**Summer at Cache Lake**

 **Chapter 41: Lakeside Birthday Party**

As the weather was perfect, Jill’s mother had decided to hold the birthday celebration right where they were, at lake’s edge. She enlisted her husband and the boys in the effort and together they got another table and more chairs out of the storage shed next to the Airstream.

There had been some pushback from Jill’s grandparents. They mentioned not wanting to walk the forest trails due to exposed roots, uneven ground, and the associated risk of a fall, but Jill’s mother had insisted. She had told them how meaningful it would be to the twins, mentioning that there were more than enough people present to walk with them, holding both of their hands if necessary.

A short time later, Nick arrived. He was early; they hadn’t even lit the campfire yet. Given their August birthday, Jill and David had celebrated most of their birthdays at Cache Lake, and the traditional birthday meal had always been the most basic camp fare, hot dogs accompanied by grandma’s Indian bead salad.

Nick had some interesting news. “I’ve learned that the Inspiration Peak trail is gone,” he said. “Where the trail crossed the scree slope below the cliff . . . well . . . that slope shifted. The trail is no longer there. Attempting to cross all that loose rock would now be too dangerous. That means that you guys were most likely the last climbers on the summit.”

“We were?” said David, a look of confusion on his face.

“He means, Sharp Tooth,” said Jill. “Remember? The rest of the world calls it Inspiration Peak. I told you that.”

“Oh, yeah . . . Sharp Tooth,” said David nodding. “So, now, tell me again what happened.”

“You know, where the trail cuts across to the left, to go around the peak to approach it from the backside. That trail had been painstakingly cut across a steep scree slope.”

“Oh, right,” said David. “I know that part of the trail. We hiked that the day before the earthquake.”

“Jill told me,” replied Nick. “You guys must have been the last to make that climb . . . unless someone went later in the day. The trail’s gone.”

“A rockslide?” asked Ryan.

“Yeah…” said Nick. “…and given budget cuts, it’s likely to be a long time before the Forest Service gets up there to rebuild it.”

As Jill listened, Nick and David continued to talk about hiking and climbing. As they had all learned during their initial meeting at the pizza parlor, Nick had a wealth of information about the backcountry. He seemed to know all the trails, all the lakes, and all the climbable peaks in the area. Hiking and climbing was apparently his primary interest and he had grown up in Agency.

Jill and David knew the area right around Cache Lake at least as well, possibly better; however, Nick’s knowledge seemed to extend across the entire region. He’d also grown up hunting, which meant that he’d spent a lot of time in the backcountry every fall with his father. Much of that time had been spent ‘off trail,’ venturing into the virgin wilderness.

Jill knew that David had an interest in expanding their horizons, but why not? They had the Jeep at their disposal. He had even gone and gotten a clipboard in order to take notes.

Jill was experiencing a bit of trepidation. She was trying to follow the conversation, but in the back of her mind, she knew what was really going on. Indeed, David was looking for hikes that they could take, but to her trained ear, he was obviously searching for trails that might be suitable for hiking with a topless girl.

The idea was scary. Their familiar trails around Cache Lake represented a comfort zone for her. She had a good feeling for which paths were more heavily traveled. Away from Cache Lake, she had no idea how much use the various trails saw. It was pretty obvious – to her ear anyway – that many of David’s questions were focused around that aspect. She thought that he was probably looking for the least traveled trails, but she wasn’t actually sure. Indeed, he had been trying to get her to play basketball topless. The bikini top in his backpack had obviously been plan B.

If he had been willing for her to go topless in front of those four guys, including whoever else might have shown up, then he might be looking for a hike that provided people to run into. She tried to imagine what that might be like, to encounter other hikers while she was topless – without a shirt anywhere to put on.

Clearly hiding in the forest was a good option; however, they were often above the tree line. There would be the hand bra option, and yet she’d still obviously be topless, even if she covered her breasts.

Growing weary of the discussion, she abandoned Nick to David and Ryan and went and joined her parents and grandparents at the fire.

The birthday party itself was a success . . . both Jill and David had succeeded in becoming a year older! Years before her parents had found a bakery in Elk Bend that they liked. Ever since, they had ordered their cakes there. Elk Bend was the last large town that one drove through between home and Agency, Stanton being smaller, but closer and in the other direction.

Every year they ordered a rectangular sheet cake, blue icing on one half, pink icing on the other. In the middle, there would always be the words, “Double Trouble.” That and the icing colors had probably been more fitting when they had been toddlers; however, their parents liked it and by now that style of cake was one of those family traditions that had a life of its own.

The cake had thirty-eight candles, nineteen on each side. There had been talk of reducing that to just one set; however, that was yet to happen. Jill and David would sit side-by-side and simultaneously blow out the candles on their respective halves of the cake as everyone finished singing the ‘Happy Birthday’ song.

The opening of presents went quickly. It ended up being a gift card birthday for Jill. While that was not so exciting for a teen, Jill knew that it was what made sense. Starting college meant that she needed new clothes and she would most likely need things for her dorm room. The gift cards would allow her to shop for what she needed once she was all moved in at college in California.

An hour or so after the party activities were concluded, they helped the grandparents get back to their trailer. A little bit later, their parents said goodnight and disappeared into their tent. That left the three teens and Nick sitting around the fire talking.

There was a new moon, a thin crescent, above the western shore. Nick asked Jill to take a moonlight beach walk with him. Being fairly certain of his romantic intentions, she feigned an extreme level of drowsiness, said goodnight and after a quick conversation went to bed.

She felt a little bad about having done that to him; he had always treated her so nice. She just decided that it was easier all the way around. The alternate, explaining to him that he was permanently in the friend zone, seemed as if it would be as difficult for him to hear as it would be for her to relate.

“Okay,” Nick had said, disappointment evident in his voice. “But before you go to bed, let’s at least arrange a next date. Given that there is no cell reception out here, I’m not really able to call you.”

Jill knew that was true. She didn’t very much like talking about a date with David and Ryan listening, but that was really her fault. She hadn’t given Nick any better option. Jill managed to limit her agreement to saying that she would call or text him the next time she was in Agency – then they would set something up.

Jill lay in her bag for some time, eavesdropping on the three guys’ conversation. She was still awake quite a bit later when Nick said goodnight to David and Ryan and departed for the long drive home.

The next day the five of them, Ryan, Jill, David, and their parents, went for a hike up the Chokecherry Ridge trail. For Jill it was very anticlimactic; she’d been there so many times. And David kept his tank top on so that she could keep her shirt on and still be in compliance with her agreement.

At first, she didn’t want to admit the truth to herself, but eventually, she did; she was missing being topless. She actually came to realize that she couldn’t wait for her parents to leave so that Ryan and David would again be able to have her be ‘one of the guys.’ That was still so scary, and yet it had become ‘a scary’ that she wanted. Now that she was willing to admit that to herself, she wondered if she’d ever go so far as to admit it to David and Ryan.

The only thing that made the hike enjoyable for Jill was the chance it gave her to show off her new knowledge of the area’s many wildflowers. Both of her parents were quite impressed that she now knew not only the names of all the wildflowers but also a great deal of information about each variety as well. Many were no longer in bloom down low, but as they climbed above the tree line the number of blossoms increased markedly.

“Jill, I really like Nick,” said her mother on the hike back to camp. “He seems so mature for his age.”

Jill looked back and noticed that her father had fallen back such that she and her mother did have a measure of privacy. “He’s too old for me, Mom.”

“I don’t know about that, dear. Your father is three years older than me,” she replied. “You two seem good together.”

“I’m not looking for a summer fling, and I am definitely not looking for a long distance relationship. I’m going off to college completely unattached,” said Jill, hoping that her tone of voice would indicate that she wasn’t interested in her mother’s opinions on potential boyfriends.

Her mother didn’t clue in or chose not to. “I liked Tyler as well. You seemed to have fallen hard for him, but then suddenly I couldn’t even bring up his name without you going ballistic.”

“Exactly!” said Jill. “If you want to get me really upset, keep talking about Tyler.”

Sorry,” said her mother, finally realizing that Jill was not going to talk with her about boys. “I won’t talk about Tyler . . . but I really liked him, and you did too.”

“Mom!”

“Okay, okay. It’s just that other mothers are able to talk about such things with their daughters.”

To Jill’s relief, the conversation ended there. Her love life left a lot to be desired. As far as she was concerned the only remedy was to go off to college where she might do a little dating – if someone happened to ask her out. Even there, she expected that she’d be avoiding anything serious.

Once their parents had left and it was again just the three amigos sitting around the evening campfire, Ryan proposed that Jill take off her top.

“Umm . . . sure,” she replied hesitatingly. She actually did want her top off, but she was still struggling to come to terms with that fact. “As I recall, the way that this works,” she continued, “…is that you guys take off your shirts . . . and then it goes from there, remember?”

“That’s not what I had in mind,” said Ryan. “There was the one night that we caught you spying. That night, around the fire, you were topless . . . we still had our shirts on.”

“That was before our agreement,” argued Jill. “I got caught without my shirt. That’s not how it works now.”

Jill liked what Ryan was proposing, that they have her take off her top . . . even though theirs would remain on. That had been a fun night and she was definitely missing all the emotions she would experience while topless; however, she couldn’t give in too easily. For appearance's sake, she could only give in after some serious arm twisting.

Fortunately, both Ryan and David seemed as much into the game as she was. They twisted and she fought back, squirming this way and that. However, winning was not on her agenda, so before too long her ‘gorgeous little titties’ were enjoying the night air, basking in the radiant glow of the campfire.

She liked the tingly feeling of having her pointy nipples on display so much that she actually felt like thanking them. Instead, she just blushed. It had been a while and it was still a shock to her system to be topless in front of boys, even if those boys were just Ryan and David.

“Your nipples are so hard, Jill,” remarked Ryan. “I’m not sure that I’ve ever seen them that they weren’t all pointy like that.

“Pocket, make him stop!” said Jill, blushing and pressing her perky nipples into her soft breasts with just her index fingers.”

“That won’t help, Jill,” said Ryan. “As soon as you let go, they’ll pop right back out . . . probably farther than before.” She knew he was right, the warmth surging in her cheeks.

“The man has a point,” remarked David. “Rubber bullets . . . that’s what they always look like.”

“Right!” agreed Ryan. “Those could be dangerous. You could put someone’s eye out.”

“Maybe,” she said. “But you guys are safe. Not getting that close to either of you.”

“Thank God!” said David. “I’m much too young to be blind. Keep those lethal things away from me.”

Jill actually liked hearing things like that. It was good that she and David both felt the need not to cross the line. Being topless around her twin brother had the potential for being awkward in the extreme. Somehow they had mostly managed to navigate those strange waters without things getting too uncomfortable.

Jill roasted marshmallows and turned them into s’mores, making absolutely no attempt at covering up. It made her feel sexy to glance over now and then and catch Ryan looking. A time or two he looked away as if he had been caught, but mostly he was comfortable enough to just stare.

It was a fun campfire. Jill enjoyed their company. The three of them always found so much to talk about. She knew that it would mostly just sound like meaningless teen banter to someone older, and it probably was, but she enjoyed the things they talked about. At times they would get intellectual and discuss the world’s problems, but mostly they just talked about people they all knew, kidded around, or told jokes.

The next morning as they returned to camp after breakfast with the grandparents, the boys removed their shirts and Jill duly followed suit. She hadn’t been wearing bras of late, so she was instantly topless.

‘The new normal,’ she thought, privately making fun of herself. She was truly amazed at what she had become: a cross between a preadolescent tomboy and a young woman who shamelessly displayed her tits on command.

“So where to today?” she asked cheerfully, her hands on her hips and her perky breasts looking forward to a day in the mountain sunshine.

**Chapter 42: Morning Hike**

“Cornice Ridge,” announced David without hesitation. “The three of us have yet to go up there . . . together . . . and we’re now in August.”

Jill tried to keep her expression from betraying her concern. While she was fully aware that she’d probably take that hike topless one day, she was quite anxious about doing so. Like all the Cache Lake area trails, it saw relatively little foot traffic; however, it was the most heavily traveled trail in the area. It was a long trail, starting at the lake, going up over the ridge and terminating at a trailhead near Agency. People climbed up to the ridge for the view from both directions. Also, it served as the feeder trail for Snow Lake and, via the Elk Meadows trail, the peaks beyond.

“I have a suggestion,” said Jill, hoping to sway their plans over to a hike with a much lower chance of an unexpected encounter. “How about Sharp Tooth? We won’t be able to go all the way up, given what Nick said, but it would be interesting to see how it looks . . . now that a landslide has taken out a section of the trail.”

“I’d like to see that,” admitted David. “But I’m still wanting to go to Cornice Ridge today.”

“We can vote,” proposed Ryan.

Jill knew that ‘one man, one vote’ was as fair as it got; however, she knew that if she bought into that the boys would be able to team up and make her do about anything.

“Okay,” she agreed reluctantly, fully expecting the vote to go against her.

“Two to one. We’re going to Cornice Ridge,” announced David with a smile after the vote had gone along gender lines.

“I still would rather go up the Sharp Tooth trail today,” said Jill.

“I might be willing to change my vote,” said Ryan.

Jill looked at him suspiciously. She knew him well enough to know that there would be strings attached.

“Do you want to hear my terms?” he asked with a grin.

“Probably not,” she said.

“Hike today in just your bikini bottoms and I’ll change my vote,” said Ryan.

“Jill looked at him without blinking, her jaw falling open in indignance as she let out a small huff. A second later she looked away bashfully.

“Just my bikini bottoms?” she asked quietly.

“Sure, they’re every bit as decent as those shorts,” said Ryan, pointing at what she had on.

Jill turned and looked at her swimsuit bottoms hanging on the line. She surprised herself by giving Ryan’s proposal a little consideration. They did cover her privates. They were narrow and low cut in front; hence, the need to shave. But they weren’t of the thong style. They covered her butt, or part of it anyway, the lower edge cutting across her buns at an angle about half way up.

She actually found herself thinking that it would be exciting to hike in nothing more than her boots and her little low-rise bikini bottoms.

“No way, Ryan!” she said. “Maybe if they had a belt. The last time I wore those around you, you threatened to strip them off me.”

“I wasn’t serious,” he claimed.

“…sure sounded serious,” she replied, looking at him askance, her arms folded beneath her breasts.

David laughed and they both looked over at him. “Always shooting yourself in the foot,” he said, looking at Ryan.

“What if I renew my promise?” said Ryan.

“Don’t ask me,” replied David, meeting his gaze. “It’s Jill you have to convince.”

“What do you say, Jill?” asked Ryan, looking into her eyes.

Jill looked away, trying to decide what to do. She had already been around them in just the bikini bottoms, much as he was proposing. That was how she had been dressed when she had performed the balance beam routine on the log . . . but they had been going swimming . . . that was different.

She imagined how bare she’d feel in just those skimpy bottoms, miles from the rest of her clothes. She had just shaved, so there would be just the one thin layer between her lady bits and the outside world. It sounded fun . . . scary fun, but also safer than hiking the Cornice Ridge trail . . . if Ryan promised AND kept his promise. She wondered if he could be trusted to keep his promise. She thought of her photos, her insurance policy.

“Okay, promise . . . but you have to keep your promise!” she said insistently.

With a contented smile of victory on his lips, Ryan promised most sincerely, “I promise to not strip you of your bikini bottoms today.”

“No . . . not today,” objected Jill in disgust. “…for all time.”

“Okay, sorry,” said Ryan.

“Sure you are,” said Jill with a scowl.

“For all time,” said Ryan.

“I can’t believe that I have to have you promise not to strip me,” she grumbled as she walked over to the line and grabbed the bottoms. She then made her way to her tent. With one last scowl at Ryan, she disappeared inside to change. She didn’t see David and Ryan exchange a high five.

A few minutes later they were out on the road walking toward the bridge, having taken the alternate trail to bypass the trailer.

“Looking good, Jill!” said Ryan who was walking just behind her. Jill reached back and tried to pull the lower edges of her suit bottoms down a bit to better cover her cheeks. She didn’t dare shift them down much lest her crack come into view above.

“Good luck with that!” said Ryan with a gleeful laugh.

Feeling the embarrassment ripple through her, Jill took off at a run, trying to put some distance between herself and the boys. At least that is what she told herself she was doing. In reality, she was simply minimizing her time on the road, just as she had done before. It was unlikely, but a car could come at any moment; the less time spent on the road, the better. As she ran, she felt her small breasts bobbing around on her chest; it actually felt nice to have them going exactly where they wanted without anything strapping them in place.

She raced right on past where her panties were tied to the signpost, not stopping until she had crossed the bridge and turned onto the trail.

Before turning around to look back at the boys, she glanced down to verify that her suit bottoms hadn’t shifted. They were small enough that there was little margin for error. To her horror, she saw that the fabric in front had fallen into the cleft in her skin there. Realizing that the absence of hair down there made that worse, she did her best to stretch her suit to get the thin fabric to cross her slit without visible camel toe.

“Whatcha doing?” asked Ryan as he came up behind her.

“Feeling embarrassed,” she said in all honesty.

Realizing that her face had to be red, she didn’t turn around. Instead, she immediately plowed ahead down the trail.

“You sure look beautiful from here,” said David following her. “Like Ryan says, you have the sleek shape of a supermodel.”

Jill wasn’t in the mood for comments on her body. She was feeling way too naked.

“What did I tell you?” said Ryan. “Ass to die for!”

Jill could feel their eyes burning into her thinly veiled butt. ‘How did I get here?’ she wondered as she followed the path that wound through the trees. With the sunlight stabbing bright shafts down to the forest floor, she realized for the first time that agreeing to go hiking in just her little bottoms represented a significant escalation; she was now just one tiny step away from being stark naked.

Glancing back at them, shirtless in their shorts, she realized that she was no longer one of the guys. Rather than fitting in, today she stood out. There would be no mistaking her for one of the guys. Her breasts were small, but they had a cute half round, half pointy shape to them . . . decidedly feminine. Additionally, her perky little nipples bounced and wobbled just a bit as she marched along.

What is more, everything about her shape in her bikini bottoms screamed female . . . young shapely female . . . not that her low-rise shorts had left any doubt. However now an observer would even be able to study the shape of her crotch in great detail – something that wouldn’t have been possible in the shorts.

Thinking about how revealing her suit bottoms were, caused her to think back to the day she bought them. She had chosen that particular suit because she had found the top, with its underwire design, to be flattering. She had only been paying attention to the top. And where was it now? Only the bottoms mattered now.

She knew there would be no way to keep the fabric in front from conforming to her shape down there. Something even worse occurred to her. If she got aroused, a moist line was likely to become visible on the front of her suit. My God, would that ever be embarrassing! Just the thought made her quiver.

But things were locked and loaded for the day. The bikini bottoms were all she had. The rest of her clothing was more than a mile away . . . and getting farther away by the minute. It was exciting to think of that, but she forced herself to try and think of other things. Thinking about how little she was wearing and how far all the rest of her clothes were was bound to lead to arousal.

It was bad enough to be nearly naked. It would be much worse to be nearly naked and have the guys notice that she was turned on to the point of being moist down below.

She forced herself to look for wildflowers. There weren’t that many in the heavy shade of the forest, but she did find two varieties that she knew all about. She paused and studied them, even telling the boys their names as well as a few other details such as their native habitat, distribution, propagation and duration.

To her surprise the boys were very respectful, listening and appearing interested. She did her best to squat down modestly, her knees clamped together and off to one side.

She could see that Ryan’s attention (his eyes) would wander back and forth between the flowers she was describing and her nipples. She couldn’t really blame him. She had come to realize that her nipples were indeed lovely; small, pointy and pink . . . blossoms in their own right.

She remembered hating how her nipples would often make themselves known through her clothing. Now she realized that it was something that a small-chested girl could use to her advantage. Rock the nipples! That might be a way for an A-cup girl to get noticed in a sea of more abundantly endowed women. And why not? Nipples were a natural part of the body, a fact of life. Was there really any good reason to be ashamed of them?

After studying the flowers, Jill went back to trying to enjoy the hike. Even though she was doing her best to forget how little she had on, she realized that she was having a lot more fun than she had had the day before when she had been fully clothed. It was exhilarating; it felt ‘edgy’ to be nearly naked . . . and doing her best to ignore that fact. One thing she couldn’t forget about, however, was the need to be constantly on the lookout for other hikers. They were surrounded by forest. Her plan, should she see someone, was to disappear into the forest on either side of the trail . . . and then simply wait until the danger had passed.

As Nick had reported, the trail across the scree slope had been erased by a slide. Crossing the loose stones looked much too treacherous to attempt. Anyone doing so was bound to not only cause the next landslide but to become part it. They could see the continuation of the tail a short distance away, but there was no safe way to get to it.

As that was the end of the line, they turned around and ended up back in camp quite a bit earlier than they would otherwise have gotten there. That was fine with Jill. She had a lot of reading to do, and she had been enjoying Uncle Tom’s Cabin. It was an enthralling story, and Harriet Beecher Stowe was masterful at showing the complexity of the issue of slavery. The nuances illustrated by the great variety of characters was eye-opening, to say the least.

Being self-conscious of the camel toe that she had been sporting on the hike, she slipped on a pair of shorts and moved her chair into the shade. She wondered if there might be any comments about her putting on the shorts, but there weren’t. She had done the entire hike in just her bikini bottoms, fulfilling Ryan’s terms.

The boys were still shirtless, so she stuck with the terms of that agreement as well. Indeed, her breasts enjoyed the fresh air. It really was a shame, she now believed, that women and girls everywhere kept their chests completely hidden – all the time. That had been something that she had always thought of as very unfair. Now she had real-life experience on which to base her opinion.

David wandered off, saying something about how he had been meaning to help their grandfather with something Airstream trailer related. That left just Ryan and Jill in camp. A little later, Ryan too wandered off. He did not say anything to Jill about where he was going, but she knew.

She was prepared with her decision about what she was going to do if he again headed into the forest. She had vacillated, but in the end she had decided that the event was too entertaining to miss. She got up and again took off up the beach.

**Chapter 43: Déjà Vu**

A short time later she was experiencing an extreme case of déjà vu; she was in her spot and he was in his. She had her phone out and had again taken a picture. It was pretty much identical to those she had taken just two days before. She decided that she wanted something even better.

It took a little courage, but she stood up and took a picture from that improved angle. Ryan didn’t notice a thing, so she took a second and then a third. ‘Why I am trembling?’ she wondered. ‘I’m not the one beating off! Ryan is the naughty one here!’

She couldn’t believe that she was looking right at Ryan’s dick, and that she was photographing it while standing up, her bare chest in full view . . . not that he was looking. She zoomed in for a close-up. His penis looked biggest right in the middle, appearing slightly smaller in diameter where it emerged from his abdomen as well as just under the head. It was also not quite straight, arcing gently upward.

Feeling quite bold and realizing that Ryan was in his own little world, she went around the bush she had been crouching behind. She climbed up the slope and took a few steps towards him, stopping twenty-five or so feet away. Feeling remarkably brave, she decided to get a picture of Ryan with his eyes open. He would then know that she had photos, but that might prove to be a good thing.

With her camera in burst mode, she said softly, “Smile, Ryan.” She must have said it more quietly than intended; he hadn’t heard her. “Oh, Ryan,” she said a little louder.

He jerked. His eyes shot open. They darted around the forest, locating her instantly. His body was rock solid, every bit as stiff as the dick in his hand. An embarrassed look of shock had frozen on his face.

Jill got the images she had been hoping for. Ryan had been looking right at the camera, his dick in hand. His expression said it all: caught red-handed beating off! She was quite pleased with herself – it had worked just as she had hoped!

Looking at the anguish on his face, she imagined that she knew what was going on in his mind. Not only had he been caught doing the deed, but by a girl nonetheless, and if that was not bad enough, she was photographing him. How terrible that must be for him! Under different circumstances, she might have felt bad about putting a guy through that – but not Ryan – not after all he had done. She actually felt good about it.

An instant later he was doing his best to conceal his erection in both of his hands while turning. Jill laughed and took another photo. “Oh, don’t stop,” she said with a coy smile. “We were just getting to the good part!”

“What the hell?” he muttered, a look of extreme mortification on his face.

“Oh, be a sport!” she said. “I want to see it . . . you know . . . squirt.” She’d already watched that once, but he didn’t know that.

Ryan started trying to pull up his shorts with one hand while he fought to keep his stiff member completely hidden with the other.

“Don’t pull up the shorts,” she encouraged. “That would ruin all the fun . . . for both of us. I think it was about to go off . . . I want to watch the fireworks!”

“You do?” asked Ryan, pausing in confusion.

“Please continue. It was a great show . . . just getting to the good part. Make it do its thing! For me,” she pleaded.

Ryan noticed that she was staring at his crotch, a look of excited fascination in her eyes.

“What’s in it for me?” he asked, his eyes traveling down to her bare chest.

“I’m thinking that cumming is reward enough,” she said with a girlish giggle.

I don’t know,” said Ryan, glancing at the ground to his side. Jill noticed that he had let go of the shorts and was now again covering his erection with both hands. She took another photo.

“Just rub it a little,” she encouraged, realizing that both of his hands were on his dick. “It wants that . . . you know. Give it what it wants.”

“What are you going to do with the pictures?” he asked, distress evident in his voice.

“A little late to be worried about that,” she giggled, thinking about all the leverage she had. What could he do? Attack her, take her phone – keep it or smash it? She was pretty sure he wouldn’t do those sorts of things. But in order to worry him less, she put it back in her hip pocket saying, “There, no more pictures.”

“I erased the photos of you,” he reminded her.

“So.”

“That would be the decent thing to do.”

“How do I know that you erased ALL the photos?”

“I did. You know that.”

Jill thought that he looked quite comical, standing there with his shorts at half-mast, his dick encased in his hands – and yet it was the photos that seemed to have him most worried. She thought it was hilarious to be discussing such matters with Ryan, especially under those conditions. He was in such a state of duress – self-inflicted duress.

“I think these photos will be my insurance policy,” she announced. “You’re a hard guy to trust. You might have photos; you might manage to take more when I’m not looking. I’ll be able to sleep better knowing that you are unlikely to do something inappropriate with images of me if you know that there would be serious consequences.”

“I wouldn’t do anything to hurt you, Jill,” he pleaded.

“Now I’m pretty sure you won’t. Enough talk about the pictures. Somebody’s dick is feeling very neglected. You need to do something about that. We wouldn’t want it to go completely soft on us, now would we?”

“I don’t think I can,” he said meekly.

“Sure you can. Just pretend I’m not here.”

“As if…”

“Better yet,” she said, placing her hands just above her belt and sliding them slowly up her torso until they were just below her breasts. “Start rubbing . . . unless you want me to leave.” Seeing indecision on his face she continued, “If I leave, the gorgeous little titties come with me. You don’t want me to leave, do you?”

“No,” he admitted sheepishly.

Jill laughed. She just couldn’t help herself. “Then rub,” she insisted.

“Come and help,” he suggested.

“I’m staying right here, and you better stay where you are!” she said, suddenly feeling slightly vulnerable. Her concern was tempered because she knew that she’d be able to outrun him, especially given that his shorts were at his knees.

“I won’t touch you, don’t worry.”

“You’re right; you won’t!” she said sternly. “But now it’s time to finish what you started. Show me how you enjoy it the most! Play with it!”

“At least help me out a little. A titty show . . . you know . . . for stimulation.”

“Earn it!” she said adamantly.

She had actually been thinking about doing just that, which surprised her. She never would have imagined doing such a thing, but the moment was just so erotically charged. She was feeling more aroused than ever before. Her sensitive titties were longing to be played with, but she was not going to allow Ryan to get any closer.

She moved her hands up and down just a little, alternately lifting her small breasts from below to encourage him. Next, she sped up the motion to make it look as if she were juggling.

As she watched, he moved one of his hands back up to the tree branch; he seemed to have a need to steady himself. The other hand shifted such that his penis was no longer hidden. She watched, again mesmerized, as Ryan started a slow back and forth stroking movement. She noticed that his fingers did not look to be sliding on his skin. Instead, it looked as if his skin was sliding back and forth along the shaft of his penis.

Glancing up, she saw a new expression on his face. Their eyes met and Ryan smiled. Jill shifted her hands up. She grasped her nipples, pulling them up and out. She allowed her eyes to travel back down over his slightly flabby midsection to where his hand was busy. ‘Got to keep this from getting out of hand,’ she thought as she bit her lower lip while continuing to tease Ryan by pinching and pulling on her nipples.

Just then, she remembered the tube of sunscreen in her pocket. Fishing it out, she squirted a large glob into a hand. She then rubbed her hands together. Once the lotion was on both hands, she started massaging it into her chest, doing her best to make it as entertaining as possible.

“Gotta keep these puppies from burning,” she said aloud.

She could tell it was working; Ryan seemed to be in a trance, staring mesmerized at her chest. She saw his mouth drop open as his breathing deepened.

“God, you’re f\*\*king beautiful,” he panted.

“These itty bitty titties?” she asked coyly.

“All of you . . . especially your . . . itty bitties!” he replied between breaths.

Jill was trying her best not to, but she was inevitably getting even more aroused. She was glad that she was no longer wearing just her bikini bottoms. On the one hand, she knew she would feel more vulnerable without the shorts and her belt. She didn’t think Ryan would come at her, but it felt reassuring to have something substantial covering her crotch. And on the other hand, she knew that her arousal would be showing through the thin material of her bikini bottoms, were that all she had on.

Just as before, Ryan’s stroking rate increased but then suddenly ceased altogether. His body stiffened and the first glob arced through the air toward her. Even though she had seen it before, she stood stock still, her mouth hanging open in amazement. Again she heard Ryan grunt. She wanted to pull out her phone and take another photo, but she had said she wouldn’t.

“Well, now I’m feeling really embarrassed,” he said once his orgasm had run its course. Ryan slumped, and their eyes met.

“I’m not surprised. You should be embarrassed . . . very embarrassed.” She felt like teasing him to make him feel bad; however, she didn’t want to be teased in return. Indeed, she was well aware that she had been engaging in very similar behavior. Continuing she asked, “Was it better with me here? Better with an audience?”

Ryan let out a sigh, looking off into the distance.

“Cat got your tongue?”

“Yes,” he said, returning his gaze to her eyes. “Embarrassingly, yes . . . better.”

“Because I was watching you or because I was here to look at?”

“Both,” he said sheepishly. “All of the above. How many questions are there going to be?”

Jill didn’t reply.

“Can I have a kiss?” he asked. “I mean . . . it seems fitting . . . now that we’re intimate and all.”

To Jill he looked so pathetic, standing there, gradually deflating dick in hand, begging for a kiss. It was as if he wanted to imagine that it had been something they had done together, something romantic.

“No,” she said, but then she walked teasingly toward him.

He turned toward her in hopes of them coming together, in hopes of receiving a kiss, but Jill was quicker. She dodged him, ducking out of the way, and kept right on going.

“Wait!” he called out as he fought to get his shorts up and buckled.

She took a few more steps but then stopped and turned.

“Wait?” she asked. “Oh, should we go back together? That wouldn’t look suspicious.”

“Umm…” said Ryan, thinking that through.

“That’s what I thought,” she replied. “Maybe you should wait at least five minutes. I’ll loop around and enter camp from a different direction.”

“Good idea,” said Ryan, hanging his head, the embarrassment again very obvious in his wavering voice.

Without another word, Jill turned and headed off through the forest. Eventually, she encountered the main trail connecting the Airstream to their camp on the point. She turned onto it, heading toward camp.

David wasn’t there when she arrived, so she sat down, intending to read. But before opening her book, she pulled out her phone to study her new images. The ‘burst’ mode had produced a series that featured the evolving emotions playing out on Ryan’s face as he had come to realize that he had been caught and was being photographed while pumping his dick. Jill couldn’t help but laugh as she looked through the images. Being slightly concerned that Ryan might try to take her phone, she got up and hid it. Sitting back down, she opened her book and found her place.

“So, what’s up, Jerk-boy?” she asked teasingly when Ryan came out of the forest a few minutes later. Initially, she had been thinking of going easy on him, to keep him from retaliating and teasing her. In the end, she had decided that he was unlikely to do that. On top of that, the situation was just too funny to ignore. After all, given that she now had the goods on him, he was unlikely to get very far out of line.

She saw Ryan check in his tent to make certain they were alone.

“What’s it like to be caught with your pants down, Jerk-boy?”

“Umm…” was all he managed to get out.

Jill smiled seeing the painful embarrassment in his eyes. She wasn’t a cruel person; it just was fun that the tables were turned for once.

“What’s it like?” she asked again.

“Bad,” he finally managed, avoiding her gaze.

“Bad? In what way?” she asked, hoping for an answer composed of full sentences.

“What do you want from me, Jill?”

“A little honesty . . . and then we’ll go from there,” she replied.

**Chapter 44: Turning the Tables**

“All guys do it,” he argued.

“But most never get caught,” she said with a devious chuckle.

“…or photographed,” he added.

“You are so . . . mine!” she gloated.

“What do you want?” he asked again. “Do you want to be released from the ‘one of the guys’ topless program? Is that it?”

Jill was a little taken aback by that suggestion. That was certainly not her aim.

“Do I look like I want out of that agreement?” she asked, using her hands to draw attention to her bare breasts. “I think I’ve adjusted pretty well.”

“I guess you have,” he agreed. “And now I guess we’re even.”

“More than even,” she replied. “I’ve seen it all . . . more than you’ve seen. I’ve seen your weenie! I’ve got proof . . . pictures!”

“Can we talk about those?”

“Nothing to talk about. I’m keeping them . . . end of story.”

“Not fair!” he protested.

“Too bad for you.”

“Where’s your phone?” he asked, looking all around.

“Don’t even be thinking about my phone,” she snapped. “Besides, the photos are safe. I already emailed a group to myself. Even if my phone disappeared, I’d still have images of you jerking off.”

“That’s impossible,” he said. “There’s no reception out here.”

“Impossible? Afraid not Jerk-boy,” she said. “I took care of that a few days ago.” Seeing a look of surprise mixed with disbelief on his face, she added, “This is not the first time I’ve watched you being naughty with your weenie. I’ve photographed you playing with it . . . on three occasions now . . . each time at that same tree. It must be your favorite tree! What is it about that tree?”

She saw the pain on his face intensify. Laughing, she continued, “You’re a very predictable guy when it comes to masturbation. I could set my watch based on when you head off for your ‘alone time.’ What’s it like to find out that your ‘alone time’ wasn’t so alone?”

Ryan collapsed down into a chair, a look of defeat on his face. A second later, he covered his face by resting his head in his hands. For thirty seconds or so, he sat there saying nothing, but then he looked up at her and asked, “Well, did you like what you saw?”

“Excuse me?” she asked in a puzzled voice.

“That must be it!” he announced. “You want to keep the photos because you like looking at my cock!”

“You’re kidding, right?” she asked.

“Time after time you followed me, you say. Each time you hid and watched. You wanted to see my cock! You just can’t get enough of it, can you?”

“Puh-lease!” she said sarcastically. “And by the way, it’s a weenie!”

To her delight, she saw him wince.

“You don’t need the photos. You can have the real thing any time you like,” he said, standing up and reaching for his zipper.

“Don’t you dare!” she said. “Now sit back down! I’ve got you by the short and curlies. If you don’t want everyone you know to have pictures of you playing with your weenie, you’ll do as I say.”

Ryan pondered that for a moment. Quietly he sat back down.

“First, keep it in your pants,” she said. “Second, are we going to tell David?”

Jill smiled to herself, seeing the shocked look on Ryan’s face. It felt good to finally have the deck stacked in her favor.

“David doesn’t need to know,” he replied.

“Doesn’t need to know what?” asked David, walking into earshot at just that moment.

Seeing the look of embarrassed pain intensify on Ryan’s face, Jill started chuckling. She did her best to stifle her laughter, attempting a serious expression.

“What did I miss?” asked David.

Jill resumed laughing. From the pitiful look on Ryan’s face, she knew that she did indeed have him right where she wanted him.

“Well, I can’t tell you right now,” she replied. “Maybe later.”

David did spend some time trying to pry from them what they had been talking about, eventually giving up once it was more than obvious that he was getting nowhere. Neither Jill nor Ryan wanted him to find out anything about their encounter in the forest.

Just before dinner, the boys put their shirts on. Jill followed suit. That meant that later, after it had gotten dark and they had a roaring fire going, Jill was sitting there in her top, wondering if she would again be topless for the evening campfire. Secretly she was hoping that Ryan would do as he had done the night before, propose that she take off her top and then pressure her into doing so. That was the face-saving route to what she now knew she enjoyed.

As it happened, it didn’t go that way at all. Ryan had apparently lost his nerve. Jill found herself wishing that she hadn’t been quite so hard on him. She was glad to have him under her thumb; however, mostly just as a failsafe method of keeping photos of herself from being taken and posted. She still wanted Ryan to be Ryan. Looking back on all that had happened, she had to admit that she had been having fun.

After more than an hour of waiting patiently for either Ryan or David to bring it up, she finally said, “So, you guys aren’t going to push me?”

“Push you?” asked David.

“You know . . . like . . . to get me to be topless at the campfire . . . like last night,” she said blushing.

“Oh, so you like being pushed?” asked David.

“I didn’t say that,” said Jill coyly. “It was just a question.”

“Just a question?” David laughed heartily.

Ryan started laughing as well, but his laugh sounded reserved compared to his typically boisterous laugh.

Jill had hoped to return to the dynamics of the prior evening when they had talked her out of her shirt. In that manner, she had avoided having to take it off of her own accord. She liked that because it allowed her to hide behind the pretense of not really wanting to be topless.

“Stand up, Jilly!” said David commandingly. “And face us.” Once she had complied, David continued, “Off with the top!”

Jill blushed. ‘What had she gotten herself into?’ But after the briefest hesitation, she removed her shirt. ‘Why couldn’t he have done something like that without the hint?’ she wondered. As twins, they often knew exactly what the other was thinking, but sometimes David was so clueless.

As she sat back down, the irony of what had just happened struck her. Had he done that early in the summer, she would have been so shocked and angry – and she never would have taken a thing off. Now his words were music to her ears.

And from that moment on, it was an awesome campfire. Jill was the only one without a shirt, but she was herself again, happy and full of youthful energy. She paraded around shamelessly, always making sure that it wouldn’t seem blatant, yet doing nothing at all to cover the ‘gorgeous little titties.’ Part of what made it fun for her was how much it went against her grain. It was almost like putting on a costume and playing another character.

It was exhilarating to play the part of the topless girl. It made her heart beat faster and she couldn’t keep from blushing, that reaction was automatic. She hoped that it didn’t show in the firelight, but she knew that it was there – she could feel it in her cheeks. And her little nipples still had stage fright. Putting on her topless girl costume turned them rock hard and caused them to extend out as far as they could reach; it also made the butterflies flutter around in her stomach.

The experience was energizing, even making the things that she did over and over, such as roasting marshmallows, once again fresh and interesting.

Her feeling of excitement even persisted after she was alone in her tent. She kicked off the rest of her clothes and lay spread eagle on her back. She twirled her index finger on her clit waiting for Ryan’s customary offer of oral services. It didn’t come.

“Dude, what’s wrong?” she heard David ask eventually. “Aren’t you going to offer Jill free tongue rides?”

“Umm . . . she wouldn’t take me up on the offer,” said Ryan, sounding down in the dumps.

“That’s never stopped you before,” chuckled David.

“How do you know if you don’t ask?” said Jill with a giggle.

“Because I know,” Ryan answered from the other tent.

“Well, tonight might have been your lucky night,” she replied. “Now you’ll never know.”

“It wouldn’t have been,” said Ryan in a depressed sounding tone of voice.

“What’s come over you?” asked David. “You’re always one for continuing the most futile of efforts.”

Jill listened intently, but there was no reply. She continued spinning circles around her clit, but always forcing herself to stop at the last moment, just as it was starting to feel real good. She was quite sure that she could not manage to cum silently, and she was not about to allow them to again overhear an orgasm.

After more than an hour of what turned out to be the most frustrating session of self-denial she had ever put herself through, she got up and headed south along the shore, stark naked. She had waited so long because she had wanted to make sure that both Ryan and David were asleep.

The moon, now a larger crescent, had been getting brighter each night. Given the light, walking the beach felt more daring, adding to the thrill. She found herself thinking of a long walk, putting some real distance between her naked body and her clothes.

Looking at the moon’s reflection shimmering on the water, her thoughts shifted over to the idea of a nude swim. She’d never gone skinny dipping; however, the idea of a night time swim all alone seemed a little scary. Even with the moon out, the water looked completely black. She thought that it would be fun to swim naked all the way to Sunken Island, but then she realized that she probably wouldn’t be able to find it. At night, it would probably be impossible to locate the landmarks that they triangulated off of.

The more she thought about it, the more she liked the idea of a nude swim, but she knew that daytime would be preferable. She shuffled the idea into the back of her head knowing that the opportunity was very unlikely to come about under conditions that would work for her.

By the time she got to the log, she was more than ready for release. She sat down, and with one hand took measure of her narrow little stripe of hair. She had been doing a good job of keeping everything so smooth, leaving just the one line of hair. With the same hand, she started circling her clit slowly, breathing a sigh of relief that this time she wouldn’t have to force herself to pull back as she approached the edge.

Her other hand drifted up to a nipple. She was amazed at how sensitive her nipples had become. At one point she had been concerned that it might be sunburn, but now she knew that it was just due to her nipples constantly being the center of attention.

She turned and lay back on the log, giving herself over to the possibility of a few noisy and exceptionally satisfying orgasms . . . should the stars all line up.

Getting herself off proved to be an easy task given all that had happened that day. First, she allowed her little pussy to relive how bare it had felt hiking up the trail in just her stylish little bikini bottoms. She couldn’t believe how far she had gotten from the rest of her clothes wearing nothing more than that. Fortunately, Ryan had kept his word. What if he hadn’t? Thinking about that possibility was good for her first orgasm.

After that, she regrouped and started imagining all the stages of watching Ryan beating off. She pictured his slightly curved dick as well as the contented look on his face as he stroked himself. She had a hard time believing that she had commanded him to finish the job – and yet she had – and then he had. Thinking of herself as being bossy like that, instructing a boy to pleasure himself until he ejaculated, brought about her second orgasm.

Had she really done that? It was so unlike the meek girl she had always been – and she had been topless the whole time – shocking behavior for the skinny, self-conscious Jill Wahlund!

Next, she moved on to thinking about how she had been commanded to stand and take off her top at the campfire. Amazing that she had put up with that; even more amazing that she had complied. And what put it over the top was that she had wanted it. She had even encouraged David to do it. She wished that he or Ryan would not have been so clueless, but they had required a little prodding. She didn’t like that she had been forced to hint, but they had left her with no better option. Thinking about being told to strip off her shirt like that was good for yet another orgasm.

It was a sexually spent girl that made her way back to her tent a short time later as the moon dipped toward the western horizon. She crawled inside and stretched out on top of her bag without a thought of putting any clothes on. It wouldn’t be long before she would regret allowing herself to fall asleep nude.

Hours later, the earth started shaking. Just as before, it happened during the black of night, well before sunrise. To Jill, this second quake felt even more powerful than the first. Instantly a sense of panic seized her. Even before she could get the zipper open to escape the confines of her tent, she heard a roar, louder than before, possibly closer. Another landslide!

Knowing that another wave might be imminent, she screamed to alert the boys. But without waiting for them to join her in the cool darkness, she charged into the forest in search of higher ground. Progress was difficult; the moon had set, making it completely dark within the trees.

The earth continued to shake as Jill struggled to follow the trail, ignoring the punishment that her feet were taking. Tripping on roots and getting branches in the face, she forged ahead, still yelling for the boys to follow. She fell more than once.

“Jill!” she heard a familiar voice call out. Her state of panic eased slightly as she felt hands grasp her upper arms. “Jill, I’m here!”

**Chapter 45: A Harsh Awakening**

“Oh, thank God!” she said, hugging him. “Where’s Ryan. Is he with you?”

“It’ll be alright,” he said. “Calm down.”

“But where is Ryan?” she asked, concern straining her voice.

“Ryan’s fine. Still asleep, I hope.”

Panic again surged in Jill. “Asleep? We’ve got to do something. He’ll drown!”

“Drown? It’s just a nightmare, Jill. I’m here,” he said.

Jill forced herself to open her eyes. She was still in her tent. David was leaning over her, holding her.

“Oh, thank God!” she said, rising up a little and seizing him tightly. “It seemed like we were going to die.”

“You were screaming, thrashing,” he said in a calming voice. “But everything’s fine. Just a dream . . . a scary dream.”

“Of course, I was screaming. I was trying to save you!”

“We’re fine,” said David, holding her reassuringly while rocking just ever so slightly.

For the first time, Jill glanced around her tent. A little light was illuminating things, David’s flashlight lay there, all but forgotten next to her pillow.

“Thank you, David,” she said. “I don’t like earthquakes. That was the worst . . . so glad it wasn’t real.”

“Me too,” said David. But a moment later he continued, “Jilly, do you always sleep in the buff?”

In shock, Jill realized that her brother was holding her and that she was stark naked.

“Oh, my God!” she said pulling free.

She spun around, her butt in the air as she fought to get her sleeping bag open. Fortunately, it was only partially zipped. After turning down the top flap, she rolled back over, sitting down near the pillow. She had to pull her knees way up to do it, but one at a time she was able to thread her legs down into the bag.

In the back of her mind, she knew that she was putting on a show, but she was desperate to get under the covers. A second later she was able to slide down into her bag, even pulling the flap up over her bare chest.

She looked up at David sheepishly. His amused smile made her flush.

“Well, I’m not going to be able to unsee that!” he said with a chuckle.

Jill pulled the top of her sleeping bag up to hide her face. The realization struck her that her legs had gone every which way in her haste to get into her bag. It had been relatively quick, but far from ladylike. The light from the one flashlight was not much, but their eyes were fully adjusted.

“I guess I should be going,” said David.

“I guess,” she replied, her voice muffled by the bag covering her face.

“Lucky I’m your brother,” he mused. “You’re a pretty tempting little morsel. If Ryan was the light sleeper, I expect this might go differently at this point. You’d be fighting him off.”

“Just go.”

“Don’t worry, I’m going,” he said, crawling feet first back out of her tent and zipping it behind him.

“David?”

“Yes?”

“Thanks,” she said sincerely, but then she buried her face in shame, plunging it deep into her pillow.

It took her a long time to get back to sleep. Her heart would not stop racing. The dream had seemed so real. Thank God, it was David who had woken up and come to her assistance! But she was horrified to realize that she had been in such a hurry to get herself hidden that she had put on what had to have been a most wanton display. David would now know exactly how she was groomed. He had to have seen everything. The only saving grace was that it had been him and not Ryan. Ryan must have slept through all the noise she had made; otherwise, he would have been there as well.

Jill’s restless night included a period of torturous wakefulness before it was time to get up. She lay there berating herself for having flashed David. She was mad at herself . . . her own brother, nonetheless. It was all the worse because she knew that if she had simply relaxed and taken her time, she would have been able to get into her bag with some of her modesty intact.

Knowing that she was not getting back to sleep, she dressed with a dawn beach walk in mind. To her surprise, David was sitting at the fire circle as she crawled out of her tent.

She started to say something, but David put a finger to his lips and pointed at his tent. Jill nodded. Yes, there was no reason to wake Ryan. David started walking south along the beach, beckoning Jill to follow.

Once they had gone far enough, Jill said quietly, “I’m feeling so bad about last night.”

“You are?”

“I can’t imagine how bad that looked . . . no . . . actually, I can. Climbing into my sleeping bag, knees far from together.”

“It’s hardly worth worrying about. You’ve got girl parts. I already knew that.”

“I don’t usually sleep naked. Really, I don’t.”

“You were in the privacy of a zipped tent. I probably shouldn’t have come in. You just sounded like you needed saving.”

“But . . . I’m glad you came in. That was the scariest nightmare! I needed to be woken up. And then I needed that hug. You were exactly what I needed right then. I just wish I had been wearing something . . . anything.”

“I’ve seen it all before, remember? We used to take baths,” he said.

“I know, but that was a long time ago . . . well before puberty.”

“Exactly. Back before you had tits or pubic hair . . . not that you’ve got much of either now.” He laughed.

“Hey!” said Jill, giving him an elbow to the ribs. “That’s not nice.”

“Sorry . . . couldn’t resist.”

“Shaving’s in vogue,” she said defensively.

“I know it is,” he said. “I was just making a joke.”

Jill took a deep breath. “I’m just so embarrassed . . . still. I mean, I’m glad you woke me up. I just wish I hadn’t been naked . . . hadn’t been so careless. Next time . . . not that there’ll be a next time . . . I’ll keep my knees together.”

David laughed. “It’s not that big of a deal. Don’t dwell on it. It happened. It doesn’t change a thing.”

“I’ll try,” she said nodding.

“Great,” replied David. “But I do have something that I want to ask . . . since it’s just you and me.”

“Okay...” said Jill meekly.

“I’ve been wondering if you are enjoying your summer? I mean, you were pretty unhappy at first, sleeping in your tent next to the Airstream. Now you seem like you’re doing better.” He paused, looking into her eyes. “I thought this would be fun for you . . . fun for all of us. I think it’s working out that way, but I wanted to ask your opinion . . . get a reality check.”

Jill didn’t know how to reply. She had so many thoughts in her head. Her summer had really turned around, but being ‘one of the guys’ was still so scary. It was nerve-racking to walk around with nothing on above the waist, but it also felt deliciously liberating. And what was more, she’d learned that there was never a dull moment when her tits were out.

“I guess you don’t have to tell me,” said David, after it seemed as if Jill was not going to respond.

“I’m just thinking, that’s all,” she said.

She didn’t know what to say. Admitting to David that she was enjoying herself might come back to haunt her. The whole summer had been an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ thing. And even though David was her twin brother, he was still one of ‘them.’

Not thinking that she should let her guard down, she decided to turn the question back on him.

“First, tell me what you think. What do you see?” she asked.

“Fair enough,” he replied with a sigh. “How should I say this?”

“Take your time,” she encouraged.

“Well, for a few years now, I’ve watched as you’ve struggled with your insecurities. I don’t remember you being so reserved when we were younger.”

“I don’t think I was.”

“And you’re certainly not that way on the basketball court. It’s almost as if you transform into a different person during a game. You’re confident, you take charge, you kick ass!” he said, full of admiration.

“I love basketball!”

“But off the court you’re often a bashful wallflower, hiding in the shadows.”

“Hiding, yes.” She knew it was true.

“But lately you seem different.”

“No layers to hide under,” said Jill pensively.

“What is it with you and layers?” asked David.

“I just don’t like to be seen,” said Jill, casting her eyes down.

“Hey, stop that,” said David, reaching a finger under her chin and tilting her head back up. “Don’t turn back into that girl. I like this new Jill much better.”

“New Jill?”

“This summer, I’m seeing a new level of confidence. I’ve always thought that Jill the basketball player was the real Jill. Now I’m sure of it.”

“Confidence? This summer? But . . . I feel so nervous all the time . . . topless,” argued Jill, a puzzled look on her face.

“Maybe. But then again . . . you are topless. Think back to how you might have felt walking around topless prior to this summer,” said David.

Jill threw her head back and laughed a nervous laugh. “Scared shitless! I wouldn’t have walked around topless.”

“Exactly! That’s what I mean. Exponentially greater level of self-confidence. It’s all relative,” said David.

“Greater self-confidence?” said Jill, obviously trying to process seemingly contradictory information.

“But separate from that, I see a spark!” said David.

“A spark?” asked Jill.

“A glint in your eye,” explained David. “It’s not like you are smiling . . . typically you look apprehensive.”

“Because I am.”

“Apprehensive, but alive . . . sparkling and so alive!” said David. “I imagine that you are enjoying yourself, but somewhat like a person on a rollercoaster. Frankly, I think . . . I hope . . . you are having the time of your life.”

Jill didn’t respond. She knew he might be getting pretty close to the truth.

David continued, “You see, Ryan studies your tits. But I study facial expressions. I really love seeing that spark in your eyes. So, your turn. Tell me. Are you having fun?”

“I wouldn’t say ‘fun’ is the word,” said Jill. “In all honesty, I’m dealing with a lot of stage fright. My stomach churns . . . butterflies . . . but on a grand scale. And my cheeks. They get so warm. I can’t help all the blushing.”

David laughed. “You do blush up a storm!”

“Stop it! No teasing!” she said, again elbowing him playfully. “Not if you want to talk about this,” she paused. “But if I’m having fun? I’m not ready to admit to that . . . not to you or to myself. It’s still so terrifying. Whatever it is, it’s extreme. I can say that.”

“And you want to be pushed. How great is that!”

“I do?” said Jill, wishing she had never said that.

“I know you haven’t forgotten saying that,” said David. “And we both know there is only one place that can go.”

“We do?” said Jill.

“Of course,” said David. “Yesterday you hiked in just your bikini bottoms. Only one more article of clothing left to lose.”

Jill stopped in her tracks, her jaw dropping. Aghast she replied, “That’s not what I meant, and you know it. I meant the campfire . . . topless.”

“Maybe that’s what you thought you meant,” said David. “But it wouldn’t be pushing if it was something you were predisposed to do.”

“You’re out of your mind if you think…” Jill’s voice trailed off. She knew he was talking about full nudity. She couldn’t even bring herself to say it.

David laughed.

“It’s not funny! And it’s not going to happen!” she said resolutely. She had to put an immediate end to any such thoughts. She knew she would never take her bottoms off, but she also remembered feeling that same way about her top.

“Jill, you don’t have a boyfriend,” said David.

“So…”

“Well, I know you as well as anyone. What you do, you do for a reason. And you’re very neatly groomed, down there.” His eyes traveled down to her crotch so there could be no doubt what he was talking about. “Might there be an explanation?”

Jill looked stunned. When she didn’t say anything, David continued, “You seem to be maintaining your hoo-ha in a state of readiness. Are you expecting it to see the light of day?”

Jill turned and stormed off. Sure she shaved, but that wasn’t why. David was jumping to conclusions. She was too shocked and appalled to continue the discussion. Half way back to camp she thought of what she should have said. She should have told him that the new swimsuits had required the aggressive trimming. That was the real reason she had started shaving. She kicked herself for blanking on that while they were talking, and now she was too flustered to re-engage.

That she shaved, why she shaved – absolutely none of his business. Unfortunately, he had seen that she had nothing more than the narrow landing strip, but that was water under the bridge. She found herself thinking about her emergency stash in the Jeep. She had a full outfit there. She was again very glad to have had the foresight to place those things up under the dash. She didn’t think it would come to that, but her emergency exit strategy was intact. She could always climb in the Jeep and leave – at the drop of a hat.

When she got to camp, Ryan still wasn’t up and it wasn’t yet time to go to breakfast, so Jill kept going, continuing along the beach headed north.

She was quite upset, but she knew that what David had said was factually correct; she had mentioned wanting to be pushed. That was undeniable. She’d of course never considered that he or Ryan might interpret it to mean full nudity; however, after listening to David, she realized that his interpretation wasn’t all that surprising.

She continued thinking and eventually began to calm down. They hadn’t taken her top off forcibly, not that summer at least. She felt certain they wouldn’t take her bottoms off either. They might try and talk her out of them, but they wouldn’t strip her.

She thought back to the basketball game. David had been pushing her to go topless, but he’d backed down. He’d prepared in advance to back down. He’d pushed hard, but in the end, he’d given her the bikini top. He might again push . . . that might even be fun in a scary sort of way, she realized. But he wouldn’t force her. If push came to shove, David would back down. At least she was nearly positive that he would.

And Ryan . . . she’d neutralized that threat. Her photos would keep him in line. And of course there was the emergency backup plan, the outfit in the Jeep. She decided that she’d be fine. She turned around to go to breakfast.

**Chapter 46: A Morning Swim**

Jill was glad for the change of subject that breakfast represented. Both boys were enthusiastically discussing a long hike, a backpacking trip of three or four nights. Listening to the discussion helped get her mind off of the new threat: David and his theories relating to what he had called her ‘hoo-ha’ and how it needed to see the light of day.

David was pouring over his notes from his discussion with Nick. He had narrowed it down to two options. Each involved a number of lakes that they could use as a base camp for further exploration. One hike went to the Broken Canyon, below which were the Aspen Lakes. The other had an Indian name, the Chief Chokma chain of lakes. David was not sure if Nick had pronounced it with an ‘sh’ sound or a ‘ch’ sound, but decided it was probably the latter as he had written ‘Chokma.’

He kept trying to get Jill’s opinion on the two hikes, but she didn’t really know what to say. She hadn’t paid much attention to the discussion the night that Nick had been invited out for birthday cake.

That wasn’t the only reason that she had little to say. She had bought into the idea of a long hike, but she kept picturing herself as she knew she’d be dressed. She expected to be topless essentially the whole time, and now she had something else to worry about. David would be ‘pushing,’ and based on their early morning discussion, she now knew in what direction.

If she had been willing to voice an opinion, it would have been in favor of the option with the least foot traffic. However, she had no idea which one that might be, and that was not a topic to bring up in front of her grandparents. What was more, she figured that mentioning her thoughts on that matter might be self-defeating. The boys might end up picking the most traveled trail in order to ‘push’ her. ‘Best to just keep quiet,’ she decided.

Both hikes were within the area that the Forest Service had designated as Primitive Area. As such, no maintained trails with signs existed, and yet there were trails as hiking was not prohibited.

The result of the conversation at breakfast was that Ryan and David would drive to the Ranger Station in Stanton to gather more information. They hoped to get maps, up to date trail information, and learn about obtaining any necessary backcountry permits.

They wanted Jill to come along, but telling them that she wanted to read, she declined. The truth of the matter was that she was willing to go on the hike, but wanted no input. The two hikes didn’t sound all that different, and she knew David would make a good selection. Surely he could be trusted as far as that was concerned.

Shortly thereafter in camp, as the guys were making themselves ready for the drive to Stanton, Jill was wondering what would happen as far as their shirts were concerned. It quickly became apparent that the guys had every intention of keeping theirs on.

“Bean,” said David, getting her attention. As their eyes met, he continued, “Time to lose the shirt. I expect you to remain topless the entire time we are gone.”

Jill felt a shiver ripple through her body. “But . . . your shirts?” she asked, her voice a bit unsteady.

“We’re keeping them on for town. You know, ‘no shoes, no shirt, no service.’ But you’re staying here, so…” He waved his hand in a manner that left no doubt as to what he meant for her to do.

To Jill, it seemed as if the ‘one of the guys’ agreement was now in flux. She hesitated, but a moment later grasped the hem of her shirt and lifted it.

Once the morning sunlight came into contact with her small, tan breasts, she said, “That reminds me. Would you do me a favor when you’re in town? I’m out of sunscreen.”

“Absolutely!” said David. “Anything for you.”

Jill looked at him curiously, but she knew he meant it.

“More of this,” she said, handing him an empty bottle after retrieving it from her tent. “The grocery store in Agency has it. Maybe a big one and a pocket-sized tube as well.”

“You got it,” said David, sliding it into his backpack.

Shortly thereafter Jill was all alone. There was still a bite in the air, as her nipples well knew. She would have preferred to sit in the sun, but due to her lack of sunscreen, she pulled her chair into the shade and sat down to read.

She had decided that her next book would be, ‘Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave.’ It was an autobiography published in 1845. To Jill it seemed to be a most fitting book to read at that juncture, given that she had just completed, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ a book she had really enjoyed. It was well written, and it had given her some perspective on what life in the South must have been like during the era of slavery.

After it had warmed up, she crawled into her tent and changed such that she was wearing only her bikini bottoms. She had concluded that she would read one more chapter and then go for a swim.

A short time later, she found herself wandering south in the direction of the log. She had a decision to make. The night before she had contemplated going for a nude swim. Given her state of arousal at the time, the idea had seemed quite attractive.

Things were different now. David had shocked her by indicating that he would likely be pushing her in the direction of full nudity. She knew, of course, that she enjoyed being nude . . . alone and nude. Swimming nude might be fun; she suspected that it would be. She was actually considering going as far as Sunken Island. That was about a one mile round trip according to their best estimate. She and David typically spent at least an hour doing it as they didn’t rush and generally spent a fair amount of time on the submerged rock before heading back.

Due to their discussion that morning, the timing was poor, and yet both boys would be gone all morning. If she was going to go for a nude swim during daylight hours – and she didn’t like the idea of doing it in the dark – now was her chance. These days she was so rarely alone. The more she thought about it, the more she talked herself into giving it a try.

She eased her suit down off of her bottom as she sat down on the log. Glancing back at the forest behind her she realized that she had just mooned . . . nobody. She searched the trees, but there was no one there. Even so, she decided that she felt uncomfortable showing that much skin in such an open area in the full light of day; her butt crack fully visible in her seated position.

She lowered herself down onto the sand and then slid the suit on down her legs. Folding it once, she placed it on the log. It looked too exposed there, so she shifted it down into the shaded area in front of the log.

She couldn’t believe that she was stark naked, right on the shore of Cache Lake, in full daylight! She started contemplating an exposed dash into the water. Again she turned and studied the forest behind her. Everything was as expected. There was no one there.

Even though she had made up her mind to go for a nude swim, it took her several minutes to psych herself up for the additional exposure that actually getting into the lake would involve.

Finally, she decided to count down from ten, but when she got to seven she decided to start over and count down from fifty. That ended up seeming like too much counting, but she stuck with it. From ten to three she again studied the forest behind her. At one she stood up, and at zero she took off running, splashing water like crazy as she ran butt naked into the lake.

She had thought about wading in slowly, avoiding all the attention-grabbing splashing. In the end, she had just decided to get it over with quickly, spending as little time in view as possible. She was certain no one was watching, but she still wanted to minimize the amount of time that she would be exposed above the surface of the lake

Once she was in over knee-deep, she dove forward into the lake, her arms overhead.

She took a few strokes but then paused to have a look around. ‘I really am a fraidy-cat,’ she thought. Standing there neck deep, she verified that nothing had changed.

Underneath the surface, she ran her hands up her body. They encountered nothing but skin. She trembled in realization of what she was doing.

Taking a deep breath, she turned and resumed her swim. She had decided to go for it; she was headed all the way out to Sunken Island. ‘When else will I have the chance to do this?’ she reasoned.

As she swam, she found herself thinking about how much more bare it felt to nude compared to simply being topless. The fact of the matter was that she felt exponentially more naked, so much more vulnerable. It probably would have felt that way anyway, but contemplating that did make her realize that she had grown slightly accustomed to walking around topless. She knew that she had also bought into the notion of being ‘one of the guys.’ Guys could walk around without their shirts on, so why not girls? She was just doing what guys did.

However, this was completely different. This could never be considered ‘one on the guys.’ Guys didn’t venture out bottomless any more than girls did. This was a major departure from simply taking the liberty to enjoy what the opposite gender could do.

Every so often, Jill would interrupt her swim. Rolling over, she would have a look all around, making sure no one else was swimming or, God forbid, boating. There were boats over at Cache Lake West, but they saw little use. She would also check her bearings. Sunken Island was a pretty small target to hit given the size of the lake.

A few minutes later, she slowed down and switched to breaststroke. She was close. After a short search, she dropped her feet down onto the familiar granite surface. She loved Sunken Island. Feeling daring she stood up, rising up so that even her belly button was just above the surface of the lake. She turned slowly, taking in the view in every direction. She dropped back down, bringing the surface of the lake to collarbone level. She studied the western shore and the cabins hidden there among the trees. If anyone was watching her, they’d be there she knew.

She made the decision to stand back up and again bare her breasts in the sunshine, but her legs failed to cooperate. ‘Don’t need to get too crazy with the risk-taking,’ she reasoned after she had abandoned the effort.

Instead, she lay back in the water and let her feet float up. Glancing down along her body she saw her nipples and then her landing strip break the surface. For a time, she paddled to remain in that position, just her face, her nipples, and her mound with its strip of hair protruding.

She decided that swimming nude was both relaxing and exhilarating. For fun, she tried doing a few handstands. She had some success with that, a time or two even allowing her legs to fall apart such that she was doing the splits with just the lower half of her body protruding up out of the water. She couldn’t quite do full splits, but it was a fun athletic exercise to attempt, nonetheless. It felt so naughty to have her bare butt and pussy sticking up out of the water like that – and yet she stayed sideways to the western cabin area – just in case there was someone there with a camera or a telescope.

As Jill swam back, she found herself contemplating the unnerving nude dash she would have to make to retrieve the bottom half of her suit from where she had left it next to the log. While considering that, a much more frightening prospect came to mind.

Thinking back, she remembered how David and Ryan had purposefully set her up the day she had been photographed floating down the outlet topless. Had this trip to town also been a ruse designed to get her to drop her guard?

“How could I have been so gullible?” she mumbled, berating herself as she slowed, switching to breaststroke in order to scrutinize the shore ahead. She didn’t see anyone on the beach, but that didn’t mean that there wasn’t an ambush awaiting her there. She tried to think of options, but there were few. Just like the troops on D-day, she would have to go ashore – and confront whatever she found there.

She got to where she could stand and stopped, putting her feet down. With her chin on the surface of the lake, she studied the log and the surrounding area. Everything seemed in order, and yet something had to be amiss. Her spidey sense was tingling. She felt panicky, and yet she did her best to focus. She didn’t want to do anything rash.

She couldn’t see the bikini bottoms, but she had left them where they wouldn’t be visible from her vantage point in the lake. She imagined that they had been taken. Likely Ryan and David were behind the log or possibly hiding in the forest just beyond.

As soon as she went ashore, she pictured them popping out and catching her naked in the sunshine. How stupid she had been to believe them – and then play around with full nudity – and on the very day that David had talked about pushing her in that direction. Her predicament reeked with irony.

Catching her naked would only prove to David that he was correct – and then things would get worse for her. They’d do everything they could to keep her naked.

Then she thought about Ryan. He’d be there, his camera at the ready. Since she had incriminating photos, he probably wanted photos of his own to use as counter ammunition. She knew how his mind worked; he’d be looking to balance the score. He was probably thinking that with full-frontal shots of her, he would be in a great position to negotiate or threaten.

As she considered that possibility, she wondered if David would still protect her from Ryan’s photography efforts. Could photography be one way that David might ‘push’ her? The butterflies were going crazy inside her stomach, but she couldn’t very well spend the day in the lake.

**Chapter 47: Swim, continued**

Well, she couldn’t go ashore and fall into their trap; that much she knew. With that crossed off the list of possibilities, she had an idea of something to try.

If she swam toward camp, parallel to the shore, she would likely cause them to abandon their hiding spots. They would realize that she was heading where the rest of her clothes were located. They would probably assume that their cover had been blown, and they would come out of hiding and head up the beach to cut her off. She wouldn’t really be any better off, but at least the element of surprise would have been taken away from them.

Deciding on that plan, she turned and started swimming, maintaining her distance from the beach. She kept her eyes angled back, fixed on the log, expecting them to pop out at any moment.

She found herself thinking about where else she might be able to go to obtain clothes, if they had her bikini bottoms and got between her and her clothes in camp. She’d obviously have to run, but she might be able to loop around and try for the Jeep. However, the Jeep no longer seemed like a very good idea.

It would be parked near the Airstream. Going there naked in the middle of the day was far too risky. Her grandparents might catch sight of her. That wasn’t something that she was willing to chance.

She could hide until dark, but it was midmorning. She’d be hiding for about twelve hours.

She had another idea: her panties on the post at the bridge. They’d been outside this whole time. They’d most likely be damp from the recent rain. They might even be ripe – smelly. She decided that she’d probably put them on, no matter how disgusting they might be. If that was her only option, she knew she’d take it.

Then she would be able to return to camp, topless of course. Problem solved. No nude pictures for Ryan, if that was indeed his plan. Keeping him from obtaining nude photos seemed to be of utmost importance.

But as she swam, carefully watching the beach, nothing moved. After she had gone quite some distance, she decided that her intuition must have been misfiring.

Reversing course, she returned to the stretch of lake right in front of the log. The coast seemed clear. After a minute to muster her courage, she waded hurriedly ashore, both hands clamped over her crotch, forming the most complete bikini bottom that she could manage.

At the log, she dropped down onto the sand, cowering behind the weathered grey landmark. Her bikini bottoms were exactly where she had left them. Barely a second later she was pulling them on, keeping as low as she could. All her fears about David and Ryan being there seemed to have been unfounded.

As she stood up to head back to camp, she realized that putting one’s bottoms on while sitting wet on the beach was a good way to end up with lots of sand in one’s suit. She waded back into the lake to rinse it out; sand in the crack was never comfortable!

As her nerves began to settle, she started to come to terms with just how scared she had been. Being completely nude in the light of day and believing that she was about to be caught had been a shock to her system. It had been a fun swim but now she couldn’t believe that she had taken the risk and put herself through the ensuing trauma.

However, the fright had served one purpose; it had made her realize that her emergency kit in the Jeep might have its limitations. Thinking that it might come in handy to have another outfit hidden somewhere that didn’t move around – and that was not usually parked right next to her grandparents’ trailer, she picked out a plastic bag and put a shirt and a pair of shorts in it.

Still topless, she walked the bundle all the way to the bridge, taking the route along the beach and then turning to follow the outlet.

The bridge was constructed of large wooden timbers. From underneath she found a spot to hide the small bag, situated such that the clothes would remain dry. She did her best to make it a location that she could find in the dark, if need be.

Making her way back to camp via the same route to avoid the road, she felt quite pleased with her second emergency kit. She was surprised that she had been considering putting on the panties that had been outside for the past few weeks. This new bag of clothes was definitely preferable to that pair of panties, should worse come to worse.

Of course, the Jeep emergency kit was of undeniable merit. It came with a vehicle that could get her home; however, the outfit at the bridge just might fit her needs better, depending on the circumstances.

As she considered that, she found herself wondering why she wasn’t just heading home. Given what David had said that morning, she knew that a wise girl would simply pull the plug on spending more of the summer at the lake. She knew that the girl that arrived at the lake earlier in the summer would probably have done just that . . . leave. However, she found herself realizing that she liked much of how things had developed.

She felt a little crazy to be admitting that to herself, but deep inside she knew she was having fun. Some parts hadn’t been so fun ‘in the moment.’ However, when she thought back over them later, while trying to fall asleep each night, the memories of what had happened tended to put a smile on her face and/or get her libido revved up.

Her thoughts traveled back to the night she had been caught topless, spying on that boys at their campfire. How devastated she had been! And yet now it was a fun memory. And that development had served as a springboard to other fun adventures.

Once back at camp, realizing that she had been getting too much sun for a girl without sunscreen, Jill moved her chair to bring it back into the shade. She then sat down to resume reading.

An hour later, the boys were still not back and she was getting hungry. Deciding to use the opportunity to have lunch with her grandparents and then to get a shower, Jill put on a shirt and a pair of shorts. Once adequately dressed, she took the trail that led to the trailer.

Her grandparents were indeed delighted to have her join them for lunch. A while later, as she was in the bathroom showering, Jill got a first look at her pink buns. She had a nice tan everywhere but there. Her long swim had been the first time that the area hidden by her bottoms had seen any significant amount of sun.

In addition to realizing that it might get a little painful, she knew how incriminating it might be. If the boys saw her sunburn, they would know instantly that she had been up to something.

Jill shrugged off that possibility. It really didn’t affect her; she had every intention of keeping that portion of her skin completely covered around the boys. She spiffed up with her razor and then dressed. She was happy. It felt really good to be clean and to comb her hair. In spite of her earlier scare, the day had been working out perfectly. She’d had some fun doing something very daring and she’d gotten quite a bit of reading in.

Back at camp a short time later, she again picked up her book. The Frederick Douglass tale was proving to be quite thought-provoking. She was developing a great deal of respect for the man and his considerable intellect. She found herself wondering why his name didn’t come up more often, and she was looking forward to a college class in which that topic might be discussed.

Martin Luther King, Jr., rightly so, got a lot of media attention; however, the same could not be said about Frederick Douglass, in her opinion. The role he had played in convincing an earlier generation that blacks were the equal of whites in terms of intellectual potential – via his writings, his public speeches, and his leadership – had surely been pivotal.

After reading for a bit, Jill returned to her tent and changed back into just her bikini bottoms. She hadn’t done that right away because she didn’t want to be doing it for the sole reason that David had told her to remain topless. Once she was sure that being topless was what she herself wanted, she went ahead and changed.

“I was starting to think you’d gotten lost,” she remarked when the boys returned much later that afternoon.

“No,” said David. “We just did some shopping. We heard about an outdoor gear consignment shop in Elk Bend.

“You went all the way to Elk Bend?” she asked. “I hope you filled the tank.”

“Don’t worry,” said David. “We did, and Ryan found a backpack.” Ryan turned to show off his backpack. “Our packs are fine,” continued David. “But Ryan needed a pack.”

“He could have used dad’s,” remarked Jill.

“I wanted my own,” said Ryan.

“And I got us a new stove. Remember how much trouble we had with the small stove last year? And that one is much too big to carry,” said David, indicating the two burner stove on the picnic table.

“I want to see how you look in your pack, Jill,” said Ryan.

“You know how I look in my backpack,” remarked Jill. “…same as last year.”

“Hardly!” said Ryan. “This year your tits will be out.”

Jill looked down at her bare nipples, rock hard as usual. She then looked back up at Ryan. She tried to picture how she might look.

“Will you model it for us . . . if I go and get it?” he continued.

“Umm . . . I guess,” she said, wondering what the big deal was.

“He’s been trying to picture you wearing just the backpack all day,” said David, after Ryan had left. Their backpacks were stored in the shed near the Airstream.

“I won’t be wearing ‘just a backpack.’”

“We’ll see,” replied David smiling and raising his eyebrows. “Maybe the bikini bottoms, but probably not.”

“Don’t start that again,” cautioned Jill. “One of the guys, remember?”

“Like I said . . . we’ll see,” said David. Continuing he added, “Grandma said you had lunch with them. That was nice. I’m glad you did that.”

“And I wasn’t topless! You told me that you expected me to remain topless the entire time you were gone. Well . . . I didn’t!” said Jill defiantly.

“What’s gotten into you?” said David in a calm voice. “I’m glad you had lunch with them. Putting on your shirt was the wise thing to do. The only thing to do.”

“But you said…” replied Jill.

“Come on, Jilly! We’re twins. You’re my sister,” remarked David. “I’m no more in charge of what you do than you are in charge of what I do. You are your own person. I was merely pushing.”

“I’ll say!”

“You probably don’t want to believe it, but you’re topless by choice.”

Jill tried to decide if that were indeed true while David studied her expression.

“And you’ll be bottomless by choice . . . if and when it happens,” he added.

“It won’t. Don’t worry,” she snapped.

As Jill started applying some of the sunscreen that David had gotten, Ryan returned with her backpack. He held it out to her. She knew what he wanted.

“Please,” he said with a toothy smile.

Jill let out a heavy sigh, but took the empty backpack and slipped the straps on over her shoulders. Putting her hands on her hips, she concentrated on her posture, straightening her back. That move lifted her rib cage, forcing her nipples up and out. She turned this way and that, giving him every chance to look. Jill felt the warmth surge in her cheeks as she realized that she was putting on a brazen titty show.

“So f\*\*king hot,” he mumbled under his breath.

“What?” said Jill. “Topless with a backpack beats just plain topless?”

“It’s just hot,” said Ryan. “I can’t explain it.”

“Okay then,” said Jill, shaking her head as she shrugged the pack back off her shoulders. She did think that she might look cute like that, her chest nicely framed by the shoulder straps, but she was not about to admit that out loud. However, she did realize that her attitude about her boobs was still evolving. It was much nicer to display them proudly than to be embarrassed about them and attempt to hide them.

They were still small and probably always would be. Some would find them too little to be attractive, but increasingly Jill was viewing that as their problem. And size was hardly the only attribute of a female chest. There were other things to take into account. Her breasts were very attractively shaped, she thought, and her nipples were pretty little rose-colored tips, essentially always pointy. That had always bothered her. It didn’t anymore.

**Chapter 48: A Morning Hike**

Ryan and David wanted to go swimming to cool off. They tried to talk Jill into joining them, but she declined. Rather than tell them that she had already had her swim for the day, she told them that she’d washed her hair and didn’t want to get it wet again. That was essentially true. Ryan and David did go for a short swim, staying relatively close to the point.

A short time later, Jill was again reading. Looking up, she noticed that only Ryan was in camp with her. David had been busying himself with carrying sections of a dead tree back to cut up into firewood. They still had a large pile, but they went through quite a bit of wood each evening.

“So Jerk-boy,” she said teasingly to get Ryan’s attention.

“Do you have to call me that?” he asked, a little pain evident in his expression.

“A well-deserved nickname, I should think,” she replied with a chuckle. “Frankly it seems perfect for you. I could think of alternates; I’m sure there are so many possibilities, most of them nastier. I think I’ll stick with Jerk-boy.”

Ryan shook his head. Jill knew his nickname wasn’t his choice. She could call him whatever she liked.

“Your tree is calling!”

“Leave me alone,” said Ryan, attempting to return his attention to his whittling. Jill could tell that he was not making anything, just pointlessly removing shavings from a stick.

“The pressure must be building. These cute little tan titties have to be driving you nuts.” Ryan looked up at her and she saw his eyes immediately drift down to her chest. “You know what they look like. I’ll bet you wish you knew what they felt like!” Moving her hands up and massaging them she continued, “They feel so nice. So soft . . . yet so firm.”

“I know you won’t let me touch.”

“Whip it out and I’ll think about it.”

“Here?” said Ryan, looking around.

“It’s private enough,” said Jill. “I mean, I spend all day topless here.”

“But, David.”

“He’s not here.”

“He will be,” said Ryan. “…any minute.”

“A minute should be enough,” said Jill with a grin. “…with these to look at.”

“Let me touch them and I’ll whip it out,” he countered.

“You’re hardly in a position to negotiate, Jerk-boy!”

“Come with me,” he proposed.

“And where would we go?” asked Jill, playing dumb.

“You know.”

“And then what would happen?” she asked, standing up. “Oh, I know! Jerk-boy could do his wiener thing while I put on a little show!” She took a step toward him and continued, “If these weren’t so tiny, I could suck my own nipples.”

She tried. Pinching a nipple, she stretched it up while at the same time bending her head down as far as it would go. “See . . . tiny, tiny titties. Just won’t reach.”

“I’ll do it for you,” he offered.

“Might be fun,” said Jill teasingly. “Not happening! I think you need to run off into the forest and release all that pressure. I’m sure it is building. Just think about these,” she added, pressing in on the sides of her boobs making her nipples extend out even farther from her chest. “Or this,” she said turning around and caressing one of her half-covered butt cheeks with one hand. She gave it a soft slap, making it vibrate.

“Come with me,” he repeated. “We can play doctor. I’ll show you mine. You’ll show me yours.”

Jill saw Ryan’s eyes drop down to her crotch.

Suddenly she felt flustered. Attempting to sound confident, she replied, “You’d like that, wouldn’t you, Jerk-boy.” But her voice squeaked as she felt her cheeks redden.

She sat back down and did her best to resume reading.

“If you prefer, we can do the same as before,” he said. “You don’t have to show me anything more.”

Jill could tell that Ryan knew he had scared her.

He continued, “The titties are enough. You show me the titties and I’ll show you my . . . you know . . . cock. You can watch the pressure build up and then release. I think you like to watch.”

“It’s a weenie,” she said, again trying to regain her composure.

She did sort of want to watch again, but she wasn’t about to admit it. She did her best to ignore him, but he continued trying to get her to follow him into the forest. Jill tried to look like she was reading, but she was too rattled to actually read.

About a minute later, David was back in camp. He propped up the log he had brought with him and went about sawing off a firewood length piece. Jill looked over at Ryan and saw that he was still staring at her. Checking that David was facing the other direction, she again tried to lift a nipple to her mouth to tease him. She wanted so badly for it to reach. It wasn’t fair that some girls could suck their own nipples, but she couldn’t.

“I’ll do that for you,” offered Ryan.

“Do what?” asked David, turning to look back. Fortunately, Jill had dropped her tit just in the nick of time.

A while later, when he thought that no one was looking, Ryan did disappear off into the forest. Jill thought about following. She knew where he was going. She did want to go and watch, but she didn’t want Ryan to know that. He knew about her hiding spot, so her ability to watch unseen no longer existed.

When he returned to camp later, Jill pointed a finger at him and slid her other index finger along it making the universal ‘shame on you’ gesture.

Ryan walked behind her and whispered into her ear, “You could have cum with me.”

Jill blushed. She knew exactly what he was referring to, given how he had emphasized the word, ‘cum.’

How dare he tease her back like that!

“It wasn’t meant to be, Jerk-boy,” she said trying to regain the upper hand.

“Your nipples deserve a good sucking,” said Ryan still whispering. “You need me for that . . . as you demonstrated earlier. One of the many services I’m happy to provide.”

“What are you two whispering about?” asked David from near the woodpile. Neither one of them replied.

Unlike what usually happened, Jill didn’t put on a top at all that evening. She simply remained topless through dinner and during their campfire, even though both Ryan and David had their shirts on. It still felt a bit strange and quite naughty to be topless, but she had grown to like the exhilarating tension that was part and parcel of being bare-chested.

Girls’ breasts were supposed to remain covered; breaking that rule was becoming irresistible for Jill. She had noticed that she even felt a small letdown when she had to put something on after a period of toplessness.

Early the next morning, immediately after breakfast, Jill, Ryan, and David departed for Cornice Ridge. They had wanted to get an early start as they had a long hike in front of them, even planning to ascend the ridge behind Snow Lake. David and Ryan had been wanting to climb it ever since Jill had reached it solo.

Jill had taken the lead, marching along in nothing more than her hiking shoes and her bikini bottoms. As she walked, she kept her eyes peeled, watching the trail ahead for other hikers.

She had done her best to talk the boys out of that particular hike. She had succeeded once, but she had always known that she’d be headed that way sooner or later . . . topless. She had also fought for a pair of shorts. In the end, she had given in on that as well.

David had pushed hard, calling shorts, “the wrong direction.” He had said, “I know you don’t want to go back to hiking in shorts. Why fight it?”

She had hated him for saying that, suggesting out loud that she wanted to be wearing so little. Deep down inside, she knew that it might be true; however, she had her pride to consider. Not even to herself was she going to admit that she was a willing participant, much less an eager one. Actually, what she was admitting to herself would change from moment to moment. Deep inside, she understood that the fact that she was still there meant a lot. She knew that she was on a slippery slope. She was doing her best to keep from sliding further down, and yet, she had not climbed off.

In the end, after a face-saving battle, Jill had given in. After all, she was much less worried about what she was wearing on the bottom half than she was about the chance of meeting other hikers with nothing at all on her top half.

Marching along, she knew that she’d be setting some kind of a record that day. At Snow Lake, she’d be over five miles from the rest of her clothes, and the ridge was something like a mile beyond that. She already felt quite bare and vulnerable – she knew those feelings would increase dramatically as the distance grew. She was destined to remain nearly naked all day. Looking down at her racy low-rise bikini bottoms she found the prospect quite exciting – especially given that they were on a trail where an encounter or two seemed possible. It was scary, but for some reason that made it all the more exhilarating. Her heart was beating faster than normal, and it wasn’t due to the exertion.

Even though she felt the most exposed walking in front, that position gave her the best view up the trail. Down low, close to Cache Lake, there was forest on both sides of the path. She knew that was where she would go if hikers appeared ahead – into the trees. However, later they would be above the tree line. The forest and its many hiding spots would thin out and then disappear altogether. She worried about that but did her best to push it out of her thoughts.

She’d put on a good layer of sunscreen. Knowing that she’d need to renew it later in the day, she’d asked David to bring it along in his daypack. Her shorts had meant pockets and the ability to carry a tube of lotion. Hiking in just her suit bottoms meant that she didn’t have a single small pocket.

Glancing down she noticed that she could even tell where her small landing strip was atop her mound. The thin layer of cloth that kept her from being naked hid very little; it was more than a coat of paint but not much more. From the rear, she knew that her buns were only half covered. She pictured Ryan, just behind her, staring at her athletic legs, her butt, and her slender back.

Glancing back for verification, she was surprised to see his eyes directed at the view of Cache Lake on their left. They had just entered the switchbacks that accomplished the last thousand feet or so of elevation gain prior to Cornice Ridge itself. The area was thinly forested, gaps in the trees allowing peekaboo views of the lovely azure lake below.

Seeing that Ryan was enjoying mother nature, Jill stopped to do the same. She took a deep breath of the fresh mountain air as the boys came up. Without a spoken word, the three teens all soaked in the beauty that surrounded them, the strong rays of sunlight searching out the remaining drops of dew on the forest floor, the various calls of the birds enjoying the summer morning.

Off to their left Sharp Tooth towered proudly above the forest. Bald Hill and Chokecherry Ridge would become visible shortly, but for the time being, they were hidden behind stands of trees. To their right lay the larger peaks with their associated foothills, many of them hidden from view as they were an extension of the range that they were ascending.

“What a lovely morning,” remarked Jill. “I doubt there is a more beautiful lake anywhere on the planet.”

“Agreed,” said Ryan nodding.

“I always look for Sunken Island,” said David.

“Me too!” said Jill enthusiastically. “I always imagine that someday the light will be just right and I’ll see it. So far . . . never have.”

“Me neither,” remarked David.

“Nor I,” said Ryan, chiming in.

David handed Jill a water bottle and she took a sip. Out of the corner of an eye, she saw Ryan studying her. She thought about dribbling water down onto her chest to make it interesting, but she didn’t.

“Ready?” she asked, handing the water bottle back.

The boys nodded and a minute later Jill was again leading the way up the switchbacks. As the elevation increased, the trees got smaller and more misshapen from the weight of the snow that they had to endure during the cold months. They crossed and recrossed an avalanche chute that was completely devoid of trees.

As she went along, Jill worked at always keeping a plan in mind – just in case she happened to see other hikers – a strategy for getting herself quickly hidden. And as the landscape changed, so did her plan.

She knew that her tendency was to panic, so she thought that focusing on the best escape route might help her react rationally. Depending on where she saw them, her plan was to simply stay on the trail and race off in the other direction. If they appeared below, then she’d run ahead – until she found a suitable hiding place off the trail, and vice versa.

It was hardly a perfect strategy, and yet it was one that she thought would probably work – as long as she kept her eyes peeled. In addition to trees, the landscape also offered a myriad of large boulders, many of which would be perfect to hide behind. Many were small, hardly larger than a car, but some were huge, like Sunken Island. That giant boulder had surely broken off and tumbled down from the rock face just to the west of where they were ascending the ridge.

**Chapter 49: …to Snow Lake**

They took their next water break on the top of Cornice Ridge itself. There was no better place to pause as the twin views of Agency and Cache Lake both presented themselves there.

Jill picked out the spot where she had first tanned topless. She thought back to that day, barely a month before. She remembered her short little trek along the ridge after removing her bikini top. How daring she had felt! She chuckled at herself. She’d been utterly alone and yet it had taken all the courage she had been able to muster to move a short distance away from her top.

Just as it was now hard to imagine that girl, her earlier self would have a difficult time believing the girl she had become.

A short time later, they were again climbing, making their way along the ridge, but skirting it to the left, following the trail to Snow Lake. It was at least another two thousand feet of elevation gain to the lake.

After a half hour or so, thinking about how much stronger the sun’s burning rays were at altitude, Jill stopped where the trail to Elk Meadows branched off to renew her sunscreen. She paid particular attention to her nose, shoulders, and nipples. She made no effort to make a show out of the lotion application process but noticed that Ryan was watching intently nonetheless.

“Here, you guys need more sunscreen as well,” she said, handing the tube to David.

She watched as the guys took care of their own faces and shoulders, but then reached for the tube to help them with their backs. After taking care of David, she moved on to Ryan.

“Your hands feel so nice,” he commented.

“Don’t be getting any ideas,” she cautioned. “It’s just sunscreen.”

Once she was done, Ryan took the tube, squirting some into his hands. “Your turn,” he said with a smile.

Jill hesitated. She did need more sunscreen on her back, but she had never allowed Ryan to touch her in that way.

Sensing her reluctance, he remarked, “It’s just sunscreen.”

“Okay, but behave,” she said, turning her back toward him. As she did so, she folded her arms beneath her breasts, pressing her upper arms against her sides, lest he get overly ambitious.

“Your skin is so soft,” he remarked quietly.

“Sunscreen, Ryan. Focus!” she reprimanded.

“Next time I’ll do the front,” he said as Jill stepped away, deciding that her back had received adequate protection.

“One day I might let you,” she said teasingly. “NOT!” Ryan just smiled happily as they turned to resume the hike.

“Lunch here or up on the ridge?” asked David as they came to the top of the last switchback bringing Snow Lake into view.

“I’m voting for here,” said Jill, noticing how much less snow there was around the lake than on her last visit. “I’d like to try wading…”

“You should go swimming!” suggested David. “Looks like you brought your suit.”

“Ha, ha,” said Jill blushing a little. The comment had served to remind her of just how little she had on.

“I think her nipples are voting against swimming,” said Ryan. “Look at them!” Addressing Jill directly he continued, “But should you decide to swim . . . I’ll warm them up afterwards!”

“They’re just fine as is,” she said, looking down at her chest, her cheeks bright red.

“Standing offer,” replied Ryan with a smile. Jill knew he was serious.

Jill took off her shoes and socks and waded in but not even up to her knees. The bottom was rocky and the water had to be only a couple of degrees above freezing. While it hadn’t seemed possible, Jill felt her nipples tighten up still further. Looking down she noticed goosebumps spreading out across her areola, covering her entire chest as well as her upper arms. ‘I better get out before I have to take Ryan up on his offer,’ said a voice inside her head.

As she waded back out, she noticed what a nice job David had done arranging a picnic on the blanket that they often carried for that purpose. ‘This is nice!’ she thought. ‘I provide the eye-candy and I get treated like a princess.’

“Can I make you a sandwich?” he offered.

“That would be kind,” she replied politely with a smile and a nod.

Jill indulged in allowing him to spoil her while she sat on the blanket, stretching out her legs and letting them dry in the bright sun.

After a relaxing lunch break, they were back on their feet and working their way around the oval-shaped lake.

“Those are some pretty dark clouds,” remarked David later as they started working their way up the rocky slope at the far end of the lake. Jill, recalling how she had knocked rocks loose the first time she had made the climb, cautioned the boys. They all made sure to avoid being right above or below one another as they scaled the steep trail-free slope.

“I don’t think it will rain,” said Jill, realizing that they were prepared for sun but nothing else.

“Famous last words,” said Ryan with a chuckle.

Jill laughed but noticed that the approaching clouds did look ominous. She knew that it wouldn’t be particularly cold if it rained, but even so, she did not want to get wet. ‘At least I’m wearing my suit,’ she thought, trying to look on the bright side. ‘It’s, of course, meant to get wet!’

Near the top Jill charged ahead to make sure she was first. Once she could see on over, Agency again visible below them, she picked out a boulder and hopped on top. As the boys approached, she let loose with her best Tarzan yell, pounding her fists solidly on her chest, the sound echoing and reverberating within her ribcage. They all paused, listening for the echo. As before, it never came.

“You are something else!” exclaimed David.

“One of the guys!” said Jill with a smile.

“Best Tarzan ever!” added Ryan.

Jill bowed low. She had almost done a curtsy, but at the last second had decided that Tarzan would never curtsy.

“This ridge needs a name,” said David. “And I have one to propose.”

“Which is?” she asked.

“Tarzan Ridge . . . of course,” he replied.

They all agreed, and the name became official. They all knew that the ridge probably already had a name, but they didn’t care. Starting at an early age, they had been in the habit of naming things themselves, just not in cases where they knew the official name. Snow Lake, Cornice Ridge, Elk Meadows; those were official names, all of them taken from the trail markers.

“Can I take a picture . . . please?” begged Ryan.

“No way!” replied Jill instantaneously.

“Let him, Tarzan,” said David, unslinging and opening his pack. “With your phone of course. You’ll have complete control of the photos,” he added, handing her cell phone to her.

“Well…” said Jill, mulling it over.

“Please!” begged Ryan.

Jill was a little suspicious that Ryan seemed so enthusiastic to take her photo under those conditions, but she relented, unlocking the phone and clicking it over into camera mode. She followed his every instruction, posing proudly, as Ryan worked at achieving the ideal Tarzan picture. As he posed her, he moved around seeking out different vantage points to take full advantage of the dramatic topography.

Jill was surprised to discover that she was enjoying modeling topless, even having fun hamming it up a little. Her boobies were there in every shot, but they didn’t seem to be Ryan’s focus. She expected the images would be very sexy, at least to those who could appreciate a slender lightly endowed woman. She concentrated on maintaining a confident look on her face; after all, she was Tarzan!

Observing Ryan, Jill noticed that he seemed to be on his best behavior. He wasn’t teasing her, looking through her other photos, talking about keeping her phone or making crass remarks. He was simply pursuing the art of photography, trying to capitalize on the opportunity, a pretty model and majestic scenery.

A little later, as they were picking their way back down the slope toward Snow Lake, it started to sprinkle. They had to slow down as the addition of a little water to the dusty, lichen-covered rocks made for a very slippery combination.

Jill quickly concluded that the rain was glorious. It was one of those rare moments that involved rain coming down in the bright sunshine. She felt like twirling and dancing. However, she didn’t dare, given the steep slope and the slippery conditions. She contented herself with enjoying the simple pleasure of how marvelous the rain felt on her naked flesh. Once she was down on the trail at the edge of the lake, a nonspecific song on her lips, she indulged, skipping along happily forcing the boys to do their best to keep up.

As they reached the limit of the glacial cirque and started down the face, the rain arrived in earnest. Gone were the sun’s rays. As they reached the first switchback, the rain came in torrents. As they were all bare from the waist up and had no rain gear with them, there was nothing to do but lose altitude and hope that the storm would blow over quickly.

Sections of the trail had transformed into rivulets, but Jill forged ahead like a pro, hurrying but paying careful attention to where she placed each step. David and Ryan were just behind, similarly being mindful of their footing and still struggling to keep up.

Just a few paces beyond the point where the Snow Lake trail merged with the Elk Meadows cutoff, Jill glanced up and froze. There were two hikers not more than twenty-five feet in front of her. They were wearing ponchos and had stopped in the middle of the trail. They were looking back at her.

Instinctively, Jill spun around and charged back toward the boys. They were standing just past where the Snow Lake trail branched off. To Jill’s horror, there were also about four other hikers coming toward her along the Elk Meadows cutoff. Again she stopped short.

As the reality of her predicament began to sink in, Jill became aware that she had just merged into the middle of a group of hikers, all much better prepared, judging by their ponchos.

In a state of shock, Jill felt more naked than ever. She realized that three trails led away from where she stood, drenched in nothing more than her bikini bottoms, but all of them had people standing in them. Frantically looking around she saw a group of large boulders straight up the slope from where she stood panicking. With no more thought than to get herself hidden as fast as possible, she turned and bolted up the rocky incline.

“Jill!” she heard David call. In the next instant, one of her feet slipped off a large rock. The rock her foot crashed into dislodged and took off rolling downhill. She made an attempt to regain her footing but fell hard, down onto the sharp rocks, rolling as she hit. Given how steep it was, she had to work to keep herself from following the rock she had knocked loose down the mountainside.

With terror gripping at her heart, she glanced around at the myriad of faces all staring at her. She started trying to get back to her feet; however, it was not to be. Pain shot through her right hip, and her left leg was not cooperating.

“Jill!” she heard David yell a second time. Making his way with utmost care, he hastened to where she lay, feeling miserable and forlorn.

Since Plan A had failed, Jill invoked Plan B, hiding what little she could with what little she had. She turned her head such that her sopping wet brown hair covered much of her face. One of her arms was under her, but the other she draped across her chest, hiding as much as possible. Realizing that her legs were slightly apart, she remedied that, lifting her knees up toward her chest in the process, doing her best to disappear in place.

“Are you alright, Jill?” asked David bending down.

With fright in her eyes, she looked up at him and shook her head. Again glancing around, she noticed everyone approaching closer.

“Jill? Jill?” she heard one of the girls remark, “I know you!”

Jill looked up into the unfamiliar face, thinking that there was no way this girl could know her.

“You’re Nick’s girl!” she continued. “He introduced us at the movie theater, remember?” Turning to the guy next to her, she added, “You remember her, don’t you, Brad?”

**Chapter 50: The Elk Meadows Cutoff**

Jill’s heart sank. She didn’t look over for the guy’s response. In agony, she turned her head away, again doing her best to get her wet hair to hide her face. Tears welled up in her eyes and she felt as if she might cry. In an instant, her life had transformed into a nightmare.

“Get me out of here, David,” she said, glancing pleadingly up at her brother, strands of wet stringy hair running diagonally across her face.

“Roger that!” said David in a confident, reassuring voice.

He helped her to her feet, or more accurately, up onto one foot as Jill quickly found that she couldn’t put any weight on her left leg.

“Can we help?” asked the same girl sympathetically. “I’m Katie, by the way. I’ll give you my poncho.”

Jill just shook her head. She didn’t want to have anything to do with Katie or her poncho. She just wanted to get away.

She leaned on David and noticed that Ryan was there as well, helping her balance on the slippery slope. “Thanks, Ryan,” she said still fighting back the tears as he helped her climb onto David’s back. The maneuver was complicated by the fact that Jill still had an arm clamped tightly across her chest.

“You’ll need both hands to hold on,” David advised discreetly.

Reluctantly Jill wrapped both arms around his shoulders. Simultaneously, she pressed her chest against his back to get her nipples again hidden from view.

As David started making his way cautiously back toward the trail, Jill was aware that two of the guys had stepped up off the footpath toward them. They were reaching for David, doing their best to offer him a little assistance so that he would not slip and fall now that he had an injured girl on his back.

Jill heard Katie again offer, “Are you sure you don’t want the poncho? I think you need it more than I.”

Jill turned her head and saw that she had taken it off and was extending it toward her at arm’s length. She didn’t want Katie to see her face up close. She didn’t want to talk with her, nor to have to explain why she was topless. Being topless wasn’t the problem; being near people other than David and Ryan while topless – that was the problem.

David hesitated, but Jill remarked, “No . . . just go.” She turned her face away, shunning the girl. She buried it against David’s neck, her tears mixing with the rain they encountered there.

Once David was back on the trail, Jill saw the other hikers step aside to make room for him to pass. They were still extending their arms to steady him, but fortunately, none of them had touched her.

“Thanks anyway,” she heard Ryan remark to Katie on her behalf as he passed her.

A brief moment later the three of them were making their way down the trail that led back to Cornice Ridge, Jill holding tightly to David, Ryan following closely behind.

Glancing back, Jill saw at least two cell phones being held up to capture images or video. She quickly counted six hikers and then again hid her face against David’s neck, trying to get her emotions under control. Her attempts at relaxing were largely unsuccessful. In more ways than one, her life had been turned upside down.

“Your knee is really bleeding,” she heard David remark.

“It is?” she replied in surprise. It was her left ankle and her right hip that hurt the most. “Which knee?” she asked.

“The left,” answered David.

Jill craned her neck, but couldn’t see the blood; however, she could only see the top of her knee.

Again glancing back, she saw that the group of hikers was following them down the trail.

“Ryan,” she called out. “Will you go back and ask them to not mention this to Nick. And ask them to please delete or at least be respectful with any pictures or video they might have taken. Ask them to keep things to themselves.”

“Sure thing,” said Ryan, turning back.

David slowed to a stop while Ryan spoke with the other group. “Good thinking, Jill,” he said quietly. They waited while Ryan conferred with the other hikers.

“You go, girl!” one of the girls called out a few moments later, just as Ryan was returning. Jill was unsure if it had been Katie or one of the other girls.

Once they were again headed down the trail, Jill asked Ryan, “What was that all about? The ‘you go, girl’ thing?”

“They wanted to know why you were topless,” he replied. “I told them that you were ‘one of the guys.’ That, in your opinion, if guys could run around in the summer without shirts, then girls ought to be able to as well.”

“Oh,” she replied. She was glad that he had put it that way. To a small degree painting it that way helped her save face. At least it might help to dispel the notion that she was motivated by promiscuity or otherwise simply ill-behaved.

About fifteen minutes later, Jill glanced back and saw that the other group was turning off, taking the trail down the other side of the ridge toward Agency.

“Good luck,” she heard someone call out. She noticed several individuals waving. She waved back but then turned away to again rest her head on David’s strong shoulders, attempting to find a little solace in a suddenly harsh world.

“I can try to walk,” she said softly a few moments later.

“You’re not going to be able to walk,” he said with a compassionate chuckle.

“Let me try,” she insisted.

David took a few more steps but then stopped to let her slide down. He immediately stooped down to get a better look at her bleeding knee.

The cut looked quite deep and there were tracks of blood running all the way down her shin. Placing her left foot on the ground, Jill quickly realized that she wasn’t going to be walking anytime soon; the amount of pain shooting through her ankle when she tested it was just too great. It had also become quite swollen.

Echoing her concern, David said, “That was quite a fall.”

“I know,” she said. “I panicked. I was watching my footing so carefully . . . and then I walked right in amongst that group . . . and I did the opposite . . . I ran . . . paying almost no attention to my feet.”

“It can’t be helped. It happened,” said David compassionately. “But we need to get your shoe off. Too bad you didn’t have your boots on, the ones with ankle support.”

“Yeah . . . should’ve worn those today,” said Jill nodding. She was standing on one leg, her hand on Ryan’s shoulder while David went about gently removing her shoe.

“We should have gotten this off earlier,” he said once he’d had a better look at her ankle. “I feel so bad, but right now we need to focus on getting you some medical care.”

“Medical care?” she asked as she climbed back up.

“I’m pretty sure you need stitches. And your ankle . . . I sure hope nothing is broken,” he replied. Once she was again on his back, David resumed his quick but careful downhill march.

“Let me take a turn,” offered Ryan after they had walked another ten minutes or so.

“I’m fine,” said David.

Jill knew that he was probably just saying that because he suspected that she would be uncomfortable being skin to skin with Ryan.

“We’ll get her in to see a doctor sooner if we take turns,” said Ryan.

Jill said nothing, but she was thinking it over. They still had about four miles to go. She really couldn’t expect David to carry her the entire distance.

“He’s right,” she said at long last. “I appreciate you guys so much. I feel like such a burden. Trading off makes sense.”

“Are you sure?” asked David.

“I’m sure,” she said, straightening her legs to slide off of his back.

A moment later she was climbing up onto Ryan’s back. At first, she tried to ride piggyback without her chest touching him. She quickly decided that was going to be impossible, given how long she was going to be on his back.

“Please don’t read anything into this,” she said as she allowed her breasts to come into contact with his bare skin.

“It’s okay Jill,’ he said, sounding unusually mature. “I just feel bad. I’m pretty much the one that got you into all this.”

For some reason that admission made Jill feel a bit better. She didn’t reply, but she relaxed, resting her cheek on his shoulder. Ryan was broader and more muscular than her brother, but his muscularity was concealed within a layer of baby fat.

“Thanks for carrying me, Jerk-boy,” she said so quietly that David would not overhear. She felt him chuckle.

As they continued down the last slope with switchbacks, Jill started to feel cold. The rain had moderated, but it was still coming down. While she had been on her feet, the exercise had kept her warm, but all that had changed now that she was being carried. For warmth, she snuggled against Ryan hoping that he wouldn’t misread the signals. She thought about again saying something witty, just to make sure. In the end, she didn’t. He and David were going to be carrying her over two miles each. She appreciated so much what they were doing. How could it hurt if Ryan felt a little appreciated?

Shivering, Jill recalled the poncho that she had shunned in the heat of the moment. It would be nice to have now, but she had wanted to get away from those people . . . as fast and as far as possible. That had been all that she had been able to think about when the girl named Katie had made the offer. As she considered that, she realized that pride had also been a factor.

They continued making steady progress, taking a break or two and trading off every half mile or so.

As they neared their little corner of the lake, David said, “We’ll take you to the trailer . . . clean you up, warm you up.”

“I am cold,” she admitted. She knew David and Ryan had to have felt her shivering. “But the trailer? I’m nearly naked.”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said David, setting her down so that they could again trade off. “If I run ahead, I can get you some clothes and meet you in the driveway.”

About fifteen minutes later, Jill and Ryan were waiting in the driveway, Jill essentially balancing on her good leg, as David came up.

“Thanks, David,” she said, pulling on the T-shirt he had brought.

The boys then helped her get her legs into a pair of shorts. Next, David picked her up and carried her the short distance to the Airstream. A minute later they were all inside.

Upon seeing her injured granddaughter, Jill’s grandmother sprang into action, immediately going about washing the blood and dirt off of her leg in preparation for cleaning out the cut just below her knee. Her grandfather got a blanket around Jill and then put some water on the stove for hot chocolate.

“What I don’t get,” said her grandmother after hearing the initial part of their story. “…is why your clothes are nearly dry. The boys are soaked.”

“Oh, that…” said Jill, trying to think up an explanation that didn’t involve toplessness.

“She slipped off her poncho and hung it up just outside,” interjected David.

“Right,” said Jill adding, “It’s so wet. I didn’t want to bring it inside.”

Her grandmother seemed satisfied with that explanation, but Jill wasn’t so sure. She immediately tried to think of a reason why her hair might be so wet . . . one that fit with the poncho lie David had just told. She expected that her grandmother would ask about her hair next. Fortunately, no such question was forthcoming. Instead, her grandmother focused on cleaning the wound as good as possible.

“Fortunately,” she said, “I think it bled profusely enough. It seems to be relatively clean. Given that you are a young woman with Miss America legs, I think you should insist on stitches . . . plastic surgery even. You don’t want to end up with a scar.”

“But I don’t want stitches,” she said.

“Leave it up to the doctor then,” advised her grandmother. “But if the doctor says it needs stitches, then you need to bite the bullet.”

Jill nodded, biting her lip. She didn’t like the idea at all.

Once they had a temporary bandage over her cut, her grandparents made three large hot chocolates to go. While they were doing that, David was outside putting up the top on the Jeep and wiping down the seats. Ryan had gone to their camp to get shirts for David and himself.

The rain had let up as they helped Jill out of the trailer a few minutes later for the ride to the ER. Jill saw that there was indeed a poncho hanging there. Later she would learn that Ryan had dipped it in the lake to ensure that it looked wet enough.