**Summer at Cache Lake**

**Chapter 31: Sharp Tooth**  
  
The trail on the other side of the outlet was different. Rather than following the outlet, it angled off sharply into the forest. That was the trail that Jill led them down.  
  
“Glad to get off the road?” asked David.  
  
“You know it,” she replied.  
  
Jill was in the lead, but that didn’t last for long. At his first opportunity, Ryan slipped by. Jill did her best to ignore him, but it was pretty obvious that he only wanted to be in front to be in a good position to glance back at Jill at every opportunity.  
  
‘At least he’s not trying to walk backwards today,’ thought Jill.  
  
Doing her best to keep her chin up, Jill kept repeating to herself, ‘At least he’s not teasing me about last night’s orgasm.’ She didn’t need any more of his Meg Ryan imitation. Once was enough. At least his version at breakfast hadn’t involved any moaning or verbalizing . . . leaving her grandparents in the dark.  
  
Even though he wasn’t teasing her about the orgasm, he was still being quite obnoxious. “Settle down, Ryan!” David said at long last.  
  
“What?” asked Ryan.  
  
“You know very well what you’re doing,” said David.  
  
“Worry about yourself!” said Ryan, turning and stopping in the middle of the trail.  
  
Jill slowed and then stopped to keep from running into him.  
  
“You spent the entire day yesterday with the topless princess. I was grounded . . . remember?” continued Ryan.  
  
“Deservedly so . . . and you might be again,” said David.  
  
“Hey, I’m following the rules you gave me,” said Ryan. “I haven’t used the word ‘pussy’ once.”  
  
“Until now,” said David.  
  
“I want Jill to be comfortable just as much as you,” said Ryan. “I can’t help it if I love it when she blushes. You said you enjoy seeing her turn all red and bashful, too.”  
  
Jill turned and looked back at her brother. He shrugged.  
  
“What is it about blushing?” she asked. David didn’t reply.  
  
“You’re just cute when your tits are out and you are feeling ‘oh, so’ embarrassed. You turn red . . . you don’t know where to look . . . you bite your lip . . . like that,” said Ryan, pointing at her face. Jill hadn’t realized that she was biting her lip.  
  
“Aren’t the tits enough?” she asked in exasperation.  
  
“Sure they are,” replied Ryan. “But if you want to bare the pussy, who’s stopping you?”  
  
“David, he said the ‘P’ word,” said Jill, turning her back to Ryan. She didn’t want to hear any more talk like that, but she could feel a little tickle down below.  
  
“Come on, Ryan,” said David. “You promised. Please don’t make any more waves.”  
  
“I’m just having fun,” he replied. “Look how scared and embarrassed she looks. You get a kick out of that, too. Don’t deny it.”  
  
“Ryan!” said David, reprimanding him.  
  
“Okay, okay,” said Ryan, turning to resume walking.  
  
“David?” said Jill, staring back at him, her arms folded.  
  
“Hey, I can’t help it,” he said. “Besides, it’s not incest if I think it’s cute when your face turns red. We’re talking ‘face’ here . . . as in, above the neck.” He started walking.  
  
“I guess,” said Jill, as he stepped off the trail to walk past.  
  
Jill started walking as well, bringing up the rear. With her hands, she reached up and felt her cheeks. They were indeed warm, pleasantly so. Thinking about it, Jill started to realize that the experience of blushing wasn’t all negative. It was a complex sensation.  
  
For quite some time, they walked along in silence, each of them presumably processing the short discussion they had all just taken part in.  
  
Awkward dynamics aside, Jill started to enjoy the hike. It was a lovely morning to be walking along the forest floor. The air was still and rays of sunshine shot all the way to the ground in places. The birds and other forest critters were to be heard even if they were rarely to be seen. The endless expanse of nature seemed to offer tranquility and peace to all who were receptive.  
  
Jill’s thoughts turned to how pleasant it was to be outside on a beautiful summer day, completely unencumbered by clothing above the waist. Guys did have it good when it came to their ability to go shirtless. It was indeed a fun world to visit.  
  
The trail started climbing and the trees thinned out, becoming smaller and more snow-tangled as they approached the tree line. After negotiating a nearly washed out switchback, the trio followed the trail off across a bare slope to the south. The rocky pinnacle of Sharp Tooth towered into the cloudless blue sky above them.  
  
Looking up at it, Jill felt that it looked entirely impossible to climb. She knew otherwise. From her discussions with Nick, she knew that it was a Class 5 climb, one that he had actually done. Determining that had been difficult as he had never heard of Sharp Tooth. Via a lengthy discussion, Jill had learned that its real name was Inspiration Peak. In her opinion, the official name was much less ‘inspired’ sounding than their Sharp Tooth name. To her utter dismay, she had been unable to convince Nick that Inspiration Peak looked exactly like a tyrannosaurus rex’s tooth.  
  
No matter the name, the face looked unclimbable. She, David and Ryan had undertaken their share of climbing, but mostly just Class 2 and Class 3 rock, the kind of climbing that involved some use of the hands but did not require ropes and other safety gear.  
  
“Nick has climbed the face,” she bragged, pointing up.  
  
“He has?” said David, looking up at the rock wall above them, his jaw hanging open.  
  
Jill looked over and saw an expression similar to jealousy on Ryan’s face. “It might not be that hard,” he said. “If you’ve got the equipment.”  
  
“Oh, right . . . Nick. We haven’t heard anything about your date. Fill us in!” insisted David.  
  
“It’s none of your business,” said Jill.  
  
“Did you guys kiss?” asked David. Jill saw that Ryan was listening intently but feigning disinterest.  
  
“I’m not the kiss and tell type. You know that.”  
  
“So you guys did kiss!” said David triumphantly.  
  
“We did not!” said Jill in exasperation, not wanting to leave them with a mistaken impression.  
  
David laughed. Jill looked over and saw what looked to be an expression of relief on Ryan’s face. Even though she had been doing her best to squelch his hopes, she knew that he remained romantically interested in her.  
  
In the middle of what looked to be an avalanche chute, they took a water break. Jill again looked up, marveling at the peak that they would be on top of in a matter of hours. They’d follow the trail which looped around to the backside where the slope was much less vertical. They’d be using their hands, but mostly just for balance.  
  
As they resumed their hike, Jill found herself wondering if Ryan would ever settle down. Here she was doing her best to behave like one of the guys, hiking bare-chested as if it were the most normal thing in the world to do. Ryan, on the other hand, was hardly treating her like one of the guys. He was constantly leering at her.  
  
By now, she had tried all methods of dealing with him. She’d tried ignoring him, she’d tried talking to him, and she’d tried scowling at him. Whatever she did or said, he seemed to just find funny or encouraging . . . and all the while he would keep staring at her chest.  
  
She expected that he’d get accustomed to seeing her breasts, and eventually start to treat her more like he had back when they had been covered all the time. Well, it seemed as if it would happen. It was probably just going to take longer than she might have thought.  
  
A bit later, realizing that they had gotten an early start and were making good time, they decided to hold off and have lunch on the summit. More typically, they would have taken their lunch break before the last long steep section of rock. It was either before or after, as that last section offered no place to comfortably take a break.  
  
Jill was, of course, traveling very light. She was wearing just her best hiking boots and her shorts and carrying nothing. Both boys had small backpacks. She had offered to carry one, but they had preferred her with nothing above the waist. Jill didn’t see how a backpack might conflict with the ‘one of the guys’ dress mandate, but she saw no point in arguing the point.  
  
The final push to the summit turned out to be more awkward than Jill had anticipated. Most of her pairs of shorts were of a certain style that she found both comfortable and attractive. They were low rise meaning that they had very little length to them. The difficult part for an activity like climbing was that they flared, the legs being far from tight against her upper thighs.  
  
They were absolutely decent in most situations, but just as with a skirt, the possibility of seeing her underwear from below was problematic. No matter what she did, that’s exactly where Ryan always seemed to be . . . below and looking up.  
  
A time or two she forced him to pass her, but a little later, he would again be just below. She tried climbing fast in hopes of making his view more distant. Somehow he always managed to keep up or catch up. Even with her chest visible, he seemed to still have a great interest in viewing her legs.  
  
Jill ended up having little success at ensuring that Ryan couldn’t get a glimpse of her panties now and then, so she kept reminding herself that they were not especially brief. Not only were her girl parts just as covered as they were by her bikini bottoms, but she was not being teased about her noisy orgasm. There was a certain amount of comfort in that. Putting that behind her was an important priority.  
  
“Okay, Tarzan, time for your Lord of the Jungle yell!” announced Ryan enthusiastically as they reached the summit.  
  
“Sure,” said Jill, acting agreeable while also trying to conceal just how much she liked this new nickname.  
  
Identifying the boulder that looked to represent the highest point on the mountain top, she climbed up. Placing one foot in front of the other and pulling her shoulders back, she stuck out her chest proudly, her rigid nipples pointing squarely in the direction Cache Lake far below and to the west.  
  
After dramatically surveying the scene, the forest, the hills and other peaks as well as the lake, much as Tarzan himself would have done, she took a deep breath. Holding her head high, she let loose with the loudest, most awe-inspiring Tarzan yell that she could muster, starting to pound on her chest a split second later. Her high pitched jungle scream shattered the near silence on the mountaintop. Keeping her elbows high, she pounded herself solidly, the rhythmic sound echoing deep inside her lungs, causing the vocal component to reverberate impressively.  
  
“Bravo, bravo!” she heard David yell while clapping, once she had completed her spirited display. Ryan joined in the cheering.  
  
Looking down she saw that Ryan had his fancy camera in hand.  
  
“Hey . . . not cool!” she yelled, pointing a finger aggressively at his face. “You better not have taken a picture.”  
  
“But can I?” he asked. “It would be such a great photograph. Look at the setting . . . and you look so awesome.”  
  
“Absolutely not,” said Jill hoping down. “Prove to me that you didn’t already take one.”  
  
“I didn’t,” claimed Ryan. “You can trust me.”  
  
“As if!” she said, laughing uncomfortably.  
  
“Okay, I’ll show you,” he offered reluctantly.  
  
“Trust . . . but verify, said David with a chuckle, as Ryan went through the exercise of showing Jill his most recent photos. As he had indicated, none of them included a topless Tarzan.  
  
“I can at least take scenery photos,” he said, pointing his camera across the valley at Cornice Ridge.  
  
“As long as I’m not part of the scenery,” said Jill.  
  
“But you are! You’re the best part of the scenery,” he argued.  
  
Keeping an eagle eye on Ryan, she added, “I don’t think I can trust you with that camera. You’re not the most well-behaved guy.”  
  
“Proudly so!” said Ryan. “Life’s too short to behave.”  
  
Jill saw Ryan grinning at David. Sighing and shaking her head, she said, “How I ever got into this predicament, I’ll never know.”  
  
Jill didn’t take her eyes off of Ryan as he went about taking various photos of the tremendous view stretching as far as the eye could see in all directions below them. While he was thus occupied, she renewed the sunscreen on her most sensitive areas.  
  
Once Ryan seemed to have taken the photos he wanted, he returned to his backpack. Instead of stowing the camera, he removed a compact tripod.  
  
“And what might that be for?” she asked suspiciously.  
  
“A group photo,” he replied. “This is an occasion that simply begs to be preserved.”  
  
“You don’t need the tripod. I’ll take a photo of you and David,” she said.  
  
“A group photo . . . The Three Amigos!” Ryan clarified.  
  
“I don’t think so,” said Jill sternly, her hands on her hips. “If you haven’t noticed, I’m not . . . umm . . . presentable.”  
  
“Don’t get your nipples in a knot,” said Ryan. “I’ve got it all worked out.”  
  
“Nipples in a knot?” repeated Jill quietly. She looked down at her chest, wondering how that might even be possible.  
  
“Just hear me out,” requested Ryan. “What if we all stand such that the gorgeous little titties are hidden from view?”  
  
“Well . . . not if I look topless…” said Jill.  
  
“Here, let me take a sample photo and show you.”  
  
“And then you’ll erase it, right?”  
  
“If you want me to,” said Ryan. Assuming that she was in agreement, he continued, “Now stand here, looking down at the lake. Now fold your arms . . . below your . . . yeah, like that.”  
  
Reluctantly, Jill allowed herself to be posed. Once she was in position, Ryan walked behind her. She heard the shutter click.  
  
“Hey,” she said, turning her head and glaring back at him angrily. She heard the shutter click again.  
  
“David!” she said as if he should come to her aid.  
  
“I think you bought into the idea of a sample photo,” said David. “He did agree to erase it.”  
  
“I did,” said Ryan.  
  
Jill frowned, realizing that she had probably agreed.  
  
“Okay, now hold that pose,” instructed Ryan. “Hold those sexy supermodel shoulders up, and look back at me. Give me your best happy-to-be-on-a-mountain-top-in-the-sunshine smile.”  
  
Looking back at him, her arms still folded, she let her scowl soften into a smile. She heard the shutter click a few more times.  
  
“Lovely. You’re absolutely gorgeous!” said Ryan with a warm smile. “Now rotate your shoulders a little.”  
  
“But…” protested Jill.  
  
“Don’t worry,” said Ryan. “Not so far that things show. Just enough to add a sexy twist to your spine.”  
  
Jill complied, and she again heard Ryan take a few photos.  
  
“Okay, now come look,” he said.

**Chapter 32: Sharp Tooth, continued**  
  
Jill walked back and Ryan showed her the photos, one at a time.  
  
“But I still look topless,” she observed.  
  
“Would they really be all that different if there were a bikini string across your back?” he asked.  
  
“Yes,” said Jill. “Then you could tell I wasn’t topless.”  
  
“Look at it this way,” said Ryan. “We’ve both seen numerous magazine covers like this in the checkout line at the grocery store . . . Cosmo, and the like.”  
  
“That’s different,” said Jill, trying to think up how it might actually be different.  
  
“It’s a sexy pose, that’s all it is,” said Ryan. “But it’s still PG-13.” As Jill seemed to be thinking it over, he continued, “Now picture the three of us in a line, all with our backs to the camera, all looking over a shoulder and smiling.”  
  
Acting as if Jill had agreed, Ryan went about attaching the camera to the tripod.  
  
After some consideration, Jill announced, “As long as I get to delete any and all . . . should that be my decision.”  
  
“That’s the deal,” said Ryan.  
  
“You have to promise,” said David.  
  
“I promise, hope to die,” said Ryan.  
  
“And, should Jill leave you with any photos, she gets to approve any and all uses or postings in advance. Agreed?” asked David.  
  
“Agreed,” said Ryan.  
  
With that, Jill decided that it was safe enough to proceed, so she went back to where she had been.  
  
Once they were all in position, Ryan took a number of photos, trying to get the poses and smiles just right. He insisted that he be in the middle, next to Jill. His reasoning was that it needed to go from shortest (Jill) to tallest (David). Jill didn’t really want to be right next to him in the photo, but after giving it a little consideration, she decided that it might appear less awkward than if she were topless right next to her twin brother.  
  
“I’ll look through them and decide if you can keep any this evening,” Jill announced. She wanted more time to consider how damaging topless photos that did not show her chest might be. On the one hand, she knew that she shouldn’t let Ryan have them, but on the other hand, she couldn’t imagine how they might be harmful. She did think that she must look really attractive in them, based on the images that she had seen, but she was not about to admit that out loud.  
  
As they started down after lunch, Jill found herself thinking about how bothered she had been on the way up, knowing that Ryan had been trying to get glimpses of her panties. It seemed ironic to her that she’d been topless the whole time, but worrying about something other than the fact that her little breasts were on full display.  
  
Her insecurities about being so light on top seemed to be diminishing, and yet she knew that it was just around Ryan and David. Also, she knew that to an extent it was the fact that there were no other girls around to compare herself to. Standing next to a girl with D-cup breasts, she knew she’d feel just as inadequate as ever.  
  
Later that afternoon, after they were back in camp, Jill sat reading her next book, ‘The Republic’ by Plato. She was still topless, indeed all three of them were. She had moved her chair into the shade so as to not press her luck as far as too much sun went.  
  
At one point, she saw Ryan get up and discreetly slip away into the forest. She observed him out of the corner of her eye, doing her best to appear as if she were still reading. She looked over at David and their eyes met.  
  
While she watched, David lifted a hand. He made a fist, pumping it back and forth. Jill scowled, returning her eyes to her book. She very much wanted to follow Ryan, to spy on him and see if David was right, but she couldn’t do that, at least not with David watching. She did her best to forget about it, returning to her reading.  
  
A few minutes later, David got up and put a shirt on. It had started to cool off a bit. With a sense of relief, Jill got a shirt from her tent. She slipped it on, not bothering with a bra.  
  
“Thanks, David,” she said quietly.  
  
“Just doing what I normally do,” he said, brushing off her comment.  
  
Jill returned to her book. Even though going topless was doing what she wanted to do, she wanted it to appear as if she were following the ‘terms.’ That gave her deniability when it came to admitting that she liked being topless, actually wanted to be topless.  
  
That evening in her tent, thinking through the events of the day, Jill felt the urge to reach into her panties and again give her little slit the attention it was longing for. She resisted, doing her best to concentrate on the noises of the night: the small waves lapping against the shore and the sounds of crickets or frogs and other small forest creatures.  
  
“Remember, Jill,” she heard Ryan from the other tent say, “Free tongue rides, anytime you like.” He laughed and then continued, “If you think you had fun last night, just wait!”  
  
“Just shut up!” she yelled.  
  
“Oh, don’t be angry,” he said. “You know you want to.”  
  
“Do not! Now be quiet . . . go to sleep!” she snapped.  
  
She thought he’d continue pleading his case, but instead, she heard some moaning and then, “Oh, oh, oh…” accompanied with plenty of heavy breathing. Realizing that he was just trying to torture her by imitating what he had heard the night before, she did her best to block out all sound by pressing her palms tightly against her ears.  
  
Many hours later, Jill awoke with an uneasy sensation. She sat up. It was still pitch black, but something was wrong. At first, she did not know what it was, but then she felt the ground rocking. A quick moment later she realized that it was an earthquake.  
  
She unzipped her tent and crawled quickly out. Standing up, she felt the ground rolling, almost like waves on the ocean. The boys tripped over each other getting out of their tent. In the near darkness, the three of them all found each other. They held one another in a tight group huddle, clinging together for comfort in a suddenly scary world.  
  
“What’s happening?” asked Jill, of no one in particular, giving voice to emotions of great concern. Having grown up with earthquakes, she, of course, knew the answer.  
  
“Just an earthquake . . . but we’re fine . . . nothing to fall on us here,” said David reassuringly. “It will be over in a moment.”  
  
Just then, the sound grew much louder and they heard a thunderous roar from the north.  
  
“What was that?” Jill called out in shock.  
  
“I don’t know,” said David. “A landslide, maybe.”  
  
“Sounded like a freight train,” remarked Ryan.  
  
Thankful that the earthquake had not happened a day earlier when she had been sleeping nude, Jill realized that both boys were also naked from the waist up, wearing just pajama bottoms. Even though they all had so little on, Jill pulled the guys close. It felt so very nice to be held, nice to have their arms around her shoulders.  
  
The movement and the noise did subside, and Jill became especially conscious of the fact that she was wearing nothing more than a pair of low rider panties.  
  
“Thank you, guys,” she said, doing her best to not think about how she was topless.  
  
“Wow, was that ever an earth-shaking orgasm,” said Ryan, tickling her ribs with his fingertips. She jerked in surprise, pulling herself free.  
  
“Not now,” said David, reprimanding him sternly.  
  
Jill went back to her tent. Reaching inside, she found a hoodie and pulled it on. A moment later she was thankful that she had done so.  
  
A giant wave swept across their camp, almost knocking her over. Regaining her balance, Jill found herself standing in about a foot of water. As quickly as it had come, the water started to recede.  
  
“What the heck?” exclaimed Ryan, his pajamas soaked to his knees. “Was that a tidal wave?”  
  
“I’m guessing a landslide hit the lake,” said David. “The roar we heard a moment ago.”  
  
“Everything’s going to be completely soaked,” said Jill. She bent down and reached into her collapsed tent. Her sleeping bag and all her clothes were half-submerged, half-floating in standing water.  
  
“Well, we can’t go back to bed,” she announced.  
  
“Let’s make a fire,” proposed David, making his way carefully over to the woodpile.  
  
“Won’t all the wood be wet?” asked Ryan.  
  
“There’s dry wood on top. Lucky we have so much wood,” said David.  
  
“But the paper will be soaked,” said Ryan.  
  
“Stop being such a pessimist,” said David. “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”  
  
Fortunately, there were matches and a flashlight on the table, but the only dry paper they could find was the book by Plato which Jill had left on the table as well. Her other books had unfortunately been in her tent. She breathed a sigh of relief realizing that the library books had already been returned.  
  
Jill sacrificed the first fifty or so pages of ‘The Republic,’ pages she had already read, and in short order they had the beginnings of a fire going. David made a trip to the Airstream using the flashlight to check on things. Returning, he reported that their grandparents seemed to have slept through the earthquake.  
  
“Maybe the trailer’s suspension or their mattress cushioned some of the movement,” he speculated. “And the wave did not get that far. Come morning, they probably won’t even believe us that there was an earthquake.”  
  
“Most likely, they’ll think that it wasn’t much of one,” said Jill.  
  
“How strong of an earthquake was that?” asked Ryan.  
  
“Strong,” said David. “I’m thinking at least 7.0, but we’ll find out tomorrow.”  
  
“I doubt it was quite that strong,” said Jill thoughtfully. “…but surely quite a bit stronger than six on the Richter scale.” Both she and David had experienced their share of earthquakes – Ryan, too.  
  
The three of them huddled close to the warm fire, finding comfort in each other’s nearness. As dawn approached, they felt the first aftershock. It was relatively mild in comparison to the initial earthquake.  
  
They each fished a few articles of clothing and shoes out of their respective tents. After wringing them out as best they could, they hung them up, working together to rig up a clothesline near the fire.  
  
Sunrise revealed what they had suspected. A large section of the steep yet verdant hillside that had formed the north shore of the lake was gone, obviously having slid into the lake. In its place was a wide greyish brown scar, completely devoid of trees and other vegetation. The view from their camp had changed dramatically.  
  
None of their clothes were dry by the time that they were ready to go to breakfast. Thanking her lucky stars that she had put on the hoodie in the nick of time, Jill made her way to the trailer in just that and her panties. She quickly borrowed a large skirt from her grandmother. The two boys borrowed T-shirts from their grandfather. As suspected, their grandparents had managed to sleep through the quake; although, her grandfather did claim to have vague memories of things swaying around.  
  
After they had eaten, they decided to all drive in to Agency together. They wanted to see if the road was open and to learn how extensive the damage had been. They hoped that no fatalities had occurred, but the earthquake had been so powerful that they were realizing that it was a possibility. The whole region was used to earthquakes, but earthquakes were the sort of thing that no one ever really got used to.

**Chapter 33: Earthquake Morning**  
  
Suspecting that the road might have suffered some damage, they all piled into the Jeep due to its four-wheel drive capability.  
  
In two places, there were numerous rocks and boulders on the road for them to contend with. Most were smaller than bowling balls and quickly taken care of by David and Ryan. There was, however, one notable exception: in the canyon, there was one rock the approximate size and shape of a Volkswagen Bug taking up one of the lanes.  
  
“There could be a body under that,” remarked Ryan.  
  
“Unlikely,” replied David. “Anyone out here in the middle of the night would have been in a car.”  
  
Things in Agency were much calmer than they had been expecting. The grocery store was open, but it was operating on emergency generator power. They spoke with Mrs. Greggory and learned that the epicenter had been very close, actually between Agency and Stanton. Preliminary reports had the quake at 6.7 on the Richter scale. Mrs. Greggory had heard of a number of injuries, but no fatalities.  
  
She told them that the oldest section of the Stanton City Hall had collapsed. It had been made of stone. The newer sections, built quite recently, were still standing. From Mrs. Gregory, they also learned that a few houses had burned down in Stanton presumably due to ruptured gas lines. In Mrs. Greggory’s opinion, it was very lucky that the earthquake had happened in the middle of the night, otherwise, there would have been people buried in the rubble of the old city hall.  
  
Looking around inside the grocery store, they were able to see evidence of the earthquake. In places, ceiling tiles had fallen, and one of the aisles was closed, blocked off with yellow ‘Caution’ tape. Looking down it, Jill saw that a great number of jars of jams and jellies had fallen and broken. Cleaning that mess up looked as if it might take most of the day if they had someone to assign to the project.  
  
Not wanting to go right back to the lake, they headed for Stanton to have a look around. On the way out of town, they passed Valentino’s Pizza.  
  
“They must have power,” remarked Jill, seeing that the sign was lit. She also noticed that Nick’s truck was among the vehicles in the parking lot, but she kept that to herself.  
  
“You must be right,” said David. “I’m voting that we have pizza for lunch.”  
  
In Stanton, they surveyed the collapsed city hall and noted a few other buildings with damage, most of it minor. They also located the cul-de-sac where the fire department was still attending to a few smoldering homes, but they kept their distance, not wanting to potentially get in the way.  
  
At that point, they headed back to Valentino’s to see if it was indeed open for lunch. The stretch of highway just outside of town seemed to be the only area of Agency with power, and given the significant number of vehicles in the parking lot, it looked as if they had to be serving pizza – most likely a lot of it.  
  
They ordered their pizza at the counter and then found a table, cleaning it off themselves as the pizza parlor seemed short on staff. As Jill had again noted Nick’s truck in the parking lot, she was keeping an eye out for him. ‘Probably in the kitchen,’ she thought.  
  
A few minutes later, Nick showed up, sliding onto the bench next to her. “My dad told me you were here. Glad to see that you’re all fine,” he said, referencing everyone but looking only at Jill.  
  
“Grandma, grandpa, this is Nick. His dad owns the place,” said Jill.  
  
“Nick Bianchetti,” said Nick, rising up a little and reaching across the table to shake hands.  
  
“Herbert Wahlund,” replied her grandfather. “And this is my wife, Helen. I trust you know the boys.”  
  
“I do,” replied Nick, glancing down the table.  
  
“Nick is Jill’s boyfriend,” added David with a grin.  
  
“I don’t think so,” said Nick with a good-natured laugh. “…but we did see a movie together recently.”  
  
Jill smiled. Nick seemed to have handled being put on the spot like that quite well.  
  
“Working today?” she asked.  
  
“Actually today is one of my days off,” he said. Looking across the table at her grandparents, he added, “I don’t work here, but dad asked me to help out in the kitchen. Whenever the power is out, everyone seems to want to go out to eat. This time dad won the electricity lottery.”  
  
“Valentino,” added Jill for clarification. “His name is really Valentino.”  
  
“But you can call me Val,” said Nick’s father, dropping by the table to say hello and introduce himself.  
  
“He seems like a nice young man, Jill,” said her grandmother, after Nick and his father had both excused themselves to return to the kitchen.  
  
“Nicer than these bozos,” she said, smiling maliciously at Ryan and David. Even though she had not intended it as a joke, her grandparents took it that way, laughing heartily.  
  
A few minutes later, Nick returned, carrying a large bowl and a group of smaller bowls. “Dad gave me permission to throw in a salad,” he said. As soon as he had set those on the table, he made a quick trip back and returned with two pizzas.  
  
“Can you join us, young man? I expect there is plenty,” said Jill’s grandmother.  
  
“Actually I am due a break,” said Nick, again sliding in next to Jill.  
  
“Any damage to the restaurant . . . or your home, for that matter?” asked Jill’s grandfather.  
  
“Very little,” replied Nick. “A lot of cans fell off the shelves here, pizza sauce, olives, that sort of thing. But cans just dent, so no loss. There were some broken dishes to sweep up, glasses mostly. Some broken dishes at home, too. Dad says that a can of paint fell and spilled in the garage, but I didn’t see it.”  
  
As the discussion continued, they compared their various ‘waking up during the earthquake’ stories. Nick was surprised to hear about the wave that went through their camp. “That’s a new one on me . . . but I guess it explains the pajama bottoms,” he said with a wry smile.  
  
Jill looked over at David and Ryan and chuckled. They had both been quite self-conscious all morning; however, they had not had anything else to put on.  
  
A bit later, Nick asked, “Hey, want to hear my quake joke?”  
  
“Umm . . . sure,” said Jill wincing.  
  
“What did one quake say to the other quake?”  
  
“No idea,” said Jill agreeably.  
  
“It wasn’t my fault,” said Nick.  
  
There were a few chuckles and a few groans.  
  
“That’s so lame,” said David.  
  
“Okay, David, let’s hear your quake joke,” insisted Jill.  
  
“Afraid I don’t have one,” he replied.  
  
“Then don’t criticize,” she said.  
  
“Sticking up for her boyfriend,” teased Ryan.  
  
Jill scowled, but then ignored him as she returned to her slice of pizza.  
  
A bit later Nick pulled Jill aside as she was on her way back from the restroom. “I’ve got a couple of days off coming up. Skyline Adventures is calling. What do you say?”  
  
“Skyline Adventures?” asked Jill.  
  
“You know . . . where I work . . . the aerial park. Ziplines and rock climbing. What do you say . . . you and me.”  
  
“Umm . . . maybe,” she said hesitantly. Jill liked Nick, but getting to college without any relationship baggage was job one in her mind. “What day is today?” she asked.  
  
“It’s Thursday. If you don’t want to, you don’t want to,” he replied with a shrug.  
  
“No, I want to . . . but can I let you know?”  
  
“You’ll text me then?”  
  
“Right . . . text,” she said. She did think it would be fun, but the look in Nick’s eyes was confirming her suspicions. He seemed to be looking for more than friendship.  
  
Back at camp, they were all glad that it was such a hot day, but they had made a significant error by not getting their sleeping bags and more of their belongings out of their tents and hung up before leaving for town. Jill decided that she wanted to wash her sleeping bag. Even without it having been soaked in dirty lake water, it had been due for a washing.  
  
They discussed heading back to Agency to go to the laundromat, but they knew that it was probably among the businesses that were closed due to the power outage. Fortunately, their power had not gone out, so Jill gathered up her bag and headed to the trailer. Her grandfather had installed a washing machine and a dryer in the storage shed there. It was a standard home machine, so it would only do one sleeping bag at a time, but one after the other, they would all be able to get their bags washed.  
  
Once back at camp, Jill returned to the project of getting the rest of her belongings out of her tent and taken care of. While she had been gone, the boys had kept themselves busy by rigging up still more clotheslines.  
  
Glancing over at Ryan, Jill saw him take off his shirt. Her cheeks flushed as she suddenly realized where things were headed. She looked over at David and saw that he was busy. ‘Oh, good,’ she thought. ‘Maybe he won’t notice.’  
  
She heard Ryan deliberately clearing his throat. David glanced up and appeared to be cluing in.  
  
“Oh, David, can’t I have the day off?” she asked as she saw him reaching for the hem of his shirt.  
  
David didn’t hesitate. With a smile, he pulled his shirt up and off.  
  
“A day off from being one of the guys?” he asked. “Surely you’d rather fit in.”  
  
“I guess,” said Jill, taking a deep breath and resigning herself to an afternoon of toplessness. “At least I had the morning off,” she added with a sigh, forcing herself to reach for the hem of her hoodie. She had been feeling way too warm in it as it was. A moment later she was much more comfortable, temperature-wise anyway, dressed in just her grandmother’s long flowing skirt.  
  
“You do look less like one of the guys in a skirt,” observed David.  
  
“Really?” she asked. “So it’s the skirt and not the boobs that tips you off that maybe, just maybe, I might not be a guy?”  
  
“I didn’t say that,” said David.  
  
“I think you did,” observed Ryan with a chuckle.  
  
“Thank you, Ryan,” she said, surprised to find herself agreeing with him.  
  
While David and Ryan continued putting up more clotheslines and getting everything hung up, Jill took a break to apply sunscreen. With her back to the boys, she applied a heavy layer to her chest and shoulders. After putting a second coat on her nipples, she again asked David for help with her back.  
  
While David was doing her back, she ended up facing Ryan. She tried to look away, but Ryan was difficult to ignore; he just didn’t seem able to take his eyes off of her chest, and he wasn’t at all shy when it came to staring. Jill knew she was again blushing.  
  
Finally, she decided that she had to say something. “Ryan, Really? How am I supposed to feel like one of the guys with you always staring like that?”  
  
After a little bit of consideration, Ryan replied, “You’re so conflicted, aren’t you? You say you don’t want me staring, but I know that down inside you enjoy the attention. I’ll bet it makes your little lady lips all juicy.”  
  
Jill let out a gasp and turned to face away. “Does not!” she said in disgust.  
  
“You enjoy being looked at as much, maybe more, that I enjoy being the one doing the looking,” he continued. “You spent the last few years thinking that no boy would want to see your chest. You were so wrong! And now you’re loving being reminded just how wrong you were.”  
  
Jill felt the need to protest, but never had truer words been spoken. But what could she say? She couldn’t agree; she had to maintain her façade. Finally, she said, “You’re certainly not making this any easier.”  
  
“Making it easier? For you? That’s not my mission,” he replied. “I’ve been very open. I love seeing our bashful Jill . . . all shy and embarrassed like this. Sexy . . . that’s what it is. You’re so goddam sexy! And you’re enjoying the hell out of having your gorgeous little titties being ogled. Admit it!”  
  
“Why would you even do this to a girl?” she demanded, turning back around and facing him. She brought her hands up and covered her breasts. “Not only have I been swindled into going topless, but now you want me to admit that I’m enjoying it?”  
  
“Well, you are . . . just be honest and say so.”  
  
“You aren’t going to be happy until I don’t have a single ounce of dignity left, are you?”  
  
“Enough, enough, you two,” said David. “I don’t want to listen to any more of your squabbling. Now let’s finish getting things hung up and then let’s go for a swim. I think it’s high time that the three amigos visit Sunken Island. We haven’t been there yet this summer, not together.”

**Chapter 34: Return to Sunken Island**  
  
Jill took a deep breath and walked past Ryan, glaring savagely at him. She returned to the task of getting her wet stuff out of her tent and on the rope lines that the boys had gotten strung up. Given how hot it was, it seemed as if things would dry quickly, but her pillow seemed hopeless. Like most of her clothing, it was going to need to be washed. But given that the sleeping bags were the priority, that was probably going to have to wait for another day.  
  
‘How dare he treat me like that!’ she thought as she worked. She knew that the boys were on to her. Indeed, she realized that she must be an open book, having been caught topless on more than one occasion. But she was not about to admit that she liked having her ‘gorgeous little titties’ stared at . . . even if it might be true. Somehow she needed to maintain her self-respect. Surely Ryan must realize that . . . on some level.  
  
Why wouldn’t he allow her to keep up pretenses? And his ‘lady lips’ comment . . . why had David let him get away with that? Indeed, he had put a halt to the conversation, but he had acted as if they were both similarly at fault.  
  
She came across her tried and true tankini in her bag of soaking wet clothes. That caused her thoughts to shift to the idea of returning to Sunken Island. While the boys weren’t looking, she slipped her panties down and stepped into the light blue tankini bottoms. Given how warm it was, it actually felt good to pull the damp fabric up and into place inside the skirt.  
  
As she hung up the purple tankini top, the top that had played a starring role in act one, she realized that she hadn’t had it on all summer. She had been wearing her big girl swimsuits. But now things were about to come full circle. She was about to swim to Sunken Island and back . . . topless!  
  
How fitting that she do so while wearing the tankini . . . the bottoms, anyway. She thought back to her traumatic return from Sunken Island the prior August. Looking down at her perky nipple capped breasts, on full display in the bright sunshine, she realized just how much she had changed in those eleven months; how much more self-confident she had become.  
  
The Jill of the prior summer would have been aghast had she been able to look through a crystal ball to witness this Jill, the new Jill, nonchalantly hanging up clothes while topless. She would have been shocked to see her little breasts bobbing around bare on her lean frame in the presence of both Ryan and David. That her breasts were nearly as tan as the rest of her skin would have made it even more unbelievable for that younger Jill.  
  
“Okay, who else is ready for that swim?” she asked, surprising herself with how cheery her voice sounded. But she was in a good mood, a great mood actually. Indeed, this particular swim was something that had to be done, and it had to be done right!  
  
Both boys were obviously ready. They had finished first and had been sitting down, observing her as she had been carefully hanging up the last of her things.  
  
“I think we are more ready than you,” said David. “We’ve got our suits on.” They had changed into them while she had been off putting her sleeping bag into the washing machine.  
  
“Ta-Da! So do I!” she announced, removing the skirt with a flourish. She was glad to be rid of it. It was way too big for her, but thanks to the elastic waist, she had managed.  
  
“Nice!” said David. “I always liked that suit.”  
  
“Should I put the rest of it on?” she asked walking toward where the top was hanging, reaching her hand up as if she were serious.  
  
David laughed, “Very funny, Tarzan!”  
  
“So, I’m the Lord of the Jungle?” she asked with a smile, the top instantly forgotten.  
  
“Lord of Cache Lake!” said Ryan. “And such a beautiful one at that!”  
  
Standing there nearly naked, Jill did enjoy his appreciative words but scowled to keep it from being too obvious.  
  
As she was now in her swimsuit, she pulled the remaining stakes and gathered up her empty tent and walked it out into the lake for a quick rinse. The wave had washed some dirt and plant matter in through the door as it had retreated. Following her lead, David and Ryan did the same with their tent.  
  
Once the tents were both hanging on the lines, Jill threw her hands up into the air and spun around in the sunshine. “So flat-chested that I can pass for one of the guys!” she announced gleefully. She knew that her small boobs became even smaller when her arms were extended overhead. ‘But why the hell not?’ she asked herself. Bare in the sunshine, there was no way to make them look any bigger than they were.  
  
“Yep . . . just one of the guys,” chuckled David.  
  
“Tiny, tiny tits!” said Ryan.  
  
“Thanks a lot,” said Jill, sticking out her lower lip in a mock pout.  
  
“Just being honest, Tarzan,” said Ryan. “Lots of guys have bigger boobs than you. Gus and Keith, for example.”  
  
“Ouch!” said Jill. She knew it was true. She knew both boys well. They were overweight, but they did need to wear a bra more than she did. “You like man-boobs?” she asked teasingly.  
  
“Hardly,” said Ryan. “I like Jill-boobs. I’m just making the point that it has very little to do with size. Girl-tits and guy-tits look completely different. And Jill-tits look the best of all! So pretty, so feminine.”  
  
“Stop it! You’re making me blush again,” said Jill, casting her eyes bashfully down. Sneaking a peak, she saw that Ryan looked quite pleased with himself.  
  
Tits, tits, tits!” she said. “Enough tit talk! Now, let’s go!”  
  
With that, she turned to lead the way south along the beach. Typically, they started their swims to Sunken Island from the big log.  
  
As she walked, Jill felt the boys’ eyes burning into her back. This was as naked as she had been around them. On the hikes, she had been wearing shorts and boots. Now she was wearing nothing more than the light blue tankini bottoms. They were of a full-coverage style, but she had worn them for a number of years. They were getting a little threadbare, but more than that they were now skintight, a little too small for her and of a style meant for a girl, not for the young woman she had become.  
  
For some reason, she started running up the beach. Suddenly it seemed as if the summer . . . her summer . . . the summer as she had initially imagined it could be . . . had begun. Her spirits soared and she began skipping. To her amazement, she was conscious of her toplessness and yet she wasn’t. She was simply a girl, enjoying being who she was, reveling in the joy of being young and carefree.  
  
“Race you!” yelled Ryan, pulling ahead.  
  
Jill threw her head back in merriment, shaking it and feeling the wind in her hair. She let him go. David passed her as well. As much as she liked running, right then she felt like skipping. She didn’t want their dash up the beach to be over too soon; everything was just too perfect to rush. It was one of those moments that she wanted to savor.  
  
The boys were standing ankle deep in the lake as she reached the log at water’s edge. Just as she might have in prior years, she hopped up and stood balancing on it, one foot out in front, her toe pointed. She had never been a gymnast, but she pantomimed an exaggerated balance beam routine for her small audience.  
  
She could not believe how unselfconscious she was feeling. She would never have imagined that she might feel like that again, certainly not while topless. It was as if she were suddenly young again, a preteen even, a girl without all the stress that came from worrying about what others saw when they looked at her.  
  
With David and Ryan cheering her on, she attempted a cartwheel. It didn’t go well, only one of her feet landing back on top of the log. Spinning out of control, she landed sitting in the lake where the water was about six inches deep.  
  
The boys laughed, and she threw her hands up overhead, as if she had ‘stuck’ the landing. Suddenly, she couldn’t remember being happier. Spontaneously she let fly with her best Tarzan yell, even pounding her chest. She knew how ridiculous she must look, sitting there in the water, doing her triumphant jungle yell even though she had just fallen clumsily.  
  
“Help me up!” she cried out gleefully, extending her hands up toward the guys. Ryan stepped forward and grasped one of them, but as he leaned back to pull her to her feet, Jill released all tension by launching herself up with her own powerful legs. The load on his hand suddenly disappearing, Ryan stumbled back and fell. Now that he was the one sitting in the water, Jill attacked, splashing him relentlessly with both hands.  
  
“Now you’re asking for it,” said Ryan, shielding his face and working to regain his feet for a counterattack.  
  
Jill didn’t wait around. She took off at full speed, squealing as she went, running straight out into the lake and then diving and swimming once it got too deep to run.  
  
She swam as fast as she could, but within thirty seconds she felt someone grab a foot. Spinning around, she saw that it was David. He pulled himself up on top of her, placing a hand atop her head. He dunked her firmly, going right on over as she fought to regain the surface.  
  
No sooner had she gotten her face back up out of the water than Ryan was there. Before she had taken more than one breath, he had his hand on her forehead, sending her right back down. Twisting around under the water, she aimed a knee for his groin, giving it all she had. To her astonishment, she connected like never before. That hadn’t really been her intent.  
  
As they again surfaced, face to face, she saw a genuine look of agony in his unfocused eyes. He actually looked to be having a little difficulty breathing.  
  
“Serves you right!” she said with a grin as she turned to continue her swim. Two strokes later she regretted having said that. She was feeling so bad that she stopped to look back. Ryan hadn’t moved, and his expression hadn’t changed. “Are you going to be alright?” she asked. She didn’t know what it felt like to have nuts, much less to have them kneed, but rumor had it that only childbirth was more painful.  
  
“You’re gonna pay!” she heard him grumble as he started toward her.  
  
With a squeal, Jill again turned, swimming hard for Sunken Island. Had he been joking? Was this their typical horseplay, or had it suddenly become more serious? She wasn’t sure. Later, she again glanced back. Her lead was holding. She knew that she could beat Ryan in a race. Not wanting to continue the encounter in open water, she put her head down and drove ahead.  
  
A few minutes later she saw that David had located and was standing on Sunken Island, his upper body up out of the water.  
  
“You gotta protect me,” she called out as her feet landed on the familiar surface next to him.  
  
“From Ryan?”  
  
Jill explained what had happened, how lucky her aim had been, and how much force she had unintentionally delivered to his balls. She saw David wince.  
  
“You’re lucky you don’t have balls to kick!” he said, his levity palpable.  
  
“But you’ll protect me, right?”  
  
“You might want to swim for the far shore,” he suggested.  
  
Jill looked toward Cache Lake West. Seeing a few cabins peeking out between the trees, she instinctively dropped down, bringing her chest just below the surface of the lake.  
  
“That wouldn’t be a good idea,” she replied. “Not dressed like this.”  
  
“You’ll be there tomorrow,” he said.  
  
“I will?” she asked, looking fearfully at the visible cabins.  
  
“Yep, you’re our secret weapon!” he boasted.  
  
“I don’t like the sound of that,” she said apprehensively.  
  
Just then Ryan arrived. Jill jumped behind David, doing her best to use him as a shield.  
  
“She didn’t mean to kick you like that,” said David.  
  
“Of course she did!” said Ryan, lunging in an attempt to get past him.  
  
“I meant to knee you,” admitted Jill. “Just not hard. I didn’t even think I’d manage to connect at all . . . certainly not solidly like that.”  
  
“Likely story,” said Ryan gruffly, making another lunge in Jill’s direction.  
  
“You gotta believe me. It just happened. Truce?” she pleaded, extending her arm cautiously around David.  
  
“Last time we were here, I took your top. Now all you have to take is those bottoms,” he said pointing down into the clear water.  
  
Jill gasped in horror. Unconsciously she grabbed at the straps on her hips. Pulling up, she seated the tankini bottoms firmly into her crotch and held on for dear life.  
  
“You better not!” she said, her voice faltering.  
  
“That would violate your ‘no stripping Jill’ pledge,” said David, pointing out the obvious.  
  
“What pledge?” said Ryan, acting as if he had no idea what David was talking about.  
  
Jill noticed the corners of his mouth curling up as if he might be joking, but she was feeling extremely vulnerable. The bottoms were all she had, and she knew how easily they might be pulled off or torn. Considering her peril, even with David there, she panicked. She saw her chance and she took it, diving in and swimming off at full speed in the direction from which they had just come. She had wanted to spend some time playing and splashing in the sunshine on Sunken Island, but not anymore, not if her bottoms were being threatened.

**Chapter 35: Sunken Island, continued**  
  
She could hear the boys calling to her, presumably trying to get her to come back; she just kept her head down, putting her energy into stroking for shore.  
  
As she thought about what had happened, she decided that getting herself out of there had made complete sense. Ryan needed to be taught a lesson. Somehow, he needed to wise up. Being stripped naked was hardly a laughing matter; it wasn’t something he should joke about – even if he had been kicked in the balls – not if he wanted her to feel safe enough to continue as ‘one of the guys.’  
  
Being stripped naked – she knew she’d die. Of course, she’d panicked! Girls that she knew tanned topless; nobody tanned nude. No wonder she had panicked; she’d gotten scared. Ryan was an idiot – nothing new there. He seemed to be taking her participation for granted.  
  
At that point, she rolled onto her side and glanced back. They were following, but she had a comfortable lead.  
  
As she started to get her frazzled nerves under control, she found herself lamenting what had just been lost. She’d been so happy on the beach. Even being dunked hadn’t fazed her – that was the sort of horseplay she had been missing. However, the knee to the groin had upset the applecart. She wished she could go back in time and miss Ryan’s crotch, and simply attempt to dunk him instead.  
  
But what was done, was done. The more she thought about it, the more certain she became that Ryan had been trying to get her back by teasing her. He had probably not intended to try and strip her. He’d only been trying to frighten her. He had succeeded. It wasn’t really surprising. She had so many wonderful memories of fun times spent on Sunken Island; however, there was one terrible exception.  
  
Things were going to be okay, she reasoned. But until she was absolutely certain, she knew she’d have to keep her distance. After all, he was much stronger than she was. She was glad that her spur-of-the-moment plan to swim back had succeeded. Ryan didn’t know how good he had it. Somehow he’d have to get that important piece of information in through his thick skull.  
  
She reached the shore with a small lead and sprinted for camp. Once there, she made the conscious decision to remain topless, hoping to somehow recapture the dynamics that had existed prior to when she had kneed Ryan. But to be safe, she grabbed a still wet pair of shorts off the line. She added a belt for an extra measure of security, cinching it up tight.  
  
“I really didn’t mean for it to hurt like that,” she apologized as the boys entered camp.  
  
“It’s okay,” said Ryan. “Not that I’ll be able to father any children.”  
  
“I am truly sorry,” she added.  
  
Fortunately, Ryan seemed to have cooled off and things seemed to be returning to normal. The boys remained in their swim trunks, seemingly waiting for what they wanted to change into to dry.  
  
Jill was a bit uncomfortable with her wet swimsuit underneath the damp shorts, but she was feeling very attached to having something sturdy on her lower half. Her trust had taken a bit of a hit.  
  
David gathered up his sleeping bag and headed off toward the trailer. She asked him to transfer her bag into the dryer. She considered going with him, but that would require that she put on a shirt, something that she didn’t really want to do. Being topless was nice, and she had decided that she didn’t need to be worried about being left alone with Ryan.  
  
An hour later they were all doing their thing. Jill was reading her now-mangled copy of ‘The Republic.’ David was stretched out in his tent, the fly tied up for ventilation, and Ryan was whittling.  
  
“What are you making?” she asked.  
  
“You’ll see,” was his only reply.  
  
She didn’t really care what he was making, so she ignored him and went back to reading.  
  
A little later, Ryan got up and slipped out of camp, just as he’d done the day before.  
  
Thinking that he was probably going somewhere to ‘relieve’ himself, Jill decided to follow. Just in case David was awake, she left camp headed in the opposite direction, looping back once she was out of sight within the tree line.  
  
She made her way carefully along. She didn’t want Ryan to see her, but she realized that it wouldn’t much matter if he did. She was, of course, still topless, but she wasn’t doing anything to be embarrassed about. The embarrassment would be all his if she were to catch him jacking off.  
  
She walked slowly and cautiously deeper into the forest in the direction that she thought he had gone, stopping frequently to scan everything that she could see ahead carefully.  
  
She finally caught sight of him at quite a distance. He was facing away. Doing her best to keep trees between the two of them, she advanced a short distance, stopping once she had found a somewhat hidden spot from which to observe. She didn’t dare go any closer.  
  
Peering around the tree she was hiding behind, she sucked in a breath, her eyes opening wide. As suspected, Ryan did look to be masturbating; that wasn’t really such a big surprise, given what David had said. She had always known that boys did such things . . . she’d just never confronted it personally.  
  
He was still shirtless and facing away, but his shorts were now down at mid-thigh level. Jill was surprised at just how white his buns were. He was standing, his left arm draped over a tree branch for support. His right arm was hidden from view, but given the rhythmic motion of his body, it was clearly engaged just as she imagined.  
  
She pictured Ryan, his eyes probably closed, playing back erotic images in his head. Tingly sensations started coursing through her body as she considered that; she knew that the erotic images were most likely of her, of her ‘gorgeous little titties’ as he liked to call them. She hoped he wasn’t thinking about stripping her naked, but she wasn’t naive; she knew that might be in the mix.  
  
‘Cute buns!’ she thought, allowing a hand to drift up to cup a boob. She tweaked her stiff nipple, lifting her small breast up by it as she continued to watch with fascination.  
  
Remembering her phone in her hip pocket, she got it out, quickly selecting ‘camera’ mode. Realizing that the images would not be that great due to the distance, she took a few quick photos. She also tried zooming in for a few additional shots, but she didn’t bother with looking at the results. There would plenty of time for that later.  
  
Returning the phone to her pocket, she went back to observing in earnest. The scene didn’t vary, but she just couldn’t bring herself to look away. Actually watching a boy masturbate, even though she couldn’t see exactly what he was doing, was enthralling, riveting even.  
  
All of a sudden she saw Ryan’s body stiffen. A few moments later he seemed to relax and slump a little. Realizing that he had just cum, she decided that her position was suddenly precarious. If he were to start back, he would turn and head right toward where she was hiding. Being caught spying once was enough. As stealthily as she could, she turned and headed quickly away. ‘Best put some distance between us,’ she thought.  
  
She was back in her chair reading when Ryan returned to camp a few minutes later. He did his best to appear as normal as possible, but Jill was snickering inside, thinking about how naughty he had been. ‘Naughty, naughty little boy,’ she thought to herself. She considered saying that out loud but decided to keep what she knew to herself.  
  
She’d already studied her photos, but she pulled out her phone and looked through them again. It was difficult to keep a straight face while looking at Ryan’s white buns, especially with him right there. The whole thing was just too funny! The pictures weren’t that great, but they weren’t all that bad either. The images were clearly of Ryan, his shorts obviously at half mast, and his right hand obviously busy, hidden from view. Most viewers of such photos would know exactly what was going on. Many might not be able to recognize that it was Ryan, but almost everyone would know instantly that the boy in the photos was jacking off.  
  
After dinner, once all three of them were again wearing their shirts, Jill excused herself, saying that she was going to spend a little time with their grandparents. Indeed, that was her plan, but on the way there she made a little side trip.  
  
Guessing that Ryan might make use of that particular spot on a regular basis, she wanted to get a better look at the lay of the land. With little trouble, she found the exact location where Ryan had done the deed.  
  
She wasn’t really willing to admit it to herself, but in the back of her mind, she was forming a plan to watch, maybe even photograph Ryan from the front the next time. She looked around for a good place to hide and a good route to take to get there. To her delight, there was a low area, most likely a dry streambed that ran from the lake to an area in front of the tree that Ryan had been leaning on. It was perfect, not too close and yet not too far, and ferns and bushes added nicely to the cover.  
  
Studying the dry streambed, she realized that if she walked bent over, crouching low, that she would be able to reach a location that was much closer than where she had observed Ryan from that afternoon. She followed the streambed back to the lakeshore where she placed one rock on top of another as a landmark.  
  
At that point, she headed on toward the Airstream. The first thing she did after arriving was plug in her phone. Keeping her phone charged at Cache Lake had proved relatively easy because she rarely turned it on. There simply wasn’t much point, given the absence of cell towers in the area.  
  
She ended up playing a few games of scrabble with her grandparents, but all the while she was unable to get the image of Ryan jacking off out of her head. Even more than that, she couldn’t keep from thinking about what she might witness in the days ahead. She hadn’t seen a real live penis in the flesh before, but the idea was intriguing.  
  
She had never imagined that she would want to see a guy stroking himself, but now that the possibility seemed to be presenting itself, she knew that she wouldn’t forgo the opportunity. If Ryan was going to do that, he might as well have an audience, she thought, chuckling to herself. Considering that, she found herself wondering what his penis might look like – short, long, fat, thin, circumcised or not.  
  
That evening at the campfire, she discovered that she was looking at Ryan differently. Suddenly he seemed to be a bit more of a human being. So far that summer he had been little more than an adversary, but now she realized that he had his needs, too.  
  
But looking over at him, lit by the glow of the fire, she was still having a hard time keeping a straight face. Remembering her own embarrassment when she had been overheard masturbating made that a little easier, but she still couldn’t help herself; she found herself thinking about the possibilities for a little retribution.  
  
As she was roasting a marshmallow, David’s words from their brief discussion on Sunken Island came back to her.  
  
“Pocket?” she asked. “What did you mean when you said I’d be going over to Cache Lake West tomorrow? Something about me being the secret weapon. Just how scared do I need to be?”  
  
“Basketball,” he replied.  
  
“Basketball?”  
  
“Right. As you know, there’s a clubhouse complete with tennis courts and a basketball court over there. Ryan and I met some of the guys, and this summer we have been going over regularly. We play a weekly game . . . prearranged for every Friday. Two of them are good players, but . . . as you know, Ryan doesn’t have much to offer . . . in a game of hoops…”  
  
“Hey!” complained Ryan as Jill cracked up.  
  
“It’s true, Ryan,” she said with a smirk.  
  
“Well, two-on-two we struggle,” continued David. “…but three-on-three we’ll kick some serious butt. The Wahlund twins will be invincible, even with Ryan on our team.”  
  
“I’ve gotten a lot better,” Ryan argued, trying his best to defend himself.  
  
“Kyle and Patrick have beaten us recently, but against the three of us, they won’t stand a chance. They’ll have to add either Eric or Hector to their team.”  
  
“What’s the court like?” asked Jill, her interest piqued.  
  
“It’s not bad; concrete . . . some cracks but not much in the way of loose gravel, no nets,” replied David. “You and I could take Kyle and Patrick . . . easy.”  
  
“Hey!” complained Ryan again. “Are you saying that Jill is better than me?”  
  
“Shut up,” said David with a smile. “You know she is.”  
  
Ryan didn’t reply, but Jill couldn’t resist the temptation. She stuck her tongue out at him.  
  
“But . . . you never know . . . she might not be at her best with her itty bitties on display,” said Ryan, returning the gesture.  
  
“What?” she said in shock, sucking in a quick breath. Ryan’s comment had knocked the wind out of her. She had been thinking about basketball, completely forgetting about that possibility.  
  
“Earth to Jill,” replied Ryan. “Skins vs. shirts. You know how this works.”  
  
“I miss the game, but I’m not playing topless!” Looking over at David defiantly she added, “I’m not.”  
  
“Well . . . we’ll see. It’s going to be hot again tomorrow,” he said with a grin.  
  
“And you’re one of the guys,” said Ryan with a sinister snicker.  
  
Jill frowned, again looking over at David. She didn’t think he would try and make her play topless, but she knew she wouldn’t go along with it if he did. She knew that Ryan would vote for topless. There could be little doubt about that.  
  
“It’s a big day tomorrow!” said Ryan. “A big day for the gorgeous little titties!”  
  
“We’ll see,” said David. “Jill only has to take her shirt off if we both do.”  
  
That comment felt slightly reassuring, but Jill still went to bed with an unsettled feeling deep in her stomach.

**Chapter 36: Game Day**  
  
As she lay down on top of her bag inside her securely zipped tent, she heard Ryan again offering up the services of his tongue. The expected laughter followed right on cue. Not replying but wondering what that would feel like, she touched herself down there. To make it more realistic, she kicked off her panties. She was only a little surprised to discover just how wet she was. She was very aware of just how stimulating of a day it had been.  
  
She hated herself for it, but the twin threats of Ryan talking about tearing off her bottoms out in the middle of the lake as well as the possibility of being on the ‘skins’ team had her emotions going every which way.  
  
As if that wasn’t arousing enough, her mind drifted over to her mental images, much sharper than the photos, of Ryan’s snow white buns swaying ever so slightly to a certain pulsating rhythm.  
  
With her fingers rubbing her moist pussy, she allowed herself to imagine just how awful it would have been had Ryan succeeded in stripping her naked out on Sunken Island. She imagined Ryan swimming away with her bottoms in his hand, just as he had done the year before with her top.  
  
Her fingers strayed all around within her slippery folds, but thinking of the boys in the nearby tent, she forced herself to pull her hand away.  
  
Listening carefully for breathing, she knew that she just couldn’t allow herself to again be caught. In agony she lay there, denying her pussy the attention it craved. It was sheer torture, only serving to keep her wide awake.  
  
Given how the earthquake had cut into the amount of sleep she had gotten the night before, she was of the opinion that falling asleep ought to be easy . . . and yet it wasn’t. Her clitoris kept her wide awake, loudly begging for more attention.  
  
Finally, Jill could take it no more. She sat up and in the same motion started unzipping her tent as quietly as she could. She slipped silently out into the cool night air. Due to the ever-present fire danger, they had doused the fire; only the astonishingly brilliant stars were there to light up their lakeside campsite.  
  
Stark naked and barefoot she turned and walked slowly south along the beach, doing her best to avoid making even the smallest of sounds. She scarcely dared to breathe, yet she knew, given the audible lapping of the small waves against the shore, that it would probably be impossible to hear a barefoot person walking in the sand.  
  
Once she reached the log, she felt confident that she had gone far enough. She considered the irony of what she was doing, given what she had witnessed Ryan do that very afternoon, as she sat down on the log and poked at her pussy. And yet they were simply two teens responding to the same sexually charged atmosphere. Finally, she was able to allow her fingers free license.  
  
Feeling the outside of her labia, she made a mental note to do a better job of staying on top of the shaving; the stubble had to go. Slipping just inside her slit, her fingers sought out the tiny nubbin that most enjoyed her little touches. Rubbing it felt so good, and she established a circular rhythm, giving it exactly what it wanted – a little bit of pressure but not too much.  
  
Because she was on the log, she thought first about her failed attempt at the cartwheel. ‘My God, did I really do that topless . . . in front of the guys?’ She felt shocked at her behavior as she relived the moment, imagining how she must have looked, bare naked boobies and all – not to mention her klutziness. Her free hand slid up and pulled on a nipple as she sought to come to terms with the spectacle she had made of herself. She smiled to herself, recalling how she had pounded on her chest while sitting in the shallow water.  
  
From there her thoughts drifted out to Sunken Island where Ryan had toyed with her, threatening to take her bottoms. Picturing herself butt naked in the sunshine, she thought back to the time she had actually been stark naked on Sunken Island – the time she had taken off her one-piece to put it on backwards. As she imagined herself nude out there – nude and in shock because this time the boys were there too – the first waves of orgasmic bliss visited her sensitive clit. It started throbbing in ecstasy.  
  
As that orgasm subsided, she turned her thoughts to Ryan’s buns. In her imagination, she wandered around him and watched as his fist pumped back and forth along the shaft of a beautiful rock hard penis.  
  
Only as she came down from that second orgasm did she realize that she must have been vocalizing again, surely doing her own Meg Ryan imitation. ‘I’m going to get myself in so much trouble if I don’t stop this,’ she reminded herself.  
  
A few minutes later she made her way cautiously back to her tent, stopping only to pee near the shore and then rinse her fingers in the lake.  
  
Her tent fly was open, just as she had left it, and within moments of lying down, she slipped off into a most blissful sleep.  
  
Upon waking up the next morning, Jill found her head full of thoughts of basketball. The more she thought about it, the more pumped up she became.  
  
She loved camping at Cache Lake, but going all summer without playing basketball was unthinkable – not something that she could imagine doing. There was an outdoor court at a school in Agency, and each summer she and David had made trips into town for the sole purpose of shooting hoops. Jill and David had long known about the court on the other side of the lake, but it was for residents of those particular cabins.  
  
If David thought they could beat the Cache Lake West guys, then they probably could. Indeed, she and David should be able to beat just about any three guys. They probably didn’t need Ryan, but he’d keep an opposing player occupied, ensuring victory.  
  
On the basketball court, she and David had all the advantages that twins were supposed to have in every aspect of life. They each had a sixth sense for what the other was thinking. She could throw the ball anywhere, and David would be there. David made similar comments – either one of them could begin a drive and the other always managed to place the ball into his or her hands such that they never had to break stride. David was right – they were going to kick some serious butt!  
  
She became so excited that she started to get angry at him, thinking about how he had been holding out on her. He’d been over there playing basketball every week, and he’d never said a word – taking Ryan, but always leaving her back in camp. Thinking about that caused her to remember how sad and lonely she had been during those first weeks.  
  
She pushed those thoughts aside to think about how much nicer things had gotten. She wasn’t even minding the toplessness – not really. It certainly did seem to add quite a large dose of excitement to activities that they had done over and over through the years. She’d never blushed as much as she had that summer, but there was something to be said about that sensation, she now realized.  
  
She thought about Ryan’s suggestion that she would be playing topless. Such comments were to be expected from him, she realized; however, she dismissed the possibility. She didn’t think that David would attempt to do that to her, and besides – agreement or no agreement, she wasn’t about to play basketball topless with strangers. It simply was not going to happen. She was relatively sure that the boys wouldn’t strip her and she knew that she would not take her own top off. End of story.  
  
At breakfast, Jill learned that the games took place after lunch, so she decided to drive her grandparents in to Agency to do a little shopping. Even though they had been to the grocery the day before, they had been too preoccupied with the earthquake to think about what groceries they might need. Jill also had a few errands that she wanted to take care of.  
  
While at the grocery store, she picked out a postcard to send to Tyler. Her next stop was the post office. Her order of books had arrived, so while picking up her package at the counter, she bought a stamp.  
  
Standing in the lobby of the post office, she addressed the postcard and affixed the stamp. She’d found herself thinking quite a bit about Tyler that summer. He was a cutie. She especially liked his dark curly hair, and he was amazingly fun to watch at the skate park; he was so talented when it came to his skateboard. The two of them had had so much fun together.  
  
Jill still remembered how his eyes had lit up as her bra had come off that first and only time in his bedroom. The way Tyler had looked at her boobies reminded her of Ryan’s expression when she was topless.  
  
She had decided to write to him but had chosen a postcard because she had thrown his letter away without reading it. She didn’t want to admit to him that she had done that, so she thought that she might be able to sidestep the issue with a postcard. It seemed perfect because there was so little room to write that she would not have the space to go into any detail.  
  
She thought about writing, “Hope you are having a nice summer. Thanks for the letter. Jill.” Or maybe just short and sweet, “Hope you are having a nice summer. Jill.”  
  
However, everything she thought of seemed awkward. What if the letter had contained a question or a piece of information that she would appear to be ignoring purposefully? What if he had asked her about getting back together? What if he had mentioned that one of his relatives had passed away? What if he had mentioned which college he had chosen? The possibilities were endless. She stared at the blank space on the card for over ten minutes, but no good ideas came to her. In the end, she threw it away, stamp and all.  
  
‘Well, that’s that,’ she thought. ‘I can’t write him back, so now maybe I’ll be able to forget about it . . . forget about him.’  
  
Thinking about her ex had reminded her that she needed to get back to Nick. She had decided that it would be fun to go to the aerial park. She thought that she ought to be able to send solid signals so that he would understand that her interests were limited to friendship. Before leaving the post office, she exchanged a few texts with him. It made her feel good to have that all arranged.  
  
She went back for her grandparents and together they all went to the small Agency library. To her delight, she found out that the librarian had gotten two more of the books on her college reading list via interlibrary loan, so she checked those out. She then went online and ordered two more books from the list. She could have done that with her phone, but it was easier on the library’s computer. Her grandparents also checked out a few books, and with that, they all headed back to Cache Lake.  
  
Jill still had to drive carefully. Someone had pushed some of the medium-sized rocks off of the road, but many of them were still there, in particular, the car-sized boulder.  
  
She, Ryan and David ate a light lunch, and before long it was time to head over to the other side of the lake for the basketball game. Swimming was not an option as they would need their things, especially their shoes – and it all had to be kept dry.  
  
“Okay, Jill,” said Ryan, removing his shirt with a flourish. “It’s titty time!”  
  
Jill looked over at David. With a feeling of profound relief saw that it looked as if he was planning to keep his shirt on.  
  
“Let’s be going,” he said, swinging the small backpack over his arm.  
  
“Aren’t you forgetting something?” asked Ryan.  
  
“I’ve got water bottles,” replied David. “What more do we need? Kyle and Patrick will bring their ball.”  
  
“Your shirt . . . duh!” replied Ryan.  
  
“Oh, I might want it,” said David.  
  
Jill saw him give her a little wink. She mouthed a ‘thank you’ in reply.  
  
“I can take it off anytime,” he added.  
  
‘So was that it?’ wondered Jill. ‘Was it over, or was David just playing mind games?’  
  
Ryan looked quite disappointed as they headed south along the beach. Jill felt like gloating openly, even sticking her tongue out at him, but she thought better of doing so. It might not be the best move, from a strategic point of view, she realized. It was her opinion that Ryan needed an injection of maturity. Maybe she should help by setting a better example.  
  
It was indeed very warm. For that reason, Jill had chosen a sleeveless top, and she had again not bothered with a bra. She didn’t really need one, not even for basketball, and her level of concern about her nipples showing wasn’t at all what it had been.  
  
She was warm, but she knew that David had to be more uncomfortable. He was wearing a heavyweight T-shirt. Every once in a while Ryan would make a comment encouraging David to take it off, but to Jill’s delight, David’s resolve didn’t seem to waver. She noticed that Ryan was quite displeased. He seemed to be moping.  
  
For her part, Jill was experiencing some conflicting emotions. She was overjoyed that she still had her shirt on and had not been forced to go back on her agreement; however, she found herself missing the rush that she got from hiking with the guys while bare to the waist. Even though her shirt was lightweight, it still felt restrictive compared to the toplessness that she had enjoyed on a number of occasions.  
  
As they went past the Chokecherry Ridge cutoff, Jill remembered the exhilaration that she would typically experience as the distance between her bare boobs and any clothing she might use to cover them increased.  
  
“This hike could be a lot less boring,” Ryan grumbled.  
  
To her surprise, Jill found herself in full agreement . . . not that she would consider admitting it. She found herself thinking about how David could have taken off his shirt to make her hike topless. He could have then put his shirt back on before entering the cabin area thereby allowing her to do the same. However, things were working out just as she had hoped. She was glad that Ryan was suffering as her thoughts skipped ahead to the basketball game.

**Chapter 37: First Half**  
  
David led the way as they entered Cache Lake West. To Jill it was a maze, small winding roads and paths leading every which way – and to make matters worse, there were no signs, just numbers on the cabins. Those that lived there had to know it like the backs of their hands, but to Jill is a confusing labyrinth.  
  
A number of guys were already on the basketball court warming up when they arrived. Jill tried to size them up, attempting to quickly get a feel for their skill levels.  
  
David introduced a dark-haired boy to Jill as Kyle. “So this is your secret weapon?” he asked.  
  
“Your twin is a girl?” asked Patrick, looking genuinely surprised. Patrick was blonde and first glance looked as if he might be taller than David.  
  
“Not just any girl,” David fired back.  
  
“So you’re going to kick our butts with your sister on your team?” continued Patrick in obvious disbelief.  
  
“Yep,” said David nodding, a confident smile on his face.  
  
“That wouldn’t work for me,” said Patrick with a chuckle. “My sister’s fat. She can only dribble if she uses both hands.”  
  
Jill was secretly glad to learn that David had apparently bragged about her skill without mentioning her gender. He’d obviously referred to her as his ‘twin’ and they had assumed that he was talking about a twin brother.  
  
Kyle and Patrick then went about showing David and Ryan two new cracks that had appeared in the basketball court, surely due to the earthquake. Jill didn’t think they looked like much of an issue. They weren’t the only cracks and the concrete was still all at the same height so tripping was unlikely to be an issue.  
  
“Okay,” said Kyle. “I’m betting that we’re skins this week.”  
  
“We’ll be skins,” interjected Ryan. “I didn’t bring a shirt.”  
  
“Yeah, right,” said Kyle with a chuckle. Looking over at Jill, he reached for the hem of his shirt.  
  
“No, I’m serious,” said Ryan. “I don’t have a shirt. We’ll be skins.”  
  
Kyle and Patrick started laughing, all the time eyeing Jill.  
  
“Does Jill have a say?” asked Kyle.  
  
Jill fidgeted uncomfortably, worrying that somehow her expression might give something away that she didn’t want them to know. At the very least, she was glad that David and Ryan hadn’t given these guys any hints that might have led them to think that she might be playing topless. But as she thought about that, she remembered that they hadn’t even told them that she was a girl.  
  
“Well, Ryan,” said David. “I guess you’ll just have to borrow one of their shirts.”  
  
Jill was very glad to hear that. David seemed as if he was going to stick to his guns. In a way, she figured she was testing him. She was hoping that he’d come through for her so that she wouldn’t have to violate the ‘one of the guys’ agreement.  
  
“I’m not putting one of their smelly shirts on,” announced Ryan. Leering at Jill he continued, “The solution is obvious.”  
  
Kyle and Patrick, as well as the two other guys, Eric and Hector, just stood looking at Jill, obviously expecting her to object.  
  
“Can I talk to you a minute?” asked David, looking across at Jill.  
  
“Umm . . . Why?” said Jill, doing her best to convey the pointlessness of any discussion.  
  
But David beckoned, so she followed.  
  
“You’re out of your mind,” she said, once they were near the trees at the other end of the court.  
  
“I think you’ll enjoy this,” said David. “Just think of how distracted these guys will be.”  
  
“Umm . . . no,” said Jill, scowling and shaking her head.  
  
“After this summer, you’ll never see them again. We can collect phones to prevent photography.”  
  
Jill felt her heart race as she found herself actually thinking about what it might be like to play topless surrounded by all these guys. She shook her head, trying to appear resolutely against the idea.  
  
“We need to be skins,” said David, taking off his shirt.  
  
A cheer went up from the guys watching at the far end of the court.  
  
“Then I’ll play for the other team,” said Jill, turning to walk back to where everyone else was awaiting the outcome of the discussion. “You won’t stand a chance against us.”  
  
“Wait, Jilly,” said David warmly. “I need my twin sister on MY team.”  
  
“Then don’t do this to me,” she pleaded, looking deep into the eyes that she had always thought she could trust.  
  
“I’ve got just the solution,” said David, unzipping his backpack.  
  
She looked down and in his hand, she saw her grey and black bikini top.  
  
“What?” she asked in surprise.  
  
“I took it off the line,” he explained. “The International Skins vs. Shirts Basketball League rules allow girls to wear bikini tops.”  
  
“There’s no such league,” she said, looking at him askance.  
  
“So I made it up,” he said with a shrug, extending the top toward her.  
  
Jill looked down at it. Until quite recently she never would have considered playing basketball dressed in as little as a bikini top.  
  
“I don’t know,” she said, thinking through her options.  
  
“It’ll be fun,” said David. “You’ll be decent. We’ll kick butt!”  
  
Jill took a deep breath trying to decide. At least this was an option that she might be able to live with.  
  
“Okay,” she said in a reluctant tone, grabbing the top. She stormed off into the trees looking for a place to change.  
  
As she emerged from the forest a minute later, wearing the bikini top and carrying the shirt in one hand, a cheer went up. She walked back to where the guys had all been waiting, looking from face to face. Everyone seemed delighted with the direction that things had taken, everyone except Ryan.  
  
“Looks like you got your wish, Ryan,” announced Kyle.  
  
“Yeah, right,” Ryan grumbled.  
  
Jill chuckled to herself. Ryan was scowling at David, shaking his head. He was obviously fuming.  
  
Jill was doing her best to hide from this new group of acquaintances just how self-conscious she felt, having her small breasts encased in nothing more than the minimalist bikini top. She hoped that it wouldn’t be too obvious how red her cheeks had become.  
  
David tossed her the ball. She caught it and started dribbling. That helped a lot, taking her mind off just how bare she was feeling.  
  
“Okay,” said David, turning and addressing Kyle, the guy who seemed to be the spokesman for the other team. “Three against three. Who are you playing?”  
  
“Myself, Patrick and Hector,” said Kyle. “If you are in agreement, Eric can ref.”  
  
Jill noticed that Hector was staring at her bikini top. “Hey guys . . . are you sure that’s a girl?” he asked.  
  
Jill was shocked. Had he really just said that?  
  
“Yes, Hector, that’s a girl,” said Kyle, giving the back of his head a glancing slap in displeasure. “And a pretty one at that. Now mind your goddam manners!”  
  
Jill was glad that at least one of these guys knew how a gentleman should behave, but Hector’s comment had stung, reminding her of how a lot of people must view her.  
  
David and Patrick lined up for the tip-off. They were the two tallest players. Jill saw David wink. She took off running as Eric tossed the ball straight up. David jumped, hitting the ball solidly, right to where Jill could get to it. Sprinting, she caught it. Dribbling twice, she made an uncontested layup.  
  
“Two, nothing,” announced Eric.  
  
This time it was Patrick’s turn to ask, “Are you sure that’s a girl?”  
  
“Shut up and throw the ball in,” said Kyle, appearing as if he was suddenly realizing that Jill had to be taken seriously.  
  
Jill smiled at Patrick’s backhanded compliment. She exchanged a high-five with David and then went right into man-to-man defense, sticking to Kyle like glue.  
  
“Pick on someone else,” he complained.  
  
“Not a chance,” said Jill. Her confidence surging, she added, “You guys are going down!”  
  
The look on Kyle’s face was priceless. To Jill, he looked as if he’d already seen the writing on the wall. She was suddenly feeling so good. Basketball was her element. The layup had brought back a myriad of memories and emotions, all of them positive. Any feelings of inadequacy tended to melt away as soon as she had a basketball in her hands.  
  
Patrick did manage to get the ball inbounds to Kyle, but as he turned to dribble up court, David snuck up behind him and stole the ball. Kyle had been concentrating, but only on Jill. Ryan was open, so David passed him the ball. Ryan took a shot, but it bounced off the rim. David got the rebound, funneling the ball back to Jill who pumped in a jump shot.  
  
“Four, nothing,” announced Eric.  
  
“You weren’t even kidding,” said Kyle, looking at David.  
  
“What did I tell you?” said David, looking proudly over at his sister. “I told you we had a secret weapon.”  
  
“That you did,” said Kyle, shaking his head as he dribbled, carefully keeping the ball from Jill as he looked for an open man. He managed to pass the ball to Hector who scored with a layup.  
  
“That was your man,” said David, reminding Ryan that he needed to stay closer.  
  
“I know, I know,” said Ryan.  
  
As Jill retrieved the ball to throw it in, she thought about just how comfortable she felt. The fact that she was playing in a bikini top was turning out to be relatively easy for her to ignore. All she had to do was focus on the game. It seemed as if it might be more of a distraction to the guys than it was to her.  
  
To a limited degree the two teams traded baskets; however, the team of the Wahlund twins plus Ryan pulled steadily ahead. They were up nine points when three girls came out of the clubhouse to watch.  
  
After learning what the score was, the girls all started laughing.  
  
“You guys are having your heads handed to you . . . and by a team with a girl on it no less,” said a stocky blonde.  
  
Jill noticed that the Cache Lake West team was doing their best to ignore them.  
  
A short time later, Eric signaled half-time.  
  
As David tossed Jill her water bottle, the girls approached her to introduce themselves. The large blonde girl’s name was Amanda. She was Patrick’s older sister, presumably the one he had mentioned. Jill didn’t make much effort to remember the other names but caught that they were all related to one of the boys in some way or another.  
  
“You’re an amazing basketball player,” said the befreckled redhead.  
  
“Thanks,” said Jill.  
  
“I’m so glad to see my brother’s ego being deflated like this. How he bragged when he and Kyle beat your brother and Ryan last week,” said Amanda.  
  
“You have an outstanding jump shot,” said the younger blonde. “I can’t believe how high you can jump.”  
  
‘Here it comes,’ thought Jill. All three of the girls were much larger on top than she was. She had a hunch that the ‘lucky’ comment was going to rear its ugly head at any moment.  
  
“You really are so lucky to have small boobs. I’ve never been good at sports . . . with these weighing me down,” said Amanda, indicating her exceptionally large breasts by pressing her palms against them briefly.  
  
‘No, it’s because you’re fat and lazy,’ thought Jill, but instead of replying she just smiled appreciatively.  
  
“I thought about playing basketball or maybe volleyball…” said the younger blonde, “…but the sports bras that it takes to strap down big boobs are so uncomfortable. They make it hard to breathe.”  
  
Jill hated these discussions. Why did girls with large breasts seem to always talk as if they wished they didn’t have them, at least around her? It always seemed so disingenuous.  
  
“Look at you,” said the redhead indicating Jill. “You’re so cute and slender. Wouldn’t it be great to be small and not need a bra at all . . . girls? No wonder you’re so athletic.”  
  
‘Oh, brother,’ thought Jill, but what she actually said was, “That . . . and the thousands of hours I’ve put into training.” She did her best to say that in her most pleasant voice.  
  
There were a few girls on her high school basketball team that liked to make similar comments. They probably did so thinking that it made matters easier for Jill when they brought up the tradeoffs associated with being chesty. However, in Jill’s case, it only served to make her more self-conscious. Having girls commenting on her small breasts simply reminded her that her minimally padded chest was all that people seemed to see when they looked at her.  
  
One girl on her team was always saying, “I’d gladly give you some of mine.” How Jill hated that. In part, because she knew that the girl was lying; she liked her boobs just as they were. The only reason she made the offer was that it wasn’t technologically feasible.  
  
Dani, her best friend, was one of the few who seemed to understand. She had large boobs, and yet she was able to acknowledge the differences each girl faced in life due to breast size . . . without ever making ludicrous comments, such as telling Jill just how ‘lucky’ she was.  
  
Jill was so glad when Eric indicated that it was time for the second half, forcing the three girls to leave the court. The second half started with Kyle tossing the ball in to Patrick who scored with a fast-paced layup.

**Chapter 38: Second Half**  
  
On the next play, Jill decided to attempt the same. Ryan tossed the ball in to her. Dribbling, she charged the basket at full speed, but both Kyle and Patrick converged to block her intended route. Quickly altering her trajectory, she jumped and tossed the ball to David in a graceful arc. He leapt, catching it in mid-air. Alley-oop fashion he lobbed it into the basket from short range, his feet never having touched the ground.  
  
It was an impressively skillful shot, but Jill’s role in setting it up seemed lost on everyone but David. “Exceptional pass, Jilly,” he said running over to her. Jill saw the admiration in his eyes.  
  
“Learned that one from you,” she said, a happy twinkle in her eyes.  
  
“Funny . . . I’m sure I learned it from you,” he countered with a smile.  
  
To prevent their lead from growing any further, the twins started taking turns feeding the ball to Ryan, who would then take the shot. At the end of the game, the score stood 67 to 52. The girls having long since departed, everyone met center court to shake hands. Kyle and team didn’t seem too excited about a rematch.  
  
“I know,” said Ryan. “What if next week Jill plays without the bikini top . . . skins, just like one of the guys.”  
  
“You’d like that, wouldn’t you, Ryan?” said Kyle, laughing and shaking his head. “How do you put up with this idiot?” he asked, looking at Jill.  
  
Jill just shook her head, all the while glaring at Ryan. She was glad, at least, that Kyle hadn’t taken the suggestion at all seriously. And he was right! How in the world did she put up with Ryan?  
  
“Well, that might neutralize their secret weapon,” commented Patrick. Covering his own chest with one arm, much as an embarrassed topless girl might, he dribbled the ball with the other hand pantomiming how that might force her to play. Advancing toward the closest basket, he attempted a one-handed jump shot. It went wide and everyone laughed.  
  
“You’re an outstanding basketball player, Jill,” said Kyle, changing the subject. His expression was one of deep respect.  
  
“…for a girl, right?” she replied. “That’s what you mean to say.”  
  
“That’s not what I said. I said what I meant,” he replied. “…outstanding athlete.”  
  
Jill smiled, nodding appreciatively. “How about that rematch then?” she asked. “You guys aren’t really going to decline . . . just because there’s a girl on the other team, are you?”  
  
“Well, since you put it like that, I guess we’ll be here next Friday,” said Kyle.  
  
“Great,” said Jill. She was glad. She had enjoyed the game a great deal. It had proven to be a very welcome respite.  
  
Early in the game, Jill had noticed cowboy boots under one of the benches. She had wondered who they belonged to. As things were wrapping up, she noticed Hector go over and pick up one of the two pairs. He sat down and after taking off the athletic shoes he had worn during the game, he pulled the boots on.  
  
Ryan walked over to him saying, “So, let me guess, you must be one of those Rodeo Club guys.”  
  
“What of it?” said Hector standing up abruptly.  
  
“Hey, I didn’t call you a Shitkicker, but that’s obviously what you are,” replied Ryan.  
  
“It’s about time I kick your ass,” said Hector, giving Ryan a shove.  
  
“Hey, hey, hey,” said Jill stepping in between them. “Save it for next week’s game.”  
  
“Thanks, Jill,” said Kyle, walking over and leading Hector away.  
  
“Next week, asshole,” said Hector, pointing his finger back at Ryan.  
  
“Next week!” replied Ryan, trying to sound tough.  
  
Jill just shook her head. ‘Boys will be boys,’ she thought.  
  
Once they were back on the trail, David commented, “Kyle has a crush on you, Jilly. That much was obvious.”  
  
Jill did her best to look puzzled. She had been thinking the same thing, but she didn’t want them to know that. Agreeing would risk making her appear vain.  
  
“Hector sure doesn’t,” interjected Ryan. “What an asshole! I had to listen to way too much of his crap. Hopefully, he and Eric will switch next week so I don’t have to have him guarding me.”  
  
“Hmm . . . I guess he did make the, ‘Are you sure that’s a girl?’ comment as the game was about to start,” said Jill. “And then there was your little ‘Shitkicker’ exchange.”  
  
“I wasn’t necessarily trying to pick a fight when I brought up Rodeo Club. Just making small talk really . . . but there were other rude comments. The one that really pissed me off was, ‘The perfect woman, just add tits.’ I should have punched him.”  
  
David chuckled, “That’s almost complimentary.”  
  
“I guess,” said Jill, wincing in pain.  
  
“It is!” said David. “Perfect in all regards . . . chest size being the only exception.”  
  
“Exactly . . . nothing a surgeon can’t fix, right?” she said.  
  
“Don’t be stupid,” said David. “I’d never let you do that.”  
  
“And you don’t need to consider it,” said Ryan. “You’re perfect as is . . . tits and all. Especially the tits!”  
  
Jill looked over at Ryan. She knew he was telling the truth. In his opinion, she didn’t need breast augmentation. His feelings on that subject were more than obvious.  
  
“Why does it seem as if we always end up talking about tits . . . my tits?”  
  
Ignoring her, David remarked, “Hector probably just likes big boobs.”  
  
“You think?” said Ryan.  
  
“Well, more power to him,” said David. “There’s hardly an ideal size . . . just preferences. Your proportions are nice, Jill . . . perfect, actually.”  
  
Jill smiled. She knew that David too preferred big boobs, but he never made her feel bad about her own minimal endowment.  
  
“And it’s time to lose the bikini top!” said Ryan. “It’s a tiny top, yet it’s hiding absolutely everything! Time to let the nipples breathe . . . I fear they’re suffocating.” To emphasize his point, he placed both hands at his throat and acted as if he were being strangled.  
  
Now that they were all alone on the trail, Jill had been expecting that to come up. Neither David nor Ryan had put on a shirt. She didn’t really mind the idea of being topless, now that she was again alone with just the two of them; however, she could tell that actually taking off her top was never going to be easy. She felt her face flush, realizing that in a moment she’d be topless.  
  
“Yep, we’re breaking the rules,” said David. “Time to be one of the guys.”  
  
She hesitated but did manage to reach behind her back and untie the top. For a brief moment, she held the cups in place, her hands on top of her young breasts. As she pulled the top free, she was conscious of just how small the cups were . . . just two little round pieces of cloth, cut off straight and level across the top. Were it not for the wires, it wouldn’t really be possible to view them as ‘cups’ at all. They’d be just circles of cloth.  
  
She didn’t really know what to do with the top in her hands, but David came to her rescue. “I’ll take that,” he said with a mischievous smile. He took the top, stowing it in his backpack.  
  
Finding herself again topless, Jill looked all around, making certain that they were indeed alone. Looking back she verified that it did not seem as if any of her new acquaintances had followed them. Still, she felt like pressing quickly on, putting a little distance between them and Cache Lake West.  
  
“Wait, my sleeveless top, we’ve got to go back,” she said, remembering that she had set it down on a bench next to the basketball court.  
  
“Don’t worry. I’ve got you covered,” said David with a smile. “It’s here in my backpack.”  
  
“Oh, good,” said Jill. “I like that top.”  
  
“My God, were you ever in ‘top form’ today, so to speak,” said Ryan as they resumed walking. “You looked hot and you were on fire!”  
  
“Thank you . . . I guess,” said Jill meekly. She thought she had played quite well, especially given how long it had been since she had last set foot on a basketball court.  
  
Traveling the long forest path around the end of the lake was largely uneventful; however, Jill was experiencing the typical amount of nervous exhilaration that came from walking topless. The odds of an unexpected encounter were low, yet she always had her eyes peeled and her ears wide open, expecting that one day she would need to dash into the forest and disappear.  
  
She had learned that she always felt a little tingly throughout, sort of a goosebumps level sensation, when she was making like one of the guys. Indeed, it was quite a bit like goosebumps, as her nipples would always be at full tilt as well.  
  
She’d found that even things that were typically mundane were fun – in a mildly terrifying manner – when her tits were out. She expected that the boys were experiencing somewhat similar feelings, but surely to a lesser extent. Indeed that had been part of the premise that David had spoken of originally when he had been justifying his involvement in a plot to get his own twin sister topless – that they’d all have a lot more fun.  
  
As they exited the forest and started the beach walk back to camp, Jill noticed storm clouds above the hills to the west. A little while later, as they paused for a quick look around at the log, she asked David, “Do you think we’re in for a thunderstorm? Those clouds are looking darker by the minute.”  
  
“Well, rain for sure, but thunder and lightning? Maybe,” he replied, studying the sky. It was still quite sunny where they were, but a change was definitely brewing.  
  
From there they started on the homestretch down the beach, walking casually along, three abreast. Essentially within sight of their camp, Jill noticed quick movement in her peripheral vision. Turning her head, she saw David charging toward her. She had no time to react. Without a word, he grabbed her, knocking her to the ground. She would have cried out, but one of his hands covered her mouth before she had the chance. He held her to the ground, right where she had fallen.  
  
Looking up at him, anxious with fright, she saw him glance back to where Ryan stood stock still, looking down at them, a puzzled look on his face.  
  
“Psst! Ryan . . . get down!” he called out is a hushed yet insistent voice.  
  
He removed his hand from Jill’s mouth. She knew to keep quiet. David had obviously seen something.  
  
“People in our camp,” he said in a whisper, unslinging his backpack and unzipping it. “Quick,” he continued, handing her both her bikini top and her shirt.  
  
Jill grabbed them, trembling nervously. Sitting on the ground, hunched over so as to be as low as possible, she pulled the bikini top into place as Ryan crawled over to their hiding spot behind some low brush.  
  
“Did you get a look at them?” he asked.  
  
“Not really,” said David. “…but I’m pretty sure I know who it is. Once Jill has her shirt on, I’ll take a look.”  
  
By then Jill had the bikini top tied, so she pulled the sleeveless shirt on over her head.  
  
“I’m good,” she said, breathing a sigh of relief once everything was in place.  
  
“Okay, keep low while I look,” said David in a whisper. Ever so slowly he rose up to peer out. A moment later he was back down.  
  
“Who is it?” asked Jill, her nerves on fire due to the close call.  
  
“I was right,” said David. “What day is tomorrow?”  
  
“Umm . . . Saturday, right?” she replied tentatively.  
  
“Think, sister, think,” he encouraged.  
  
“I don’t know,” said Jill. “You mean what day of the month?”  
  
“Month, year, yes.”  
  
“August something,” she replied.  
  
“Really?” said David in disbelief. “Our birthday! Duh!”  
  
“Our birthday? Oh . . .oops. So . . . you mean, mom and dad?”  
  
“Yep . . . must have driven out to surprise us.”  
  
“Well, it worked,” said Jill standing up cautiously.  
  
“David . . . thank you,” she whispered in a very sincere tone as she tried to wrap her head around how bad it might have been had she walked into camp topless with her parents there.  
  
“I’m trying to keep you safe . . . make it work,” he replied. “I hope you know that.”  
  
“Thank you,” she repeated.  
  
A moment later the three of them strolled into camp, doing their best to act as if nothing out of the ordinary was going on.

**Chapter 39: Parental Visit**  
  
“Mom, Dad, what a surprise,” said Jill, as their parents got up out of the chairs they had been sitting in at the fire circle. Jill noticed that there was already an additional tent set up next to hers. It was their large blue family tent.  
  
“We hoped to surprise you,” said her mother, giving her a hug.  
  
“Oh, you did,” she replied, her heart still racing as she moved over and hugged her father.  
  
“We have two kids, but only one birthday to celebrate each year,” said her father. “We’ve only got the weekend but decided that we just had to make the drive. It’s lonely at home with both of you off at Cache Lake.”  
  
“Out on a hike?” asked her mother.  
  
“Yes and no,” said David. “We were just over on the other side of the lake for a game of basketball.”  
  
“I would have enjoyed that,” said her father. He was, of course, the origin of their interest in basketball.  
  
“You would have loved it, dad,” said David. “We creamed ‘em. Jill was on fire!”  
  
“Yep, 67 to 52!” she said proudly. “…and during the second half, we were letting Ryan shoot to avoid running up the score.”  
  
“Hey,” said Ryan. “So I’m not a Wahlund. But I’m not that bad.”  
  
“No, you’re not,” agreed Mr. Wahlund politely.  
  
“But we’ve got a lot to talk about,” interjected their mother.  
  
“We do?” asked Jill apprehensively.  
  
“The earthquake!” she replied.  
  
Jill breathed a sigh of relief.  
  
“Yes, it made the national news . . . but 6.7 . . . that’s a serious quake! We even felt it in Holden,” said their father. “…woke us up.”  
  
“I was wondering about that,” said David. “I’m sure you saw the hillside,” he added, pointing.  
  
“We did,” replied their father. “The trees and whatnot won’t grow back quickly. And I understand it caused a wave that went all the way across the lake, collapsing your tents. Your grandparents briefed us.”  
  
“I was very disappointed to learn that you two have been feuding again,” said Mrs. Wahlund, frowning and looking back and forth from David’s face to Jill’s face. “Continuing the disagreement that started last summer . . . they said. What’s that all about?”  
  
Neither Jill nor David replied, preferring to just stand there, looking at the ground.  
  
“Ryan, can you tell us what’s been going on?” asked Mr. Wahlund.  
  
“Well…” began Ryan.  
  
“The important thing is that we are now . . . again . . . the most loving twins on the planet,” said David, interrupting whatever it might have been that Ryan was about to say. “Isn’t that right, Jilly?”  
  
“Absolutely,” said Jill, taking a step toward David and putting an arm around him.  
  
“See,” said David. “We are getting along. It won’t help matters if you force us to revisit all those emotions.”  
  
“It won’t,” agreed Jill.  
  
“Well . . . I guess,” said their mother. “I still think that we are owed some sort of an explanation.”  
  
“Why?” asked David. “We are eighteen. Doesn’t that mean that we are adults?”  
  
“And tomorrow you’ll be nineteen,” said their mother as a smile crossed her lips.  
  
“So much to celebrate!” said their father.  
  
“I’m parched,” said Jill, walking over to the ice chest and fishing out a lemonade. “Anyone else?”  
  
Everyone was thirsty so she and David handed out cans of cold lemonade.  
  
They all sat down around the fire circle and went about catching up with everything that had been going on that summer, both back home as well as at Cache Lake. David, Jill and Ryan limited the stories to what they had been doing since Jill had moved her tent out to the point, of course, leaving out all the toplessness.  
  
Their parents were also quite interested to hear about the reading Jill had been doing in order to hit the ground running once she got to college.  
  
While Jill was talking about the books she had read, Ryan looked quite bored. At one point he got up and slipped quietly away, heading off into the forest. Jill looked over at David and saw the smirk on his face.  
  
More than anything she wanted to race up the beach, follow the dry streambed inland and hide in her preselected viewing spot. Unfortunately, she was hardly in a position to do so. Her departure would be more than obvious. She was so disappointed. Ryan was surely heading into the forest to beat off, and she was going to miss it.  
  
About three-quarters of an hour later, well after Ryan’s return, they felt the first raindrops. After quickly throwing things in the tents and zipping up the flies, they all made their way to the Airstream.  
  
The trailer ended up crowded and quite cozy with the seven of them inside, but that was the best option given how hard it was raining. Jill curled up, reading in the corner of her grandparents’ bed, while her mother coordinated dinner preparations. There wasn’t enough space at the table, so they handed her a plate and she ate where she was.  
  
After dinner, everyone but Jill played several games of Yahtzee. Jill actually wanted to play, but she was realizing that she still had a lot of books to read. She could picture college life and knew that there would also be fun activities that she’d want to take part in. Best get as much of this reading out of the way, she decided.  
  
It rained hard for about three hours, but then the sun came out, shining in under the lingering clouds, shortly before sunset. That ended up being perfect, making it easy for them to return to their tents and sleep in their own beds.  
  
Jill went to sleep wondering what to do about her ‘date’ with Nick the next day. It was going to be her parents’ only full day with them and it was her and David’s birthday. That complicated things. She didn’t want to cancel on Nick, but she also didn’t feel as if she could abandon her family for half a day on their birthday.  
  
During breakfast the next morning, the subject of choosing a group activity came up. Her parents had been thinking that they might all go on one of the area’s many hikes, possibly heading up the trail to Cornice Ridge for the expansive view.  
  
David mentioned that they’d all been there quite recently and suggested that floating the outlet together was worth considering; although, they had, of course, all done that fairly recently as well.  
  
Jill, still struggling with her dilemma, brought up her prearranged date to Skyline Adventures. She explained that she had not realized that it was her birthday and had not known that her parents might be coming for a visit.  
  
“Nick? Who’s Nick?” asked her mother.  
  
“Well, David will tell you that he’s my boyfriend,” said Jill. “But he’s not. We’ve only just met.”  
  
“…and started dating,” added David.  
  
“See,” said Jill in exasperation.  
  
“He’s a very nice young man,” said her grandmother.  
  
“You’ve already introduced him to your grandmother and this is the first I’m hearing of him?” asked her mother.  
  
“OMG!” complained Jill. “Not you too!”  
  
“He just happened to be at Valentino’s when we went there for pizza the day of the earthquake,” explained her grandmother.  
  
“Thank you, grandma,” said Jill appreciatively, explaining that Valentino was his father.  
  
“I’ve been wanting to go to Skyline Adventures,” interjected Ryan.  
  
“Me too,” added David.  
  
“Skyline Adventures?” asked their father.  
  
David and Ryan explained what they knew about the place. To Jill it did sound as if they had done their research; they knew more about the place than she did. It had only opened up the year before, so their parents had never heard of it.  
  
“We should all go,” suggested Jill’s father. “It sounds like a great place to celebrate a birthday.”  
  
“I agree, dear,” said Jill’s mother. “But we can’t just invite ourselves along on Jill’s date. How would you have felt if a girl brought her family along on a date . . . when you were Jill’s age?”  
  
“Right . . . I see what you mean,” he replied.  
  
“I don’t see a problem,” said Ryan.  
  
“Me neither,” said David.  
  
“You wouldn’t,” replied Jill.  
  
“Jill, it’s a big place. Besides, you keep saying that he’s not your boyfriend,” said David. “So what’s the big deal?”  
  
“But it’s a date,” said her mother.  
  
Jill started to say something. She wanted to claim that it wasn’t a date . . . and yet she knew that it was. At the very least, Nick had to be considering it a date.  
  
“And we’ll have to invite Nick out for cake!” said her mother.  
  
Again, Jill started to object, but she bit her tongue. It seemed that the more she tried to minimize her relationship with Nick, the more everyone else seemed to read into the relationship.  
  
As Jill continued to think about it, she realized that everyone going to Skyline Adventures might actually be the best solution. She didn’t want to cancel on Nick, but she also didn’t want to go off and abandon her parents on their one full day at Cache Lake – their twins’ birthday.  
  
She concluded that they should all drive in to town. She would then give Nick a call and explain the situation. She could even leave it up to him. Either they could all go to the aerial park together for a big birthday celebration, or she and Nick could reschedule their date.  
  
To her delight, Nick, after initially sounding disappointed, agreed to the idea of everyone going as a group. Jill was very pleased about that. It seemed as if it would make for a fun birthday and it was going to make things less date-like between the two of them.  
  
And so, later that morning, everyone rendezvoused at Skyline Adventures, located in the foothills above Stanton. Even Jill and David’s grandparents had come. They weren’t planning on doing any ziplines or rock climbing, so they had brought folding chairs. They were hoping to find a good vantage point from which to observe the others enjoying the attractions. There was also a large picnic area where they could hang out, as well as a restaurant. They were all planning to have lunch together in the restaurant during their visit.  
  
Nick had arranged a ‘friends of an employee’ discount, and a short time later they were all gearing up. As Jill was being fitted with a safety harness, Ryan approached and whispered in her ear, “I hope you enjoy yourself today. Next time you’ll be topless!”  
  
Jill sucked in a quick breath involuntarily, but cut it short as soon as she realized what she was doing. She didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of a reaction; however, she wasn’t able to keep her cheeks from flushing. That was a response that she couldn’t control. She looked up and saw in his expression his realization that he’d gotten to her.  
  
“You’re going to love it,” he added, smiling in self-satisfaction.  
  
“What’s she going to love?” asked Nick.  
  
“Nothing,” said Jill, glaring at Ryan. “He’s just being an asshole.”  
  
“In that case, keep away from Jill!” said Nick, pointing right between Ryan’s eyes to indicate that he meant business.  
  
Jill glared at Ryan as he shuffled away, giving them more space. Jill was glad that Nick had stuck up for her, but Ryan’s comment had definitely had its intended effect. She was trembling ever so slightly, suddenly imagining herself right where she was, only bare to the waist. She looked around at the other park patrons and tried to picture how they would react to a topless teen. On the one hand, she knew she would never allow that to happen. But on the other hand, she knew that some of Ryan’s predictions had been coming true. Not exactly right away, but eventually.  
  
Once everyone was ready, they climbed a tower constructed of what appeared to be telephone poles. At the top was the Eagle’s Nest and the start of zipline number one, the Screaming Eagle. There was a series of eight ziplines that wound their way through the forest, crossing and recrossing the river. Ryan and David were anxious to get going, so Nick wisely allowed them to go first.  
  
They all watched as the boys, one after the other, hooked up and swooped off under the forest canopy, their landing point hidden from view due to the arc of the cable. Jill went next. The ride was wonderfully exhilarating, and when she landed she felt a spontaneous urge to let loose with a Tarzan yell; however, her audience wasn’t there. Ryan and David had already departed for the next zipline. With only a Skyline Adventure staff member there to witness whatever she did, she restrained herself, calmly waiting for the others to arrive. It seemed like a major opportunity lost. Here she was, finally swinging through the trees like Tarzan, and there was no reason to holler and beat on her chest.  
  
Looking on the bright side, Jill decided that it was for the best that Ryan and David had taken off. As it turned out, that would be the last they would see of them before lunchtime.  
  
The ziplines were all separated by uphill hikes of various lengths, many involving stairs, to regain lost altitude. Nick, Jill and her parents made their way casually from zipline to zipline, everyone getting to know Nick a little better along the way. Even though Jill had decided that it was for the best that the boys had taken off, she did feel a little regret that she was stuck doing the ziplines with the adults. Maturity had its time and place, but the ziplines were better enjoyed in a youthful frame of mind.  
  
On one of the walks between ziplines, her mother invited Nick out to Cache Lake for cake and ice cream that evening. Jill didn’t end up feeling as upset about that as she had thought that she would. There would be others around, so it wouldn’t be like a date. At least she hoped it wouldn’t.  
  
“Sure, I’d enjoy that!” said Nick enthusiastically, smiling over at Jill. She looked away, not really knowing how to keep him from thinking of her as girlfriend material.  
  
After completing the eight ziplines, they tracked down everyone else and went to the Long Branch Saloon for lunch. The menu was entitled simply, ‘Grub,’ and their waitress was dressed up as a Wild West era floozy. She introduced herself as Miss Kitty and along with glasses of water, she delivered bowls of peanuts to the table. Jill noticed that the floor was covered in peanut shells. Additionally, there was a mounted moose head above the long bar and a buffalo head on the opposite wall.

**Chapter 40: Skyline Adventures**  
  
Jill ordered Marshal Dillon’s BBQ Pork Rib Sandwich. Deciding that it would be best to avoid the Rootin’ Tootin’ Baked Beans, she opted for Dodge City Potato Salad as her side dish. Nick ordered the Gunsmoked Bacon Burger also playing it safe and choosing the Festus Fries.  
  
Jill was not at all surprised when Ryan ordered the Rootin’ Tootin’ Baked Beans or when David ordered them as well. She looked at her mother and rolled her eyes. At least her father had the good sense to avoid the beans, choosing the Tumbleweed side salad instead. ‘Fortunately, the Jeep has great ventilation for the ride home,’ she thought.  
  
While they were eating, a medium sized aftershock rattled the dishes on their table. Jill looked at her glass and noticed small ripples in the surface of the water.  
  
“Do you think there will be another big earthquake?” asked Jill’s mother.  
  
“You never know,” said Nick. “Presumably the first earthquake released most of the tension that had built up in the fault . . . but you never know.” He went on to point out the Buffalo’s ears. One of them was damaged because the mounted head had fallen off the wall during the recent earthquake.  
  
As soon as they had finished eating, Ryan and David ran off to the climbing wall. Jill felt like hurrying off after them, but Nick seemed content to sit a while longer. He seemed to be taking quite an interest in her father’s political opinions. Jill was doing her best to be patient, but she knew she’d rather be off with David and Ryan. They were quite immature at times, but they were full of energy and she had fun with them. Not feeling as if she could just get up and leave Nick there, she remained; however, she eventually told him that she was ready for the next activity.  
  
As with the ziplines, Nick knew the staff at the climbing wall. Just as he had done at the multiplex the night they had gone to the movie, he introduced Jill in a way that made it seem as if she was his date. She found herself again wishing that he wouldn’t do that, and yet she knew that it was more or less a date.  
  
She ended up having a great time on the climbing wall. Nick’s experience was more than obvious. Rock climbing had always been something that she had been interested in. Indeed, she had dabbled in it on many a hike, but this was different; this was a chance to learn and gain skill in a safe environment. Climbing the vertical wall was challenging and Nick turned out to be an excellent instructor – a bit too serious maybe, but she knew that he was probably just following protocol.  
  
He was also very complimentary of Jill as she went about trying the various paths up the wall. He even claimed that she was the fastest learner that he had ever worked with; although, she suspected he might say that even if it weren’t quite true. However, Jill did know that she had an athletic aptitude as well as all the arm and leg strength that came from playing basketball and spending her summers hiking.  
  
When it came time to say goodbye to Nick, she was glad that they were surrounded by family. She knew that Nick would never attempt a first kiss under such circumstances and he didn’t. However, Jill knew that he’d be out at the lake for their birthday party. It would get dark. Her family would be there, but there were likely to be opportunities for Nick. She tried to think of a way to discourage him so that she wouldn’t have to go through the awkwardness of saying, ‘no,’ or otherwise denying him. She’d been trying to send subtle signals, but given how much she had enjoyed the climbing wall, she knew that the messages that Nick was receiving were probably mixed at best.  
  
As they drove through Agency on the way back to Cache Lake, Jill remembered something that she wanted to do while they had cell phone reception. She emailed the photos of Ryan beating off to herself, so that they would be backed up if something happened to her phone. Once she had done that, she logged off. Those photos could prove valuable; she didn’t want to take any chances with them.  
  
Later that afternoon, they were all relaxing at camp. Jill was reading, but out of the corner of an eye, she was studying Ryan. He was again whittling. He had taken off his shirt; much to his credit, David hadn’t. She thought that Ryan might not be experiencing any pent up sexual tension because she hadn’t been topless at all during the day. Maybe he didn’t feel the need to go and jack off. Or maybe jacking off was simply something he did every day. She wondered. Indeed she had heard that many teen boys masturbated multiple times every day.  
  
Deciding that she was not going to again miss the opportunity to watch, she took a chair and moved it into the shade of a tree a short distance up the beach. She was still in sight of the camp. Indeed she needed to be; she needed to watch Ryan. But her chosen spot had a distinct advantage; she would be able to slip away and head north along the beach at a moment’s notice, possibly even without being seen. Earlier she had changed into khaki shorts and a dark green T-shirt to blend in with the foliage as much as possible.  
  
She’d finished ‘The Republic’ by Plato and had just started ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ by Harriet Beecher Stowe. She didn’t know if there was an order in which she was supposed to be consuming the books, but she thought that it probably didn’t matter all that much. As she considered that, she realized that there were certain themes, namely issues of freedom, tying Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Alexis de Tocqueville book together.  
  
Every few paragraphs, she would look up as part of her plan to keep close tabs on Ryan. She found herself getting slightly excited at the prospect of getting to watch him beating off, and this time from the front.  
  
As she had been hoping, a little later he did stand up. He stretched, set down what he had been working on, and then very casually slipped off into the forest. To her surprise, he didn’t even appear to look in her direction. Probably because he was doing his best to attract as little attention as possible, she thought.  
  
As soon as she knew that he would not be able to see her, she got up and stole off up the beach, leaving her book behind on her chair.  
  
Once she was out of sight of the camp, she broke into a run. A short distance up the beach she made a hard right turn at the rock marker and headed straight into the forest. If Ryan was indeed headed for the same location, as she hoped he was, she wanted to already be in position when he got there. That was exactly how it worked out. She had only been there about thirty seconds, crouching down low, when she saw Ryan approaching.  
  
She held her breath and peered at him from the depression of the dry streambed, her chin nearly down at ground level. To her delight, Ryan went to exactly the same spot.  
  
His hands went to his shorts. She stared at him, in a state of disbelief, as he undid his belt, the top button and then the zipper. In a daze, her eyes wide, she watched as he pushed his shorts and underwear down his legs together, almost letting out a gasp as his penis flopped free.  
  
Fortunately, she had anticipated the moment so that she was able to stifle any sound that might have otherwise escaped her throat. She stared mesmerized at the first flesh and blood penis that she had seen . . . other than the fleeting glimpse she had caught of her brother’s. It was fascinating. She had known exactly what to expect, and yet it almost took her breath away. It was beautiful, like a work of art, and yet intimidating and vulgar at the same time.  
  
While she watched, Ryan shifted his feet a little farther apart, presumably to keep his shorts from sliding on down his legs. She saw him place his left arm on the branch, just as he had done before, likely for balance.  
  
With his right hand, he took ahold of the shaft of his penis, gripping it between his thumb and fingers. He pulled on it, stretching it up and out. She was amazed at how rubbery it seemed to be. It was hypnotizing, watching him tugging on himself like that. As she watched, it grew, getting both longer and bigger around. She tried to commit all the details to memory: the look of the mushroom shaped head, the bushiness of his dark pubic hair, the partially furry ball sack dangling loosely just below.  
  
As Ryan kept at it, making himself hard such that his penis pointed skyward, Jill glanced up and saw that his eyes were closed. He had a look of contentment on his face. ‘Obviously fantasizing,’ she thought, ‘probably thinking about me.’ She knew that sounded vain, yet she was fairly certain what he was visualizing her ‘gorgeous little titties.’  
  
Since his eyes were closed, Jill pulled out her phone. Verifying that it was set to mute, she switched it to camera mode. She loved the idea of the photos she was about to take. Their usefulness seemed infinite. If there might be any way to keep Ryan in check, it just might very well be embarrassing photos. She imagined his willingness to behave . . . if he knew that she had photos of him masturbating.  
  
Doing so was nerve-wracking, but she rose up a little on her knees to get her phone above the vegetation. She wanted a clear shot. She took three.  
  
As quietly as possible, she returned her phone to her pocket, lowering herself back down. Once she was back in position, the most that Ryan might have been able to see would have been her eyes near the base of a bush, and yet he saw nothing; his eyes were still closed.  
  
Jill was ecstatic! She had succeeded in capturing full-frontal photos of Ryan being bad. She didn’t have blackmail in mind; however, she knew they would be perfect for that. Instead, her plans were almost the opposite: using the photos to keep Ryan in line, possibly even preventing him from blackmailing her, should it come to that.  
  
Thinking about it, she knew that she probably wouldn’t even let him know of the existence of the images . . . unless she had to.  
  
Almost in a trance, she continued to watch Ryan. ‘Would that even fit?’ she wondered. His dick had grown so much since it had come into view in its initial flaccid state. It looked so large, and yet when she tried to estimate its actual size, she realized that the penis before her was probably not much larger than average. She couldn’t quite imagine a boy sticking one of those into her. She knew she might warm up to the idea, and yet, everything about that was a little difficult for her to wrap her head around.  
  
She was feeling quite aroused, watching Ryan pleasuring himself rhythmically; however, both of her hands were on the ground, supporting her weight. Getting a hand free to slide into her own shorts did not seem like something she should do. Doing so would involve too much movement, difficult to accomplish without making a sound.  
  
Looking up at Ryan’s face, Jill noticed his expression changing. He actually looked to be squeezing his eyes shut. As she watched his facial muscles continued to tighten, his expression transitioning into what could only be described as a grimace.  
  
Looking back down, she saw his stroking becoming fervid. Suddenly it ceased, his entire body stiffening. His fist appeared to tighten down on his rigid member, which a split second later twitched visibly, firing a gob up into the air, arcing toward her but a bit to the left. She couldn’t believe how far it traveled. Just then she heard Ryan grunt.  
  
Her mouth fell open in amazement. His dick continued to fire, pumping out spurt after spurt, more than one a second, but none of them traveling quite as far as the initial one.  
  
At that point, Ryan slumped. Had he not had his arm on the branch, he looked as if he might have fallen to the ground. He looked that weak.  
  
Glancing back down at his penis, she saw that it was no longer straining skyward. His hand was still on it, but now it was approximately horizontal. It was still spasming, but the spurts were now only adding to the glistening accumulation on and just below the helmet shaped head.  
  
She froze, noticing that Ryan’s eyes were open. He tilted his head down and appeared to examine the subsiding erection in his hand. He gave it a shake and one last glob fell to the forest floor. Jill held her breath, doing her best to remain completely motionless. With Ryan relaxing, she sensed that her position had become more precarious. It seemed as if he might notice her if she made even the slightest movement.  
  
Suddenly she found herself wishing that he would pull up his shorts and leave; however, he didn’t. He seemed to need to catch his breath. She had to breathe, but she did her best to do so as silently as possible, opening her mouth wide. A minute later he did pull up his shorts and fasten them. Turning, he wandered slowly back in the direction from which he had come.  
  
Jill lay there, thankful that she had not been seen – processing her thoughts and emotions. She thought about getting up and beating Ryan back to camp; indeed, she was sure she could. He had not looked like he was moving very fast. Instead, she decided to relax and take her time.  
  
Rolling over onto her back, she pulled out her phone and studied her spoils. A few of the photos were much better than she had hoped. She could zoom way in! In that manner, she was able to study the raised veins that had been visible on the shaft of his penis. She had noticed them earlier, but she was able to get a much better look at them in the still images.  
  
Eventually, she did get up. The idea of looking for semen crossed her mind. For some reason, that didn’t interest her in the slightest.  
  
Rather than heading back toward the lake, she went deeper into the forest. She had decided on a long circuitous route around their camp. That would allow her to approach the point from the south. She thought it best if Ryan saw her coming from the opposite direction relative to where he had been.  
  
As she made her way along, she sought to come to terms with what she had done. ‘Was she a voyeur? A stalker?’ she wondered. Indeed she had gone looking for the opportunity to invade Ryan’s privacy. And yet, he had been out in the open. Privacy was pretty limited in a camping situation . . . as she’d learned the night they had overheard her orgasm.  
  
In the end, she decided that the ends justified the means. She rationalized that she hadn’t placed herself in that viewpoint for the sake of her own enjoyment, but rather as a way to regain a measure of control. The boys, Ryan especially, had cornered her such that she was now going topless, essentially on command – their command.  
  
Now that they had succeeded, it seemed as if turning the tables on them could be easily justified. Indeed, David might protect her; however, with this new set of photos, she now had the ability to protect herself!  
  
With a new sense of self-assuredness, she walked up the beach, reentering the camp a few minutes later. Ryan glanced up, but then immediately returned his attention to the piece of wood he was working on. Jill was delighted; he really had no idea what had just happened!