of the flight attendants offered me a glass of champagne, and no I didn't take it.

Lacey met me at the airport, and she could tell something was wrong. I told her about the half-assed search and how everyone searched looked like me. Lacey told me to look at my ID then check a mirror, and yes, I don't look anything like my driver's license pic. Back then my hair was a mix of rose and purple with black tips. I stopped dying my hair well, I just said why

so let's get back to the story. Looking at myself with my sister standing behind me we looked like well, sisters maybe for the first time in a while. It also felt strange to be staring into a mirror in a woman's bathroom at the airport with my sister, so we went to get my bag. That is, we went to get it rather than getting it because my bag was on it's way to Dallas Texas. Something about my name and a code reader sent my bag to the wrong plane. To make matter's worse all I had in my bag was my white bikini and a pair of blue short shorts. Lacey and I are built different, and her clothes hang funny on me. Especially in the front with my C's not quite fitting her double D's. To solve this, we went to a thrift store and soon I was ready for the next day of house shopping.

That afternoon we met with a realtor that had no idea of what reality was. He showed us his plans, and not a single house was under six-hundred thousand. I bet that they were some nice houses just not something we were going to see. When Lacey reiterated her budget, he said, "*well good luck with that.*" We left his office and went to the first night of tiny house hell. My brother-in-law was out of the country, but the house still had that man scent. The composting toilet is a fresh well not that fresh kind of smell that I don't want to talk about. Yes, I do. To save money, their toilet was an actual bucket with a toilet seat and lined with compost. Unlike the real ones you can buy, this one stunk up the place. We bought a pizza and ate outside watching the sun set into the water knowing that we would have to sleep in the tiny outhouse. Lacey said she was used to the smell, but it was all over her face that she wanted out of this place if it's the last thing she ever does.

The next day she tried to show me around town until her car broke down. Undaunted she did something I didn't expect. Derik has a motorcycle. A Harley Davidson Super-glide that he rebuilt himself all Grease 2 style. You know that montage of the guy rebuilding a bike using salvaged parts and somehow building a cool ride. I don't remember most of the places she pointed out all I remember was the ride and what I thought people would have guessed about us. I was in a pair of cutoff jean shorts, and my white bikini top and Lacey was dressed in what looked like her Sandy costume from the end of Grease leather pants and all. We ended the day on a beach that was just as I pictured in my head when I was asked to come. That night I got up

on the roof of the tiny house and slept there. Anything was better than the compost smell. Oh, by the way, shorts and motorcycles don't work well as the cuts on my legs would demonstrate and it was why Lacey wore the leather pants.

I woke up and came down to find the door to the indoor outhouse open and Lacey sitting on the bucket holding a plastic stick. Anyone want to guess what that stick was? Lacey was pregnant, and now the hunt meant more than just getting away from the smell. She made a call to set in motion what was necessary to call Derik and tell him about his upcoming fatherhood. I talked her out of calling mom and dad until she was ready for them to come out to California. That day was spent in a doctor's office and trying to talk to Derik on Skype. Watching a grown man in desert camouflage cry made me almost feel something. Derik is a manly man or what dad calls a squared away Marine. Dad was in the Marines and served in the gulf war, but he wasn't happy Lacey was dating a Marine. After the call, Lacey broke down in tears, and she spent the rest of the night crying. Some were tears of joy, and some were her missing Derik. I made it worse when I said how I missed her back home.

The next day started with a mission. We would find a house or die trying. With newspaper in hand, we went looking on our own. After a few houses, our spirits dropped, and it became clear that renting would be better than owning. We stopped at a coffee shop and weighed our prospects. The waitress saw all the listings on the table when she saw the prenatal vitamins Lacey had. She sat down next to us and asked what we were doing. Lacey is a trusting person who will talk a complete stranger's ear off, so she told her about everything from the tiny house to Derik. All the while I could see the waitress's eyes tear up. As it turned out our waitress was named Nancy and her husband was a Marine that was retiring after thirty years as an instructor. They had a house they bought nearly twenty-five years ago and were selling it, so they could move closer to their children and grandchildren in Texas. After few calls, we were off to see the house.

Phil and Nancy moved out of the house about a year ago, so they could remodel before selling it, but their plans never went anywhere. The house was close to the water in a neighborhood that would be nearly seven to eight hundred thousand dollars. Lacey told Nancy that they only had four-hundred dollars even after I said she should keep her mouth shut. The house was a mix of adobe and craftsman that screamed both California and Lacey. It had a garage in the back that was big enough for the tiny house and a backyard with a pool. The kitchen was straight out of the 1950's with antique appliances, black and white vinyl, and countertop of some unknown material. The bathroom was just as old, but all the wood in the house was original, and there was a lot of it. Near the end of the tour, a man straight from a Marine poster walked in. Phil was the very model of a modern Sargent Major with the campaign hat and all. He took his hat off and smiled changing his whole demeanor. Nancy went to her husband, and they kissed, and, at that moment, I could see them as the young couple who bought this house all those years ago.

After a talk with a lawyer and some papers, Lacey bought the house for three-hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. Nancy said how they paid ninety-five thousand for it and they were buying a condo for one-hundred and twenty-five thousand in Texas. They both liked the idea of another Marine family living in the house. When they found out about the tiny house, they gave Lacey the key and said, *“as far as we are concerned this is your house to move in, and we will square everything later.”* There was a generator in the back, and the water was on, so we moved in that night. I slept on the futon from the tiny house while Lacey slept on her mattress. In the morning she called both our parents then his parents. In that call she let the whole pregnancy thing slip only to find out that Derik already told his parents who then called mom and dad. I don't know what this means for Derik's ability to keep a secret.

The next day we went looking for some simple furniture and the basics such as towels and cleaning products. We then spent the afternoon cleaning. Under every layer of dust was hardwood laid down at a time when a craftsman would build a house like this for his family. An insurance agent living next door told her the house would be valued at around seven-hundred thousand dollars easily. Mom and dad called saying they were coming to see the house and

lacey. Their flight was landing about an hour after mine. The plan was to leave me the car so I could get home. With one night left I went to the beach while Lacey stared at pink paint samples. I asked her, “*what if you have a boy?*” She said, “*well that boy better get used to the color pink.*” I just shook my head and left for the beach in my white bikini with the blue shorts.

The flight was going to be on time, and so was I. At the airport we met up with my wayward bag from its trip to Texas. It was retagged and loaded onto a plane going to Albany New York and yes if you remember I live in Ohio. Like before after a look at my driver’s license I was picked for another random search. Having one woman feel my clothes while another felt me up just seemed to bookend the whole trip. On the plane, I opened a small scrapbook my sister made about us as sisters, and I can’t believe it, but I think I am going to miss her. I miss my friends, and I miss my school. I also miss my parents. Life is changing, and I don’t see it slowing down anytime soon. For all practical purposes, I am already a graduate with all the credits I need. With a few months of school left I plan on using every minute of it to have some fun and as they say in sports leave it all on the field.