**Summer at Cache Lake**

 **Chapter 51: With Ryan**

The next morning, as Jill made her way to the trailer on a pair of brand new crutches, she continued processing the many developments of the prior day. Physically she was going to be taking it easy for a week or so, that much was clear.

She had overheard the doctor describing her wound to a colleague as, “a 4cm contusion with a 2cm laceration at the proximal tibia.” Six stitches, which the doctor had referred to as ‘sutures,’ had been involved in closing the wound. They would come out in a week and came with restrictions that meant that she would not be going swimming for a while.

Fortunately, nothing serious had been seen on the x-ray, so her ankle had been fitted with an air cast and she had been provided with the crutches. In addition, she had a regimen to follow that involved elevating the joint as well as icing it.

She also had a few bruises here and there, a few of them quite sore, especially the one on her hip. None of them had been serious enough to require attention. It was really just the sprained ankle and the stitches in the knee that would be cramping her style for the near term.

As an active girl, Jill had dealt with her share of bumps and scrapes, but this was the first time that she had been stitched up . . . a rite of passage, as she saw it. She was determined to take it all in stride.

She had done her best to sleep with her leg elevated and was going to breakfast early to put some ice on her ankle. The Airstream’s refrigerator incorporated a good-sized freezer, something that they made considerable use of, primarily to make ice for the cooler that they kept in camp.

Jill settled herself on the couch, her leg up on a pillow, an icepack that her grandmother had prepared resting on her ankle.

“At least one of you was well prepared yesterday,” said her grandmother as she returned to the stove.

“Prepared?” asked Jill.

“You had your poncho. It’s still hanging outside. The boys obviously didn’t.”

“Right,” said Jill.

While waiting in the ER they had learned that rain had been in the forecast. Had there been reception at the lake, they would have known to take ponchos . . . or to stay home. The other group of hikers had seemingly been privy to the forecast.

Jill thought about those hikers, three guys and three girls, all more or less young adults. Katie and Brad were the only names she remembered hearing. She wondered if they would say anything to Nick. Agency and Stanton were such small towns; everyone knew everybody.

She was sure they had photos. That worried her, but the more she thought about it, she realized that they probably only showed her from the back; David had been carrying her. They probably didn’t show her face, much less her bare chest. She was probably not identifiable; however, they obviously knew of her as ‘Jill.’

At first, being seen topless by six strangers had seemed like the end of the world, but now it was starting to seem as if it might blow over.

She continued to wonder if Nick would find out. She decided that it was like Russian roulette; it only took one of the six to say something, and sooner or later one of them would.

She spent some time trying to decide if this needed to be the end of the ‘one of the guys’ agreement. Her rational side knew that she should call it quits; however, she was no longer the girl who had come to the lake in early July. She still considered herself a rational person; however, she had certainly been evolving.

When she, David, and Ryan got back to camp after breakfast, Jill went to the table. She leaned her crutches against it and pulled her shirt off over her head, folding it and placing it there. Taking the crutches back up, she made her way to her tent where she bent down, looking for a book to read. With the book in hand, about all that she could carry while using the crutches, she made her way to a chair.

“What?” she said, noticing that both boys were standing stock still, staring at her.

“It’s just that I thought you might be thinking about going cold turkey,” said David. “I mean, getting seen yesterday seemed like it was quite the shock to your system.”

“Who’s topless?” she replied. “I’m one of the guys! That’s why I don’t even have to wait for you bozos to take your shirts off.”

“That’s the spirit!” said Ryan, nodding his approval.

“Just because I’m stuck in camp, and just because yesterday was a little embarrassing . . . a lot embarrassing . . . doesn’t mean I have to go back to being uncomfortable and sweaty.”

“I guess not,” said David with a smile.

At that point, Jill realized that she had forgotten to get the sunscreen while she had been on her feet. “Ryan,” she asked. “Will you bring me the sunscreen? It’s on the table.”

“Sure,” he said. “Can I do the honors?”

“Nope . . . but if you’re nice, I’ll let you watch.” Jill knew she really couldn’t very well keep him from watching. “…and you can bring me another chair so I can elevate my leg.”

Once Jill was settled, she studied the book she had selected. As she had enjoyed the Frederick Douglass autobiography, she had decided on another. This one was entitled, ‘The Story of My Life,’ by Helen Keller. For some reason, it seemed fitting to follow up a story of one person overcoming the bonds of slavery with another individual overcoming the challenges of being born blind and deaf. From the dust jacket, Jill quickly learned that she was wrong about that. Helen Keller had not been born that way. Instead, an illness had taken her sight and hearing when she was one.

After making sure that she had what she needed, the boys took off, leaving her alone to read. She chuckled to herself as she considered that. Ryan had apparently seen so much of her boobies that he could voluntarily leave her presence.

However, she learned that she was wrong about that as well. Her tits proved to still be too much of a draw for him. He returned alone less than an hour later.

“Did you come back to keep me company, Jerk-boy?”

“Umm . . . I don’t really like being called that,” he replied, an uneasy look on his face.

“Too bad. You’re just going to have to deal with it. I’m one of the guys, and you’re a Jerk-boy. We both have our crosses to bear.” As Ryan moved a chair to sit down, she continued, “Speaking of jerking off, when do I get my next show? The pressure must be building. Because of my ankle, you’ll probably have to jerk off right here.”

Jill smiled, pleased with herself as she saw the look of surprise and discomfort on his face.

“I’m not doing that!”

Jill stuck out her lower lip in a pout.

“You really want me to?” he asked in astonishment.

Donning her best puppy dog expression, Jill looked up at him and nodded.

“Well, too bad!” he said adamantly.

“You will,” she said with a confident smile. “You’ll jerk off for me again!”

“Will not.”

“Yes, you will! You want to. I sense it.”

“Do not,” said Ryan.

Jill chuckled. His voice was not at all convincing.

“Today or tomorrow? That is all that you get to decide,” she said.

“Well . . . not in camp. David could walk in at any moment.”

Jill laughed. She knew she had him. Now it was only a matter of when and where. She decided to ease up on him for the time being – to let him adjust to his new reality.

Jill went back to reading and Ryan took out his knife and started whittling. Jill got curious about what he was making, so he pulled his chair over next to her to show her.

“It’s called a caged ball,” he said proudly. “If you like it, you can have it . . . when I’m done.”

Jill smiled and went back to reading. She was surprised he was actually trying to make something. Typically he seemed content to be making nothing more than a pile of shavings.

They were like that, sitting side-by-side, a little later when she sensed Ryan stiffen. Looking over at him, she saw that something had captured his attention; his eyes were wide open. His head was angled; he was looking at something off in the other direction.

Jill turned quickly to see what he was looking at. There stood Nick, frozen in place not more than twenty feet from them. Initially, their eyes met, but then she saw Nick’s gaze drift down to her bare chest.

“Oh . . . oops,” he said, obviously just as surprised as she was. Before she could react and cover herself, he turned around adding, “I’m so sorry.”

Jill’s face flushed. In that same instant, she saw that Nick wasn’t alone. There was a girl with him.

“So, this is the ‘Jill’ you keep talking about,” said the girl smugly.

Unlike Nick, she did not avert her eyes. Jill, however, quickly covered herself, a palm over each breast. With her left leg elevated, she was not in a very good position to do much better than that. She might have again panicked and run – had she been able to. ‘Not two more people!’ she thought, realizing that her face had to be bright red.

“Hate to tell you this, Nick,” said the girl, glancing over at him with a smile. “But it looks like your girl’s already taken.”

“Jill, this is my little sister, Martina,” said Nick, his back still facing her. “I hadn’t guessed that you and Ryan were . . . you know.”’

“…lovers!” said Martina, completing his sentence. She walked past Nick, approaching closer to Jill and Ryan.

“Umm . . . we’re…” stuttered Jill, trying to find her voice to correct their mistaken impression. “Will you get me my shirt, Ryan,” she said instead.

While Ryan got up to retrieve her shirt from the table, Jill gave a little thought to letting Nick think that there might indeed be something between the two of them. Doing so might solve two problems.

First, it would bring to an end Nick’s advances. She did like him. He was mature and obviously a gentleman. No one had turned around or otherwise averted their eyes the day before when they’d encountered the six hikers.

And second, it might be the easiest way to explain why she was topless. The truth was much too complicated and might be hard for someone to believe. However, a nineteen-year-old girl, alone and topless with a boy – who would need an explanation? Jill decided to not contest the point.

“Thanks, honey,” she said as Ryan handed her the shirt. As soon as she had said it, she was kicking herself. She saw the surprised look in Ryan’s eyes. ‘Oh, no. Now I’m going to have the opposite problem,’ she thought as she sat up to put the shirt on. She felt like standing up and leaving, but the crutches made that awkward.

“I guess we should be going,” said Nick, turning back around now that he knew that Jill was no longer exposed.

“We just got here,” protested Martina.

“But we’re intruding,” said Nick.

Even though Jill was wishing that they would leave, her manners kicked in. Also, now that she had a top on, the circumstances were quite a bit less humiliating. “Don’t run off. Have a seat,” she said. “There are drinks in the cooler. Help yourselves.” She didn’t want to jump to conclusions, but she was steamed at Katie. It was obvious that either she or someone else in her party had gotten in touch with Nick.

“Very sorry about barging in,” said Nick, taking a can from the cooler and handing one to his sister. “But when I heard about your injury, I had to come right out.”

“What exactly did you hear?” asked Jill. She was torn. She didn’t really want to hear the details, and yet she knew she needed to.

“That you’d gotten stitches and had a bad sprain,” said Nick, pointing at her ankle in the air cast. “One of my mom’s friends was in the ER...”

“Wait,” said Jill, interrupting him. “Someone from the ER told your mom?”

“Who told me,” said Nick.

“Whatever happened to patient privacy?” asked Jill in surprise.

“Oh, she doesn’t work there,” said Nick. “And she didn’t know your name. She was just talking about her own ER visit and my mom and I put two and two together. Two teen boys and a teen girl, camping at Cache Lake . . .”

“Hmm…” said Jill.

“She was there for a burn,” said Nick.

“Hey, I remember her,” said Ryan. “Fat, right?”

“Well . . . on the heavy side,” said Nick chuckling.

“Fat? Really? That’s not nice!” reprimanded Jill. Ryan just shrugged.

Jill had heard all about small towns, but this development surprised her. However, looking on the bright side, she realized that Nick must not know that she had been hiking topless. That fact hadn’t come up during her time in the ER.

“Nothing happens around here without everyone finding out,” said Nick. “Agency, Stanton . . . small towns.”

“I guess,” said Jill, shaking her head.

She heard Ryan laughing. Looking over at him, she said, “Shut up! Don’t you dare say a thing.” She was worried that he might give something away. He wouldn’t if he knew what was good for him!

“So, how is the leg?” asked Nick. “And what happened? Did you fall? I really don’t know that much.”

“Did she fall?” said Ryan again laughing.

“I told you to shut up!” said Jill, pointing an index finger between his eyes and glaring at him sternly.

She saw Ryan run a finger and thumb across his lips zipping them shut. She gave him another sharp look and turned back to Nick. She proceeded to tell him a variation of the truth, about how she had slipped and fallen in the rain, how the boys had carried her a long distance, how grateful she was about that, etc. There was no mention of how she’d been dressed, no mention of witnesses.

“Well, that will slow you up a bit,” said Nick after hearing her story.

“Not for long,” replied Jill. “I intend to bounce back . . . faster than the doctor said I might.”

“Good for you . . . just don’t be in too much of a hurry. Let things heal. You’ll be sorry if you don’t,” said Nick, acting as if he might be ready to get up and leave.

“What I want to know,” said Martina, “…is why your tits are so tan.”

“You don’t get to ask that . . . and we should go,” said Nick, standing up.

“How old are you?” asked Jill, seeing that Martina was not getting up.

“Sixteen.”

“Ever tan topless?” asked Jill.

“Maybe,” Martina replied.

“And you’re wondering how tits get tan?” asked Jill. Ryan snickered.

Realizing that she wasn’t going to get a straight answer, Martina replied, “Your tits are so tiny, but they’re cute.”

“Umm . . . I don’t think we need to talk about this,” said Jill blushing anew. She knew that it would be quickly obvious just how uncomfortable she was.

“And they’re soooo tan,” Martina added with a smile.

“Yes, they are,” said Jill, not knowing what more she could say. “Any other observations you feel inclined to share?”

Jill could tell that by putting the younger girl on the spot that she might have finally succeeded in getting her to shut up.

“Let’s go, Martina,” said Nick. “My sincere apologies for the intrusion,” he added, looking into Jill’s eyes.

“I’m glad you came,” replied Jill. Still blushing she continued, “I’m just sorry about the timing.”

“Me too,” said Nick. “We did not mean to interrupt you two.” He made a point of glancing around the campsite and added, “No walls, no doorbells.”

“I know,” said Jill. “Camping . . . no privacy.”

“Small towns . . . no privacy,” added Ryan with a chuckle.

A minute later Nick and his younger sister were gone.

“So, honey,” said Ryan teasingly while looking deep into her eyes.

“Shut up!” said Jill, again wishing she had never said that. Being somewhat socially inept certainly had its downside. “But would you get me a lemonade? My throat’s dry.”

**Chapter 52: Friday . . . Basketball**

Ryan was in a talkative mood, but Jill wasn’t. She was nearly in a state of shock. Nick and Martina meant that eight people had seen her bare breasts in under twenty-four hours.

Since she couldn’t get Ryan to leave her alone and didn’t much feel like reading, she decided to go for a beach walk, telling Ryan in no uncertain terms that he was not to tag along.

It took a little practice to figure out how one walks with crutches on sand, but she soon had it figured out.

Jill was in a very melancholy mood. This was, in part, why she had been so reluctant to go along with the ‘one of the guys’ plan in the first place; she’d be seen, and then the dominos would start to fall.

Fortunately, she didn’t think that there were any extremely incriminating or embarrassing photos out there floating around; however, she knew that it would just be a matter of time. If she continued with the toplessness, at some point those photos would be taken. They’d get out, and then she’d be dealing with the repercussions . . . probably for a very, very long time. She imagined that in ten or twenty years she’d be looking for employment and potential employers would still be finding topless pictures of her as an irresponsible teen.

Certain aspects of being topless had been fun, but being seen on back-to-back days was surely a sign. She knew what she was going to have to do.

With a heavy heart, she made her way back to camp to inform the boys. She wondered if she’d again be told that she wasn’t welcome to continue camping out at the point. She hoped not. But if it came to that, to moving her tent, then she’d just move all the way home, all the way across the state, she decided.

It had already been an amazing summer. If they didn’t want her in camp, it would be their loss. She’d just go home and continue making her way through her college reading list there.

“Ryan told me that Nick and his little sister stopped by,” said David when she returned. He’d obviously heard the whole story.

“Yep,” she said nodding. “I don’t know if you thought it might turn out like this, but in the last twenty-four hours, eight people have seen your sister’s boobs. Some of them have photographic evidence.”

“Nick?” asked David.

“I don’t think so,” said Jill. “…but he certainly got an eyeful.”

“You know we didn’t plan it this way,” said David.

“But you knew it might happen.”

“Of course, we did,” he admitted. “It’s hardly the end of the world.”

“I’m sure that’s how you see it,” she replied. “Maybe if they were your tits, you’d see it differently.”

“Are you backing out?” he asked.

“Backing out?” she said, surprised at his choice of words. “I guess. I can’t continue taking these risks. Photos will find their way onto the internet, and then my life will start to unravel.”

“You know we don’t want that to happen.”

“But you want me to continue going topless.”

“Of course, we do. It’s a lot of fun.”

Jill looked over at Ryan and saw that he was nodding in agreement.

“I’m sorry that you’ve gotten hurt. I mean the physical injury, as well as any mental trauma that being seen, has caused,” continued David. “But you’ve had fun, too. We’ll all have fond memories.”

Jill knew that was true, provided that she stopped before it was too late.

“I guess what you need to decide is if I can continue to camp here . . . now that I’m no longer going to be ‘one of the guys.’”

“Hmm…” he said as if he hadn’t yet considered that issue. “What do you say, Ryan? Kick her out? Add insult to injury?”

She looked over and saw Ryan shaking his head. “In my opinion, she’s more than earned the right to stay. If anyone has to go, it should be me,” said Ryan.

Jill smiled at him. That seemed to be an unusually gracious statement for Ryan.

“Yeah . . . you can stay,” said David. “Besides, I don’t think you’re done. You were still on board this morning. I guess Nick walking into camp somehow changed things?”

“I guess,” she agreed. “Yesterday seemed like an isolated incident. Today made it seem like a pattern. And I know Nick; he knows me.”

“You won’t see any of these people again . . . after this summer,” argued David.

“Maybe not,” said Jill. “So I can stay?”

“Of course,” said David. “We don’t own the lake.”

“But girls’ half, guys’ half?”

David laughed. “It seems funny now, doesn’t it?”

“Funny? You guys were so mean!” she said, and she meant it.

“But now we’re all friends again,” said David, acting very sincere. “And in a couple of days this will all be forgotten; you’ll be back to being ‘one of the guys.’”

“I don’t think you’ve been listening,” said Jill with a scowl.

She spent the rest of the afternoon with her shirt on and her nose buried in the Helen Keller book. She found it ironic that she happened to be reading that particular book at this juncture. Here she was, withdrawing back into her shell as she was reading about Anne Sullivan, Helen Keller’s teacher, herself blind, helping Helen communicate so that Helen might come out of her shell.

As luck would have it, the next day was Friday, the day of the weekly basketball game. Prior to her injury, Jill had been looking forward to the game, even though she knew that it was destined to be preceded by another battle of wits. The ‘shirts vs. skins’ thing would again come up, the boys endeavoring to get her to play topless. In the end, she would have again played in her bikini top. That is how she had pictured things working out. David would have pushed; she would have pushed back.

Mostly she had been looking forward to the game itself, at least that is what she kept telling herself, and it was probably true. She really loved the game. It had been so fun, how she and David had dominated. They were a well-coordinated machine on the court. She had really enjoyed playing with her high school teammates, but this was something almost completely different. For some reason, the ‘twin bond’ seemed to peak when they were playing basketball, especially on those occasions when they were on the same team.

She had thought about that a number of times during the week . . . that she would certainly admit, had she been asked. What she would not admit, however, was that on each of those occasions, she had ended up trying to imagine what it might be like to play topless.

It had been so stimulating to play in just the bikini top. She actually wanted to do that again . . . also something that she would never admit. However . . . playing topless? Such an intriguing idea! It was the forbidden fruit . . . to be avoided at all cost, yet deliciously fun to imagine. She wouldn’t let it happen, no matter how hard she was pressed, but just thinking about it caused her heart to race. That was because, in her mind’s eye, it wasn’t just David and Ryan present . . . a lot of people were there watching.

It was so fun to think about, that she had even spent time trying to figure out when and where she might be able to play topless . . . all alone, of course. Unfortunately, she hadn’t been able to think of a single basketball court that might afford the necessary level of privacy. Those that she was aware of were all in public settings, gymnasiums and wide-open school playgrounds, for example.

She had even considered sneaking over to the court across the lake, and there, playing in the wee hours before dawn. Even that would be too risky, she had concluded. There were bound to be early risers.

All that aside, she wasn’t going to be playing basketball that week. The following week, however, might be a possibility. One more week would make nine days since her fall on the slippery rocks. Her stitches would be out and it seemed conceivable to think that her ankle might be up to the task.

This week was an entirely different matter. Regrettably, Jill had decided to stay in camp. David and Ryan could walk over alone and play Kyle and Patrick. She was getting tired of sitting and reading, but it was too far of a walk to undertake on crutches, doubly so because it was a forest trail. Considering that, she realized that she hadn’t yet used the crutches enough to know her limits. She imagined the pads wearing her underarms raw.

In the end, David persuaded her to go by suggesting that they drive. That was not something that they did because it was such a great distance to drive. The direct road had fallen into disrepair decades before, becoming the path that they used around the south end of the lake. The only remaining driving route involved going nearly all the way to Agency and then heading back to Cache Lake via a separate road – essentially going over two different passes in the mountain range that bordered Cache Lake to the north, one on each side of Cornice Ridge.

Jill brightened up a little after it was decided that they would drive so that she could go. It would hardly be fun to be confined to the bench, but she was looking forward to the outing nonetheless.

“So, keeping your shirt on today, Tarzan?” asked Ryan as they returned to camp after breakfast the next day. It was destined to be a hot day, so both he and David already had their shirts off.

“You were here when we talked about this yesterday,” said Jill in a condescending tone.

“You know what I’ve been thinking about?” asked Ryan.

“Enlighten me,” said Jill with a frown, fully expecting it to be something perverted.

“You’ll no doubt recall me telling you at Skyline Adventures, while harnessing up for the ziplines, that the next time you’d go topless.”

Jill hadn’t forgotten. She looked up towards the heavens for divine intervention and sighed deeply.

“Well, we’re one big step closer . . . now that Nick knows how cute your little titties are . . . the ice has been broken. We should definitely go ziplining again!”

“You never give up, do you…” She stopped herself midsentence. She had almost called him ‘Jerk-boy’ in David’s presence . . . something she had been purposefully avoiding. Instead, she added, “You really weren’t listening.”

“Oh, I was listening,” said Ryan. “I just know how much you were enjoying top-freedom . . . pointing your bare nips wherever your heart desired. Those rock-hard little rosebuds . . . they love the sunshine!”

Jill just shook her head, doing her best to pretend that it wasn’t true. She knew that she was going to miss it. Going back to keeping her breasts hidden was not destined to be a fun transition; however, she had always known that her summer of toplessness would come to an end. After all, she was college bound. At college, there would be no toplessness.

Rather than respond, Jill went to her tent for a book. She had finished the Helen Keller autobiography. Thinking that a novel might help her through the coming somber period, she selected, ‘Giants in the Earth,’ by O. E. Rølvaag. She knew little about it beyond that it was the story of a Norwegian immigrant family creating a life for themselves on the Great Plains in nineteenth-century America.

As she made her way back to her chair on her crutches, her mind lapsed back to what Ryan had been suggesting. A shiver passed through her body, from one end to the other, as she imagined herself zooming through the treetops, ziplining, breasts bare.

Before she could stop herself, she found that she was wondering if Skyline Adventures might be closed one day during that week. If so, that might make it possible for her to go with Nick and the boys, and then with them as her only witnesses, she could zipline topless. Maybe Nick had a key . . . maybe he could get permission . . . in which case . . .

She stopped herself right there. What was wrong with her? Her shirt was staying on. Why was she even putting herself through the ridiculous exercise of imagining doing something so crazy? It wasn’t going to happen. Opening her book, she tuned out her surroundings and entered the long-ago world of Per Hansa and his wife Beret.

A while later, David brought her back to reality by asking, “What’s so funny?”

Jill hadn’t realized that she had been chuckling.

“So this Norwegian couple lives in the middle of nowhere,” she explained. “In the distance . . . there are no trees because they live on the Great Plains . . . they see a wagon approaching. So, the man tells his wife that they have company coming . . . to get out the coffee! Coffee is very precious, you see. It reaches the east coast via ship, sailing ship most likely. It then makes its way out to the Great Plains . . . via horse-drawn wagon.”

“What’s funny about that?”

“Well, as the wagon gets closer, Per Hansa sees that there are three people coming. ‘Hide the coffee,’ he tells his wife.”

“Afraid they’ll steal it?” he asked, a puzzled expression on his face.

“No, silly. There’s just a limit to his generosity,” said Jill with a smile. Early indications were that it was going to be an enjoyable book.

When they reached the basketball court that afternoon, Kyle, Patrick, Eric, and Hector were all there shooting baskets. Jill looked around for the girls who had made an appearance the prior week. She was glad to see that they were nowhere in sight.

As soon as the guys saw the crutches, they surrounded Jill, bombarding her with questions and voiced expressions of concern.

Jill told the tale of her injury just about exactly as she had done for Nick. She kept it short, a slip and a fall onto sharp rocks on a steep slope. There was no mention of clothing . . . or lack thereof. That was unnecessary. Who would guess that she might have been hiking above Cornice Ridge in the rain, wearing nothing more than shoes and the bottom half of a bikini?

The guys, very graciously, said how sorry they were that she would not be able to play that week. In the back of her mind, Jill suspected that the opposite might really be the case. After all, Kyle and Patrick had a much better chance of winning two-on-two against David and Ryan.

Jill really did want to play. Once her tale had been told, she made her way to one of the keys and laid down her crutches. She got Kyle to toss her the ball. She shot a few baskets, hopping around on one foot a little to maintain balance. She was having fun and the guys all seemed to enjoy taking turns feeding her the ball.

After a couple of minutes of that, it was time for the game. A coin was tossed and it was determined that David and Ryan would be ‘shirts.’ They were both shirtless; however, upon hearing the outcome of the toss, Ryan didn’t object and two shirts miraculously appeared from a small duffle that they had brought with them in the Jeep.

Jill’s jaw dropped. As she had suspected, Ryan’s stink the prior week, insisting that they be ‘skins,’ had simply been part of a scheme to put pressure on her to play topless. Frowning at David, she turned and made her way to the bench on her crutches.

**Chapter 53: Ryan’s Tree**

A few minutes into the game, Amanda and the other girls did stop by. They sat down next to Jill, forcing her to again recount the details of her injury. After listening to the story, the girls hung around but turned their attention to the action on the court.

Either because she wasn’t playing, because she was wearing a shirt, or because they had gotten it out of their systems, none of them again brought up how ‘lucky’ she was to have small breasts. Jill was glad about that, and she felt much more comfortable around them. They were treating her more like a peer.

Jill enjoyed the game, having a good time analyzing each player’s strengths and weaknesses. At halftime, she mentioned to David that Patrick was over committing every time he charged in for an overhand layup. All David would have to do would be to slow down at the last second or alter course, maybe go in for a reverse layup. Those small changes might allow him to take the shot essentially unguarded. Making use of Jill’s astute observation, David was able to score a number of baskets in the second half.

And yet it wasn’t enough. Without Jill on the court, David and Ryan came up short. They lost by just three points, but a loss was a loss.

Jill had considered challenging the guys to a game of horse at the conclusion of the game. She thought it would be fun and she was pretty sure that she could be competitive even though she would be shooting while balancing on just one foot. However, once the game ended, she decided that no one would be in the mood. Additionally, it occurred to her that Ryan might suggest a game of strip horse. She’d never heard of that, but she wouldn’t put it past him to think up some rules. She decided to not push her luck. She’d gotten through the entire game without anyone suggesting that she take off her top. She chalked that up to Ryan’s concerns about the pictures she had of him.

After a quick conversation in which everyone agreed to return the following week for another game, they climbed into the Jeep and headed back.

David was in the habit of showering after their games, so as soon as they got back to camp, he grabbed what he needed and headed off in the direction of the Airstream.

“You’re up, Jerk-boy!” said Jill as soon as David had gone.

“What?” said Ryan, acting as if he had no idea what she was talking about.

“Yesterday, we decided, ‘today or tomorrow.’ Tomorrow is now today.”

“You’re not making any sense.”

“Bottom line, it’s time . . . time for you to jerk off.”

“Aww, Jill. I don’t think I can.”

“Sure you can. I’ve seen you. You’ve had a lot of practice . . . a LOT of practice.”

“But…”

“Quit stalling! We don’t have forever.”

“But not here.”

“Stalling!” she said talking over him. “We need to hurry. David will be back.”

“But . . . well... But . . . in the forest,” said Ryan, capitulating.

“Same place?”

“Why not?” asked Ryan.

“Because . . . the crutches. I’m slow in the forest. It would take me forever to get there.”

“I guess I could carry you.”

“Piggyback?”

“Sure,” agreed Ryan.

Jill had ridden a long distance on his back, yet it seemed a little odd to let him carry her into the forest for the purpose of a masturbation show. And yet, it was going to be uncomfortable no matter where they did it, piggyback ride or not.

“Leave your phone here?” requested Ryan.

“Umm . . . okay,” she agreed.

A minute later, Jill was on Ryan’s back as he made his way into the forest. She had to hold on, but she was doing her best to keep the fact that her arms were around him from seeming like she was hugging him. She wanted to make Ryan do this; she even thought she’d enjoy it, but she didn’t want it to change their relationship significantly.

“Getting stiff yet, Jerk-boy,” she asked to tease him.

“Oh, boy . . . how did I ever get myself into this?” he grumbled.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes,’” she giggled.

After a brief pause, Ryan asked solemnly, “Do you like me, Jill?”

“Not saying,” she replied. “I don’t want you to get the wrong idea. Your job it to whip it out, make it hard, make it happy, make it squirt. That needs to be Jerk-boy’s focus.”

“And what’s your job?”

“To make this as humiliating for you as possible.”

“You’ve got to help!”

“I’m not helping. I’m not getting anywhere near that thing.”

“But you want to.”

“Do not! Turn around! We’re going back,” she snapped.

“I’m not going back,” said Ryan.

Jill laughed out loud. “I knew you wanted to do this!”

Ryan didn’t reply and Jill continued, “But I’m definitely not helping. That has to be clear.”

“Just do what you did before,” requested Ryan.

“What did I do before?”

“You know . . . looking hot,” he said.

“Topless?” asked Jill.

“Please!”

“I’ll think about it,” she said softly.

She wasn’t going to go back to being one of the guys, but this was different.

“Okay,” she said finally. “…but no touching.”

“I’ll kiss your nipples.”

“No, you won’t.”

“You’ll enjoy it. You need me for that. Sucking . . . another one of my services! You can’t reach them yourself, remember?”

“That’s irrelevant. It hardly matters what I can and cannot do myself.”

“Then . . . we both need to be naked. You know, play doctor.”

“I’m calling the shots, Jerk-boy!” she stated in no uncertain terms.

“I think you’re going to show me your pussy. I think you want to.”

Jill let out a gasp. “Do not!”

Suddenly she was feeling a little vulnerable. Here she was, all alone with him, deep in the forest. She trusted Ryan, but he was getting excited and it was obviously giving him ideas. He acted as if he was feeling bolder than usual.

“Topless only, and no touching. No touching of any kind. Those are the rules. You need to promise . . . or take me back . . . right now!”

Ryan agreed reluctantly. Hearing him promise helped Jill relax. A minute or two later they arrived at Ryan’s tree. Jill slid off.

Noticing how embarrassed Ryan looked, avoiding her gaze, Jill announced, “Showtime! Off with the pants!”

“Jill…” he pleaded.

“We don’t have time for this,” she said, hopping along on her good leg. Being careful to skirt the patch of ground where she had seen Ryan’s ejaculate land, she made her way over to a log. “Pants off!” she exclaimed as she took a seat.

Ryan’s hands went to his belt buckle but lingered there motionless.

“I’m not doing that for you,” she said, indicating his belt. She felt very out of character. This was not who she was; this was who she was pretending to be. Something deep inside her psyche wanted a little payback. She almost wished she wasn’t there, and yet she had initiated this so she was going to see it through. “If you think this is embarrassing,” she added. “Just wait until we both return to camp together. If David is there, he’ll be curious. I’ll have to tell him. He’ll want to see the photos.”

“You wouldn’t!” said Ryan.

“We have a deadline, Jerk-boy. Why are your pants still on?”

Slowly Ryan undid his buckle and a moment later started lowering his shorts.

“Underwear, too! Are you going to take all day to strip?”

“What about your shirt?” he asked sheepishly.

Jill scowled, but a second later she had it off. Ryan’s eyes were glued to her bare breasts as he slid his underwear down, his boner popping free.

Jill took in a sharp breath of air, her eyes glued to his rock-solid member. It jutted obscenely skyward as Ryan took ahold of it timidly.

“This is so embarrassing,” he said, looking away.

Jill knew exactly what he meant. Her cheeks were burning. She felt so embarrassed to be sitting there, topless, looking at a guy’s dick not more than fifteen feet in front of her. Somehow it hadn’t been nearly as bad before. Everything felt very different this time, the circumstances having been artificially arranged and by none other than she herself. It all seemed so very awkward, but there was no going back.

Jill looked up and saw Ryan looking at her.

“Why don’t you close your eyes like before?” she said, wishing he would.

“Why don’t you play with your titties?” he replied.

Jill reached up and pressed them together.

“Yeah! Try and get the nipples to touch,” he suggested, obviously appreciating the action.

“I’m way too small . . . my boobs, I mean.”

“I know. I didn’t say to touch your nipples together. I said to try. You won’t be able to, but it will be fun to watch and see how close together you get them.”

Jill dug the heel of each hand into the sides of her breasts, shoving them together. Looking down she saw that she had actually created a minute amount of cleavage; her two small breasts were touching. Pressing her hands forcefully into her ribs, she got her nipples much closer to one another than they were at rest.

“Like this?” she asked, looking up at Ryan.

He smiled appreciatively. “Yes. Like that,” he said. “Now lick them.”

“I can’t,” said Jill.

“Just show me how close you can come to your nipples with your tongue. The point isn’t doing it. The point is trying. I want to watch you try.”

Jill looked down at his dick, his hand stroking back and forth along its length. She stared at it, feeling her own arousal increasing. Without a comment, she grasped her left boob in her right hand. As she bent her neck down, she lifted her breast up toward her face.

“Like this?” she asked, glancing up.

“Don’t forget your tongue.”

Jill returned her eyes to her breast. She snaked her tongue out as far as if would go. To her surprise, her tongue touched skin. She hadn’t known she could get that close. She had licked her breast, just not the nipple.

“Cool!” said Ryan. “Close, right?”

“Closer than I thought I might get,” she said, switching sides.

She pulled her right boob up toward her face. Again her tongue touched skin. “I got pretty close,” she said proudly, again looking up at Ryan.

In that instant, she heard him grunt and saw his dick twitch as the first glob rocketed toward her.

“That didn’t take long,” she giggled.

“Oh, Jill,” he panted as his dick continued pumping out glob after glob. “That was fun.”

“Fun, but quick,” she teased.

“You seem to have no idea just how hot you are.”

“Little ole me?” said Jill, placing a hand flat on her chest and giving him a coy smile.

“Yes, you. Now get over here and put a nipple in my mouth. I sense that you want to know what it’s like to have your nipples sucked, and besides, it’s your turn to cum.”

“Nope. Play time’s over,” said Jill, picking up her shirt and turning it to get it aligned to put on.

“Oh,” said Ryan sadly. “Leave the shirt off . . . please . . . at least until we get back to camp.”

Jill smiled at him as she disregarded his wish, pulling the shirt on over her head. “Say, bye, bye, titties.”

“Bye, bye, titties,” he said obediently.

Jill felt a bit glum about covering her chest; it had only just come out of hiding. She hopped back over towards Ryan, preparing to climb onto his back. She slowed when she saw that his shorts and underwear were still on the ground.

“I think you want to touch it,” said Ryan.

His comment made Jill realize that she had been staring at his dick.

“Do not,” she said, averting her eyes. “Now put that weenie away! Our deadline, remember?”

They were halfway back before either said another word. Jill was lost in thought. How unusual it was to get a piggyback ride from the guy she had just watched ejaculate. Her braless breasts were again pressing against him, but this time there was a layer of cloth in between.

“I think you like me,” said Ryan. Jill didn’t respond, so he continued, “That was more fun than I thought it would be.”

‘That’s because you got to cum,’ she thought. She knew that she’d have to wait until after bedtime before she would be able to take care of her own needs.

“Can we do that again?” he asked. “Tomorrow?”

“Um . . . I don’t know.”

“We should,” he said. “And I want to carry you every time . . . even after your ankle is better. It’s really nice to have you close like this.”

Jill wasn’t sure she was in agreement, but more than anything she felt the need for her own orgasm.

Fortunately, they were back in camp before David returned.

Jill got her book and her water bottle and sat down to read. After she had located her page, she looked up. Ryan was just sitting there . . . staring right at her.

“What?” she asked, somewhat perturbed.

He didn’t reply so she looked back down to start reading.

“Jill,” he said.

“I said, ‘what?’” she replied, looking back up.

“I think we should take our relationship to the next level,” he said matter-of-factly.

‘Oh, no,’ she thought. ‘What have I done?’

Fearing what he was going to say, she stood up abruptly. “Let’s not talk about this. It’s too awkward.” Tucking her book into the waistband of her shorts and grabbing her crutches, she headed off.

“Where are you going?”

“To the trailer. I’ll read there.”

“Then we can talk later,” he said optimistically as she departed.

Jill didn’t reply. She passed David halfway. “I’ll be with grandma and grandpa . . . reading,” she said, not pausing for a reply.

**Chapter 54: Arrowhead Falls**

It was warm and stuffy in the trailer, so after exchanging some pleasantries with her grandparents, Jill sat outside under the awning. After she had a read a few pages, her grandmother joined her and they read their respective books side by side.

Her grandmother had brought out some grapes, one of Jill’s favorite snacks, so Jill helped herself to a large bunch and ate them as she read about Per Hansa and his family’s very limited and meager diet during that first winter on the prairie. Fortunately, Per had been smarter than his neighbors. While they had focused on building their houses, he had planted a late crop of potatoes. Because of his decision, he had difficulty getting a roof over their heads, but he was the only one in the vicinity with a crop to harvest that first fall.

Jill read all the rest of that day. That night in her tent she ended up thinking about how she had instructed Ryan to beat off . . . and how he had done it! She got herself just as worked up thinking about that as she had been watching Ryan pumping his dick. Lying there naked, she allowed her fingers to tease her slit for a while, but then she forced herself to stop.

She thought about trying to bite down on something and in that way attempt to have a quiet orgasm. She decided she didn’t trust herself. She wasn’t going to again be teased by the boys for moaning. Unfortunately, her sprained ankle made it so that slipping away under the cover of darkness did not seem like an option. She was pretty sure she’d wake them up getting herself up and out of her tent, and if she succeeded at that, then making her way up the beach in the darkness seemed too risky. Falling and getting hurt seemed like a possibility. It probably wouldn’t happen, but it wasn’t something she wanted to chance. All in all, she decided to do her best to turn her thoughts away from her body’s needs and focus on getting some sleep.

The following day, Jill finished ‘Giants in the Earth’ just before noon. By the time she had made it all the way through the book, she was feeling quite bored. To keep herself from going stir crazy, she volunteered to drive her grandparents in to Agency. They wanted to do some grocery shopping. Fortunately, their truck was an automatic, so it wasn’t an issue that Jill’s left foot was out of commission.

The post office was their first stop. Jill had another couple of books waiting for her. She looked blankly at the garbage can in the lobby as she walked by.

While her grandparents were shopping, she went to the library to use a computer to order more books. ‘Giants in the Earth,’ had brought to eight the number of books that she had read for her freshman core humanities course, only about a third of the titles on the list; however, that was probably eight more than almost all of her future classmates. Thinking back over all that she had read, she felt really good about her decision to get a jump on her fall semester.

As her grandparents were never in a hurry, Jill took some time to catch up with her friends back home via social media. Since her ankle and knee injuries were her news, she took a sad-faced selfie with her crutches and posted it. She hadn’t posted anything for a long time.

She tried to call Dani, but when she didn’t pick up, she called Amber instead. It was nice to hear all that she had to say. The conversation was reassuring in that it sounded like an ordinary boring summer back in Holden. She didn’t seem to be missing out on any excitement. Amber was still enjoying her new job as a hostess. She said that she had been working evenings, so she had not had much contact with Dani. She mostly blamed that on Dani spending all her time with her new boyfriend, Brendan.

Hearing mention of Brendan, reminded Jill of Ryan as the two of them were such good friends. Once Jill had said goodbye to Amber, she took care of something that she had wanted to do the next time she had cell reception. She picked out the best explicit photos from the last set that she had taken of Ryan beating off. She emailed them to herself so that they would be secure, no matter what might befall her phone.

That afternoon, she started her ninth book, ‘Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,’ by Dee Brown. Given that it consisted of over four hundred pages on a very ignominious chapter in American history, it looked like it would be a challenge to read. Fifty pages in, she knew that it was going to be a very emotional experience; certain parts were destined to be so sad that she thought she might have to skip over them.

Like the rest of North America, Cache Lake had been Indian country, and there was a giant Indian reservation just twenty miles up the road.

Even the town of Agency itself had gotten its name from the Indians in a roundabout way. It had been a crossroads. As she understood it, the Indians had used the area as a trading post of sorts, supposedly for centuries, prior to the arrival of the white man. Later the U.S. Government established an Indian Agency there to communicate with the local Indians on an official level. A generation or two later, the small settlement that had sprung up around the Indian Agency had been incorporated simply as, ‘Agency.’

The name of Stanton had a related origin. It had been named after the region’s first Indian Agent, Hiram Stanton.

The next day was Sunday, the fourth day after Jill’s accident. Jill felt as if she was about to go crazy due to all the sitting and reading.

“Guys, let’s go to Arrowhead Falls . . . after breakfast,” she suggested.

Due to the distance, it was not a place that they visited often, but her book had gotten her thinking of the place. Years before, her brother had found an obsidian arrowhead there. It was that find that had led them to designate it, ‘Arrowhead Falls.’ That arrowhead had always been one of David’s most prized possessions. He and Jill both imagined that an Indian must have been hunting. Likely his shot had missed his intended game. As they pictured it, he had not been able to find the arrow and it had remained there, probably for centuries, everything but the arrowhead itself rotting away. And then a lucky David Wahlund, just nine or ten at the time, had chanced upon it.

They all agreed upon the falls as a suitable destination and after breakfast went about preparing a lunch and packing up what they wanted to take with them.

The falls was indeed a good distance, requiring a drive to reach the starting point. The trail, however, at least the first part, was straight and nearly level. It would have been perfect for someone on crutches, had it been a little wider.

Jill wore her bikini underneath the shirt and shorts she had put on for the hike. The pool of water below the falls wasn’t deep enough for actual swimming, but she knew that she’d strip down to just the bikini and wade in.

The trail was undeveloped, meaning that there were no signs, resulting in very little use. Arrowhead Falls itself didn’t measure up in comparison to some of the more impressive falls in the area, no doubt keeping it from receiving much attention.

As the crow flies, the falls was about ten miles west of the trail to Cornice Ridge. Geologically speaking, the area north of Cache Lake was simply one long mountain range. At Cornice Ridge and their recently named ‘Tarzan Ridge,’ they could look down upon Agency. If they took the trail toward Arrowhead Falls but kept going, they would eventually reach a ridge high above Stanton. From there they would have sweeping views of Stanton and the rolling hills beyond.

That ridge, which they had years ago started calling simply ‘Stanton Ridge’ was actually a very popular destination; however, those who hiked there predominantly climbed up from a trailhead on the outskirts of Stanton. The trail on that side of the ridge was large and well-traveled. David and Jill had only seen it from the top. There had never been the occasion to hike down to Stanton or to locate the trailhead near Stanton and hike up.

They had both visited Stanton Ridge a number of times. From there one had access to a few peaks: Pimple Peak and Spaghetti, for example. Those were, of course, their own names for them. They had agreed on the name of Pimple Peak for the obvious reason that they had been in a silly mood and had decided that it looked a lot like a zit. Spaghetti had received its name because the first time they had climbed it, they had been with their parents. Their mother had packed leftover spaghetti for lunch. All the way back down after lunch, Jill and David had been singing the well-known kid’s song, ‘On Top of Spaghetti.’

Those were the destinations further up the trail; however, with Jill on crutches, they had their sights on a short hike much lower down, just to the falls and back.

Jill knew that the odds of encountering other hikers were extremely low. So low in fact that she was wondering why she had decided that she would never again hike as ‘one of the guys.’ But she had and was planning to stick with her decision.

“Would you guys mind if I hiked in just my bikini top?” she asked as they were getting out of the Jeep after parking alongside the dusty road. There wasn’t a parking lot there as the trailhead was completely unmarked.

“Not at all,” said Ryan. “You know I’ve been wanting to see your pussy. Just the top half is an awesome idea!”

Jill flushed. “You know that is not at all what I meant!” she said, shuddering at the thought. “The shorts stay on, at least until the falls.”

“And then the pussy comes out?” Ryan asked mischievously.

“No! Of course not, dipshit! The other half of my suit is underneath,” she said. ‘What I put up with!’ she thought as she took off her shirt.

“You should just leave the bikini top in the Jeep, Jilly,” suggested David. “It’s just us. You know we aren’t likely to run into anyone else today.”

“I know,” she replied, but she kept the top, with its little underwire cups, on just as she had decided. Grabbing the crutches, she took the lead, heading off along the straight and level trail.

She hadn’t gone more than a few hundred yards before she realized that she had a problem. The pads on the crutches at her armpits were rubbing against the small wires that gave the cups their shape. Those were, in turn, digging into her flesh. If she continued as she was, she’d be rubbed raw long before they got to the falls.

“I guess I have to go back for my shirt,” she told them. “…or to speed this up, one of you could run back and grab it for me.” She explained the problem, showing them where the ends of the wires were digging in.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Jill,” said David. “There is an obvious solution. Lose the top.”

In the next moment, she felt someone pulling on the string, untying the bow behind her back.

“Hey!” she snapped, spinning around. Her motion contributed to the untying effort and she felt the top go slack. Ryan was standing there; caught red-handed, he had a shit-eating grin plastered across his face.

“Hey!” she repeated. “You guys promised . . . no stripping.”

“I’m just helping . . . not stripping,” he said. “Look, your top’s still on.”

Jill glanced down. The cups were still in position. What Ryan had said was technically correct.

“Just take it off. You’re among friends,” encouraged David.

“Not happening. Stop being so pushy!” she scolded, holding the top to her breasts while keeping an eye on Ryan.

In that instant, she felt David grab and pull the string where it was tied behind her neck.

“You guys!” she said in mock anger. “Two on one . . . not fair!” Jill decided that it seemed like a fun game, but they were being so naughty.

“You’re not fooling anyone, Jilly,” said David. “You don’t want the top on, and it’s uncomfortable because of the crutches. The answer is obvious.”

“Yeah, three against none!” announced Ryan with glee.

Jill didn’t know what to do. They were right. It had been four days since she had been topless for any significant amount of time. She was starting to miss it – the sense of freedom combined with the fresh air and sunshine.

David saw in her eyes that she was waffling. “Good choice,” he said, holding out his hand for her top.

“What are you going to do with it?” she asked, keeping her hands right where they were.

“Well, I’m not taking it back to the Jeep, that’s for sure,” he replied. “I vote we leave it here.”

“Okay . . . I guess. But I’m only going to be topless for this one hike,” she said sheepishly. She felt her cheeks redden as she let the top fall. She placed it in David’s hand. She didn’t want it to seem as if he were calling the shots, but she didn’t want the top on or even with them. She preferred the escalating level of exhilaration that she experienced as the distance to her clothing increased.

“How ‘bout I hang it here?” said David, looping it over an eye-level branch next to the trail.

“Someone might take it,” she objected.

“But you said yourself that no one else would be on this trail today.”

“That’s not exactly what I said. Put it on that branch,” said Jill, pointing a short distance into the forest.

“Okay,” agreed David, stepping off the trail to do as she instructed. “But it will be harder to find. Not my fault if we end up going home without it.”

“I’ll recognize the spot,” said Jill, looking around to note details.

“You’ve got the greatest, most pointiest, most diamond hardiest nipples on the planet!” announced Ryan gleefully.

“I guess I know where your mind is,” said Jill, turning her head to see that he was indeed staring wide-eyed at her chest, an infatuated look on his face.

“Just trying to make you blush.”

“It’s working!” laughed David.

“Stop it,” said Jill, taking up her crutches and wielding them threateningly. However, there was no denying it. The four-day interruption in her topless adventures meant that it did again feel more embarrassing to have her breasts bare – and to have Ryan blatantly talking about them while openly staring at her.

“The chance to examine those mouth-watering morsels at close range is an opportunity that requires comment,” said Ryan.

“No it doesn’t,” said Jill, her cheeks crimson red.

“Young guys everywhere should have the chance to see these supermodel tits!” he added.

“No! Absolutely not!” she snapped. “And they’re not supermodel tits.”

“But they are!” he exclaimed. “If you’re ready to look at my copy of the Swimsuit Edition, you’ll be convinced.”

“No I won’t,” she said obstinately. “Now let’s go before I change my mind.”

She headed off, gliding along quickly on her crutches. She was already an expert on their use and the uncomfortable rubbing was gone. At a spot where a down tree caused her a little difficulty, Ryan shot past. He started walking along backwards as he had done the first day on the beach, smiling and enjoying the view.

“You’re gonna trip,” she remarked.

“But it will have been worth it,” he replied. “Your tits look great dressed only in crutches.”

“Oh, boy,” she said, shaking her head. “I look great in backpack. I look great in crutches.”

Jill did her best to sound disgusted, but the truth of the matter was that it did her heart good to hear Ryan talk like that. His comments combined with the smitten look on his face felt like warm sunshine to a girl who had spent years believing that she was ugly for the simple reason that her breasts were tiny. And what made it really nice for Jill was that Ryan was not the sort of guy that might be able to hide his true feelings.

“But you do!” he exclaimed happily.

They came to the small unmarked side trail that led to the falls. Ryan and Jill had walked right by it, but David had been watching more carefully.

A short while later, they were at the falls.

**Chapter 55: Arrowhead Falls, continued**

“Ryan’s right, Jilly,” remarked David. “You do look great in crutches. Time for a photo . . . your phone, of course. This summer merits documentation, even if only you have the pictures.”

Jill saw no reason to protest. After unlocking her phone for him, she went forward and turned so that the small waterfall would be the backdrop.

“What do you think you’re doing, Ryan?” asked David. Jill glanced over. Ryan had slipped in next to her.

“Jill and I together,” he suggested, beaming.

“It’s up to Jill,” said David, looking at the image on the small screen.

“Sure . . . why not?” she said. As she saw it, the photos would never see the light of day. After a few shots, she felt Ryan’s arm around her back, his hand on her shoulder gently pulling her close. “That’s plenty,” she said after two more shots, spinning to get free of his arm.

“Shall I take some of you and David?” Ryan offered.

“Umm . . . no,” said Jill. There was no reason to take a topless photo with her brother. She’d have to delete it to be certain that no one would see it . . . ever. A photo like that would be misunderstood, no doubt about it.

Jill slid off her shorts and took off her shoes along with the air cast. She then ‘waded’ into the water, hopping along on one foot, splashing as she went. It might now be okay for the stitches to get a little wet; however, to be on the safe side, that morning she had taped a waterproof layer over the top of a fresh dressing. It might leak a little, but it was much better than nothing.

The cool spray from the falls was refreshing. Jill looked down at her even tan. She imagined that she had to look pretty good in just her little bikini bottoms. A supermodel body though? Supermodel tits? She didn’t think so. But she knew that her nipples were very attractive. If she had learned anything that summer, it was that it made no sense to go to a lot of effort to keep such nipples from poking out such that they were visible in a shirt. She now believed that they almost made up for her small breasts. Like her legs and butt, they were an asset. ‘No more layers!’ she decided then and there.

“Stop splashing!” she yelled. The boys were again ganging up. “No fair!” she added, doing her best to return the fire. It was difficult, given that she had twice as many targets to aim at and had to remain stationary, most of her weight on one foot.

“You’re splashing too!” yelled David.

“But why is it always two on one? Let’s get Ryan!” she called out in a blatant attempt to get David to switch sides.

“Nah . . . this is more fun,” he replied.

“But my stitches. They’re not supposed to get wet.”

“They’re fine,” said David, doubling his efforts to soak her.

When she finally gave up and headed back to dry land, Jill was glad that they had towels with them. She was soaked. She looked down and saw the sunlight glistening on the water droplets clinging to her naked breasts. She thought her nipples looked like lovely little rose-colored gumdrops, but she made sure to look away quickly. She didn’t want to get teased for checking herself out.

After lunch, they spread out a bit, each of them laying their towel in a spot of their choosing. Jill found a place that she liked right at the edge of the pool. It was only partially in the sunlight. Way up high there were branches swaying in the summer breeze allowing just the right amount of sun to filter through.

Jill had been slipping in and out of sleep when about fifteen minutes later she felt a tickle at her left breast. Thinking that it had to be an insect, she tipped her head up to look. To her surprise, Ryan’s head was right there. He was giving her nipple an Eskimo kiss with his nose.

She inhaled to scream as he placed an index finger to his lips. “Shhh,” he whispered. She saw him glance over to his right, indicating that she should look. Looking over, she saw that David appeared to be sleeping on his towel some twenty feet away.

As she shifted her eyes back, Ryan engulfed her entire nipple in his mouth. She felt it being drawn in between his lips. It had all happened in just a matter of seconds.

“Eww…” she yelled out in shock, suddenly wide awake. She pushed him away, doing her best to sit up. “What the f\*\*k?!” she shouted.

“It’s just me,” he said, surprise evident in his expression.

In the next instant, Jill slapped his face for all she was worth. “Get the f\*\*k away from me!” she screamed.

Suddenly David was there. “What the hell?!” he yelled, pulling Ryan up off of his sister.

“You don’t understand,” she heard Ryan say as David shoved him forcefully, the palms of his hands impacting Ryan’s chest audibly.

Ryan stumbled back. Tripping, he fell hard, landing on his butt in the shallow water.

“You f\*\*king idiot!” yelled David as he grabbed Ryan’s hair and yanked his face into his knee.

In horror, Jill watched Ryan fall to the side. He lay there for a second or two before continuing to roll over onto his front. He started trying to get up. He had just managed to push up to his hands and feet when David landed the next blow, an upward kick to the gut.

Jill was torn. She knew Ryan had it coming, but she hated seeing David like this. So many times she had been forced to intervene. He was typically so calm and collected, but when he snapped, he snapped. Over the years, he’d gotten in a lot of trouble for fighting.

With his arms holding his belly, Ryan managed to get back to his feet. He looked up just in time to see David turn to Jill and ask, “What did he do?”

“Sucked my nipple,” she replied angrily, a look of embarrassment in her eyes.

“Asshole!” David shouted, turning his attention back to Ryan.

Jill saw the fury in David’s eyes as he sized him up. Ryan stood there motionless, calf-deep in the water. Launching angrily at him, David landed a quick one-two punch to the jaw.

Ryan had a look of pain and bewilderment in his eyes as he again stumbled back. To Jill, it appeared as if he had no intention of defending himself. She saw him glance away from David to look into her eyes. David landed the next punch solidly on his stomach. As Ryan started to double over, David landed an uppercut. Again, Ryan stumbled, falling to a knee.

Trying to read the look on his face, Jill found herself wondering if this might possibly be an honest misunderstanding. From Ryan’s perspective, all that had gone on between the two of them might be interpreted quite differently than the way she had been viewing it. She scowled. Could he really be that stupid?

“David, stop!” she yelled. Grabbing her crutches, she struggled to her feet.

“After I’ve reduced him to a bloody pulp,” said David, moving in for another attack.

“No . . . stop! Now!” she yelled, making her way into the water to get between them. “Let me talk to him.”

“What the hell for?” he asked, pausing. “He’s a piece of shit. He promised to never do anything like that.”

“That was before…” said Ryan, but his voice was weak. Feeling his jaw he looked over at Jill.

“Before what?” asked David angrily. “We agreed . . . if you wanted to touch my sister, you had to date her . . . ask her out. You said you could keep your hormones in check . . . if I went along with this cockamamie scheme of yours.”

“Let me talk to him,” she repeated. As David seemed to be respecting her wishes, she went back for her towel. Picking it up, she wrapped it around herself, tucking the end down between her breasts so her hands would again be free for the crutches.

“Okay . . . I guess. But I’m not letting either of you out of my sight,” he said, looking back and forth from one of them to the other.

Jill made her way a short distance into the water toward Ryan. With one hand she shooed David away, indicating that he should give them some space. Reluctantly, David backed away to the other side of the clearing. Jill saw that he was watching them with an eagle eye.

“What the hell?” she demanded, turning back to face Ryan.

“Your nipples. They’ve been begging for attention. You can’t give them what they need; you can’t reach them. I watched you try. And I know you have feelings for me! Don’t deny it. The way you were hugging me when I carried you down the hill, pressing your chest into my back.” Pausing, he added, “Even Nick and his sister sensed it.”

“Oh, Ryan,” she said, sighing and shaking her head.

“We’re ready, Jill. Let’s give this a try . . . you and me. What do you say?” She saw him attempt a sweet smile even though he looked to be in pain.

“I suppose I’m guilty of leading you on a little,” she admitted, hanging her head. “I know you were thinking . . . a relationship. Well, I’m not. I should have kept things much more clear between the two of us. And I couldn’t help that . . . the piggyback ride . . . I was only holding on, and I was cold.”

“You wanted your picture with me,” he said, a look of confusion on his face. “With just me. Not with David. You let me put my arm around you.”

“True . . . but it was just a picture. Only a picture!” she said. And yet she could think of other things that had happened or been said, things that had contributed to him having the wrong impression.

“The kind of sex that you enjoy is odd . . . to be sure,” said Ryan. “Kinky even, but I’ve been trying to be open-minded about that.”

Jill looked over at David nervously.

“Did he just say ‘sex’?” asked David, a look of bewilderment on his face.

Jill hadn’t realized that he might be close enough to hear.

“There’s been no sex,” she said, her face angled toward David to make sure that he could hear. Turning back, she studied Ryan’s eyes. Realizing that everything was going to come out, she continued, “Well, he jerks off for me . . . but only a couple of times. That’s not sex.”

Looking back at David, she saw surprise in his eyes. A moment later he erupted in laughter. “Only a couple of times?!” he said gleefully.

“While she performs for me,” said Ryan, “…attempting to lick her own nipples. Of course, she can’t, but she tries. It’s cute as hell.”

Jill saw David studying her. She’d never felt so ashamed nor crestfallen. She knew how she must look, her face and upper chest bright red from extreme embarrassment.

“You guys,” said David, walking toward them, shaking his head. “You’re too funny!”

Jill tried to smile, but she couldn’t. Instead, she turned around to hide her face from the two of them. Had she been able to run, she might have disappeared into the forest. Instead, she crumpled down into a ball. She pulled the towel over her head and wrapped it tightly around her body, attempting to disappear, turtle fashion.

She heard David ribbing Ryan, “So, you jack off for my sister?”

“She likes it. You should see the look on her face while…” said Ryan. Pausing he continued, “I think she likes me. In fact, I know she does . . . but we have a most unusual relationship. She’s kinky. She likes to be the boss . . . gives me orders . . . tells me to jack off.”

“Sounds like you two have been having a lot of fun,” said David, chuckling. He was clearly enjoying the revelation.

She heard David apologize to Ryan for hitting him.

“He deserved it!” she called out loudly from under the towel. “He violated my nipple! I never gave him permission . . . never any consent. A girl has to give her consent!”

Jill was experiencing so many emotions as she lay there. She wanted to stay hidden forever, but eventually, she would have to get up. Once she finally emerged from her towel-shell quite sometime later, she was in a sullen mood. She had imagined that David finding out about the masturbation sessions would be embarrassing for Ryan. She had never considered that it might be even more embarrassing for her.

Doing her best to keep her face hidden and avoiding all eye contact, she took up her crutches and immediately started back. She knew that they would follow, but she didn’t really want them to. She felt like being alone, and yet she knew that there was just the one Jeep; they’d all have to ride back together.

**Chapter 56: Some Good Advice**

Along the way back to the Jeep, Jill found herself thinking about her relationships with members of the opposite sex – how they had been hampered by her inability or reluctance to communicate clearly.

It had always been a problem, but at that moment the communication problems seemed particularly acute. She hadn’t been able to tell Nick that she was not interested in a relationship. Instead, she had gone out with him, obviously leading him on. How could that have been the wise or kind thing to do?

Her Nick problem had been dealt with by passively allowing him to think that she was romantically involved with Ryan. She’d even called Ryan ‘Honey’ in Nick’s presence. That hadn’t exactly been ‘passive,’ but Ryan had seemed to laugh it off; however, deep down inside he had probably liked hearing that term of endearment. That she might be interested in him was something that Jill knew Ryan would go to some effort to believe.

She hadn’t intended to lead Ryan on, and yet that hardly released her from any blame for what had ensued. She recalled Ryan asking to talk about, ‘taking their relationship to the next level.’ In characteristic fashion, she had avoided the conversation entirely. That would have been the ideal opportunity to set things straight. Hindsight! Funny how clear everything seemed as she made her way back down the trail.

Jill also found herself thinking about Tyler, how their relationship had developed and ended. She had felt so close to him, even trusting him with the unimaginable . . . allowing him to see, even touch, her bare chest. Tyler had made a bone-headed comment, one comment, and what had she done? She’d gone ballistic! She had shut down all lines of communication, avoiding him, not taking his calls, blocking him on social media, and then, when Tyler had continued reaching out to her, she’d thrown away his letter.

Yes, Jill realized, many of her boy problems stemmed from communication issues, self-inflicted communication problems. And now it had all come to a head. She’d given Ryan room to imagine that there was something between them. It had all been in his head, wishful thinking on his part perhaps, but she had been complicit.

He had been way out of line to put his mouth on her breast like that, but given the signals she now realized that she had been sending, it wasn’t really all that surprising. Shocking, yes, but surprising, no. She’d been playing with fire.

Ryan had referred to her as, ‘kinky.’ However, she had gone to some effort to be a voyeur, even taking pictures, and she couldn’t deny that she had required him to beat off while she watched. In her book, such behavior was indeed kinky. And what was probably worse was that to Ryan it had all seemed as if she had a genuine interest in him . . . or his dick . . . which to a boy probably seemed like one and the same.

Jill continued to think about how she felt about Ryan’s violation of her nipple, and all that she might have done to contribute to the misunderstanding when suddenly the trail opened up onto the road. There was the Jeep just a short distance away.

“My Top!” she exclaimed aloud in exasperation even though she was alone. She had been so self-absorbed that she hadn’t even looked for it. “Guys,” she said a minute later as they came into view. “Will you come back with me to find my top? I forgot to look for it.”

She surprised herself by asking them to accompany her. On the hike out, she had preferred being alone, only now she didn’t want to head back into the forest all by herself. The boys had also forgotten to look for it along the way.

“I’ll go back and get it,” volunteered David. “I can run. It will be quick. I know right where it is.” He hesitated, looking back and forth at the two of them. “Can I leave the two of you here . . . alone? Jill?” he asked, looking into her eyes.

Nodding, she replied, “We’ll be fine. Won’t we, Ryan?”

“Yes,” he agreed.

“Okay,” said David, but as he was turning to run off, he added, “Be good!”

Studying Ryan’s face, Jill saw that there was indeed some swelling. Serves him right, she thought as she realized that within a day or so his bruises would turn black and blue.

“Jill,” said Ryan after David had gone. “David has been giving me some advice . . . on the way back from the falls.”

“Oh, he has, has he?” she said curiously.

“He tells me that I need to wine and dine you first.”

Jill frowned. She took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Noticing that he was watching her breasts rise and fall, she turned her back to him.

“Not that it worked for Nick,” continued Ryan.

Jill hoped that he would get the hint; she did have her back to him. She didn’t want to have to tell him straight up that she wasn’t going to go out with him.

“Let’s go out to dinner. How about this evening? We can take the Jeep. There are some nice restaurants in Stanton. I haven’t been to any of them, but…” Ryan’s voice trailed off. He seemed to be waiting for a reply. When none came, he continued, “What do you say? Just you and me. It will be fun, and it will be a nice change . . . from all the hot dogs . . . from the dynamics at Cache Lake. We can start over.”

“I don’t feel like talking,” she said after the period of silence had grown uncomfortably long.

“Do you mean now, or in a restaurant?” asked Ryan, obviously doing his best to stay upbeat.

Jill didn’t respond. She realized that she was doing exactly what she always did, and yet she really didn’t feel like talking.

“When might you feel like talking?” he asked after more than a minute of silence.

Remembering that she had decided to try to be better at communicating, she replied, “Umm . . . later. I don’t know.”

It wasn’t much, but at least she had made an effort. Ryan didn’t respond, so she tried to ignore the uncomfortable situation by watching how the light breeze was making the leaves flutter way up above them against the blue sky. Fortunately, David was back a minute later.

“Thanks, Pocket,” she said, as he handed her the bikini top. She let him hold the crutches while she put it on, doing her best to ignore the fact that she had an audience. She knew that they were watching her carefully as she went about getting the cups situated on top of her pert breasts. “No more untying this thing! Either of you!” she said with overemphasized severity. She did mean it and she wanted that to be clear, crystal clear. Just because they had seen a lot of her breasts didn’t mean that such behavior was permissible. It wasn’t.

She saw David reaching as if for the string on her back. “David!” she scolded. Twisting, she slapped his hand away. “You should know better! Especially after what’s happened. You both need to learn to behave.” She made that last comment glaring at Ryan.

“What? I didn’t do anything,” said Ryan.

Jill frowned as she glared at him. “You raped my nipple! I should go to the police!” she said angrily. Surely he knew how naughty that had been. At least she hoped he did.

There wasn’t a lot of talk during their drive back to their corner of Cache Lake. Jill’s thoughts turned to her ankle. She’d mastered the crutches, but she was ready to have her full freedom back. Fortunately, her ankle was feeling much better. She thought she might almost be ready to walk without the crutches, but she knew that she needed to continue taking it easy to avoid any sort of a reinjury.

At camp, she again took up her book, elevating her ankle as she had been instructed.

“Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,” said David, reading the title of the book in her hand. “Is it just a coincidence that the girl with stitches is reading a book about wounded knees?”

Jill examined the cover of her book. “Hadn’t thought about that,” she said. “It’s not exactly about wounded knees. Wounded Knee is the name of a creek in South Dakota . . . where a massacre took place. About the saddest thing I’ve ever read.”

“Hmm…” said David, nodding thoughtfully.

After just a few more pages, she made the decision to set the book aside. It was just too difficult to read, especially given the fact that they were in Indian country. Maybe it will be easier once I’m in California, she thought. And yet that too had been Indian country.

Jill knew that she was completely innocent of all that had happened in the country prior to her birth. She was white, but she had never owned slaves, nor had she played any role in the displacement of the Native Americans; that she knew. And yet, the country did have a history that was complicated . . . broken treaties, misguided Catholic mission policies, Indians wars, massacres even.

As a whole, there was a lot to be proud of, but there were certainly dark chapters as well. Those chapters had to be acknowledged. That was clearly destined to be among the topics that her professors would be discussing that fall in class. It was bound to be an invigorating learning experience.

She found herself grieving for the American Indian as she closed the book. The amount of injustice that had taken place was beyond belief. Hoping that it might be quite a bit more upbeat, she selected ‘Candide’ by Voltaire. At least it was a novel, a work of fiction, she reasoned. At least, if it turned out to be a depressing story, she would have the comfort of knowing that none of it had actually happened.

That evening at their nightly campfire, Jill continued to sulk. She was very disappointed in David. From the tone of his voice, she could tell that he seemed to have forgiven Ryan for what he had done at the waterfall. Indeed, she had not wanted to stand by and watch Ryan get beat up, but some sort of punishment seemed in order.

Jill had even given a little more thought to going to the authorities. She knew that actual rape was a serious crime, a felony. However, she had no idea how uninvited contact with a girl’s breast might be treated. This had been similar to groping, only worse, she thought because it had involved his mouth on her bare skin. In her mind, groping typically meant a hand squeezing a girl’s boob through her shirt.

In reality, she never really considered turning Ryan in. There were too many extenuating circumstances. The police would learn that she had spent a good portion of the summer topless. And they would find out that she had instructed Ryan to beat off for her amusement. In the end, it would all be terribly embarrassing and most likely nothing would come of it. The local police might just end up finding it all very amusing.

Besides, she reasoned, she didn’t really think that Ryan should serve jail time, nor did she want him to have a criminal record. However, it did seem that he needed to learn a lesson; if for no other reason than to protect the next girl that he might get in his sights.

“So, Jill,” David asked. “I want to hear what led up to Ryan jacking off for you. I mean, this is a side of you that catches me by surprise. As your twin, I thought I knew you pretty well. Tell me . . . is this something that you’ve had other guys do?”

“No!” she replied adamantly. She hadn’t meant to allow herself to get sucked into the discussion, but she couldn’t let that question stand unchallenged. “Of course not!”

“Tyler?” he asked.

“No! Never!”

David continued trying to get details from her, but she wisely refused to answer any further questions. Finally giving up, David turned his attention to Ryan, hoping to have more success with him.

Initially, it also seemed as if Ryan was going to take the fifth and keep his mouth shut when suddenly he surprised her.

“She’s been blackmailing me,” he said, finally relenting to David’s barrage. “She has naked pictures of me, even stroking my dick . . . everything. I didn’t know she was there. She’s sneaky! I can’t let those photos get out.”

Jill’s jaw dropped in astonishment. David was laughing uproariously, but she was so taken aback that she hardly heard him.

“So, my sister’s a blackmailer!” he said, full of mirth.

Jill couldn’t take it any longer. “I am not!” she objected.

“Then what do you call it?” David asked, the merriment more than evident in his voice.

“I get attacked while tanning, and you side with my attacker!” she said angrily. Taking up her crutches, she stormed off up the beach, feeling the need to be alone.

A minute later she realized that David was following her, jogging to catch up.

“I am not siding with your attacker,” he said as he caught up.

“Sure seems like it,” she hissed.

“Ryan should not have done that,” said David. “He was wrong, very wrong. But he’s Ryan.”

“So, it’s okay then?” she asked, he mouth hanging open in disbelief.

“No . . . it’s not okay. But we both know what he’s like.”

“You're excusing bad behavior!” she argued. “Maybe even criminal behavior. And then you go and tell him that he needs to ‘wine and dine’ me. And then I suppose it will be okay for him to attack me . . . once he buys me dinner.”

“Not at all what I said! I told him that he needs to establish a romantic relationship with you . . . any girl for that matter . . . before taking things to a physical level. I was just coaching the poor guy . . . God knows he needs it. I like him, but his social skills…”

“I’m not going out with him!” she interrupted.

“I’m not surprised. He doesn’t seem like your type. Just tell him! Be clear!”

“I tried. I can’t . . . but it should have all been clear. I’ve never shown any interest in the guy . . . well . . . well . . . beyond messing with him,” she said.

David laughed.

“Stop that!” she snapped.

“An attractive girl needs to be able to tell guys in no uncertain terms that she is not interested.”

“David, will you tell him? Please?”

“Tell Ryan?”

“Yes, tell him that I’m not interested. That I’m never going to go out with him,” she pleaded.

“Jill . . . no,” he replied. “This fall we are going off to college, different colleges. This is a skill you need. You need to be able to put guys in the friend zone . . . and keep them there. Clearly, firmly.”

“But . . . it doesn’t seem nice.”

“So, what? It has nothing to do with being nice. It’s your job to live YOUR life. Guys’ feelings? Not your problem.”

“Some things I can talk about,” offered Jill in her own defense. “But I have trouble telling guys that I don’t like them.”

“That’s why you tell them that you value their friendship too much to date them,” coached David.

“Everyone sees right through that.”

“Not your problem, Jilly!”

David continued trying to coach Jill on how to be honest with members of the opposite sex, how to let them down gently but firmly. They reversed direction and started heading back toward the fire that they could see the glow of in the distance.

**Chapter 57: Deciding on the Hike**

“Ryan, Jill has something to tell you,” David announced a short time later as they reached their camp on the point.

“Okay,” said Ryan, his voice sounding full of trepidation.

“Oh, brother!” said Jill unhappily, not expecting to be put on the spot like that. “Maybe tomorrow,” she stalled. “Right now, I’m tired. I’m going to bed.” She went and got her toothbrush to begin her preparations.

A little while later, Jill was indeed in her tent, trying her best to fall asleep to put another bizarre day behind her. The boys were still at the campfire. She could hear them but was doing her best to ignore their conversation.

She found herself thinking, yet again, about how violated Ryan had made her feel. There was really no excuse for what he had done. No matter what had gone on before, he had been completely out of line. She was the victim of a sexual assault – there was no way around that. And yet she didn’t want to think of herself as a victim. She felt as if she had the right to rise above what had happened. She felt the need to be strong and go on with her life rather than let this change her. Instead of labeling herself a ‘victim,’ she wanted to be strong and go boldly into her future as if she were fully in charge of her life.

Somehow, she thought, if she got her head around things, she could use it to her advantage. What Ryan had done could end up being empowering! She could come out of this stronger than she had been going in.

And her brother was right, she realized. At college, she was going to have to do better. She was going to have to set boundaries. She was going to need to make sure that she only led on the guys that she was attracted to. In that way, she might ensure that she was only asked out by those for whom she had a genuine interest.

That thought gave her pause. Guys that she might be interested in? She decided to give that topic a little extra thought. Just what would her ideal man be like?

She knew that she wasn’t attracted to Ryan, but why not? He was moderately attractive. Not gorgeous, but certainly not bad looking either. Jill realized that looks didn’t have that much to do with it . . . at least, not in her case.

Ryan was good-natured and fun to be around. That was a definite plus in his favor. However, he was unambitious. He was not planning to attend college. That was fine. Everyone didn’t need to go to college, and yet she realized that she was more attracted to guys who were going places in life. In her opinion, they were simply more interesting.

She also realized that she was put off by Ryan’s selfish attitudes. Selfishness was not attractive in a guy. Had Ryan truly cared about her, he never would have violated her personal space as he had done that afternoon. He also never would have thought up the ‘one of the guys’ scheme. He was interested in her, but for his own gratification, that much was clear.

So below ambitious, she added, ‘compassion for others’ to her mental list.

The more she thought about it, the more she realized that respect was a key component. She was most attracted to guys that she could respect, and it went both ways. Those individuals that earned her respect were those who demonstrated respect for others. Ryan had never shown her any real respect. Yanking her top off the prior summer? That was not something that a person who respected other human beings did.

She thought about Nick and how he had turned his back, averting his eyes as soon as he had realized that she was topless. He’d certainly earned a lot of points that day!

She reviewed her list. The ideal man for her would be someone that she respected because he showed respect for others. On a similar note, he needed to have genuine compassion for his fellow human beings . . . animals too, probably. And he needed to be ambitious.

Rounding out her list were other important factors. He would need to be intelligent and athletic – hopefully, he would like basketball. Basketball – that, of course, was not a requirement, but basketball dates sounded so fun. He also needed to be reasonably good-looking, but that was probably less important than basketball. And he needed to be roughly her same age. She added the age factor to her list as a sort of afterthought. Without it, she had been realizing that Nick was rating a little higher than she felt he deserved.

Just before falling asleep, she realized that if anyone fit her list, it was her brother. He was younger, but only by seven minutes. The thought of her brother’s high score according to her criteria made her chuckle. Had she acquired her taste for men from him? She decided to disqualify David by adding another item to her list, ‘someone I’m not related to.’ That made her chuckle as it was too obvious to merit inclusion; however, now her list seemed complete.

Upon waking up the next morning, Jill located paper and pen to write down her list. Even though it would probably not be her final list, it had to be captured. Likely she would add to it as she thought of other desirable character traits. It was, at the very least, an excellent start.

Looking over her list, she realized why she was not attracted to Ryan. He was severely lacking in a number of ways; however, that was probably to be expected as Ryan and his inexcusable behavior had been what had inspired her to make the list in the first place.

As she went about her morning routine, Jill found herself thinking about her commitment to go off to college unencumbered by any relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Given that it was August, it seemed as if she were destined to achieve her goal. And considering that ‘ambitious’ was on the list, her college seemed like the ideal place to start fresh and meet someone. Since her chosen college was so selective, there weren’t going to be any students there who weren’t both ambitious and intelligent.

Ryan’s face looked quite a bit worse at breakfast that morning. Their grandparents asked about it. David said that the two of them had gotten into a fight, which was technically correct. Jill could tell that David’s explanation inspired as many questions as it answered. If they had really fought, for example, why was David completely unscathed? Was Ryan really that bad at defending himself and hitting back? Jill listened in amusement, refusing to participate, as the topic was discussed.

As she had been feeling the need for a down day, Jill had brought her book along to breakfast. Once they had eaten, she stayed behind, letting the boys go back to camp without her. They seemed surprised, but little was said.

After doing the dishes, she curled up on the couch to read. Her book seemed to be based on a curious theme: that this world was the best of all possible worlds, in spite of all the pain and suffering.

Pausing to think, she tried to decide if she were experiencing the best of all possible summers. It was hardly that, she decided. But it was an interesting tumultuous summer, to be sure. Recent events had caused her to almost forget about the first few weeks and how bored she had been.

After lunch, she took a walk out to the point. The boys were nowhere to be found. While there, she dug her newly created list out of her tent. She had thought of a few things to add.

First, she decided to add ‘optimism’ as a desirable trait. The character of Candide was very optimistic, and it helped him cope with a life that would probably get others down. She considered herself optimistic, so it made sense to try and find a guy who she might have that in common with.

Second, she decided to add ‘honesty.’ In thinking about what had been said the night before, she realized that Ryan was less than honest. She was still mad that he had told David that she had been blackmailing him. Indeed, she had never threatened him with the release of those photos. In her opinion, it had been quite clear that she was keeping the photos just to protect herself should he himself have incriminating photos. He claimed he didn’t, but she still had her suspicions. If she was guilty of being a blackmailer, then she was a defensive blackmailer – if there was such a thing. She had certainly never threatened to do anything with the photos if he refused to jerk off.

‘Honesty’ definitely belonged on the list. It was very becoming on a guy, and Ryan definitely fell short. Giving it a little more thought, she realized that even David could stand to be a little more truthful. He was much more honest than Ryan; however, he was still difficult to trust. She felt that she would only marry someone who was completely trustworthy.

As she considered that decision, she thought about how she herself had been less than honest. Indeed, she had never leveled with her mother or her grandmother about what had been going on at the lake between herself and the boys. She had kept that to herself. And yet, that wasn’t exactly lying, she reasoned.

Even though she was feeling the need for a little activity, she returned to the Airstream and resumed reading. Doing so made sense on two levels. It kept her off her leg, and it moved her closer to her reading goal. She had come to realize that she might be one of the few students that had actually read the books prior to the relevant lectures. There were simply so many books, and many of them were long. No way were other students going to find the time to read them during the semester AND keep up in their other classes.

That evening at the campfire, Jill learned of David’s plan for the long hike that they had been discussing. He had chosen the Broken Canyon trail over the Chief Chokma chain lakes. Even though she knew next to nothing about the two hikes, she was glad that they wouldn’t be taking a hike with ‘Chief’ in the name. She didn’t need any more reminders that Native Americans had once called the forests around Cache Lake home.

“Why is it called Broken Canyon?” she asked.

“I didn’t ask,” replied David. “My best guess is that it must look broken, but we’ll see.”

David went on to explain that he was proposing that they spend three nights there. That would allow them time to explore the canyon in some detail, and it would be easily manageable in terms of the amount of food that they’d have to pack in. Fortunately, they had a water filter so they wouldn’t have to carry a significant amount of water.

David’s suggestion was that they depart on Friday. They could drive to the other side of the lake, play the weekly game of basketball, and then depart from there. The advantage of doing so was that the Broken Canyon trailhead lay to the west; they would already be part of the way there if they left from the far side of the lake.

“But it all depends on your ankle, Jilly Bean,” he said. “If it’s strong, you’ll be able to play and then go on the hike. If it needs a little more time, then you get to again watch the game . . . and we delay the start of the hike until you’re ready.”

“I think I’m going to be ready to play this week,” she replied. “I’m mostly using the crutches at this point because I’m trying to be a good girl. The ankle feels stronger each day.”

“Great!” said David. “Then this week must also be the week for you, Ryan and I to all be ‘skins.’”

“What?” said Jill, shocked to hear how quickly the topic had cycled back to that.

“You heard me,” said David. “You’re ready. You might still need a bit of a push, but what you won’t need is your bikini top.”

Jill was taken aback. She had thought that the topless basketball game idea had been laid to rest. Discovering that it was still alive and well, she replied, “I’m not going to even dignify that comment with a response.”

David smiled. “You’ll have so much fun! Imagine everyone seeing just how cute your little titties are . . . in the flesh! Picture them bobbing around on your chest as you dribble and shoot. You’ll be the star . . . excuse me . . . your boobies will be the stars, plural! I can’t wait to see Kyle’s and the other guys’ faces when they get a look at you . . . nearly naked! Maybe bikini bottoms rather than shorts, too.”

Jill knew what he was doing. He was going on and on about the scene he was imagining just to make her squirm. She wanted to tell him that he was crazy, but she had already said that she wasn’t going to dignify what he was saying by responding.

Looking over, she saw that Ryan was smiling. Seeing the look on his face, caused her to imagine the expressions on all of those guys’ faces – were they ever to get the chance to see her topless. She made a point of trying to look disgusted, but the real truth was that it was titillating to imagine herself playing basketball without a shirt. She would never admit it, but she sort of did want to know what that would be like, but only hypothetically. She knew she couldn’t and wouldn’t play topless.

Based on encountering the six hikers, she knew that she’d probably run and hide, maybe even pass out. It wasn’t going to happen, but if it did, she knew she’d feel panicky. The guys would be fine, but she’d overreact, and then disaster would ensue – just as it had on the hike down from Snow Lake.

Later, in her tent, she found herself thinking about it again. A wandering finger verified what she had suspected. The very thought of topless basketball was enough to make her inner lips slippery. She knew that an orgasm would take little time if she rubbed her little nubbin while fantasizing about herself on the court topless. With the guys’ tent so close, she forced herself to pull her hand away, denying her slit the attention it was hungry for.

She couldn’t believe how sexual she had become. She now had an honest to God libido where previously next to nothing of the sort had existed. Prior to that summer, she had been able to go to bed and fall asleep without any sexy thoughts whatsoever. How things had changed! At times she now felt as if she were a bundle of raging hormones. She wondered if estrogen or progesterone was pumping out of her ovaries or her adrenal glands. She found herself wishing she had paid more attention in Health class. Something had changed, that she knew.

The next morning she was feeling that her day needed to include more than just reading while keeping her leg elevated.

“Guys, let’s float the outlet!” she proposed as they walked back from breakfast.

“But tomorrow’s Wednesday,” David pointed out. “You get your stitches out. Wouldn’t tomorrow afternoon be better? They aren’t supposed to get wet, you know.”

“I know,” said Jill. “But I can again cover it and sit with my legs up and over the tube. My knees won’t be in the water.”

“But you know how this goes…” said David.

“You’ll be soaked before we get to the first bend,” interjected Ryan. “I’ll make sure of it.”

Jill frowned and shook her head.

“But you’ll behave today . . . if Jill goes, right?” said David.

“Behaving’s overrated,” said Ryan. “But I will leave her nipples alone . . . if that’s what we’re talking about. But splashing Jill . . . too tempting!”

They did eventually get Ryan to promise not to splash, dunk or upend Jill’s tube, and they went about making preparations. The boys had both taken off their shirts and Jill was in her bikini.

The truth of the matter was that she felt trapped in her bikini top. She didn’t want to float the outlet with it on; however, she couldn’t very well just take it off, given all that she had said. She needed to be patient. Hopefully, they’d up the ante and provide her with the face-saving excuse that she needed.

“You’re not planning on wearing your bikini, are you?” challenged David.

This was the sort of thing she had been hoping for, and yet she disliked how David seemed to be referring to her suit as a whole.

“I most certainly am!” she said defiantly.

**Chapter 58: Floating the Outlet**

“You’ve already floated the outlet topless,” Ryan chimed in. “This time you should go naked!”

Jill frowned. “Naked? Really? We all know that was never part of the deal,” she scolded.

“What deal? You broke the original deal. We’re in new territory now!” said Ryan mischievously.

Jill rolled her eyes. She wanted to leave her top behind, but this lame direction wasn’t going to get them anywhere.

“Think about it, Jill,” said David. “A full-body tan. No tan lines . . . none at all!”

“More like, I’d burn and peel where the sun doesn’t shine. Now admit defeat and let’s go and have some fun!”

“Okay, maybe just half the suit,” suggested David.

Jill hesitated. This was more like the direction she had been hoping for.

“Forget it,” she said, knowing that she had to put up a fight. “Been there, done that.”

“I didn’t say which half.”

Jill’s jaw dropped. She decided to confront this one head on. Turning, she let her crutches fall onto the sand as she stood facing David in just her bikini, her feet shoulder width apart, her hands defiantly on her hips.

“So, the bottoms?” she asked, glaring at him.

When he didn’t reply, she slid her hands down and boldly made a fist around each strap. She pulled them out sideways, stretching them away from her body.

“So, the bottoms?” she asked again, trying to make it look like she might actually pull them down and off. She was trembling but doing her best to look like she was confident and in complete control of the situation.

“Yes, the bottoms!” said Ryan. He was obviously more than happy to answer if David wasn’t going to.

“I’m talking to my brother,” said Jill, her eyes glued angrily to David.

“Yes . . . the bottoms,” said David coolly.

“Not the bottoms!” said Jill obstinately. Showing them who was in charge, she pulled the straps up firmly, seating her suit securely against her crotch. As she released the straps she regretted just how high she had lifted them. From the look on Ryan’s face, she knew that she had stretched the fabric tight. She didn’t look down, but she knew that she had inadvertently created a severe camel toe situation. “Now let’s go,” she said, turning and picking up her crutches, gladly hiding the front of her bikini bottoms in the process.

“Let’s flip a coin,” said David. “You agree to wear half your suit. We’ll let the coin determine which half.”

In surprise, Jill turned back around. She saw that David already had a coin in his hand. There was an awkward pause. She stood there indecisively.

“Heads . . . topless. Tails . . . bottomless,” said David, throwing the coin aloft.

He caught it and slapped it against the back of his other hand.

“Ready to learn your fate?” he asked, looking at Jill with a sly smile.

Jill held her breath. She hadn’t agreed to anything.

“Which is it?” asked Ryan, stepping close to David to view the outcome.

David removed his hand and the boys both looked.

“Tails!” shouted Ryan triumphantly.

Jill sensed that something was amiss. “Let me see!” she demanded, quickly closing the distance.

David kept his hand right where it was, permitting Jill the opportunity to look.

“You asshole!” she said in disgust, looking over at Ryan. “You’re such a liar.”

She reached behind her back and untied the knot. As she pulled off her top and tossed it onto a nearby chair, she realized that she could never agree to a coin toss such as that. This time she had gotten lucky, but next time it would surely come up, ‘tails.’

Turning and heading up the beach in just her bikini bottoms, she imagined how bare she’d feel wearing just the top half. There wasn’t a lot of fabric to the bottoms, and yet they made all the difference in the world.

“Double or nothing!” shouted Ryan.

This guy never gives up, she thought.

“No more coin tosses!” she shouted back over her shoulder. “One and done!”

Heading along briskly on her crutches she smiled to herself. She had gotten exactly what she had wanted. The guys probably knew that she would never have taken off the bottoms had it been ‘tails,’ but it didn’t really matter. It felt so nice to again be topless in the sunshine.

She realized that she was going to need to find a way to reinstate the ‘one of the guys’ terms in a manner that allowed her to refuse if need be. No more Cornice Ridge hikes! Just the three of them, that was fun, but she could do without being seen by others. And no topless basketball games either! That was certainly not something that she would ever consider. She needed to remain firmly in charge, even if she wanted it to appear that the boys, or even their coin toss, might have determined that her breasts would be bare on the river that morning.

She thought about how David had let her discover the truth about the coin toss. Ryan had attempted a dishonest trick, and David had not allowed him to get away with it. David was certainly much more honest than Ryan. He was a good guy, even if he was ganging up against her, joining forces, to try and get her naked. She didn’t think he had the hots for his own sister, but the situation was certainly a little uncomfortable. And yet, she remembered asking to be pushed. That had to be taken into consideration. She did enjoy being pushed . . . within limits; she knew that. He might actually be doing it for her, she realized.

She stopped to glance back at the boys. They each were carrying their own inner tube in one arm, and between them, they were carrying her tube.

“You guys are so slow!” she shouted back teasingly. “It’s not like those tubes are heavy!”

She turned and again headed toward where the outlet exited the lake. She moved along quickly on her crutches. She was impressed with how fast she had gotten. She wouldn’t be able to keep up with someone running, but she could easily outdistance someone jogging.

A few minutes later, Jill sat down onto her inner tube, taking care to keep her left knee high and dry. The lake water felt quite chilly to her bottom as she slid into the center hole. After all, it was a snowmelt-fed mountain lake. But she knew she’d adjust quickly. Looking up, she saw Ryan eyeing her breasts.

“Don’t be getting any ideas, Jerk-boy,” she said finding her most authoritative voice. “You can look, but if you ever again touch me, I’m turning you in! You deserve more than just the bruises David gave you. Don’t you ever cross the line . . . again.” It felt empowering to finally be saying what needed to be said. Taking a breath to gather her thoughts, she continued, “Now, about that date…”

She paused, noticing a hopeful look in his eyes. ‘What an idiot,’ she thought.

“No! No date! Not ever!” She observed the optimism evaporating from his expression. “You and I are friends . . . barely. We’ll never be more than friends. And right now, hearing myself say this, I’m not sure we’re friends. You might be able to win your way back into my good graces. If you succeed, we’ll still be JUST friends.”

She was proud of herself. She was shaking, but it felt really good to be assertive, to stand up for herself. She had rehearsed those lines in her head as she had made her way up the beach. She had delivered them perfectly. Ryan’s blatant dishonesty at the coin toss had cemented her resolve. Looking over, she saw David nodding approvingly.

As she paddled along the shore with her arms, making her way toward the point where the current would draw her into the river, she realized just how good it felt to stick up for herself. She was worth it! God dammit, she was worth it!

She and David entered the mouth of the river side by side. Ryan was bringing up the rear, a gloomy despondent look on his face. She glanced over at her brother. “Good job, Bean,” he mouthed.

Jill smiled and tipped her head way back, dipping her ponytail into the current. She took a deep breath to relax, trying to get her heart rate back to normal. The warm sunshine felt wonderful on her face and neck, but a moment later the sun disappeared as the river entered the forest.

“Thanks for carrying the crutches,” she said. David had them across his lap, resting on his tube on either side.

“They’ll be in my way when the splash war starts,” he said with an evil smile. She knew he was joking.

Taking her hands from the river, she dribbled water on her bare breasts, allowing her fingertips to graze her nipples. They had been rock-hard before she had sat down into the water. Now they were diamond-hard.

Arching her back and lifting her ribcage, she commented, “My tits disappear entirely when I stretch like this.”

“Not quite,” said David, a look of curious amusement on his face.

Tucking her chin to inspect her tan chest, she remarked, “You like big boobs, don’t you, brother?” When David didn’t reply, she continued, “Bailey has big boobs. I’ll bet you liked that about her. It won’t hurt my feelings if you admit that you like big boobs.”

“Okay, I’ve got a thing for big boobs.”

“I knew you did,” she replied. “But it’s okay.”

“Small breasts are lovely, too.”

“Do you think about her? Do you think the two of you might get back together?”

“I like Bailey. She’s fun. I have fond memories, but we won’t be getting back together.”

“Why not?”

“Just because. Nothing against Bailey, but she’s part of my past.”

“Do you miss her boobs?”

“Jill . . . I’m not answering that. Why all the questions?”

“You touched them, sucked them. Am I right?”

“No comment.”

“So, it’s okay to see your twin sister . . . naked . . . but a conversation like this is off limits?”

“Right,” said David. After a pause, he continued, “Why are you so boob obsessed? I thought that being ‘one of the guys’ would change that.”

“And how was that supposed to work?” she asked wrinkling up her nose. “I spend my days topless, making my breasts the center of attention. Strangers see them. You and Ryan . . . Ryan especially . . . he stares at them, talks about them constantly. That’s supposed to make me forget about them?”

“Well . . . at least be at peace with things . . . come to realize just how beautiful you really are.”

“By showing the world just how little my titties are?”

“Something like that,” replied David with a smile. “I guess . . . learn that size is not really all that important. And yet, here you are, talking about Bailey, focusing on size, asking me if I miss her boobs. Truth be told, there is so much to that young lady. She’s smart. She has a delightful personality. Breast size, and I do like big boobs, is less than one percent of who she is . . . in my mind. We didn’t start dating because she was chesty, and her boobs had nothing to do with why we broke up. She can’t help how big she is any more than you can. She’s a human being . . . a delightful, compassionate one. That’s who I dated . . . the person that she is on the inside.”

“But you got bored with her.”

“I guess I did,” admitted David. “It just wasn’t meant to be. That’s all.”

Looking up ahead, Jill caught a glimpse of the bridge they would shortly be passing under. A shiver of concern passed through her as she tried to see if there was anyone on it, but the sun was in her eyes.

She paddled a little as if she were trying to delay the inevitable. They would have to pass under the bridge. Looking back, she saw that Ryan had caught up. As their eyes met, he gave her a weak smile.

Once, she had daydreamed about passing under the bridge topless, imagining that she might roll over, hiding her breasts by pressing them down into the inner tube. Given that doing so would put her knee into the river, she crossed her forearms, cupping her left breast in her right hand and vice versa. Glancing down, she found it a little reassuring to see that her hand bra covered as much as her bikini top, probably more.

As they got close to the bridge, she caught sight of the bag that held her clothes. She hadn’t realized how visible it might be from the river. She knew that if David or Ryan saw it, they’d be curious and investigate.

Hoping to keep them from seeing it, she bared her breasts. That ought to get their attention, she thought. And yet, it didn’t. They didn’t even seem to notice. Jill realized that her chest was no longer the attention magnet that it had once been.

“Ryan,” she called out. “Should I show David how close I can come to licking a nipple?”

She saw a puzzled look accompanied by a smile spread slowly across his face. Reaching up, she pinched the area around one of her nipples firmly. Looking over, she saw that she had David’s full attention.

Better not be anyone on the bridge, she thought as she tucked her chin and stretched her breast upward for all it was worth. She saw Ryan paddling to get closer as she stuck out her tongue and licked, contacting her skin just inches above the areola.

“See, David, I can lick my own boobie! Not the nipple, but darn close.” Despite her attempt at appearing confident, she was quite embarrassed to find herself doing this in front of her brother and again in front of Ryan.

David laughed, shaking his head. “I certainly wouldn’t be able to,” he replied.

Glancing up, she saw that she still had both boys’ full attention. They wouldn’t see the bag if she kept it up.

“Did I get closer that time?” she asked, turning and looking at Ryan.

“Didn’t I tell you that your sister was kinky?” asked Ryan, looking over at David.

“I should try for the other nipple,” she said, doing her best to ignore Ryan’s comment as she took hold of her other breast. Realizing that she was just about to go under the bridge, she forced herself to keep her eyes on her chest rather than looking up.

Angling her face down and pulling her breast up, she did her best to close the gap. She wanted to keep the guys attention focused on her. The white bag really stood out against the dark timbers. I’ve got to do something about that, she thought, as she again stuck out her tongue.

“Now you know why I was helping her out, David,” Ryan laughed. “One minute she wants oral-nipple sex. The next, she doesn’t.”

Jill was disappointed to hear David laughing at Ryan’s joke. It wasn’t funny. “I never wanted oral-nipple sex!” she said spitefully. “What I get to do is different from what you get to do, Jerk-boy. They’re my nipples! Why don’t you get that?”

“Whatever,” replied Ryan.

“Jerk-boy?” asked David laughing.

**Chapter 59: Captivating Tan Lines**

Jill was caught off guard by his comment, but she decided that it was okay that she had accidentally used Ryan’s new nickname in front of David. Ryan was a Jerk-boy; there was no way around it. But even if that was okay, she suddenly found herself wishing she hadn’t just been attempting to again get her mouth on her breast as a distraction. Would it really have been all that bad for them to find her clothes? It wouldn’t be that big of a deal. She could just hide another bag somewhere else.

Realizing that she needed to own her actions even if she regretted them, she asked, “How much bigger do you think my boobs need to get for me to be able to suck my own nipples? Not just lick, but actually, suck?”

“There you go . . . size again,” said David. “But you’re nineteen. To avoid disappointment, I wouldn’t count on them growing. You’ll probably never be able to do it yourself. Find Mister Right and let him do it for you. I expect that will be much more fun anyway.”

Glancing over at Ryan, she saw the dejected look return to his face.

“Ryan needs to find the right girl. You need to find the right guy. Problem solved,” added David.

Silence fell over the group as the bridge disappeared around a bend behind them. David was obviously right, but what more was there to say? Thinking about it, Jill expected that she’d be living down her randy little diversionary tactic for some time to come. At least Ryan had been set straight. She didn’t think she needed to worry about another ‘misunderstanding’ if that was what it had been.

The rest of the voyage proved rather uneventful. It was a very different trip down the outlet than others that they had experienced as a group; they weren’t splashing or dunking one another. They were just floating along peacefully, enjoying nature, each one of them seemingly lost in his or her own thoughts.

Along one stretch, David entertained them by singing MacArthur Park at the top of his lungs.

Someone left the cake out in the rain
I don't think that I can take it
'Cause it took so long to bake it
And I'll never have that recipe again
Oh no!

To his disappointment, he wasn’t able to get Jill or Ryan to join in. Their father always sang that song while floating the river. It was essentially a family tradition. Jill enjoyed hearing it, and she would typically sing along. However, that particular day, she wasn’t in the mood.

They climbed out just past the Giant Bend, about where Jill had exited the day Ryan had photographed her. The rapids, just ahead, were quite fun, probably their favorite part of the river, especially while singing MacArthur Park; however, Jill would definitely get soaked were they to continue.

“You’ve come a long way from the shy girl who had her picture taken here earlier in the summer,” David remarked as they stopped to survey the Giant Bend from above before heading back along the trail.

“I have?” asked Jill. She knew she had, but for some reason, she was interested in hearing his perspective.

“Absolutely! Look at you,” he replied. “You’re not at all that same girl. I remember how mad you got that day . . . thought you could whoop us both.”

“Maybe I was just hoping to die trying,” she replied. “And you were so rude, throwing me in the lake over and over.”

“I had to cool you down somehow. You had steam coming out your ears.”

“I HAVE put up with a lot this summer!”

“I suppose you have,” he admitted. “But it’s obviously been worth it.”

Jill replayed David’s last comment over and over in her head as they made their way back to the bridge. Had it been worth it? If she suddenly found herself back at the start of the summer – ‘Groundhog Day’ fashion – might she do it all again? What might she do differently? Jump right in, skipping right past all the delaying tactics? Head immediately for home?

The next day was Wednesday. Jill and David climbed into the Jeep and drove in to town together to have her stitches removed. During their drive, David brought up how Jill had told Ryan that the two of them would never be more than friends.

“You obviously didn’t need me to friend zone Ryan for you, Jilly. You got the message across loud and clear. Proud of you, Sis.”

“I think I might have overdone it . . . a little,” she replied.

“Not at all. Ryan’s a little thick. You hit him hard . . . right between the eyes. That’s what it takes with Ryan. You might even have to do it again.”

“I hope not. I don’t like conversations like that . . . squashing a guy’s hopes. This time . . . with Ryan . . . well, he definitely deserved it. Actually, he deserves worse.”

David laughed. “He’s got a few bruises. We both hit him pretty hard. I bruised his face. You bruised his ego. That will take longer to heal . . . a lot longer.”

“Thank you for coming to my rescue at the waterfall. It’s nice to know that I have a brother who cares enough about me to throw some punches,” she said condescendingly.

“Who loves you!” said David. “I’d never let anything bad happen to you.”

Jill contemplated that as they drove along in silence for a little bit. Did he really think that his willingness to throw punches when things went wrong – after the fact – made her safer?

“This time, with Ryan . . . this was a special situation,” said David. “Off at college, if a guy starts hitting on you…”

“I know,” said Jill. “Friend zone him, right?”

“Exactly!” replied David. “We’re not talking Ryan, so you’ll be able to be nice . . . but be firm.”

“I don’t think that works,” said Jill.

“You don’t?”

“I’m not going to friend zone every guy that shows an interest. I’ll have to be pragmatic. What if I want to go out with the guy? And what if I don’t, but I don’t really know him. In that case, I can’t really tell him that I think of him as a friend.”

“Good point.”

“But I do need to be better about communicating clearly. No more dates with guys I have no interest in. No charity dates. No more leading guys on.”

“Sounds like you’ve given this some thought since we last talked.”

“I have,” said Jill. “And I’ve come to realize something. I did lead Ryan on. But, I’ve also concluded that I’m not to blame for what happened. I told him quite clearly…” Her voice trailed off and her cheeks grew red. “…when he was beating off, that there was to be no touching. He asked for a kiss. I refused. But even if things weren’t absolutely clear, he was way out of line. Technically speaking, what happened was sexual assault.”

“I’m sure you’re right.”

“I’m not going to, but I could probably press charges.”

“Yeah, I suppose you could.”

“But moving on . . . I want to talk about basketball. I hope you were kidding when you said, ‘skins.’ The bikini top . . . okay . . . I’ve done that . . . I’ll do that again. Topless? Drop that . . . please.”

“Oh, Jill. I don’t want you to do something like that against your will, but I know you’d have fun. What a great memory, right? You’d carry it with you for the rest of your life. As I’ve said before, you won’t see these guys again, and we can keep them from taking photos.”

“You might be able to confiscate phones and prevent photography. So what?” Her position hadn’t changed. She did think that it would be a wild experience that might make for amazing memories . . . but only on a fantasy level. “You need to forget it, David. The answer is, no. It’s not going to happen.”

“Jill, that’s been your attitude about everything this summer. That’s exactly where you were when we first talked about you becoming ‘one of the guys.’ Look how much fun you’ve had! You’ll give in on this, too. And you’ll be happy that you did.”

“No, I won’t!” said Jill, her hackles rising.

“Jill, I’m sure you will.”

“I’m sure I won’t.”

Jill did her best to sound resolute, but down inside she couldn’t help but worry that David’s crystal ball might be more powerful than her own.

The office visit in Stanton went much quicker than she had anticipated. In no time at all, they were back out the door. Jill had been given a clean bill of health. There was no swelling or redness where the stitches had been, so she was told that she could resume normal activities.

They made a few stops on the way back to the lake. First, they stopped at the grocery store and did a little meal planning for their upcoming hike. As they’d be out for just three nights, they didn’t need any specialized dehydrated backpacking meals. That was good as they were expensive. Instead, they bought pasta, which was about the same.

They wouldn’t have refrigeration, so they bought some canned goods to take: Vienna sausages and canned vegetables, for example. They were on the heavy side and they’d have to pack out the garbage; however, the three of them were young and strong, so why not? They selected packets of instant oatmeal for their breakfasts. Those, at least, were quite light.

They also stopped by the post office and the library. At the first stop, Jill received another book, and at the second stop, she had books to return. While at the library, Jill did a little earthquake research.

“You know, David,” she said once they were back on the road. “There really was an earthquake in Lisbon . . . in 1755. For some reason, I felt the need for independent verification.”

“Huh?” By the look on David’s face, she knew that to him it seemed like a completely random thing to bring up.

“It’s in my book. Actually, according to the introduction, that earthquake is what inspired Voltaire to write the book in the first place. Tens of thousands of people died. And the earthquake takes place in the story as well, just as Candide and another character, Pangloss, arrive in Lisbon.”

“That’s interesting, I suppose,” he said.

“Current estimates place that particular earthquake at between 8.5 and 9.0 on the Richter scale.”

“Wow!” exclaimed David. “That makes it about the most powerful earthquake I’ve ever heard of.”

“Right!” agreed Jill. “And then within minutes, a giant wave hit the city, drowning many of the earthquake survivors.”

“Double wow! Natures, one-two punch,” said David.

Jill was enjoying her book. She explained more about what she knew about the earthquake and the role it played in Voltaire’s tale as they continued toward the lake.

After lunch, Jill decided to go for a swim. Swimming had been mentioned as an excellent way to rehab the connective tissue in her ankle, the ligaments and tendons. Now that her stitches were out, she could take advantage of the non-impact exercise associated with swimming.

Shortly thereafter, Jill crawled out of her tent wearing her white Mickey Mouse one-piece. Hoping to avoid any discussion of topless, bottomless or a coin toss to decide between the two, she had decided on that particular suit. Unlike her bikini, it had seen very little use.

“What?” she asked when both David and Ryan stopped what they were doing to laugh at her.

“Your tan lines,” said David.

“That looks so hot!” exclaimed Ryan.

Jill looked down to see what they were referring to. As her bikini bottoms were of a low-rise style and her one-piece was cut extremely high on the hips, relatively large areas of white skin were visible to each side of her crotch. They tapered down to almost nothing where they extended around her hips.

“That’s surprising,” said David.

“What’s surprising?” she asked.

“What one suit covers, the other doesn’t. They only overlap at your…”

“Don’t say it!” cautioned Jill, quickly pointing a finger at him.

“At your hoo-ha,” he continued, disobeying her wishes.

“Hoo-ha!” echoed Ryan, laughing heartily.

“I told you not to!” she exclaimed. “Where did you guys learn your manners?”

“What manners?” asked David.

“Exactly! What manners? But, for your information, you’re not supposed to discuss a lady’s…” she hesitated, “…hoo-ha . . . in front of her. Not even behind her back…”

“We weren’t,” claimed David. “We were talking about tan lines. Right, Ryan?”

“Right!” he agreed. “Hot . . . so hot! And I love how said tan lines draw a person’s eyes right to your vajayjay.”

“Please!” scolded Jill sternly.

“I mean, hoo-ha,” said Ryan apologetically.

“That’s better!” laughed David.

Jill didn’t reply, giving the boys the impression that the one word was more acceptable than the other. Taking a few steps away, Jill went about applying some sunscreen, paying particular attention to the white triangular areas that the swimsuit change left unprotected.

“So, I’m going swimming . . . if you hadn’t guessed,” she said. “Care to join me?”

Both guys hurriedly got into their suits. It did come up . . . that Jill should leave her suit behind and swim in the buff, but she would have nothing of it. Her new strategy was to get them to drop the nudity thing by making them realize just how lucky they had been to be around her dressed as one of the guys. In that way, she hoped that they might lower their sights and go back to focusing on just encouraging her to be topless.

They all had a nice roundtrip swim to Sunken Island. Nothing particularly out of the ordinary happened. Jill had continued to receive a lot of pressure to take off the suit, but that was certainly not out of the ordinary. She’d been dealing with that sort of thing all summer.

Back in camp, Jill again took up her book. Late that afternoon, she decided that she was a little bored and that Ryan needed some pestering.

“So, Jerk-boy!” she said in David’s presence. “Your tree is calling. Go beat off . . . you know you want to!”

Jill saw his eyes darting back and forth between hers and David’s. It was pretty obvious that he was uncomfortable and didn’t know how to respond. She was glad about that.

“If I do,” he answered at great length. “Are you coming with me?”

“Dream on, Jerk-boy! As before, you’ll be the only one cumming. I’m staying here. You ruined this for both of us, I hope you realize. Embarrassingly, it worked for me before. Not anymore.”

**Chapter 60: Putting Jerk-boy in his Place**

Jill had wondered if she’d be sad about that. She wasn’t. She no longer had any interest in watching him beat off. She had once considered that she might one day enter in, rub out an orgasm of her own while watching him. Now she was certain that would never happen.

“Go on, Jerk-boy,” she said pointing into the forest. “Get out of here. Go take care of your adolescent needs.” She thought it was a little ironic that she was berating him for ‘adolescent needs’ when she had discovered that she had them as well. She didn’t think that Ryan would call her out on that.

He had a distressed look on his face. She could tell that he didn’t like being ordered to go beat off. It was probably much worse because she was doing it in front of David. And yet that was what it had come to. He had mistreated her and he had seemingly gone to some effort to embarrass her in front of David . . . by claiming that she had been blackmailing him.

As Ryan skulked out of camp, she called out after him, “And don’t you be fantasizing about me while you’re doing it. I’ll know . . . I’ll be mad . . . so don’t you dare!”

She glanced over at her brother. He looked as if he was about to burst at the seams.

“You’re too funny!” he chuckled, once Ryan was finally out of earshot.

Jill smiled. “I am, aren’t I? But he’s an asshole. It’s going to bother me for a long time . . . that he touched . . . I mean, that he…”

“Again, I’m so very sorry,” said David.

“Thanks. I know you are. Girls put up with a lot. I just never thought it would be me.”

She saw a confused look on David’s face, and it occurred to her that he might be wondering if she was referring to just the nipple violation or possibly her entire summer. She decided to leave him wondering.

That night Jill made her first nude foray out of her tent in over a week. She had been promising herself that, as soon as she could walk without the crutches, she’d go back to the log after the boys were asleep. And once there, she’d have as many noisy orgasms as she felt like having.

The moon was nearly full as she made her way south along the beach. It was a beautiful August night, and it felt wonderful to walk naked up the beach, the cool sand caressing her bare feet and the crisp air caressing her bare skin. When she got to the log, she sat down and, after breathing deeply, started rubbing right where her little clit kept itself hidden. She had been wanting this so badly, and yet something wasn’t right. She closed her eyes, forcing herself to focus. She tried to find something to fantasize about, but she quickly realized that it was no good.

Her mood just wasn’t right. Had she managed to get there the evening after the last time she had watched Ryan jerk off, then it would have worked wonderfully. Unfortunately, everything to do with Ryan and what she had witnessed at his tree was no longer suitable material for fantasizing. It was all tainted by what had happened at the waterfall.

She sought around in the recesses of her mind for alternative thoughts or memories, but she came up empty. Yes, I have led a boring life, she concluded. Until that summer, she had not had much happen to her that she could fantasize about to creatively boost her libido.

No big deal, she decided, abandoning the effort. Letting her hand fall away, she opened her eyes, taking in the beauty around her. It really was a lovely night. The moonlight illuminated the lake and surrounding countryside so fully that nearly everything seemed visible. How wonderful it was to be able to spend the summer in such a majestic place, and how glorious it was to be able to enjoy it unencumbered by the trappings of society . . . not a single stitch of clothing.

She stood up and raised her hands overhead in celebration. Yes, she didn’t have to have an orgasm to enjoy being naked. She’d come into the world naked. She’d leave it naked. How wonderful it was to enjoy some of the time in between naked as well. She strolled into the shallow water, letting it caress her feet. Wiggling her toes, she felt so very alive.

The rejuvenative power of nature overwhelmed her senses. Thoughts of ‘Candide’ filled her mind, as well. Yes, there can be earthquakes, and yes, there can be unwanted sexual contact, and yet it can still be a wonderful world. It can even be the best of all possible worlds . . . even though bad things can and do occur.

It was a different girl who returned to her tent an hour or so later that night. She was now a more mature Jill, and yet a profoundly happier Jill. She was very much at peace with herself, who exactly she was, and even everything that had happened that summer. She fell asleep – almost as soon as her head hit her pillow – and didn’t dream.

The next morning, as she walked to the trailer for breakfast, Jill felt the lingering effects of her spiritual experience at the log the night before. How lovely it had been to be naked and tanning by moonlight, soaking up all the goodness that nature had to offer, letting it cleanse the body and soul, feeling at peace with herself and her planet. She found it uplifting to realize that she had enjoyed being nude without the orgasms she had originally had her heart set on.

After breakfast, the three of them all worked on packing for their upcoming backpacking adventure. Some things would have to be packed the morning of, like their sleeping bags, but much of what they were taking could go straight into their packs.

They all decided not to take tents. The boys’ tent was really not meant for backpacking; it was too big and too heavy. Fortunately, David and Jill had remembered to check the weather forecast when they had been in town the day before. It was supposed to remain clear and dry through the weekend, making the decision to sleep under the stars an easy one.

It took a little bit of work, but they managed to divide up the food, the stove, the pans, the plates, and the other common stuff somewhat fairly. Each of them would, of course, carry their own clothes and sleeping bags.

Once they had done about all the packing that could be done the day before departure, Jill took a chair into the shade and sat down to read. That morning, she finished ‘Candide.’ She hadn’t known what to think of the book and its message until the night before. Now she knew what she thought it meant; however, she realized that her professor might have a very different take on it, likely finding deep significance in aspects that she was ignoring. She found herself looking forward to a classroom discussion on Voltaire and his work of fiction. She almost couldn’t wait.

She picked out her next book but decided to wait until after lunch and a swim before diving in.

After lunch she again put on the one-piece, hoping that doing so might be adding to the extent that the guys were missing her toplessness. That was a difficult strategy as she had come to realize that she might be missing it just as much, maybe more. Men didn’t know how great they had it, not needing to wear shirts, but she now had a full appreciation.

David and Ryan again tried to pressure her into stripping and going naked, but they seemed to be just going through the motions. It felt as if they knew they would ultimately lose, no matter how hard they tried.

After another roundtrip swim to Sunken Island, Jill picked up the ‘Communist Manifesto,’ by Karl Marx, and sat down to read. She didn’t know why that book was on the list, but it was. She wasn’t looking forward to reading it, but she knew that her misgivings about it likely stemmed from unfounded assumptions. It might actually be an interesting book, she realized. At least it was short; she was glad about that.

One lemonade, one water, and half the book later, she realized that it was time for Ryan to perform his midafternoon ritual. She was no longer all that mad at him, but she couldn’t let him know that.

“Okay, Jerk-boy,” she called out loud and proud. Both Ryan and David looked over at her. She held Ryan’s gaze, a confident closed-lip smile on her face. She stretched out her arm and pointed into the forest in the general direction of his tree. “Now!” she said sternly when he didn’t move. “You’re going to obey me to make up for how you lied to David . . . saying that I was blackmailing you. We both know that about all I said about those photos was that I was keeping them. Now go!”

Ryan reluctantly got to his feet.

“And again, I don’t want to star in your wet daydreams. Maybe you better take your Swimsuit Edition with you,” she said. “Go and get it!”

To her surprise, Ryan headed right to his tent. He was obeying her orders nicely. Glancing over, she saw in David’s expression how much he was enjoying watching her manhandle Ryan. She gave him a wink, and he broke into laughter.

A few moments later Ryan emerged from his tent, a rolled up magazine in his hand. He turned to head off into the forest.

“Wait!” she called out. “Minor change of plans. First, bring it here.”

Ryan did as instructed, handing Jill the magazine. He stood behind her, looking over her shoulder as she flipped through the pages, scanning the models in their skimpy little bikinis on far away exotic beaches.

“She looks great,” said Ryan pointing. “So much like you.”

Jill paused and scrutinized the image he was indicating. The woman’s body type was indeed very similar to her own, and they were both brunettes. She couldn’t tell which one of them was lighter on top, herself or the woman in the magazine. At the very least, it was clear that the model on that page was also an A-cup girl. Jill glanced at the woman’s legs. Like her, she was very fit.

“She’s not quite as cute as you . . . damn perky, though.”

Ignoring that comment, Jill rolled up the magazine. Spinning around, she whacked Ryan in the chest with it, saying, “Here! Now get lost!”

“Ryan’s right,” said David, still smiling gleefully after the two of them were alone. “Your picture would not look at all out of place in that magazine. You’d blend right in with those hot women.”

Jill rolled her eyes. She was still not willing to believe that she had the body of a supermodel. Taking a deep breath, she returned her thoughts to the relationship between the proletarians and the bourgeoisie and how Marx believed that capitalism was unstable and communism was inevitable.

After dinner, Jill walked to the trailer and showered. She was realizing that it was her last chance to do so for the next four or five days. Since she was now occasionally wearing both swimsuits, she went to a lot of effort to do an impeccable job of shaving between her legs. Having unusual tan lines down there was one thing; having stubble show would be quite another. She also trimmed down the height of her small landing strip. She didn’t want there to be enough hair there to be visible through thin fabric.

Late that night, she again walked nude to the log. She didn’t know if she’d attempt an orgasm or not, preferring not to plan ahead one way or the other. In the end, she didn’t. It was nice enough to just revel in being completely and utterly naked. She even found herself wondering about the tiny little landing strip. Would she feel more naked without it? Would she be more naked without it? Wasn’t she already completely naked?

She gave a little thought to swimming. She had so enjoyed her nude swim out to Sunken Island. Why not at night? It would be safe enough, with the full moon, she reasoned. She’d never be able to find Sunken Island, but that hardly mattered; she would never go that far at night.

In the end, she headed back to her tent without swimming. She knew she needed her sleep. There was an exciting day ahead, another basketball game and then the start of their backpacking adventure. She was looking forward to that, and suddenly she realized why. So far that summer, they had only hiked places they had visited in prior years. This would be new territory. Jill found it fun and exciting to think about venturing off into terra incognita.

Waking up the next morning, Jill realized that she had been dreaming. This new dream had been a variation of a previous dream, the one that had involved Nick. As before, she had been bottomless and riding in his truck, only it hadn’t been a truck. There had been a back seat and Nick had been in it. Someone else had been driving. While she had been dreaming, she had known who he was and where they were going; however, now that she was awake, those pieces of the puzzle had vanished with the morning haze.

Jill was in a sunny mood as she and the boys headed to breakfast. To her delight, her grandmother had a surprise waiting.

“Dutch Babies!” squealed Jill as she caught a whiff upon entering the trailer.

“Yep, just for you!” replied her grandmother.

“With fresh lemons and powdered sugar!” added Jill, seeing them at her place on the table. “You spoil me rotten, Grandma!” she added, giving her an appreciative hug.

“You’re worth it!” she replied.

‘I’m worth it?’ thought Jill. ‘Yes, I’m worth it!’ she decided, recalling that she had concluded as much the morning that she had told Ryan off.

“You’re worth it!” echoed both David and her grandfather simultaneously.

“Jinx!” they all shouted laughing.

During breakfast, David talked about needing to go into the Ranger Station in Stanton. He said that he had to fill out a form and get a Backcountry Permit which was a requirement. The authorities, of course, needed to know who was where, presumably so that they would know where to look if a group went missing. David claimed that he had told her of the requirement days earlier, but Jill had no recollection of such a conversation.

Suddenly, Jill realized that this might be her chance for another nude swim. How she wanted to again visit Sunken Island in the buff! If only Ryan would go along with David, she thought. That would be ideal! She wanted to say something, but she knew that it wouldn’t happen if her interest in being left alone was at all obvious. Not wanting to mess things up, she kept quiet.

“You guys should all come with me,” proposed David.

Jill said nothing, doing her best to appear lost in thought.

“I’ll come,” said Ryan.

‘Score!’ thought Jill as she did her best to maintain an indifferent expression.

After a sufficient pause, she remarked, “Maybe just the two of you should go. I still have a lot of books to get through, and I’ll probably have less time to read on the hike.”

“Whatever,” said David with a shrug. “…up to you.”

Jill exchanged smiles with him. She was on cloud nine, but she had to keep that to herself.

“You sure look happy about the idea of reading,” remarked Ryan.

“It’s the Dutch Babies,” said Jill, putting an arm around her grandmother and planting a kiss on her cheek. “They’re my favorite.”