**Barely Comfortable**

by[Javahead](https://www.literotica.com/stories/memberpage.php?uid=5037405&page=submissions)©

"Your family thinks I'm a prude!" Amanda sounded frustrated.  
  
I glanced away from the road a minute to check; despite her tone, she looked just a bit exasperated rather than genuinely upset. But it still surprised me -- I'd thought the trip to introduce her to my family had gone well.  
  
Everyone who can make it shows up at our Tahoe cabin for one last skiing weekend in late March or early April, so it had seemed like the easiest way for her to meet my family and friends. Days on the slopes or the cross-country trails, family dinners, and chances to talk at night.  
  
We'd been up there a couple of weekends since we got engaged there on Valentine's Day, but we'd had the place to ourselves both times. This was our first visit as part of a group. Even though we'd been relegated to the bunk room with the other "kids" this time, we'd still had fun, and I'd been proud to have a chance to introduce my fiancé and show her off.  
  
I couldn't believe that anyone would have been rude to her; as far as I could see, everyone had been on their best behavior, and I'd thought they liked her, and she liked them. If anything, they'd been impressed by my good taste; my folks had seemed to consider her family already, and my uncle Lars had pulled me aside to congratulate me.  
  
So I risked a question: "Why do you say that, Amanda? I thought everyone liked you, and they seem to think I'm lucky to have found you. I certainly think that!"  
  
"Oh, last night. When I didn't want to join your brother and cousins in the sauna." She sounded a bit embarrassed.  
  
"Well, it was going to be crowded. And if you don't grow up with it like we did, seeing our parents and grandparents using it that way, a nude sauna can be a bit daunting. Did anyone say something bad about it when you said no?"  
  
"No. In fact, they said pretty much the same thing you did. But it made me feel like a little girl they were making allowances for." She sounded unhappy. After a moment she added. "I should have said yes. I didn't have any problem when it was just us two! Now they probably all think I'm a prude. Dave, do you think I'm a prude?"  
  
Her last question sounded rather plaintive. And utterly ridiculous -- the words I might have chosen to describe her during our times together would have been something like "playful", "sexy", or even "shockingly uninhibited." But she seemed serious.  
  
I wanted to head off that line of thought, so perhaps I answered too fast. "Of course not! Amanda, you may be modest outside the bedroom, but when we're alone together you're the most delightfully bawdy wench a man could hope for!"  
  
"Modest? What do you mean?" Trust her to seize on that word. I tried to phase my next words as carefully as I could.  
  
"Amanda, you aren't a prude. But you are a little ... conservative in how you dress. At work, you're very professional and don't show off. You usually wear pretty unrevealing clothes at home, too; I don't think I've ever seen you without a bra, even on weekends. That's not a bad thing, but it was one of the reasons I had trouble realizing you were interested in me -- I thought you dressed that way to discourage unwanted attention." I shrugged. "But that may just be me -- you're right that I'm Captain Clueless sometimes."  
  
I paused a beat and added: "It's one of the reasons it hit me so hard the first time I saw you in a bikini. I'd never suspected what a nice figure you have."  
  
"So you think I only dress like a prude?" Despite the astringent wording, she sounded slightly mollified.  
  
"Amanda, in the bedroom that's the last word I'd use to describe you!"  
  
"Oh? What would be your first choice?"  
  
"Umm ... How about seductive? Demanding? Enthusiastic?"  
  
I breathed a sigh of relief -- another quick glance showed that she was fighting to hide a smile.  
  
ooOoo  
  
Whatever had brought on her self-doubts, Amanda seemed to have dealt with them enough to drop the discussion. The rest of the drive home, our conversation was disjointed -- the weekend past, plans for the future, things we saw on the wayside -- but cheerful.  
  
It still felt a little odd that "home" meant that we were living together. Even if we'd been unconsciously falling in love with each other for more than a year, admitting it -- to ourselves, even -- was much more recent, and we'd only been engaged for a couple of months. But it just made sense: her lease was almost up, and mine had nearly a year to go. After the closeness of the vacation week that had led up to our engagement we really didn't want to be separated; even before she formally moved in, we'd seldom spent a night apart.  
  
Welcome or not, though, it had still been a major shift in our relationship. No matter how much we both wanted the closeness, being together full-time wasn't all sweetness and light. Except for college roommates, neither of us had ever lived with someone before, and it had taken some give-and-take adjustments on both our parts to make it work. But despite the bumps, it had soon felt natural to split chores, take turns cooking, and all the rest of the details of day-to-day living. Best of all, even when things felt awkward, we were together. Even if we were still learning things about one another, I was sure of one thing: she loved me as much as I did her. It still gave me a little jolt of pleasure to wake up and see her face on the pillow next to mine, and I thought -- I hoped -- it always would.  
  
So I was in a cheerful mood as I carried our bags in. We'd gotten a late start and eaten dinner on the drive back down from Tahoe; it was late, almost bedtime. Once I'd finished unpacking -- really, just putting everything I'd worn into the clothes hamper -- I grabbed my robe and headed in to shower while Amanda was still sorting through her bags. I'd be in and out fast, so she wouldn't need to rush with her own.  
  
As expected, she didn't -- as practical as Amanda is in most things, it hadn't taken long to learn that she's positively sybaritic about bathing when she has the chance. One of the things I liked about this apartment was that it had a tankless hot water heater -- you could shower as long as you wanted without running out of hot water, and Amanda usually took full advantage of that. So it didn't surprise me at all that she took over half an hour in the bathroom that night.  
  
What did surprise me was what she was wearing. In private, at least, she'd proven to be comfortable in her skin, and she was an eager, uninhibited lover. But she'd usually either worn a warm, practical nightgown or chosen to go nude; I hadn't even known that she owned the scanty lingerie she was almost wearing. "Almost" because it seemed designed to more showcase than conceal the woman inside; though some key areas were slightly translucent rather than transparent, I could still easily see the shape of her body and make out the darker outlines of her nipples and her neatly-trimmed pubic patch.  
  
She giggled happily at my pole-axed expression and did a pirouette to show it off from all angles. "Do you like it? Not bad, for a prude, is it?"  
  
Despite her light tone, that caught my attention. Why had she brought that up again? And it was her choice of words, not anyone else's. She was showing a side I'd never seen before, and one I hadn't expected. Until today, I'd never have imagined that Amanda might think of herself that way, or worry about it if she did. She's too sensible a person, and though I'd describe her as a basically modest person she knows that she's an attractive woman. She certainly seemed to enjoy it when I look at her; she's not at all body-shy or prudish when we're alone.  
  
I didn't think it was anything I'd said or done. I was certain I'd never said anything negative about how she dressed, and while I might have enjoyed seeing her dressed to impress, it had never been that important to me. If anything, I was relieved she didn't push things too far - I'd dated a couple of girls in the past who'd seemed to enjoy skirting the edge of the indecent exposure laws. "Modestly sexy" would have been fine, but given the choice of "elegant" and "slutty", I knew which one I preferred.  
  
And Amanda did "elegant" well. Despite her restrained dress style, I had ample evidence of the warm, sexy woman inside the deceptively modest wrapper. I'd thought she knew who she was, and that she -- and I -- were happy with that.  
  
But it sounded as if she might not be.  
  
"Amanda? Where did 'prude' come from? I'm sure I've never used it -- I've never even thought it about you! Do you feel comfortable telling me why you called yourself that?" I was a little worried, but didn't want to show it; instead, I tried to sound concerned without pressing too hard.  
  
I must have succeeded; though she didn't reply at once, after a long pause Amanda nodded. "I suppose I should."  
  
She looked rather embarrassed, and bit her lip for a moment, but continued without further prompting. "I hadn't really thought about it until last night. But I realized that I've been letting old bad memories control how I act, and how I dress. I don't think I'm a prude. But I've been dressing and sometimes acting like I'm one. Like I'm trying to hide. And I'm tired of hiding."  
  
"Old bad memories? How bad?" It was an effort, but I kept my voice as soft and sympathetic as I could manage.  
  
She might have caught the effort -- she gave me a grateful smile before answering.  
  
"Don't sound so worried, Jack. They're not that bad. Just ... uncomfortable. But they don't make much sense unless I tell you the whole story." She sounded almost whimsical if a bit tense.  
  
Amanda sat down on our bed, leaning her back against the headboard and hugging her knees against her chest as she stared off into memory.  
  
"You know that I almost got date-raped in college?"  
  
I nodded. I'd never pressed her for details, but I knew that it had made her cautious around men. It had been one of the reasons I'd been slow and careful about first showing my interest in her.  
  
She shot me a quick glance. "Don't look so solemn! I said 'almost' -- I got away unhurt, and he spent some time in jail, OK?"  
  
I nodded again, and she gave me a quick grin.  
  
She started off on a tangent. "Do you know what fashion is like in Hong Kong? Compared to here, people pay a lot more attention to how they dress. It's important to look good."  
  
I shrugged. "I've never been to Hong Kong, but I think you told me that before."  
  
She raised an eyebrow. "Did I ever mention women's fashions are usually a lot less revealing? You want to look good, but just hint, not show too much. I know you think my bikini is pretty conservative, but it's about as risqué as you'd ever see anyone actually wearing to the beach there."  
  
I thought about that for a moment. "So you're dressing like you're still living there?"  
  
She shook her head. "No. I've been dressing like my mother would like me to dress, or maybe my grandmother."  
  
"But why?"  
  
She gave a slight smile. "Would you believe that when I first came to here, I lovedto show off? I came here, and I saw that girls my own age dressed a lot sexier than I'd ever dared. I saw really short skirts or cut-offs, tube tops, tight t-shirts .... and it was pretty obvious that a lot of the girls weren't bothering with bras. And they looked good. Sexy, but not too sexy, you know? Just ... nice. Teasing."  
  
"So I did the same. I thought I looked pretty good. Hot." She looked down for a moment, then managed a grin. "I may not be huge, but I've got pretty nice boobs for a Chinese girl. They looked darn good in a tight t-shirt, especially when I didn't bother with a bra! Susan -- my roommate, another girl from Hong Kong -- teased me about being an exhibitionist, but I liked the way I looked. And so did the guys."  
  
"I got asked out on dates a lot. That was another new thing -- I could date without my folks grumbling about it." She shot me an embarrassed look. "I haven't been a virgin since my first serious boyfriend, the first year I was here. I didn't do hookups, I didn't cheat if I had a boyfriend, and I was pretty selective about who I went to bed with, but I liked sex."  
  
"Maybe I was too trusting -- Susan certainly thought so! -- but I enjoyed dating. So if I didn't have a current boyfriend, I'd usually say 'yes' to a first date unless the guy was an obvious creep. Casual, you know? Even if it didn't turn into a serious relationship, we usually had fun, and I made sure guys knew upfront what my limits were."  
  
"So this guy asked me out. He seemed OK -- we'd shared a few classes, and he wasn't a bad looking guy. No real sparks, but it was an OK first date. He walked me back to my room afterward. I was alone that weekend, but I didn't say 'no' when he wanted to come in to talk some more. Like I said, no sparks, but I thought he was OK. I was happy to keep talking. I hadn't said 'no' to a second date, either. But I'd said 'talk', not 'make out', and he was really unhappy when I said 'no' to that."  
  
She looked away for a moment. "He thought that because he'd paid for our date I owed him. He called me a 'cock teasing Chink slut' when I told him 'no', then tried to pull my clothes off. To force me. I screamed and fought, and managed to get a finger in his eye, then ran when he flinched. I made it out the door with my blouse torn open and one boob hanging out, but I was safe; there were half a dozen people in the dorm lounge who saw me make my escape."  
  
Amanda looked back at me. "There were enough witnesses that it was pretty obvious what happened. I was lucky -- I didn't get raped, just roughed up, and he ended up in jail. But it scared me. A lot. And I had been dressing to show off." She sighed. "So I quit showing off. And I didn't date again for nearly a year."  
  
It sounded as if she was blaming herself. Unfairly. I felt like I was picking my way through a minefield when I told her "Amanda, it wasn't your fault. Even if you were showing off a little, it sounds like you'd made it plain you weren't interested. I'm just glad that you got out mostly OK."  
  
She gave a weak smile. "Well, yeah. It could have been a lot worse. At least it didn't make me afraid of all guys or hate sex. But I think today I finally realized that I was still letting it affect me. I was hiding. And I'm tired of it."  
  
Amanda took a deep breath. "Jack, I don't want to show off like I did in college. The only guy I want to tease is you! But I'm not ashamed of my body, and I think it's time I quit dressing to hide it all the time." She shot me a much bigger grin. "And the next time we're sharing the cabin with your family they can look all they want in the sauna."  
  
ooOoo  
  
She let it lie at that, but over the next few weeks, I could see the effects. Most noticeably, she'd started to update her wardrobe.  
  
I'd tried to be diplomatic in how I described it, but she was right; she had been hiding. As long as I'd known her, Amanda had been extremely conservative in the way she dressed. Not frumpy or old-fashioned, just ... conservative.  
  
At work, perhaps a touch formal -- nothing form-fitting, long skirts or slacks, long-sleeved blouses buttoned to the top or loose pullover turtlenecks, flats or very low heels. Feminine, but unrevealing and low on sex appeal. Low enough so that despite her lovely face and pleasant personality she had mostly avoided the careful -- very careful, to avoid upsetting HR -- dating overtures most attractive single women received. Almost everyone liked her and knew she and I were close friends, but I think it had shocked them all when we announced our engagement.  
  
Since we were living together, it was easy for me to track the changes, since she made a point of modeling them for my enjoyment. And I did enjoy then, quite a lot. I'd thought her lovely even when she'd dressed to conceal it. But it was obvious to anyone who looked now that she wasn't trying to hide it anymore.  
  
Even if minor, the changes were noticeable.  
  
Her work clothes remained quite professional, but now they were chosen to at least give subtle hints of her figure. As tiny as she is, "buxom" isn't the right word, but despite her slender body, she's not "boyish", either. Amanda has curves, quite nice ones. Though she wasn't blatant about it, she no longer avoided choices that revealed a shapely calf or showed an enticing hint of cleavage.  
  
And people noticed the change. She wasn't targeted by gossip, but by early summer she reported that several of our female coworkers had complimented her choices, or asked where she'd found them.  
  
Feedback from our male coworkers mostly came my way. There was a little envy from the singles, a feeling that I'd stolen a march on them all. Instead of "one of the guys", they belatedly realized that Amanda was a major babe, but she was already taken -- by me. I fielded everything from thumb-ups to a couple of envious "you lucky dog!" type comments.  
  
Off work, most of her weekend outfits remained practical; as much as we both loved the outdoors, they needed to be. But as the weather warmed up she'd as often wear shorts and tank tops as jeans and long sleeves when we went hiking, or brief skirts or sundresses if we were staying in town.  
  
And though Amanda modeled every new outfit for me joked about how much less prudish she'd become, she didn't make a big production of it, either. Still, as small as the changes were, it was easy to see the increase in her self-confidence. Even if nothing she wore was particularly revealing, she was increasingly less worried about showing that she had a fit, attractive body.  
  
Really, by any objective standard, even her boldest weekend outfits weren't usually too revealing. But they were more relaxed than what she'd worn in the past. It wasn't as if she was always pushing the boundaries, either. Sometimes, she had just had fun with her choices. I mean, Winnie the Pooh bib overalls? Seriously?  
  
So I enjoyed watching her experiments, but they didn't occupy all of my attention. Other than the occasional thumbs-up, I often went days without thinking much about them. There were a lot of other things on our plate to focus on.  
  
Most importantly, we were still learning to live together, and learning about each other. I got blindsided fairly often, in a good way; life with Amanda was never boring. I never knew quite what to expect -- despite her still-demure public persona and down-to-earth practicality, in private, Amanda had loved surprising me with playful teasing.  
  
Or not teasing -- as she gleefully demonstrated, she certainly wasn't "prudish" at home. She'd always had an impish sense of humor, but I'd never suspected that it was such a playfully ribald one. Nor would I have ever suspected she had such an active libido -- when she gives her love, she holds nothing back. Amanda's as shamelessly enthusiastic a lover in private as a man could dream of.  
  
Still, even an enthusiastic love life couldn't take up all our time; besides the normal day-to-day demands of living, we needed to do a host of other things.  
  
A big chunk of time went into planning for our fall wedding, far enough out that her parents could arrange to travel from Hong Kong and her sister could bring her brood from Texas. Most of our other relatives and friends didn't need as much lead time, but we still needed to arrange a hall, book the obligatory Chinese wedding banquet, and send out invitations. At least our honeymoon was easy -- Amanda had asked if we could spend another week alone in the family cabin.  
  
Then there were discussions about whether we should look for a house, condo, or just a bigger apartment when our current lease ran out, talking about children, when, and how many... We had quite a lot of things to keep us distracted if we let them. At least most of them weren't terribly urgent, so if we spent a little time on them regularly we could keep our weekends free.  
  
We took full advantage of that free time. Weekends were for seeing friends, doing our part in whatever monthly activity our company's outdoor club planned, family obligations, volunteering for coastal cleanup day ... we kept busy. One weekend we flew down to LA so I could meet her brother. Another, we helped my younger brother Mike move into his new apartment.

Most of all, we tried to keep active. We swam occasionally in our apartment's pool (even in a modest bikini, Amanda looked amazing!) We played a little tennis (neither of us is terribly good, but we had fun), we rented mountain bikes a couple of times, and -- most of all -- we hiked.  
  
It may not be well known outside the southern San Francisco Bay region, but we have a lot of good trails, ranging from the easy and popular to the strenuous and remote. Most of them are open year-round, too -- your choice of where to go may change depending on the weather, season, and your mood, but you can always find somewhere to go.  
  
Amanda and I met through our company's outdoor club, and we were hiking buddies long before we became lovers. Now that the winter sports season was past it was only natural that hiking was again our favorite outdoor activity. I've always enjoyed getting out on foot anyway, but except for the company-organized group events, I'd usually gone alone. Now it was the two of us, and we made the most of our time together.  
  
Most weekends saw us outdoors at least once. Since we're both strong hikers, we had a wealth of places to try that we'd never have considered visiting with a larger group: one weekend we'd be walking through the shade of coastal redwoods near Santa Cruz, the next climbing windswept rocky hillsides inland south of San Jose enjoying the spring wildflowers. Beaches; mountain passes; open space preserves; county, state, and national parks: we sampled them all. As the season turned, we watched the early spring blooms fade and disappear while the green hills turned California's summertime golden brown, but there was always something new to see, even on trails we'd visited many times before.  
  
The only drawback of hiking on the weekends is that occasionally the trails get a little crowded -- not like the long lines you see in famous parks, like climbing Half Dome in Yosemite, but enough that you're seldom out of sight of others. One of the things we'd both loved about cross-country skiing and snowshoeing near the cabin was that you could get away from everyone else -- except for the get-to-meet-you weekend with my family we'd had the local trails almost entirely to ourselves.  
  
That wasn't the case in our area. The internet is a mixed blessing and curse: it makes it easier to find good places to hike even if you're not a local. The hidden gems that used to be mostly word-of-mouth are accessible to anyone with decent search skills -- in Silicon Valley, that meant "almost everyone." It helped, a little, to talk to the local rangers -- if nothing else, they could tell us which places to avoid, and which times were the least congested. And they're usually enthusiastic about their job and love it when asked for advice. Generally, I let Amanda handle that part; she's much better with people than I am. Or maybe it's that the guys -- and it's mostly guys -- respond better to a cute woman. Whatever the reason, it worked -- she picked up some interesting tips. Starting with "try to hike during the week, if you can."  
  
So it didn't seem that odd when Amanda asked me to take a day off work in July to go hiking, a week or so after the 4th of July holiday weekend.  
  
ooOoo  
  
Amanda had been deliberately mysterious about her plans. She'd told me that we'd be gone "all day", so I wasn't too surprised that after breakfast she handed me a loaded backpack, not just our usual day hike knapsack, to take out to my SUV.  
  
What did surprise me was that when I came back in was that she was wearing a bright sundress rather than her usual hiking outfit. Not that it didn't look comfortable, practical, or even that revealing, but from the slight bounce as she moved and the hint of nipples showing through it was obvious she wasn't wearing a bra. That wasn't unusual now when we were staying at home, but unheard of when we were going out. And she did plan to go out -- her hiking boots looked rather odd underneath that dress, but Amanda already had them neatly tied.  
  
I didn't say anything, but my expression must have been ... interesting. At any rate, Amanda giggled and reached up to close my open mouth before leading me out.  
  
At least her directions weren't mysterious. She had us headed to one of our favorite places when we wanted a longer hike, a trailhead that offered access to both a county park and an adjacent open space preserve. I mentally applauded her choice -- even on weekends, the area was remote enough that the number of other hikers was usually limited.  
  
Today, "limited" meant "none". When I pulled off the winding lane-and-a-half access road, the gravel parking lot was empty, even though it promised to be a beautiful day.  
  
Amanda pulled out our hiking sticks as I was shouldering on the pack. I wasn't sure what she'd packed, but it was surprisingly heavy as well as bulky. Once I had it settled in place, she handed me my stick and a photocopied map with a marked route and told me "we're going here."  
  
I raised an eyebrow. "Buried treasure? Did you pack a shovel?"  
  
She giggled. "Aye, me hearty! But I'll have to shoot you once you dig it up for me -- dead men tell no tales!" She mimed shooting me with her hiking stick and giggled again at my theatrical groan. "No, but it's supposed to be a really nice place to picnic -- one of the rangers told me about it."  
  
The first part of the route was familiar -- we zigzagged our way up through chaparral, then ducked into forest cover at the top. This far into summer, most of the spring wildflowers had passed and the grass on the exposed hillsides had gone tawny gold, but there were still patches of green under the trees.  
  
I let Amanda take the lead -- it's easier for me to see past her on a narrow trail than the reverse, even when I'm not wearing a backpack. Really. I'll admit to enjoying the sight of the dress swirling around her bare brown legs. Why is that so much more appealing than shorts, even if it doesn't show any more skin?  
  
The dress was swirling pretty fast, too. Amanda was making good time; this early in the day and shaded from the direct sun, she could push hard without either of us overheating. The one drawback of this trail was poor visibility -- the oak woodland was lovely, but the same trees that shielded us from the sun blocked any long distance views, and the occasional patches of open meadow never lasted long before we were under the canopy again.  
  
Finally, after a couple of miles along the ridgeline, the path led down into the long canyon on the ridge's north side. This part of the trail was wider, an old ranch road, and we could see occasional glimpses of coast range mountaintops through gaps in the trees as we wound our way back down to the bridge across the stream running through the narrow valley's floor.  
  
Past the bridge, our trail ran into another -- we turned right, then left again as the trail forked. I didn't think we were more than half a mile from the destination on the map, but we still had a stiff climb to get there. Watching Amanda's bottom working as she went up the hill ahead of me, I began to wonder; I couldn't be certain thanks to the loose-fitting dress, but I couldn't see any trace of a panty line. A thong, maybe?  
  
There wasn't anything immediately visible when we turned to the corner on the last switchback and reached the point marked on the map. We were just below the crest of an out-thrust spur of the hill we were climbing, but it was hard to see much -- the trail was surrounded by dense manzanita thickets on both sides. After a moment, though, I spotted what had looked like a game trail -- fortunately, free of poison oak -- cutting through the uphill thicket and followed it to the top of the ridge.  
  
I'd guessed right -- though there was no table or place to sit, the small clearing had an old circle of blackened stones on the uphill end still ready for a fire, with a couple of flattened-off logs on the inner side for seating. Unexpectedly this late in the season, the surrounding trees had given enough shade that the grass was still mostly green, and with late wildflowers -- a scattering of poppies and mariposa lilies, spikes of purple-blue or white lupines, and shrubby mounds of orange monkey flowers visible on the edges.  
  
It was a dramatic spot for a picnic. There was a beautiful view down the drop-off into the narrow valley below and across to the long ridge on the far side, the better part of a mile away. It felt remote; despite the long sightlines, until I walked to the far edge of the clearing I couldn't see any sign of the trails we'd followed coming here, or any hint of humanity other than the abandoned Cold-War-era radar tower miles away to the north-west on Mt. Umunhum.  
  
With a sigh of relief, I pulled the pack off my back and set it carefully down, rolling my shoulders to work out the kinks before pulling off my shirt and wiping my face. Despite our early start, by now it was warm enough that my face and body were glistening with sweat from the climb. At least here on the ridge, the breeze kept things comfortable enough, now that we weren't climbing further.  
  
I gave a disbelieving head shake as I looked around, then asked Amanda "Where did you find out about this place? I've hiked that trail a dozen or more times over the years and didn't know this was here."  
  
She looked up from where she was pulling things out of the pack. "I sent Lupe an email about what I wanted to do today, and she recommended coming here."  
  
I waited for more, but she turned back to where she'd spread a blanket on the grass. When she started pulling out picnic food, I surrendered and asked: "Lupe?"  
  
She looked up again and gave an apologetic grin. "Oh! Lupe ... Hernandez, I think. You know, one of the rangers here?"  
  
Given the context, I thought I knew who she was talking about -- I hadn't caught her name, but I remembered Amanda talking to a rather pretty Latina ranger a couple of times. I hadn't realized they'd kept in touch.  
  
I nodded. "OK ... so you asked Lupe. So what did you need to ask her about?"  
  
"If she could recommend someplace like this. Someplace nice for today."  
  
I searched my memory frantically. Had I forgotten something? It wasn't her birthday. Today -- July 14th was exactly five months after our Valentine's Day engagement, but we hadn't celebrated the previous months. What was I missing? I hoped for the best and asked: "So what's today?"  
  
She flashed her best urchin grin and told me "It's National Nude Day!" I was still processing that when she pulled her sundress over her head.  
  
I'll admit it -- my brain shut down briefly, and needed to reboot. It didn't take long, but by the time I was thinking clearly again Amanda had our picnic neatly laid out. Sandwiches, carrot and celery sticks, a container of olives, a bottle of wine (no wonder the pack had felt so heavy!), and plastic wine glasses ... it all looked good.  
  
And Amanda was totally naked. Her sundress was folded on top of the pack, with her socks and boots neatly arranged beside it.  
  
She had a slight whole-body blush and an equally slight worried expression, but she was looking at me steadily. I was probably goggling back at her owlishly, but at least I hadn't said anything stupid -- yet.  
  
Before the silence could stretch longer, I managed to engage my mouth. For a miracle, I even managed to hit the right note. "I ... see. And you dressed for the occasion. It looks very good on you."  
  
The corner of her mouth twitched. It wasn't quite a smile, and she was still flushed pink, but the worried expression was gone.  
  
"I'm really impressed by the effort you put into this -- you totally blindsided me. So, why?" I was still off-balance, but I was recovering. My voice sounded quite normal now. And I really was impressed -- she'd done a lot of behind-the-scenes preparation, and I hadn't suspected a thing.  
  
I could hear a note of relief, but her tone was whimsical. "Would you believe Susan was right, and I really am an exhibitionist?"  
  
That threw me off for a moment. "Susan who? Oh, your college roommate? No, not really -- you look a little too uncomfortable for me to believe that."  
  
She gave an embarrassed grin. "I suppose you're right." She bit her lip for a moment, then continued. "Actually, I know you're right. I certainly feel uncomfortable! I think I've mostly overcome the need to hide, but I wanted to push myself to prove it. To do something daring, just once. Dramatic, even. Something fun, and maybe a little naughty. Then I saw an article about National Nude Day and said 'that's it!'."  
  
I shook my head in bemused admiration. "Well, it's certainly dramatic! But why here? If you'd wanted, we could have gone to a nude beach."  
  
Amanda actually blushed. "I thought about it, but I was still too embarrassed. I would have had to tell you where we were going, too -- this way, I could chicken out any time up to the last moment." She gave a giggle. "I almost chickened out before asking Lupe for advice. She'd told me about going to nude beaches so I thought she'd listen, but I didn't expect her to be so helpful." Amanda giggled again. "Or so enthusiastic. I think she sunbathes here herself."  
  
Her voice turned a little more serious. "I really like the symbolism of National Nude Day, too. Accepting yourself. Not being ashamed of your body. Being part of nature." She paused. "Care to join me?" She didn't press further.  
  
She seemed more relaxed now, but I'd still caught an uncertain note in her voice. Rather than answer directly, I sat down to pull off my boots and lined them up next to hers. I already had my sweat-soaked shirt off, so I spread it out on a rock to dry before starting to unfasten the waistband on my pants.  
  
"So you don't think I'm crazy for doing this? You're not upset?" Her voice was hesitant, but her face showed relief.  
  
I raised an eyebrow as I folded my pants. "Maybe a little crazy. But I think I understand why you wanted to do this, too." I grinned. "And I generally don't have a problem with you taking off your clothes where I can watch!" I gave her an obvious up and down scan.  
  
"Oh! You -" I'd gotten the response I'd hoped for -- she was laughing hard enough she couldn't continue. She shook a finger at me instead.  
  
"Actually, I like the symbolism too. It feels odd being out in the open like this, doesn't it?"  
  
That almost set off another round of laughter, but after a moment she managed to answer. "I keep feeling like people are watching me! Even if I know better."  
  
"Well, unless they've got a really good telescope I don't see how they could be. Your friend certainly picked a private place for you to try this; the only trail I can see from here is on top of that other ridge, maybe a mile off across the valley. Even with binoculars, they couldn't see enough to matter."  
  
Amanda nodded. "That's what Lupe told me, too. You're both right. But it still feels weird."  
  
"So now that you've surprised me, what are the rest of your plans for today?"  
  
"We eat lunch and enjoy the view. And take some pictures afterward, to remind me of today." She gave another of her impish grins. "I don't think you'll mind doing that. Just promise me you don't share them around!"  
  
"Amanda, I'll promise to never share them without your approval. And delete them if you ask. Much as I'd love to brag about my beautiful fiancé and put them on my computer desktop and as my phone's background."  
  
She grinned again at the last. "Well ... I don't want to deprive you too much. I don't mind if you put it on your home computer. Just never show anyone else, especially my parents!"  
  
"I can live with that."  
  
She pulled a container out of the pack and held it out. "But first, I think we both need sunscreen. Lots of sunscreen. Or we'll have a sunburn in places I don't even want to think about."  
  
ooOoo  
  
Despite the temptation and the impossible-to-hide evidence of my arousal, I managed to give Amanda's body an even coat of sunscreen without pushing for more. Mostly. I'll admit to a few tickles and a little groping along the way. Then again, she teased me just as much applying mine.  
  
By the time we settled down to eat, the tension was almost gone -- despite the novelty, I think we both enjoyed feeling the sun and breeze on our bare skin. The hills and trees made a marvelous backdrop to the woman sitting across from me. Amanda didn't try to tease me further; in fact, she did a remarkably good job of behaving as if this was an ordinary picnic. I tried my best to match her sangfroid, hard as it was.  
  
The conversation was desultory as we ate -- by that same unspoken agreement, we avoided the obvious topic to touch on the food, the weather, the wine ... perfectly ordinary, except for our lack of clothes. Finally, though, I leaned back and raised my wineglass to her.  
  
"Feeling more comfortable now?"  
  
Amanda raised hers back. "Surprisingly, yes. Sitting here bare like this feels almost normal now. I'm still not certain how I'd react if someone else saw me, but it feels good." She tilted her head and considered a moment. "And it makes me feel ... I don't know. In control? Maybe powerful? Anyway, I'm not hiding myself anymore. I chose to do this, and I'm enjoying it." She paused a moment and repeated herself, wonderingly. "It feels good."  
  
I laughed at her expression. "Maybe your friend Susan was right, and you're an exhibitionist and just didn't know it."  
  
She made a face at me, then put her hands over her head and gave a languorous back-arched stretch that belonged on the centerfold of a magazine. I did my best to keep my face straight, but didn't succeed -- she giggled, then stuck out her tongue. "I don't think so, Jack. Except maybe for you, if you're very nice to me."  
  
"Amanda, for another like that I'll do my very best!" I was utterly sincere.  
  
She grinned and attempted a Mae West voice. "Want to take some pictures then, big boy? They last longer."  
  
She wasn't just teasing; as soon as she finished her wine, she walked to the edge of the drop-off and struck a pose, holding it patiently while I fumbled my phone out of the pile of clothes.  
  
Amanda limited herself to the "artistic" rather than the "pornographic" -- no spread-legged crotch shots for her -- but it was incredibly erotic. She looked fantastic -- and a fantasy, the layer of sunscreen adding a faint sheen to her golden-brown skin that almost glowed in the bright sunlight, her black hair, neatly-groomed pubic patch, and dark nipples highlighted in contrast. My erection, which had subsided while we ate, returned with a vengeance, though I did my best not to pay it attention as I concentrated on capturing each pose.  
  
Beyond an occasional smile or teasing wink, Amanda ignored my growing arousal, but it was obvious she knew precisely what she was doing. She might not be a professional model, but she'd given it thought; each new pose was chosen to highlight both her body and the natural setting. If none of her poses went beyond mildly risqué, the sort of almost-innocent naughtiness you might have found in an early-60's edition of Playboy magazine, she still exuded a sense of smoldering passion. Here was a woman who knew she was desirable, was proud of her body, and was enjoying showing herself off to an appreciative audience.  
  
And even if we were both ignoring my reaction, it was increasingly -- visibly -- obvious how achingly appreciative I was. Not that Amanda was immune. She was equally affected, no matter how controlled her expression -- perhaps more so. By the time she struck her last pose she was breathing faster, her skin was flushed, her nipples were puckered, and I could see glistening pearls of dew below her dark pubic thatch.  
  
Though she loves to play games, Amanda's basically a direct person. So after the last pose, she didn't try to pretend indifference or play hard to get -- instead, she gave her urchin grin and held out her arms for a hug.

After the long, teasing, build-up she'd given, I was tempted to take her hard and fast where she stood. I doubted she'd object -- unless I was totally wrong, she was half-hoping I'd do just that. Instead, I did something far more difficult; I gently pulled her close and gave her a long, unhurried, kiss before leading her back to the blanket and lowering her carefully down at my side.  
  
Our next kiss was equally unhurried but more intense, our tongues dueling as I slowly ran my hands up and down her body, tracing her curves but avoiding her most sensitive spots. For the next few minutes, I did my best to tease and torment her just as much as her show had done to me.  
  
If I'd hoped to frustrate her, I failed. She might have been anticipating fast rough sex -- it had surprised me to find how much she enjoyed that sometimes -- but she responded happily to my slower approach, almost purring as my hands worked my way around her body. Some things didn't work -- to my dismay, oral sex was right out, giving or receiving: sunscreen tastes nasty! But in compensation, it felt almost like baby oil under my hands; I slid them down her back and kneaded her firm bottom while my tongue plundered her mouth.  
  
Judging by her moans, she enjoyed everything we did, but she had been closer to the edge than I'd first thought -- her body clenched when I lightly strummed her clit. Her moans became a growl when I slipped an exploring finger inside her opening -- the accompanying glare was downright feral.  
  
"Jack -- no more teasing. Please!"  
  
I'd been tempted to continue, but I could hear the raw need in her voice. "How do you want it, Amanda?"  
  
"Any way! I'm sorry I teased you so much, all right? But I want you now." Her voice slid into an earthy growl by the end.  
  
I held her tightly against me as I rolled over; ending up on my back with her laying atop my chest. "OK. Since you're so desperate, I'll let you do all the work." My easy acquiescence seemed to calm her; though still eager, she didn't rush.  
  
Amanda took the time to give me a kiss before she straddled me, positioned my hard cock at her entrance, and slowly lowered herself down to seat me inside her.  
  
Cowgirl is one of our favorite positions. It gives her a chance to set the pace, while I love the view. I can watch myself sliding inside her, the play of muscles on her taut body, the sway of her breasts, and -- especially -- the look of rapt concentration on her face as she chases her orgasm.  
  
Another advantage is that since I don't need them to support my weight, both hands are free to explore and tease. Perhaps I'm shallow; more often than not, my hands end up holding those lovely breasts. Amanda said once that they were "pretty nice boobs for a Chinese girl", but she was overly modest -- they're "pretty nice boobs", period. Not huge, but shapely, full for her size, firm, just enough hang to show they're real, with wide dark areola surrounding thick nipples ... I love to play with them, and they feel absolutely marvelous in my hands.  
  
Usually, even when we're excited, Amanda and I try to hold back as long as we can. It's a game we play -- who'll outlast the other? This time, it wasn't a game; watching Amanda had left me so turned on that I had to use all my willpower to last as she rode me. Somehow, I mustered the needed control, but it wasn't easy -- I tried desperately to ignore the feeling of her body moving against mine, her tight, slick tunnel sliding on my swollen cock, her erect nipples pressing against my palms.  
  
Fortunately, Amanda had been just as aroused as I was -- although she'd started slowly, her pace rapidly increased. I had only shreds of self-control left when I felt her tense and her face began to show the familiar inward focus, but it was enough -- I didn't flood her with cum until her orgasmic lock-up subsided and she collapsed onto my chest.  
  
For a little while, I just held her. We were hot, slick with sweat and sunscreen, and panting as if we'd just finished running a race -- in a way, I suppose we had. Only after we'd both caught our breath did I help her to move down beside me.  
  
She propped herself up on an elbow and gave me a tired smile. "Wow."  
  
"Yeah. Wow. Amanda, that was amazing."  
  
She giggled. "See? I told you I wasn't a prude!"  
  
I rolled my eyes. "No, you've pretty well proved that. Though I could easily believe 'sex maniac' after that performance. As well as 'exhibitionist'."  
  
She stuck out her tongue. "Only sometimes. And only with you. Are you complaining?"  
  
I smiled and shook my head. "Not at all. I just hope I can keep up."  
  
We didn't say anything else for a while, just lay quietly together and enjoyed the moment. But finally, reluctantly, we had to move.  
  
Amanda had thought ahead -- she produced some baby wipes from the pack so we could clean off, then traded help renewing our coats of sunscreen before repacking the remains of our picnic. To my surprise, she pulled on her socks and boots but added her folded-up dress to the load in the pack.  
  
"Amanda?"  
  
"Jack? There shouldn't be anyone else on the trail. I want to finish the hike this way. Just to prove I can." Her eyes searched my face before adding "Does it bother you?" She sounded apologetic, and a bit nervous again.  
  
I thought about it briefly. It was a little crazy -- but then, so had been everything else today. I shrugged and gave her a thumbs-up. "No it doesn't, you're probably right about the trail, and I'm here with you in case we do meet somebody. I think that covers everything." Her eyes widened as I added my own clothes to the pack. "If you can do it, I can do it too."  
  
I should know better than give her an opening like that. But it served its purpose -- her reflexive "Oh? It should be interesting when I'm in the hospital for our first kid!" sounded as much relieved as amused.  
  
ooOoo  
  
We were already more than halfway up to the top of the hill we were climbing. Like most of the other trails in the area, it had started as a ranch road, but I'd always suspected that they'd made this one with a jeep -- I couldn't imagine a standard pickup managing the grade. This high up, the trail was a series of steep switchbacks that ran through dense thickets pf manzanita and scrub oak most of the way to the top. It was a trade-off: no views, but the trail had lots of shade, a real advantage on a hot summer's day.  
  
We needed it -- we still had nearly a mile before reaching the top. Not a huge distance, but it was a fairly stiff climb, and I was carrying the loaded backpack. I might have objected to the pace Amanda was setting except for one thing: she'd moved a little ahead of me and I was intent on the view. It had been good enough when I'd just watched the sundress swirling around her thighs. Seeing them in the open while her sleekly muscled bottom alternately tightened and relaxed ... I was a little distracted.  
  
"... surprised you're going along with this so easily, Jack. I was really afraid you'd think I was a little crazy. Does it worry you?" I'd let myself get a little lost watching her, but I'd caught the gist of her question. I could see why she might have worried about my reaction.  
  
But she'd worried unnecessarily. Now that I'd had a chance to process it, I wasn't worried about her being "a little crazy", or feeling upset. Knowing her motivations helped -- I knew what she was reacting to, and why. Was it an odd way of dealing with her issues? Yeah, probably. But so what? It seemed to have helped her get past them, finally. And despite recent evidence to the contrary, I didn't think she was turning into an uncontrolled exhibitionist, or interested in attracting other guys, or, really, anything I'd find too upsetting.  
  
But as near as I could parse it, she was still a least a little worried that I might be.  
  
"Amanda!" At least I didn't sound too exasperated. "Yes, this is a little -- small-c -- crazy, but it's not CRAZY crazy, all right?" I bulled right over her attempted response. "The only thing that worries me is that you're worried. No, I'm not upset. Yes, I think you're a little weird, but I already knew that -- you agreed to marry me, after all! Are you planning on dumping me? Or doing this to attract other men ... or women, I suppose?"  
  
She gave an emphatic head shake.  
  
"Are you planning on doing anything crazier than today?"  
  
Her answering head shake was just as emphatic.  
  
"Then I'm not worried. Why are you?"  
  
She looked thoughtful and quite a bit more relaxed, but she still took her time in before replying.  
  
"I guess because I sprang this on you without warning. I wanted to surprise you -- what if it really had upset you? I shouldn't have blindsided you like that."  
  
I nodded "I'd have appreciated some warning -- but I have to admit it was really hot, too. It's not as if I have any objections to nudity per se -- you know that! I just worry about things like safety, and legal issues. Like I said earlier if you'd wanted to visit a nude beach, all you needed to do was ask. Really, I'm surprised you're comfortable doing this if the beach embarrassed you."  
  
She shuffled her feet uneasily and shrugged.  
  
I grinned at her "Or maybe it doesn't. Hiking like this is pretty hot. So was making love outdoors, earlier. You've convinced me that when we buy a house it definitely needs a private back yard."  
  
Her answering grin was shy but equally certain. "I think I'd like that, too. That was the other thing that worried me a little bit: I don't care about showing off for others, but it feels good to be outside like this. It makes me feel more like I'm part of nature. I like the feeling of the sun on my back and the wind on my skin." She gave me a teasing look. "I like the way that you watch me, too. And I kind of like watching you."  
  
I snorted. "You stole my lines! As long as it's safe, I love watching you like this. So have fun. I am."  
  
The climb wasn't any less steep, but now that we'd cleared the air it felt easier, somehow. And the best proof that Amanda took me at my word was that she was teasing me again.  
  
Not a lot -- it was playfulness, more than anything else. But her wordplay, side-eyed glances, and occasional wiggle of her tempting -- and oh so bare -- bottom in my direction were all proof she was in good spirits.  
  
After our recent tryst, I wasn't quite ready for another round, but she was fun to watch. She really was a lovely sight, even though her hiking boots contrasted more oddly with her nudity than they had with her sundress earlier.  
  
To be fair, I imagined I looked even odder -- nude, but wearing boots, a pack, and carrying a hiking stick? Even if I was used to nudity at home, it felt downright weird to feel my cock swaying in the breeze as I climbed the trail. Especially since watching Amanda had me reacting just enough that my interest was fairly obvious -- there was a noticeable amount of swaying going on.  
  
But other than quick glances and the occasional teasing grin, we both concentrated on climbing. It got a bit steeper, but in another few minutes, we reached the end of the climb as our trail joined the one running the length of the high peaks.  
  
The trail up had been largely closed in and shaded by thickets, but the area at the top of the ridge was mostly open. For the last few hundred yards on the way up the path had run through a thick shag of golden-brown grass. Despite an occasional lonely tree, the ridge trail was more of the same. Which meant that unlike the trail up, the length of the high peaks trail was visible to anyone on the main valley trail below, or to the trail on the opposite ridge we'd taken on the way in.  
  
Not that it was a very good view -- in a straight line, the valley trail was the better part of a mile away, the opposite ridge even further. Without binoculars, all anyone could see were small moving dots; even with binoculars, they wouldn't be entirely certain about what we were or were not wearing, much less be able to identify us. It still felt odd knowing that anyone on the trails below could see us, however poorly.  
  
I think we both realized that at the same time -- at least, Amanda's eyes widened slightly when we stopped to look behind us. I wasn't too worried -- after all, even if there was someone down there, and even if they realized what they were seeing, they wouldn't be able to identify us. And it would take a fast hiker the better part of an hour to reach us, even if for some odd reason we didn't move from our current position.  
  
Amanda seemed to make the same calculation; after another look back she gave me an impish smile and an exaggerated wiggle of her bottom before starting along the ridge. Compared to the routes up, the ridge trail itself is easy -- fairly level, with only minor climbs up or down as it winds its way along the crest. Or it could have been easier if the gentler grade hadn't given her more scope to tease me -- meaningful glances, exaggerated hip-swaying, and the occasional unnecessary bounce. Nothing too extreme, just ... teasing. She seemed to be enjoying herself -- I suspected I knew just how she'd behaved in school.  
  
There was no shade to speak of, but the near-constant breeze made up for the lack; even though it was a warm, sunny day I was pretty sure that most of the sweat was her fault. This section wasn't very long; we didn't push too hard, but even with her teasing it took us less than an hour to reach the end of the main ridge and the lone oak tree marking the last fork in the trail.  
  
We stopped in the shade of the oak to rest, and I swung the pack off to pull out a couple of bottles of water to sip as we took in the view. From where we stood, we could trace most of the course down to join the valley floor trail again. It seemed empty, but I checked for other people on our route. As far as I could tell there were no other hikers on the trail down.  
  
"Do you see a jeep?"  
  
"Amanda?"  
  
"Do you see a ranger jeep down there?" She shaded her eyes and looked down trail to the valley entrance, then gave a head shake. "No jeep. There's nobody out there."  
  
"Oh?" I must have sounded skeptical -- considering how nervous she had been earlier, she now seemed very much at ease. She actually giggled before replying.  
  
"Thank Lupe -- she's the only ranger working here today. She promised that if she saw any hikers heading in she'd drive up our route in reverse to give us some warning. If we don't see her, we're still alone."  
  
I blinked. "It sounds like you two did a lot of planning. You must know her better than I thought."  
  
"Better than I did! When she guessed what I wanted to do she fell all over volunteering to help." Amanda gave a lop-sided grin "Actually, I think she's living vicariously -- she'd really like to be able to do this herself, but she'd get fired if she did."  
  
She looked down again. "Even if there was someone there, do you think they could really see us?"  
  
I judged the distance. "Um ... maybe. We're pretty exposed here. I doubt if they'd see a lot of details, but if they have binoculars I think they'd be able to tell whether we're wearing clothes."  
  
Amanda's grin got wider. "Let's show them if they're out there!" She took my hand and pulled me over to the edge of the drop-off. "Wave to them, Jack. Give them something to see!" She pumped both hands above her head in an exaggerated 'victory' pose to show what she meant.  
  
I was laughing as I followed her lead, then struck a couple of exaggerated muscle-man poses. "You can pretend otherwise, but you really are a bit of an exhibitionist, Amanda. And a terrible tease."  
  
"Oh? Maybe I like what happens when I tease you. Especially when you can't do anything about it until we get home." She gave a suggestive shimmy, then stepped close and raised her face for a kiss.  
  
It was a long, slow, kiss that promised a lot when we got home. It left me -- once more -- with a throbbing erection fit to hammer nails. And incredibly frustrated. I would probably have left it at that if she hadn't slipped a hand down to give my aching cock a tug before stepping away again.  
  
"Jack! What are you -" she broke off with a squeak as I swung her over one shoulder and gave her bare butt an admonitory swat. There are advantages in being a lot bigger than your lady -- I could have carried her a lot further than the few yards back into the shade. Her struggles to get free would have been far more convincing if she'd tried harder or if she hadn't been laughing -- as it was, she stayed in place until I swung her down again and pinned her against the tree.  
  
I had just as much trouble making my growl convincing. "Wench. You really are a terrible tease. But I don't feel like waiting until we get home."  
  
"Brute! I suppose you're going to ravish me here where anyone could see us?" She sounded unworried by the prospect.  
  
I smiled and looked her slowly up and down "Just like you were hoping I would. Or am I wrong?"  
  
"Of course you're ...." I cut off the rest of her answer with another kiss. One that she answered eagerly. She didn't even pretend to any reluctance.  
  
I'd let her set the pace before, but this time I was in control. I didn't bother with unpacking the blanket -- instead, I bent her over to brace against the tree and slid into her from behind. Our previous session had been lovemaking; this was a hard, nasty fuck for both of us. Amanda had been slick and ready from the first and was as into it as I was, gasping and shoving her hips back to meet me as I took her. There are advantages to the second round of sex -- usually, I can outlast her. I did this time, too, but it was a close-run thing -- after she half-collapsed against the tree I joined her almost immediately.  
  
Neither one of us spoke until our breathing slowed. I'd been doing most of the work, though -- Amanda recovered first.  
  
"Brute. Caveman. Cad." She sounded remarkably satisfied.  
  
"Yup. And you spent the last couple of hours teasing me with your oh-so-delectable little bod, then grabbed my cock while telling me 'later'? Don't pretend you didn't expect exactly what you got. And that you didn't want it. Or that you have a problem with it. Do you?"  
  
Amanda gave a rueful smile. "No. But I didn't intend to give quite that much of a show to anyone watching."  
  
I shrugged. "There's shade under the tree. I don't know if they could have seen much."  
  
"Do you really think so?" She sounded skeptical.  
  
I grinned at her "Probably not. But we can pretend. That you weren't hoping for watchers, that is." It was easy to dodge her mock punch. She was laughing too hard to aim, anyway.  
  
ooOoo  
  
We didn't talk much as we took the trail down, but the silence felt comfortable. So did our lack of clothes. By now, it felt perfectly natural to feel the sun on our bare skin, though I was sure I still cut an odd figure carrying the pack. No matter -- now that we'd dropped off the ridge, there wasn't anyone other than Amanda to see me. Or anyone other than me to see Amanda, I supposed. Though by now neither of us was too worried about meeting other hikers.  
  
Not that I expected any until we reached the bottom. I'd always liked this part of the route; though it didn't have much in the way of shade, it offered great views across the valley as we descended. And despite ending at the main valley trail it felt very isolated -- though it was no steeper than the trail we'd taken earlier, the lack of shade made it a much more daunting climb up.  
  
Downhill? Its only problem was that it meant that our hike was nearly over. We kept an easy pace, even walking hand-in-hand part of the way, but it didn't take much over half an hour to near the junction with the valley trail. Just past it, we rounded a corner and saw a jeep parked in a patch of shade off the trail ahead.  
  
I took my cue from Amanda -- her pace barely faltered. I did my best to keep my face straight and stay in step with her as we approached the jeep; I could see the outline of someone wearing a ranger's Smokey-the-Bear hat standing beside it and hoped it was her friend.

It was; she stepped out of the shade to meet us. Up close, I could see my half-memory of her face had been correct: Lupe was the woman I'd recalled seeing Amanda talking with.  
  
And to my relief she took our undressed state with equanimity; though she gave both of us a slow up-and-down, her only visible reaction was a faint smile. "Did you have a good hike?"  
  
Amanda did a good job of duplicating her appearance of nonchalance; though I could detect a hint of tension, I doubted anyone else could have. And it went away as they talked -- however well she knew Lupe, I could see that Amanda both liked and trusted her.  
  
I nodded to Lupe and walked up the jeep, leaving them to their conversation. I swung the pack off my back and onto the cargo bed, then rummaged inside for our clothes.  
  
They broke off their talk when I handed Amanda her sundress. "Sorry to interrupt, but I'm guessing we need to get dressed now?"  
  
Lupe gave an apologetic shrug. "Yeah, you probably should. Not that I'm going to write you guys up, but if someone came in after I left the parking area they might file a complaint."  
  
Amanda made a face, but she was pulling the sundress over her head as I turned away.  
  
It took me quite a bit longer -- unlike Amanda, I had to pull off and replace my boots so I could get my pants on. By the time I'd pulled on my shirt and had my boots laced again their conversation was over.  
  
Or mostly over -- Amanda gave her a quick hug and told her "Call me!" before taking my arm and leading me away.  
  
ooOoo  
  
"So, was that all you hoped it would be? Do you think you'll want to do it again?"  
  
She shifted in her seat. "Yes, it was. Maybe, if it's safe. I was so scared, but I know that when we buy a house I want that private back yard. With a hot tub, and a deck for nude sun-bathing."  
  
I teased a little. "How about visiting a nude beach? Or an adults-only resort for our honeymoon? You seemed to like the idea of people seeing you."  
  
That got a nervous giggle. I risked a quick glance her way; Amanda was definitely blushing, but told me, "I'll try it if you really want to, Jack. I'm still not sure I'd be comfortable around other people, though." She really did look uncomfortable.  
  
I quit teasing her. "I'd probably be off-balance, too. I'm used to nude sauna and hot tubbing with my family, but it felt downright weird to walk up to your ranger friend that way. I was amazed at how calm you looked."  
  
"I was terrified! But I didn't want to let her know that; she'd sort of dared me to do it."  
  
I grinned to myself. I'd guessed that one correctly -- Amanda might have enjoyed herself, but she'd pushed well past her comfort zone.  
  
"So, 'call me'?"  
  
"I like Lupe. I'm going to ask her over for dinner next weekend. Do you think she's cute?"  
  
"Um ..." I could see this one backfiring no matter what I said.  
  
"Gotcha! No, I was thinking of inviting your brother Mike over too. Do you think he'll like her?"  
  
I risked a quick glance her way. She looked smug. "Playing matchmaker? He's single, she's good looking, what do you think? But do you think she'll like him?"  
  
She giggled. "I'm just giving her what she asked for."  
  
I waited for more, but finally gave up and prompted her. "Asked for?"  
  
"She told me that she could definitely see why I liked you. And asked if you had a brother. So I thought I'd do them both a favor."  
  
"Witch!"