



SIX STORIES OF CALIFORNIA, CALAMITY, AND LOVE

Generous JOHN M.
DANIEL **Helpings**

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Structure, Style, and Truth: Elements of the Short Story

*Generous
Helpings*

s t o r i e s

John M. Daniel

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Hum a Few Bars and I'll Fake It

“Okay,” Casey said. “Yes. I heard you. Thank you. Goodbye.” He hung up softly and gave the telephone the finger.

He pushed away from his desk and stood up. He could yell and throw things if he wanted to; there were no guests in the hotel. That’s because the county had taken away the hotel license and given them a Mickey Mouse weekends-only bed-and-breakfast permit. Now even that was in danger.

Casey was not by nature a yeller or a thrower of things. He wished he still smoked. He wished he still drank. He wished he had a woman. He wished he had a day off. He wished he had a successful hot springs resort to manage.

Having none of the above, he decided to settle for a hot bath. He left his desk and left the lobby, slammed the door on his way out of the hotel, and stomped across the road to the bathhouse. There in the steamy mist, he took off his clothes and settled into a long, tiled trough of slippery, sulphery hot water. He closed his eyes with a sad sigh. He muttered and fumed. He twitched.

Then he felt a hand on his ankle. Surprised that he wasn’t

alone, he opened his eyes and found that he was facing a beautiful, naked, smiling blonde.

“You can quit smiling, Diana,” he told her. “We’re screwed.”

“What now?” his co-manager asked. “More static from the county?”

“The health department this time,” he said. “They claim these baths are swimming pools because they’re over thirty inches deep. Anything over thirty inches deep is officially a swimming pool. How do you like that?”

“So? What’s wrong with swimming pools?”

“They require a chlorine filtering system, which we don’t have.”

“Can we get one?”

“I don’t know, maybe. But last month we had to replace all the wooden surfaces in the kitchen with stainless steel. That shut us down for two weekends. Yesterday I saw a county road department truck on the road and when I called the county about that this morning I was told they plan to repave it. They wouldn’t give me a schedule, but we may be without road access for a month. They’re trying to fuck us over, Diana. They’re trying to put us out of business.”

Diana squeezed his toes. “Why, Casey? What do they have against us? Because we’re clothing optional?”

“I don’t think so. There are other clothing-optional health spas in this county. Maybe it’s because of all the hippies on our staff. This place is basically a commune.”

“So what? We’ve been living together for years, since the sixties.”

“It’s the eighties now,” Casey said. “And the place is open to the public now. That’s the difference, I guess. All I know is somebody’s trying to put Hope Springs out of business, and I don’t know why. I almost don’t care why. I’m ready to quit, myself.”

“Casey, don’t say that.”

“I mean it. I was better off tuning pianos. This job sucks out loud. I’ve been here for six months, and the gig’s getting old. I’m a musician, anyway, not an innkeeper.”

“You can’t leave us, Casey.”

“Give me two reasons.”

Diana shifted her position until she was kneeling, her breasts above the water, drops falling off her nipples and plinking before him. “You could use a night off,” she said. “And so could I.”

“What are you doing tonight?” Casey asked her, shifting his eyes away from her bosom and into her bright blue eyes.

“Are you asking me out, Casey?” Diana asked. “Like a date?”

“Well?”

“On three conditions.”

“Yes?”

“That we get off the property, and that we don’t talk business.”

“No shoptalk. Okay, you got a deal. What’s number three?”

“That you cheer up.”

Forgoing for the nonce his customary smart-ass grin, Casey smiled politely as he opened his Volkswagen door for his date.

Yeah, date. Casey could not remember the last time he’d been on an actual date. Usually the women lined up for him, were hanging around the bar wherever he happened to be playing, and if he felt like company, there was company. A lonely life, full of plenty.

Sometimes he’d been in love with this one or that one, and he had pitched his share of woo, at the microphone and on the dance floor, in motel rooms and parking lots. Other times love had nothing to do with it, but Casey had seldom been at a loss