**Summer at Cache Lake**

 **Chapter 121: A Surprising Revelation**

Jill felt the same way. Many of the hikes in the Cache Lake region were annual traditions. As she listened, participating in the discussion occasionally, her mind was going a mile a minute. It was obvious why David had selected that particular hike. She couldn’t imagine that they would meet other hikers south of the ridge. Indeed, the trailhead on that side was completely unmarked. There wasn’t even a wide spot in the gravel road for them to park. They just had to pull off and leave the Jeep in the ditch.

Meeting people at the top, on Stanton Ridge, was certainly something that could happen. They’d met people there before; however, most of the people who climbed up to that viewpoint were day hikers who tended to turn around there. The trail that went up along the ridge from there, to Spaghetti and Pimple Peak, was again very lightly traveled. Most of what could be seen from the peaks was already visible on the ridge.

Jill realized that this hike was not in an area at all like where she had hiked with the Copelands. The area near the Lupine Lakes had been full of people due to its proximity to the campground. The trail that David had in mind was likely to be devoid of people except for where it shared the viewpoint with the popular trail coming up from Stanton.

Jill was getting nervous as the minutes ticked down. Unless she grew a backbone and asserted herself resolutely – or ran off to be alone – in something like a half hour she would be nude and leaving her clothes far behind.

While hiking nude with David and Ryan was something that she had done before, the situation that she found herself in was completely new. Before, she had taken off her swimsuit and gone for what had been intended to be a solo, out-and-back swim. She had ended up naked and in among people in the cabin area, but she had never meant for that to happen. It had occurred via a series of events that she had not been able to control.

This time, if she took off her clothes and got in the Jeep, she would be actively participating. She knew that even if she did that, she would be resisting verbally. However, it was clear that such resistance, at this stage of the game, would be ignored. If she really wanted to avoid all risk of being seen naked, then she would need to ditch the guys. She could keep her clothes on, or she could go off alone somewhere and do a little naked sunbathing. Indeed, when she’d seen Fuzzy Wuzzy’s former perch that morning, it had looked to be almost as white as it had been when she had first shaved the little guy off. She could spend some more time working on darkening it – off somewhere all by herself. That seemed like a worthy endeavor.

“Jill . . . earth to Jill,” she heard David saying.

“Oh, sorry. Was I daydreaming again?” she asked, suddenly noticing that everyone was looking at her and laughing.

“Is that what you’d like?” he asked.

“You’ll have to repeat the question. I guess my mind was elsewhere,” she replied honestly.

Again there was laughter.

“Grandma has kindly offered to put a lunch together for us. She’s making sandwiches. Ham and cheese for you?” David asked.

“Sure. That would be fine . . . mustard, pickles, and olives . . . if you have them,” she said, turning to her grandmother. “You’re the best, grandma,” she added, reaching across the table to take her hand and squeeze it.

Jill knew exactly what was going on. David was trying to make it so that there wouldn’t really be a decision point. Because of the presence of her grandparents, she was being forced to be agreeable. He was clearly hoping that she’d simply continue going with the flow. If she continued with that, she’d, of course, end up naked. From here on out, it looked to be a slippery slope.

“I need to use the bathroom,” she said, getting up and walking back down the trailer’s narrow aisle.

Once the door was closed behind her, she quickly stripped everything off. The bathroom was tiny, but she stood in front of the mirror, looking at herself, imaging that doing so might bring some clarity to her thoughts. All it did was make it abundantly clear just how naked a naked girl was.

Her bare nipples stared unblinkingly back at her. Glancing lower down she saw just how visible her slit was. Prior to that summer, it had been largely hidden under a thin but dark thatch. To get a better idea of what might be visible to an observer as she moved around, she shifted one foot to the side and opened her knees slightly. Her outer lips separated enough to allow a glimpse of the delicate bits within.

Jill closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. It was unthinkable for a young woman to put herself on display like that. And yet, that was exactly why it was so excruciatingly thrilling. Could she do it? She dressed, still not knowing the answer to that question.

Once she had everything back on, she remembered to pee. After all, that was supposedly the reason she had gone into the bathroom in the first place. It would make no sense to go back to the table, and then within a short while, need to return.

After exiting, she poured herself another cup of coffee. She knew she was trying to stall, trying to slow down the passing of time. As soon as they left the trailer, David would be telling her what to do; he’d be telling her to undress. Somehow she needed to put that moment off until she had reached a final decision. There could be no waffling. The guys would take advantage of any hint of indecisiveness.

“Well, you kids should be going. You’ve got a long hike ahead of you,” said her grandmother, shooing them out of the trailer. “Go get ready and then stop back by. I’ll have your lunch ready in about ten minutes.” Jill couldn’t believe that her grandmother seemed to be on the boys’ side – making things more difficult for her.

Just outside the trailer, David conferred with Ryan. Jill heard him say, “Why don’t you hang out here? You’ve got your boots on. I’ll walk back with Jill. I’ll explain everything to her and help her get ready.”

A short time later, as the two of them walked back to the point, she said, “I can’t do this, Pocket. You know that.”

“You can. You know you can,” he replied.

“I’m not doing it, then . . . even if I could.”

“You’re just getting cold feet. It’s no big deal.”

“How would you know?” she asked incredulously.

He just laughed.

“David, at least have a little compassion. Try to understand why I can’t.”

“You’ve done it before.”

“That means nothing. I didn’t have a choice before.”

“Jill, I’m not going to force you . . . if that’s what you’re hoping.”

Jill was taken aback. “You think I want you to force me?”

“Do you?”

“Of course not!”

“Well then . . . what?”

“I don’t know,” she replied softly, looking down. She really didn’t know.

“First things first,” said David upon reaching their campsite. “Get a fresh pair of socks and get those shoes off. Time to get your hiking boots on.”

No matter what she was going to do, she’d probably need her hiking boots, she realized. She got them from her tent and sat down to put them on. David did the same, also changing into his boots.

“Okay, now the shirt,” he said.

Taking a deep breath, Jill replied simply, “no.”

“Ryan’s not here. It’s just me. You want to do this. Why don’t we skip the preliminaries? Save us both the trouble. I’ll tell Ryan that you put up a tremendous amount of resistance, fighting me tooth and nail. He’ll believe me. He knows you.”

“It’s not just for appearance's sake,” she argued. “I really can’t do this.”

“Just clear your thoughts and take off your clothes. We both know you want this. And then let’s go have some fun!”

Jill didn’t move. She looked over and saw David pick up her phone from the folding chair next to the one she was sitting on.

“I’ll bring this . . . for the Tarzan video. Awesome . . . fully charged,” he said. Jill didn’t protest. It was password protected. He wouldn’t be able to unlock it. “I’ll carry it. You won’t have any pockets today,” he added, sliding it into one of his pockets.

David stared at Jill, and she stared back. They were both strong-willed people and they were at an impasse.

After more than a minute, David said, “Okay, here’s how this is going to work. I’m going to walk back to the trailer. Grandma probably has our lunch ready to go. You need to undress . . . once naked, you won’t be able to go anywhere near the Airstream. So, undress, leave all your clothes in your tent. Meet us at the bridge. We’ll take our time getting there so you’ll have enough time. But you’ll have to hurry.”

Jill listened, making sure that her expression remained blank. She didn’t want David to know what she was thinking . . . even though she herself did not know what she was thinking.

“If you’re there and naked, hop in the Jeep. We’ll go with plan A. We’ll take the Arrowhead Falls trail up to Stanton Ridge. From there, we’ll go on up to Spaghetti or Pimple Peak. One of those should be perfect for the Tarzan video.” He paused and their eyes locked. “If you’re not there, we’ll wait a few minutes. Not too long mind you. Once we decide that you’re not coming, we’ll go on without you. That won’t be nearly as much fun for us . . . any of us. I doubt you’ll find anything fun to do. You’ll probably just be moping around, thinking of all the fun you could have been having.”

Jill looked away and took a deep breath. She knew she’d spend much longer than just the one day feeling as if she had missed out.

“If you don’t come and we end up leaving,” he continued. “I’ll leave your sandwich behind for you. I’ll place it at the base of the post. You know the one. The one that you look at every time we cross the bridge.”

Jill looked up. She saw a sly smile and a twinkle in his eyes. “The one with your white panties tied to it.”

Jill’s jaw dropped in shock. Her heart skipped a beat. How could he know about the panties?

“You didn’t know that I knew, did you?” he continued. “You weren’t the only one up that night. I came looking for you.”

Suddenly Jill remembered how she had almost knocked over her tent that night, diving for the opening. She had been sure that she had left it unzipped.

“You were so hilarious, ripping off your panties in a state of panic. I wasn’t at all close, but you were framed in that car’s headlights. You sure do the darndest things when you panic! That’s one video I wish I had!”

Jill stared at him, her eyes wide in disbelief. He couldn’t have been there, and yet he must have been.

“And what was too funny was how you started to talk about that the night you got drunk.”

“I did?”

“You did! You were telling Britt and Jenna about how you got caught topless . . . wearing just a pair of black panties. You said something like, ‘Well, at least they weren’t white . . . like the ones on the post.’ It was so funny! Even though you didn’t go on, the post did come up that night.”

Jill didn’t know what to say. She was racking her brain trying to remember if she had really talked about the panties on the post in everyone’s presence.

David continued, “There was a bright moon. Maybe you remember. I’ve thought back to that night multiple times. It’s been so hard . . . keeping this to myself. And don’t worry, Ryan doesn’t know. I never told him.”

Jill was incredulous. She was completely dumbfounded.

“But I was glad I was there when I saw you charge down that embankment. I imagined I might be carrying you back in the dark. I was wishing I had a flashlight with me at that point. I hadn’t brought one along as I had only been going to your tent. Fortunately, you were all right. I was so glad to see you back up on the bridge after the car had passed.”

Jill was in shock.

“You’ve really known about those panties all along?” she asked.

David laughed. “Yep! It made me feel much better about pushing you. Not only did you go there in just your panties, but you walked back in nothing at all . . . bare-assed naked. I knew then that you really did want to be naked. Even though you’re not admitting it, apparently not even to yourself, you crave nudity.”

Jill turned her back to him. If he’d really been watching that night, it did seem as if it helped explain his behavior.

“So that’s how this will work,” he said when she didn’t say anything more. “If it works for you, meet us on the bridge. If not, stop by later for your sandwich . . . before the forest critters get it. And if you don’t come with us, then I hope you have a very nice day. I mean that sincerely.”

He paused, waiting for her to reply. When she again didn’t, he continued, “Okay, I’ll be going then. And whatever you decide, I want you to know that I love you. If this happens today, or if it doesn’t, nothing will change. We’ll still be close. I want you to know that.”

Again David waited for a response. She said nothing; she didn’t even turn to face him.

“Okay then, see you soon . . . or later this evening.” With that, he turned and headed down the well-worn path toward the trailer.

Jill turned and followed him with her eyes. Just before he was about to disappear into the trees, she called out, “Pocket!”

He stopped and looked back. “Yes?” he said when she didn’t continue.

“Please don’t tell Ryan about that night . . . about the panties and all,” she said just loud enough for him to hear.”

“You got it, Jilly,” he replied. He gave her a thumbs up, and a moment later he was gone.

**Chapter 122: Jill’s Decision**

Jill was still in shock over this latest revelation. Wouldn’t she have heard him? She started going back over what she could recall of that night. What he had said was impossible to believe, and yet it must be true. How else could he know all that?

But she forced those thoughts from her head. She had to focus. She knew that her inability to say ‘no’ and simply forget about it meant that her illogical side felt a strong desire to strip naked and go. If she didn’t, she’d regret it. She knew that, but she still had all kinds of reservations.

She didn’t know what to do, but she knew that she had no time to waste. At least ten minutes had elapsed; grandma was probably already done with their lunch. David was surely halfway back to the trailer, but it would take her nearly fifteen minutes to get to the bridge. He’d said they’d wait so she had enough time, but he had also said that she would have to hurry. It seemed as if he might be trying to force a quick decision, and yet she’d had a whole day to think about the choice that was now at hand. It was now or never. If she didn't leave soon, she could miss her ride.

Placing her arms stiffly down at her sides and making two fists of frustration, she muttered, “Shit! Shit! Shit!”

Taking it up a notch, she started hopping up and down, stomping her feet in unison as vexation surged through her. “Shit! Shit! Shit!” she repeated to herself, a cloud of dust swirling around her boots. Time was short. She had to decide between the two options, and both choices were far from ideal.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” she called out a third time as she ran to her tent, tearing off her shirt on the way.

A moment later, she was down to just her boots. She couldn’t believe she was going, but she wasn’t going to revisit the decision. She’d already spent way too much time thinking about it. It was crazy and she might come to regret it, but she was going. She was going naked!

She left the point, sprinting up the beach in the direction of the outlet. Barely fifty feet from camp, she stopped and ran back. Unzipping her tent, she quickly located her tube of sunscreen.

She squirted some into her hand and plastered it on where Fuzzy Wuzzy had been. That spot would not be able to withstand a full day in the sun, and the last thing she wanted to do was to apply sunscreen there in front of the guys. It was bad enough that it was white.

As her fingers were still greasy, she wiped the rest of the lotion onto her nipples and rubbed it in.

A moment later the tent was zipped and she was again running up the beach, naked but for her hiking boots, the tube of sunscreen in hand. Maybe David had some with him, but she didn’t want to take that chance. Heading out naked was crazy enough. ‘I might as well do one intelligent thing,’ she thought.

Suddenly she remembered the cabins across the lake. Someone might be watching. She felt the urge to cover up, but instead just ended up laughing. “Just look at me!” she said gleefully. “What has happened to you, Jill Wahlund? You used to be so careful!”

At the outlet, she slowed momentarily to a walk; however, remembering the need to hurry, she resumed jogging as she made her way along the trail that followed the river downstream. It seemed unlikely that she’d be late and miss them at the bridge, but she didn’t want to take that chance.

It was a nice day, and she tried to clear her mind and come to terms with her choice as she hurried along. The gurgling sound of the water helped; it was indeed a soothing happy sound.

Upon reaching the bridge, she climbed up the slope to the road cautiously, looking carefully in both directions, her ears on full alert. It was always scary to venture out into areas where other people might be, even if there seemed to be no one around. Nothing like being naked to make one pay good attention to their surroundings, she thought.

Once she was positive that the coast was clear, she walked over to study her panties on the post. They seemed to be exactly as they had always been. It didn’t look as if anyone had ever untied them to figure out what they were. She wondered if David had simply noticed them; however, his account of that evening had been much too detailed and accurate.

Noting that there was no sandwich at the base of the post, she tried to relax. As she apparently had a little bit of time to wait, she went about applying more sunscreen. She’d have to get help with her back, but the rest she could reach. She remained near the end of the bridge, ready to make a hasty retreat should a car other than the Jeep come into view.

When the Jeep finally appeared, she decided to make it good, striking a dramatic hitchhiker pose. She placed one hand above her hip and the other up and out, her thumb pointing skyward but angling back in the direction they were headed.

As the little white stripe, about exactly the length and width of her pinky finger, was about to be seen for the first time, she decided to lead with it. Placing her feet a bit wider apart, she thrust her pelvis forward, tilting it up in the process. She found herself imaging that she was hitchhiking with her pussy rather than with her thumb. The very thought seemed so naughty; however, it tickled her funny bone.

As the Jeep rolled to a stop, she saw that both boys were smiling, laughing even. They were all in such high spirits, all three of them. Ryan, in the passenger seat, had a phone up as if he might be filming.

As they came alongside, she said, “You better not have been filming.” But then she saw that it was her phone.

“I was trying,” he replied. “But David wouldn’t let me bring my phone, and yours is locked. I tried your birthdate . . . didn’t work.”

“Of course it didn’t,” she said, starting to climb in.

“Wait a second, Jilly,” said David. “That was too good. We should go back and turn around. We should do that again . . . this time with Ryan actually filming.”

Jill hesitated.

“It’s your phone. Only you will have the video,” he added.

“Okay . . . I guess,” she said somewhat reluctantly, taking the phone from Ryan to enter her password.

As she watched the Jeep drive away, she walked over to the post that held her panties. If this is being recorded of posterity, she thought, then the panties may as well have a cameo. She was realizing that they might have played a somewhat larger role in all that had happened than she had previously known.

As the Jeep approached, she again stuck out her thumb as well as her pelvis. This time she was a little more reserved in just how dramatically she thrust the little white stripe forward. She didn’t want it to look too intentional or unnatural in the video – not that she would be showing it to anyone.

Glancing down, she saw that the white stripe was in the sun. It would be small in the video, but it would probably show.

“I’m sad for Fuzzy Wuzzy,” said Ryan, looking over into the back seat once they were together and underway.

Jill felt a pang of misgiving pass through her. She hadn’t wanted Ryan to see her pussy like it was, certainly not so soon. She had meant to keep teasing him, and she had hoped to erase the stripe via tanning. The urge to cross her legs was strong, but she managed to resist, instead, just pressing her knees together.

“Why are you sad for him?” she asked. “You probably think he crawled inside. Don’t you think he likes it in there?”

Jill had been giving this some thought. She had been expecting that Ryan would start joking about Fuzzy Wuzzy being inside her vagina. She thought that he might say that he’d built a cocoon in there and that one day he would emerge as a beautiful butterfly – colorful, but no longer fuzzy.

“I don’t think that is what happened . . . not at all,” said Ryan. “I think that you murdered him!”

“Now why would I do that?”

“I don’t know. Did you?”

Jill didn’t know how to reply. She didn’t like being accused of killing – even if Fuzzy Wuzzy had only been an imaginary caterpillar.

“Not saying,” she replied. “I guess you’ll never know.”

“I think I know,” said Ryan. “I can see his ghost.”

Jill looked down at her freshly shaven pussy. She tilted her pelvis and pressed on her abdomen, stretching the skin across her pubic mound, to get a better look. Maybe it did look a little like a caterpillar ghost, she decided. The edges were not crisp; they had the wispy appearance that a ghost might have.

Suddenly realizing that the distraction had resulted in her knees drifting apart, Jill glanced up and saw that Ryan was gazing straight into her open slit. She felt the familiar warmth surge in her cheeks as she knocked her knees back together.

“Eyes forward, Ryan!” she commanded. “Have a little respect.”

“Respect?”

“For Fuzzy Wuzzy . . . our dearly departed.”

She didn’t want to encourage him; she knew that arguing the point would.

“Um-nee-om, gol-ee-om, tres-par-ces de-vee-ces . . . om,” chanted Ryan.

“What is that?” asked David.

“Latin . . . a Catholic burial chant . . . to help Fuzzy Wuzzy’s spirit find its way to the next world.”

“You’re not Catholic,” replied David.

“I know.”

“What does it mean?” asked David.

“I have no idea. I made it up, but maybe it will do some good.”

“I doubt it,” Jill scoffed.

“Your opinion wasn’t requested. You’re a caterpillar murderer!”

“All right, kids, try and get along,” encouraged David. “We’ve got a long day ahead of us. I don’t need to hear any more squabbling.”

“Are you going to pull over and wait until we promise to behave?” asked Ryan.

“Do I have to?” he asked.

“Ah, Dad, haven’t you figured out that this is how we have fun?” asked Jill.

David laughed. Jill and Ryan joined in.

The drive to the falls trail was not particularly eventful, but it certainly did a number on Jill’s nipples. The cool morning air swirling around them in the open Jeep made them painfully hard, even raising goosebumps on her arms. Jill ended up pressing her nipples into her breasts with her clenched fists in order to save them. Fuzzy Wuzzy might be expendable, but her nipples weren’t.

A few times, she ducked down to keep from being seen by those in passing cars, but only a few times. There wasn’t much traffic, and the final five-mile stretch was a small, godforsaken gravel road. It was so wretched, in fact, that the off-road capabilities of the Jeep were called into play in several places.

The lower part of the trail, from where they parked to where the path to the falls branched off, was similarly uneventful. They didn’t pass anyone, and yet there was still the thrill of being naked and outside, even if it was just with David and Ryan. She’d been able to relax and let go of her breasts with the end of the drive. The air had not warmed up, but at least it was still. Her nipples remained rock hard, just no longer painfully so.

Jill felt a little more naked than ever before. Even though naked was naked, the absence of Fuzzy Wuzzy did seem to make a difference. Every inch of her pussy was now completely visible. Not only was she conscious of just how bare she was, but she also couldn’t keep from wondering what the guys must think of her for having shaved. She was very curious, but she certainly wasn’t going to bring the topic up for discussion.

Jockeying for position, Ryan managed to be just ahead of her as they followed the trail into the forest. She tried to ignore him, but it was difficult. Every chance he got, he was looking back at her, and he made no attempt to hide what he was looking at. Jill found it strange that her bald pussy could be so fascinating; however, she remembered staring at Britt and Jenna’s smooth pussies. Hopefully, she had not been nearly as obvious about that as Ryan.

**Chapter 123: Stanton Ridge**

Ryan continued making a nuisance of himself by stopping occasionally to stare back at her as they made their way along the forest trail. In part, there was something about his attention that Jill liked, but she wouldn’t admit it to herself such that she might enjoy it. Her official stance had to be that she didn’t like it one little bit, so she scowled at him and kept after him to behave – to not be such a pervert.

Jill was surprised at how little time it took for them to reach the turnoff to the falls. She knew the reason. The last time had taken longer because she’d been on crutches. She had been quick on the crutches, and yet she knew she was faster without them, especially on the narrow, curvy track through the forest. She also remembered having to take off her bikini top because of how the crutches were rubbing against the wires that gave shape to the cups, causing them to dig in. She no longer had that problem; no crutches and no top.

They took their first water break there, where the trail branched off. They talked about visiting the falls but decided to do that on their way back, knowing that then they’d be hot, tired and dusty from the long hike. The pool at the base of the falls would be particularly refreshing at that point; it was something to look forward to.

Jill wondered if the falls might now have negative associations for her, given what had transpired there earlier in the summer. She decided that it would only bother her if she let it. She made the conscious choice to not allow the one event to ruin the waterfall for her; after all, it was beautiful. Its beauty would always be a much better thing to focus on than how Ryan had taken liberties there.

Just past the intersection, the main trail turned sharply to the right and began climbing at a very steep angle. The trees kept it from being completely obvious, but Jill knew that they were climbing the same escarpment that the falls descended. Fortunately, after just over half a mile, the slope of the trail moderated. Jill was glad about that. It had seemed almost like actual mountain climbing, quite similar to what she knew lay ahead.

The trail remained well below the forest canopy. She knew that eventually they would emerge above the tree line, but she couldn’t remember how far up the ridge that took place. She decided to enjoy the shade while it lasted. Much of their day was destined to be spent on the exposed mountainside.

Enjoying the shade was a simple matter as it was a lovely morning. The birds were active, and what sounded like happy mating calls filled the air. Parallel rays of sunlight pierced all the way down to the forest floor, creating a cathedral-like atmosphere. The air was still quite cool, and yet it was warming up quickly.

Jill allowed the fingertips of one hand to graze across a nipple, doing her best to make it appear unintentional should one of her companions happen to be watching. As she had suspected, it was just as stiff as it had been during the drive. She knew that arousal was part of the formula that kept it that way. Being naked simply affected her body in a number of ways; there was no way around that. And yet she knew that her nipples were typically almost as hard in the absence of a straightforward logical explanation.

Even though she was expecting that they would not meet anyone on that section of trail, she kept her vigilance on full alert. Fortunately, there were so many places to hide in the forest. Meeting someone would not be an issue, provided she saw them first.

She chuckled to herself, again considering the person that she had become. She had come to love being naked in the great outdoors. Something about it was absolutely wonderful. She was even starting to think that it felt natural. Initially, being clothed had been what had felt natural. Being naked had seemed so unnatural. Her logical mind had not taken long to identify the irony in that.

Clothing was, of course, the artificial element in the formula. That much was undeniable; however, a lifetime of wearing clothes made being dressed seem much more natural than being nude. That was of course backwards; however, it had taken her body quite a bit of time to catch up with her mind as far as that point was concerned. She still had a long way to go to feel comfortable while nude, that much was certain. However, it felt glorious to have the fresh air and sunshine caressing her bare skin. Summertime in the mountains just couldn’t be beat!

It had always felt perfectly natural for her arms, her legs, and her face to be bare. Now it was beginning to feel that way for the rest of her body. In many ways that development surprised her, and yet it was a welcome change. For some reason, it was delightful to learn that clothing wasn’t nearly as necessary to a person’s comfort and wellbeing as she had always assumed.

Once they had cleared the last of the tall trees and were making their way through the small scraggly ones that signaled that they were nearing the tree line, the three amigos paused for a second water break. Earlier, Jill had slipped her sunscreen into David’s daypack. She fished it out and went about reapplying it everywhere she could reach, deliberately facing away from the guys while putting it on Fuzzy Wuzzy’s ghost as well as her breasts. She wanted it to darken and disappear, but she knew better than to try and rush that.

“I’ll do your back,” Ryan volunteered, stepping toward her and reaching for the tube.

Instinctively, Jill pulled her fist with the sunscreen in it to her chest, preventing him from taking it. She had never let him do her back. But then, for some reason, she had a change of heart.

“Okay,” she said, extending her hand back towards him. She saw a look of delight in his eyes as she turned her back. “But you better be good! Or this will be the one and only time.”

Jill half expected him to mess up right away. She thought she’d feel him trying to reach around her ribcage to spread lotion on the sides of her boobs or maybe down onto her buttocks. For some reason, she felt that he wouldn’t be able to keep himself from taking liberties, even if he tried. She was ready to jump away at the first hint of an infraction.

Ryan surprised her, however. He was so good, in fact, that she wasn’t even sure that the area to which he had applied sunscreen overlapped where she herself had spread it. Before she knew it, he was done and handing the tube back to her quite respectfully.

“Okay then,” she said with a smile. “Thanks.” Might Ryan be trying to turn over a new leaf? She wondered.

Four or five switchbacks and many hundreds of feet of elevation gain later, they were finally approaching the ridge. Jill found herself wondering why she had come on the hike in the first place. Approaching the viewpoint from below put her at a distinct disadvantage. Thinking back to her day hike with the Copelands, she suddenly knew why she had not seen the couple on the bench as she had crested the ridge while carrying the girl’s backpack.

As she made her way cautiously along, she thought about how anyone above could be looking down on them. They’d know that she was nude long before she even knew that she was being observed.

David seemed to sense her discomfort, not that doing so would have been difficult given how she had slowed. She was now last in line and falling behind, peering up at the ridge above them, a look of profound apprehension on her face.

Jill saw David stop and wait for her to catch up. As she approached him, she wondered what he had in mind.

“Safety in numbers, Bean,” he said as she came up. Let’s stick close together. I’ll shield you.

“Okay,” she replied tentatively. He might not be the perfect brother, but it was obvious that he was trying to look out for her.

David and Ryan were not wearing all that much more than she was. Other than their boots, they each wore just a pair of shorts. David obviously had nothing to share, clothing wise, should they meet people; however, he was right. If she stayed right behind him, she might be somewhat hidden.

They continued on toward the ridge like that, in lockstep, Jill so close that she could easily reach forward and grasp the waistband of his shorts with both hands had she had the inclination. She mostly wanted to keep her eyes on the ridge above, but she was forced to focus on David’s legs, lest she get too close and trip.

To Jill’s surprise and delight, there was no one on the ridge when they reached it about ten minutes later. Upon seeing that, Jill ran across to look at the view as well as to be able to see the trail coming up from the other valley.

Studying the trail coming up from Stanton, Jill saw not one but two groups of hikers. The closest one looked to be a couple. They were headed down.

“I guess you lucked out,” said David coming up behind her. “Had we been just a little quicker, they would have still been here.”

Pondering that, Jill realized that she had narrowly escaped pushing her tally up to forty.

Jill looked at the other group. They were below the couple and consisted of five individuals; they were coming up. She quickly realized that they were coming fast. They would reach the ridge in a matter of minutes.

“Time to get going guys,” she said turning and making her way quickly toward the continuation of the trail, the one that followed the ridge toward Spaghetti, now visible to their left.

“What’s the rush, Jill,” hollered Ryan.

“See you on top,” she yelled back, breaking into a run. She had to get away.

**Chapter 124: Spaghetti**

Considering the approaching group, Jill realized that she had been able to tell exactly how they were dressed. If they reached the ridge and looked up at her, they’d know in an instant that she was nude. Seeing that, they might decide to follow. She couldn’t have that. As far as she knew, the trail to the two peaks had no outlet other than back to Stanton Ridge.

Her only hope was to increase the overall distance by such a significant amount that it wouldn’t be all that apparent to them that she was naked. It wasn’t much of a strategy; however, there on the barren slope, the options were extremely limited. Considering her decision, a decision made in haste, she realized that heading back down might have been the wiser choice. That hadn’t occurred to her right then, and now it was too late. It would be foolhardy to turn around.

She continued at a run as the trail angled up; doing so was quite a feat, given how steep and rocky the route was. One rock she stepped on dislodged, causing her to stumble. That served as a wakeup call. She slowed her pace appreciably in order to be more certain of her footing. Even though her boots might keep her from twisting an ankle, a fall could still be bad. The guys had carried her down before. She didn’t need to force them to do that again.

She had been topless during that prior rescue. That had been bad enough. A butt naked rescue would be much worse. Imagining herself being carried like that through the group of people below, her legs apart in piggyback position, she realized that it had already happened. Both Britt and Jenna had carried her on their backs through large groups. It hadn’t been as bad as she might have thought, that is, until Britt had set her down. She seethed, gritting her teeth. She liked Britt, but that was something that she’d never be able to forgive . . . or forget.

She came to a small fork in the trail. The left branch went off nearly horizontal. From experience, she knew that it skirted Spaghetti. The main trail continued along the ridge, going up and over. The two routes rejoined and continued on to Pimple Peak on the other side of Spaghetti.

She was tempted to take the left fork. It crossed a steep scree slope. Going that way might get her hidden more quickly; however, she decided to go straight and remain on the main trail. The summit and the making of a Tarzan video there were central to their plans for the day.

The idea of having that video as a memento of her unusual summer had been growing on her ever since David had suggested it. Even though she had yet to see it, she was also glad that Ryan had filmed her debut as a naked hitchhiker that morning. She’d been trying to visualize what that video must look like. She hoped it looked cute rather than vulgar. Hopefully, it would safe from prying eyes on her phone. She had been thinking that it would have to be moved off of her phone when she got home to ensure that no one ever saw it . . . and that it never got lost or accidentally deleted.

Still racing along, she paused a moment to glance back; she was glad to see that David and Ryan were following. They looked to be going quite slow. She had worried that they might wait on the ridge and talk with the hikers that she had seen. She wouldn’t put it past them to point her out. Fortunately, they hadn’t been so inclined.

Turning back around, she focused on the project at hand: disappearing. As there was nothing to hide behind, all she could do was to make herself less noticeable by getting farther away.

A minute later, she glanced back again. The group was arriving on the ridge below them. It didn’t look as if they were all there yet, but she didn’t take the time to count. She realized that they would quickly see David and Ryan; indeed, they probably already had. She didn’t know if they’d look beyond them and see the nude girl hurrying away up the incline. Just possibly the absence of clothing might make her blend in with the rocky hillside. Bright clothing would have caused her to stand out, but as it was, her monotone tan skin and brunette hair might be functioning as a sort of camouflage given the distance. Even her brown boots were not all that different in color from the rocks around her.

Jill pounded on ahead, sweating profusely in the bright sunshine as she advanced steadily straight up the steep hill. At one point, she short-cut across a switchback even though doing so required the use of her hands as it was so steep. She was breathing hard and her heart was pounding in her chest. She was in good shape, but this escape had turned into a marathon. In addition to taxing her cardiovascular conditioning, the rapid climb was making her quads, glutes, and calves burn.

Near the top, she stopped for a quick breather. With her hands on her knees, she turned and looked down. She had left everyone in the dust! The hikers were just about where they had been. Whether they had seen her or not no longer seemed very important as it didn’t look as if they were going to continue on past the viewpoint.

David and Ryan were still coming, but they were even farther behind than before. ‘Either I accomplished what I set out to do, or I didn’t need to do that,’ she heard an internal voice say. Recognizing that the danger seemed to have passed, she did her best to shift her thoughts back to enjoying the day. She wished she had a bottle of water, but everything was in David’s pack.

While continuing to catch her breath, she stood back up and took in the view. The majestic beauty of the mountains surrounded her in all directions. The conifer-covered hills with their rocky outcroppings were indeed splendid to behold. The scenery was awe-inspiring beyond what any camera could ever hope to capture.

Down below, Stanton, the county seat, represented the only visible intrusion of man on the landscape. Except for the valley floor, the view surely looked just as it must have to the area’s native inhabitants prior to the arrival of European fur trappers and then settlers. Off in the distance, she could tell about where Agency had to be located. The town itself was not visible; however, she was able to see where the road from Stanton scribed a straight line on the valley floor heading toward it.

After once again verifying that the group of hikers that had forced her to flee was still not following, Jill turned and resumed climbing. This time she did so at a leisurely pace. She was no longer feeling panicky.

Once on top, she reveled in the fact that, except for the boots, she was completely naked. She found herself wishing that they weren’t required, and yet they were. She needed sunscreen and boots, nothing more. However, she was thirsty. She also needed water; it would arrive shortly.

From where she had climbed to, she could no longer see Stanton Ridge or the valley below. Spaghetti was nearly flat and quite large on top, such that she couldn’t even see David and Ryan on the trail heading up. It was as if Spaghetti was an island floating in the air. Other than her immediate surroundings, everything else in view looked to be many miles away, except for Pimple Peak, their next destination. It was probably just a mile away as the crow flies.

Pimple Peak was taller and pointier than Spaghetti. From prior climbs, Jill knew that there was essentially no trail near the top, just rock. It was more or less a class 3 climb similar to the route that they had taken up the back of Sharp Tooth. She knew that carrying a rope was recommend for class 3 rock, and yet they’d never had a rope or any other real rock climbing gear for that matter. The trail she’d just taken up Spaghetti would probably be considered class 2. She’d needed to use her hands in places, but not enough for the climb to be considered class 3.

She found herself continuing to think about Sharp Tooth. She tried unsuccessfully to remember its official name. Nick had told her what it was, but that had been a long time ago. She wondered when the trail would be repaired such that they might again be able to climb it. She imagined that it might be years before the forest service got around to it, given all the budget cuts she was always hearing about.

Shifting her thoughts over to how David and Ryan would be arriving in a matter of minutes, she decided to enjoy herself by reveling in the fact that she was nude, alone, and miles and miles from anything to wear. Starting at the tops of her boots, she ran her hands up her legs, caressing her dusty skin. She was essentially verifying with her sense of touch that she was indeed nude, even though that had never been in doubt.

Not only did her hands not encounter any clothing, they didn’t come in contact with anything at all. There was not even a single pubic hair to be felt. Between the boots on her feet and the hair on her head, there was nothing . . . just naked girl skin. Smiling, she touched herself lightly everywhere as if it was important to her to confirm her nudity.

Thinking ahead to the Tarzan video that she would surely be starring in shortly, Jill untied her boots and removed them. She didn’t need any stinking boots! As far as she could remember, Tarzan was always barefoot in his movies. After placing her socks on top of them, she stepped gingerly away, looking for the ideal place to film her Tarzan yell.

The mountain top was composed primarily of small sharp stones, so the going was tough. Eventually, she found a large, smooth rock that would work. It wasn’t as tall as she might have liked, but upon further consideration, she decided that it was probably ideal. If Ryan filmed her atop a tall rock, the background would be just sky. Had that been the goal, then they wouldn’t have had to climb a mountain. This shorter rock on top of Spaghetti meant that the background would be the neighboring peaks. Due to the altitude, there were no trees to block the view.

In considering the location, she realized that it might have been more appropriate to film atop their recently named ‘Tarzan Ridge,’ the ridge above Snow Lake that had a view of Agency. It was probably only about ten miles away as the crow flies. She even had photos on her phone of herself doing her Tarzan yell there – still photos, not video – and she had been wearing her bikini bottoms. ‘No bikini bottoms now,’ she chuckled to herself.

While that might have been the most obvious place for David to have selected for the planned video, she was glad he hadn’t. There were too many places along that route where it seemed likely they would encounter people. The hike up and over Cornice Ridge to Cache Lake was popular, and many people liked the hike to Elk Meadows. Indeed, it was people that were returning from Elk Meadows that they had met, causing her to fall and injure herself in the rain.

Hiking nude there seemed almost as bad as hiking nude near the Lupine Lakes. She knew she wouldn’t have done it. She was still amazed that she had taken off her clothes and climbed into the Jeep that morning, but it had only been because the hike had been planned for an area where the chances of being seen were very small. David had been wise to suggest the destination that he had.

She couldn’t believe that she wanted to be filmed naked, shaved pussy and all, yet she did. She wanted the video for posterity’s sake, but she was also looking forward to the experience. She imagined that being filmed doing her ‘thing’ would be both fun and exciting. She was glad that David had suggested it and had been pushing to get her to agree. She knew that it was something that she never would have proposed herself.

**Chapter 125: Spaghetti, continued**

Knowing that David and Ryan would be there momentarily, she took a quick look at Fuzzy Wuzzy’s ghost and her pussy just below in order to get an idea of what the camera would see. To her horror, she saw that the dust around her slit was dark because it was wet.

Would the boys think it was that way because she had been sweating or would they assume that it was due to arousal? She didn’t want them to think that she was turned on, but the idea of them thinking that she had a sweaty pussy wasn’t to her liking either.

She faced away as they approached, acting as if she were simply looking at Pimple Peak.

“I’m thirsty,” she said as they came up, looking back over her shoulder at David, her hands on her hips.

“Sure thing,” David replied, unslinging his small pack. “Hardly surprising given that you just set a record. I’m positive that no one has ever climbed Spaghetti faster.”

Jill smiled as she took the water bottle from him. Still facing away, she took a long drink.

“Not too fast,” he cautioned.

Jill sputtered, deliberately dribbling water down her front, but doing her best to make it look accidental. She tilted her pelvis to ensure that the rivulets would pass right over her mound. Glancing down, she saw that she had accomplished her mission. Her pussy was of course still muddy; however, it now appeared as if it was something that had just happened.

“Oh, the water feels so good,” she said, turning part way toward them. “I wish we had extra. I’d take a bath.”

“You need a bath,” chuckled David, studying her front.

Jill looked down at herself. Doing her best to act surprised, she said, “Oh, my God, I’m all muddy.”

“We can’t have a muddy Tarzan,” said David with a smile. He pulled a small hand towel out of his pack. It was the one that he had started carrying so that Jill would be able to sit down during lunch. “We probably have about a bottle extra,” he added. “You do need a bath.”

Jill accepted the towel from him. After taking a few more large sips, she wet a corner of the towel. Setting the bottle down, she went about washing off the dust. She started with her face and neck, working her way down from there.

“Should I be filming?” asked Ryan.

Jill looked up and saw that he had made his way around such that he was now looking at her from the front. He was extending her phone toward her, obviously hoping that she would enter her password.

“Get a life!” she replied, meeting his gaze momentarily.

She turned again, trying to deny him the frontal view. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that he was again moving, trying to get back in front of her. She did her best to pretend that she hadn’t noticed.

Realizing just how great of an opportunity it was to tease, she picked up the water bottle and poured a small amount on her tummy. It ran down, and with the towel, she went about cleaning everything below, her pussy as well as all the surrounding skin, carefully. The water felt wonderful, and she liked how her moist skin sparkled in the sunshine.

Making good use of the damp towel, she wiped off the dust from her legs as well as from her arms. Once she had also taken care of the dust on her butt, she said, “Okay, Ryan. Since you did so well with the sunscreen earlier, you can help with my back. That is . . . if you don’t mind.” She looked at him, curling her lips into a coy smile.

Ryan took the towel eagerly. After adding a small amount of water, he washed her back respectfully. Jill knew that it was impossible; however, she was feeling as if she might be starting to get him trained.

“Looks like Tarzan is all spiffed up and ready to perform on camera!” said David.

“Maybe Tarzan will do her thing, but no camera,” she replied, knowing full well that resisting was futile. She didn’t have to worry that David might be easily dissuaded.

After a fair amount of friendly arm twisting, Jill agreed to allow herself to be filmed, provided that it was on her terms: her phone only and no closeups. David and Ryan had no problem with doing it her way, and Ryan went about discussing with her the video he had in mind. He’d obviously given it a lot of thought.

“Ideally, I’d have a drone. It would circle during your performance,” he said waving an arm overhead to indicate just how rapidly he was thinking. “If you gave us a good long Tarzan yell, we might film two or more turns around you. The scenery would look majestic, even though it might look a bit like it’s whizzing by! As I have no drone, I’ll try circling you on foot while I film. It will be challenging to do well . . . to hold the camera steady and not trip . . . to keep you centered.”

Even though she knew he was a camera buff and was doing his best to sound artistic, Jill knew Ryan well enough to know that his real motivation stemmed from a desire to capture her naked body from every angle. She’d seen a look of disappointment on his face when she’d said that no closeups would be allowed.

“David will have to stay with me . . . right behind me, more or less. Otherwise, he’ll show up in the video.”

“We wouldn’t want that,” he chuckled.

“Exactly,” said Ryan. “Jill, I mean Tarzan, needs to appear as if she is all alone on the mountaintop, communicating with her distant jungle animal friends. If we had a chimp suit for you, then maybe.”

David laughed, but Jill just rolled her eyes.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep out of the shot,” said David.

Once they had talked through all the details, Jill stood at the ready, her left foot well forward of the other. Ryan was behind her right hip, just far enough back that Jill could not see him while keeping her eyes fixed on a distant hill, many miles away across the valley.

From that position, Ryan would start filming and then begin circling in a counter-clockwise direction. Jill knew that the video would start with a butt shot, and she cautioned him again about closeups. She made sure that he understood that she’d be verifying right away that he had followed the agreed upon rules.

Jill was to maintain a serious appearing demeanor and to keep staring at the one point on the horizon. As soon as she noticed Ryan entering her peripheral vision, she was to raise her arms and begin her Tarzan yell, giving it her all. Under no circumstances was she to look at Ryan or the phone in his hand.

As Tarzan psyched up for her video debut, she stood tall, pulling her shoulders back. While it had not been her focus, the posture adjustment caused her rib cage to lift, thrusting her young breasts up and out proudly. Without glancing down for confirmation, she knew that her nipples were on full-alert, doing their utmost to upstage the rest of her taut body.

She was to do as long of a jungle call as she could manage, pounding rhythmically on her chest as always. It was Ryan’s hope that he could get nearly all the way around before she would finish.

Considering what had to happen, Jill realized that Ryan’s role was almost as challenging as her own – maybe more so. He had to keep the phone steady, at just the right height, and he had to keep her framed in the center of the small screen. As if that wasn’t enough, he had to walk quickly in a circle, maintaining a certain distance from her. Because his path was littered with rocks of all sizes, he was going to have to split his attention between filming and avoiding tripping.

Jill found it difficult to keep her eyes fixed on the distant point while watching for Ryan to appear in her peripheral vision, but she managed. She knew about when he would show up, as Ryan gave her a verbal cue just before he started filming so that she could start filling her lungs.

She tried to not think about how open and on display her pussy might be, but she couldn’t help it. Even though there would be no closeups, every little detail was going to show, and she suspected that her little lips might be visibly moist.

Upon glimpsing Ryan, Jill raised her fists and her vocal cords roared into action, the first notes booming across the valley just before her pounding began. She beat her clenched fists against her chest just above where the swelling of her breasts began, the thumping causing the verbal component to reverberate within. From the top of her head to the tips of her toes, every muscle in her body was fully engaged in a masterful display of feminine power and confidence.

Once she was done and Ryan was again behind her, she stayed in character, waiting for Ryan’s signal to relax.

“And, cut,” he said.

Jill dropped her arms and turned to look at the boys behind her as she sucked in her next breath.

“Bravo, bravo,” cheered David, clapping.

Jill smiled. This Tarzan thing had come out of nowhere, but it had turned into something that they were all enjoying. Suddenly a funny idea occurred to her, maybe down at college, she could introduce herself as, “Jill, but my friends call me Tarzan.” That seemed as if it would inevitably lead to her needing to do her Tarzan act, fully clothed, of course. The result seemed as if it could be that the Tarzan name might stick such that she’d no longer need to introduce herself in that manner. She wondered if she’d like that – probably not, she decided.

As she shook the tension from her arms, she observed Ryan reviewing the video he’d just filmed, David watching over his shoulder.

“So, how is it?” she asked.

“Pretty good for take one,” he replied.

“What? Take one?” she asked in surprise.

“You didn’t think we’d nail it the first time, did you?” Ryan asked.

“Well . . . yes,” she replied truthfully.

**Chapter 126: Pimple Peak**

She looked down at the red areas on her chest. “How much do you think my chest can take?”

“Maybe you need to pound on the soft part,” he suggested.

Caught somewhat off guard, Jill lifted a fist and placed it on a nipple. With it in that position, she pressed it into her pillowy flesh.

“Yes, right there,” said Ryan.

“Bang on my boobies?” she asked, appearing as if she were contemplating that for the first time.

“You can’t ask her to do that,” said David.

Jill looked up and her eyes met his as he continued, “Girls’ boobs are sensitive. Getting hit there is just as painful for them as it is for a guy to get kicked in the nuts.”

“Is that true, Jill?” asked Ryan.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

With the fist that she had been pressing against her breast, she pounded it three times. The first time somewhat tentatively, but then the next two times quite forcefully. Looking up, she saw that both guys’ mouths were hanging open, looks of astonishment in their eyes.

“Well?” asked Ryan.

“I don’t know,” she repeated. “I’ve never been kicked in the nuts.”

“But does it hurt?” asked Ryan.

“I know,” said David before Jill could answer. “Jill can punch you in the tit and then kick you in the balls. You’ll be able to tell us which hurts the most.”

Jill saw Ryan cringe as his knees slid together.

“But what would that prove?” Ryan asked. “I don’t have girl tits.”

‘Neither do I,’ Jill thought, wondering if banging on her breasts might hurt more if they were larger.

“It doesn’t matter. Tarzan is not banging on her tits. But she’s definitely up for kicking you in the nuts for even suggesting it,” she said, glaring at Ryan.

“Second the motion!” said David with a smile.

“Yep, knees apart, Jerk-boy,” said Jill, moving into position across from him, a malicious smile on her lips.

Doing his best to ignore her, Ryan walked over next to her to show her the video. Jill quickly saw for herself that there would need to be another take. Even though she had done her best, she had looked right at Ryan, not just once but twice.

“Okay, I won’t do that again,” she agreed.

“And this time, I’d like for you to turn a little while I’m circling. In that way, maybe we can get close to 360 degrees by the time your Tarzan yell ends,” he proposed.

“Okay, be more specific. What do you have in mind?” she asked.

Ryan showed her what he was thinking. While he was circling at a steady pace, she was to shift position twice, as if she were projecting her voice in three different directions.

Jill was hesitant to agree. What Ryan had just demonstrated, seemed as if it might be intended to showcase her pussy, and yet she knew that it would probably make for a better video.

After being reminded that it was her phone and she’d have the only copy, and that she could delete it if she chose, Jill agreed.

She decided that she needed a practice run without voice or fist involvement. She got into her first position, left foot again forward. She rose up onto the balls of her feet, as she had always done, to highlight the musculature of her athletic legs.

After Ryan had reached a certain position, she shifted her gaze to a second point on the distant horizon, a split second later, twisting her body to follow; not actually moving her feet but simply rotating. In that second position, her legs were out to her sides, her feet more than shoulder-width apart. She stayed in that position as Ryan passed in front of her, the camera relatively low and pointed directly at her crotch.

After Ryan had reached the next predetermined position, she would shift her gaze to a third point, her body again turning to follow. In this final position, her right foot would be forward just as her left foot had been at the start. She practiced twice more, focusing on ignoring Ryan and the camera such that she wouldn’t ruin the next take by again looking where she wasn’t supposed to.

Once they were ready for what she hoped would be the final take, Jill placed her left foot a little forward of where it had been in the practice runs; doing so meant that her knees were just slightly farther apart. She told herself that she wasn’t doing it on purpose, but in the back of her mind, she knew otherwise.

The next take went exactly to plan. Jill poured her heart into her vocals as well as into her pounding. She was very conscious of how far apart her legs were as the camera passed in front of her. She knew she was blushing, but all the effort was surely making her face red, too. Mentally she breathed a sigh of relief as the camera moved on by and she turned, angling her body away from it.

“Bravo!” she heard David again cheering just after Ryan had called out ‘cut’ to indicate that he was no longer filming.

Suddenly, there was more cheering and clapping coming from an entirely different direction. Instinctively, Jill crossed her arms over her chest as she snapped her head around looking for the source. The five hikers were now on the mountaintop with them! They had approached startlingly close without being seen; however, that wasn’t particularly surprising given how focused Jill, David, and Ryan had been on their video project.

Jill turned to run but winced in pain as she stepped off of the smooth rock onto the sharp stones around it. “My boots!” she called out.

Taking charge, David shouted, “Ryan, get Jill her boots. I’ll take care of them.”

Shifting one hand down to cover her crotch, Jill yelled at him, “No bloody noses, David!”

“I know, I know,” he replied as he raced over to confront the approaching group.

Doing her best to keep everything hidden, Jill followed him with her eyes. She was glad to see him hold up his hand, indicating that they should stop, and then begin a discourse. She didn’t see anymore because by then Ryan had her boots and socks there.

“Thanks,” she said quietly as she sat down on the rock that had just been her stage.

Less than a minute later, she had her boots on. She took off running in the direction of Pimple Peak, holding her socks firmly in one hand. She didn’t look back until she had gone quite some distance down the back side of Spaghetti. Ryan was right there behind her.

“You don’t like those close calls, do you?” he said as he came to a stop.

“Not at all,” she replied trying to catch her breath.

Thinking that the coast was clear, at least for the moment, she found a rock and sat down in order to get her socks on. David caught up just as she was again tying her boots.

“What did they say?” she asked.

“They thought it was hilarious that you were my twin sister,” he said.

“You told them?” she snapped.

“Hey, I talked them into leaving us alone, so give me a break!” he said. “It wasn’t as easy as you might imagine. They really wanted the chance to meet Tarzan, one of them in particular.”

Glaring at him, Jill took a deep breath and let it out slowly. With nothing more than a little disapproving shake of her head, she turned and continued on down the steep slope. Hearing a sharp slap, she snapped her head back around in time to see that David and Ryan had just exchanged a high five. They were all smiles.

“What’s to celebrate?” she asked angrily.

“Lighten up, Jilly,” said David. “It’s just funny, that’s all.”

“You guys are having fun at my expense. I’m not very happy about that,” she said turning to resume making her way downhill.

“I think we’re all having fun,” he called out. “You’re enjoying yourself.”

Jill decided that comment didn’t merit a reply. He knew that she didn’t like being seen naked. And what was worse, this time she had been doing her Tarzan routine. He wouldn’t understand, she decided. It took a few minutes, but eventually, the thought of what had happened did bring a smile to her lips. I’ll bet they had no idea they might encounter a naked Tarzan girl when they got out of bed that morning, she thought. That must have been quite the surprise! She tried to imagine what she might have thought, had she come upon such a scene before any of her ‘one of the guys’ experiences.

At the base of Pimple Peak, she asked for her phone. Ryan gave it to her, and she watched the video. She paused it at just the right moment.

“See . . . here they are,” she said, holding up the screen so that Ryan and David could look. She turned it back towards herself and zoomed in a little. Sure enough, just as she had suspected, Ryan had inadvertently caught her audience on camera. They were just standing there watching from a short distance away. Jill realized that she too would have been able to see them, had she not been staring at distant points on the horizon.

“Great souvenir!” commented David with a smile.

“Yeah, right,” she scowled, turning off her phone and handing it back to Ryan.

She turned to begin the next ascent. She hadn’t gone very far before she realized that her tally had just jumped to forty-three.

Turning back to again confront David, she asked, “Did they take pictures? Just what I need, Lady Tarzan pictures all over the web!”

“I don’t think so,” he replied.

“You don’t think so,” she said, shaking her head in disgust. “So much for looking out for me.”

She made a mental note to study the video more carefully at some point. Hopefully she wouldn’t see them taking photos; however, that would prove little. Their appearance in the video was quite brief.

“I’m doing my best,” he replied defensively.

“Your best,” she replied mockingly.

With a frown on her face, Jill looked back at Spaghetti, trying to see if there was any movement indicating that they were still being followed. Not seeing anything, she turned and resumed climbing. She knew that Ryan was just behind her, but she tried to not think about that.

It was a strenuous climb, and not much more was said until they were on top. As David took off his pack to dig out their lunch, they each took turns watching the short clip.

“It’s really good,” said David. “See how perfectly I performed my role.”

Jill smiled. It was true. He had managed to keep himself completely out of the video.

“I thought we’d do a few more takes up here,” said Ryan.

“Well, you thought wrong,” said Jill, her face expressionless.

“I really want to see you do it . . . banging your titties, not above them. For some reason, I think that would be so cool! Hot and sexy!”

Jill just shook her head in disgust. Ryan never knew where to draw the line.

“We don’t need more takes,” said David. “In my opinion, the last one is perfect . . . everything about it.”

“I want a copy,” said Ryan. “You can send it to me later.”

“Dream on,” replied Jill.

She turned away, hoping that she might be able to forget about Ryan if she couldn’t see him. How dare he suggest that they make a video with her beating on her breasts! That didn’t sound sexy at all. Wasn’t it enough that she had just allowed him to film her naked? When would it ever end?

She spread the still damp hand towel atop a rock and sat down to eat her lunch. It actually felt nice to sit on the cool moist cloth.

“Thanks for bringing the towel,” she said, looking over at David. She had decided that she was ready to try and enjoy the rest of the day. Now that a little time had passed, she was starting to find it a little funny that none of them had noticed that they were putting on a show for a group of strangers.

**Chapter 127: Dust**

After a nice, long, relaxing lunch, Jill added a little water to the towel and again used it to wipe herself off. She then went about renewing her sunscreen, even allowing Ryan to again do her back. After all, it wasn’t his fault that they had been followed. It wasn’t David’s either, she knew. It had occurred on his watch, however. She didn’t have herself or the Copelands to blame this time.

Shortly thereafter, they were ready to begin their return trip. Jill was already looking forward to a dip in the pool below Arrowhead Falls, even though she knew that it would take them a couple of hours to get there.

They took another quick water break as they reached the fork in the trail just after they had started back up Spaghetti. The main trail, the up and over route, was the one they had taken before. The right fork skirted the mountain, going around on its right flank.

“I don’t need to go back to the top,” Jill announced, clearly indicating her preference.

Neither David nor Ryan was interested in making waves, there had been enough of those, so they let Jill make the decision. She led the way. It was a good trail, nearly horizontal, but extremely narrow. Someone, presumably the Forest Service, had managed to carve it across the face of the steep scree slope.

Jill was still in the lead quite some time later when she suddenly heard a noise she could not place. It started as a muffled grinding noise but grew quickly louder. Looking around for its source, she noticed immediately that the hillside below the trail was in motion. At that moment, David was a short distance behind her.

She glanced back at him, and their eyes met. He had noticed the rockslide as well. In the next instant, the trail below his feet gave way. In horror, Jill saw the look of surprise on his face change to one of terror.

Her legs buckled. A split second later she was down on the trail, hoping that her section was not going to collapse as well. Looking for Ryan, she saw that he too was sliding downhill, flying along on top of a wide river of moving rock.

In a frantic state, she was forced to watch as the two of them, both initially on their backs, slid down toward the valley below. A brief moment later, one and then both of them were rolling sideways. And then . . . they disappeared completely as a cloud of dust enveloped the hillside below. The dust rose up to where she lay such that even the blue sky above her was blocked from view. Within seconds it grew surprisingly dark.

“Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!” she muttered repeatedly in a state of shock and disbelief as she clung to the narrow ledge. In an instant, the beautiful summer afternoon had been transformed into a war zone.

With her face at ground level, she started choking on the dust. She pinched off her nose and covered her mouth to cope with the suddenly inhospitable environment.

In her stricken state, she lay there, hyperventilating but trying to hold her breath. Fortunately, the roar of the rockslide had ceased. An earie silence descended over the mountainside. She screamed out the boys’ names, but there was no response. Over and over she called out. A memory flashed through her mind while she lay there, waiting for the dust to clear.

At one of her father’s company picnics a few years before, she had been introduced to a man named Matthew. The reason she remembered the encounter so well was that she had seen tears forming in his eyes as he had been shaking her hand. It had been such an awkward, curious moment.

Later she had asked her father about him and had learned that Mathew was also a twin. Tragically, Maggie, his twin sister, had died in a car accident. She had been just sixteen at the time.

Jill’s first reaction was to be angry at her father for not telling her about Matthew in advance. She had felt blindsided by the whole thing. It seemed unfair that she had not known anything prior to coming face to face with his unusual reaction. He had obviously known that she was a twin, but she had known nothing.

She had run off to a far corner of the park where she had sat in a swing to try and process her sadness for the man she had just met. Part of the time she cried. Being a twin herself, nothing seemed more tragic than losing one’s twin to an untimely death.

The entire memory took just a fraction of a second to pass through her mind as she lay there precariously on the rocky ledge. She continued to shake, experiencing a level of dread that she had never before encountered. Suddenly it was a distinct possibility that she, like Matthew, was now a twinless twin.

Desperately needing to know that David and Ryan were alive, she continued calling out their names, each time listening while holding her breath, hoping to hear a reply. Nothing.

She was hoping and praying that David was all right. She was concerned about Ryan as well; however, her concerns for David and his wellbeing overshadowed all other thoughts. In that brief period of time, her soul visited levels of despair and pain that she had never before experienced.

Finally, the dust settled enough that she was able to discern both David and Ryan sprawled out on the rocks several hundred feet down the slope. It looked like the slope was not as steep where they lay. Presumably, that was what had halted the rockslide.

As she lay there assessing the situation, she tried to wipe her eyes. That proved to be hopeless. Other than her hands, which were, of course, dirty, she had nothing to use. She blinked, hoping that her tears would clear the dust that remained. She knew her face was coated with what was essentially a thin layer of mud . . . tears combining with dust from the rockslide.

She studied David and Ryan carefully. Neither showed any signs of life. She called out to them yet again. They didn’t move. Knowing that time was of the essence, she began looking for a route down. The last thing she wanted to do was to start another rockslide. Whatever she did, she could not risk sending any rocks down on them. Noticing that the slope was less steep to her left, away from the boys, she headed off in that direction, initially crawling, but quickly standing up.

Once she had gone a few hundred feet, she found a place that looked stable enough. She sat down on the trail. In order to avoid falling, she ended up making her way carefully down the steep slope, belly up but on her hands and feet. She was essentially doing the crab walk, feet first, occasionally sliding a little, at times putting her butt down, but only when absolutely necessary as the rocks were sharp. Against her will, her thoughts returned to that long-ago company picnic as she made her way down.

After sitting for a long time in the swing, she had eventually gone back to look for Matthew. She felt a deep desire to find him and give him a hug. He was older, so it had all happened many years before; however, he had lost someone very much like herself. Coincidentally, she even happened to be sixteen at the time. She had felt so very shaken by the revelation. She didn’t know what she might say, possibly nothing. She simply wanted him to know that she understood . . . and cared.

In the end, she had learned that he had already left. Weeks after that incident, she was still thinking about searching him out, but she never did. She never even spoke about it again with her father. In many ways, what had befallen Matthew had been just too painful to think about.

Once she was down at the boys’ level, she traversed the slope, quickly but cautiously. As David had been closest to her on the trail, she reached him first. He was on his side, his head angling uphill. She knelt next to him, trying to get his attention. He didn’t respond. Ryan had been moaning but not David.

She noticed blood, not a lot, but it was running across his cheek to his chin, dripping from there down onto the rocks. It was coming from his hairline above his ear. She wanted to hold him, but she knew not to move him, lest she make an injury worse.

“How is he?” she heard Ryan ask. “Is he alive?”

“I don’t know,” she replied without looking up.

She placed her hand gently on his bare chest.

“His heart is beating,” she announced just loud enough for Ryan to hear.

“Thank God,” he replied as she leaned down to place her cheek in front of his mouth.

“And he’s breathing,” she added, tears of relief welling up in her eyes.

She blinked them away. This was no time for tears of any sort.

“But he’s unconscious?” asked Ryan.

“Yes . . . unconscious,” she replied, racking her brain to remember the first aid class she had taken years before. ABC popped into her head: Airway, Breathing, Circulation. Check, check, and check. Unfortunately, she was drawing a complete blank when it came to how someone was supposed to care for an unconscious victim.

She looked over at Ryan and attempted a reassuring smile. He looked very uncomfortable. He’d stopped moaning, but he looked to be clenching his teeth in pain.

“How are you?” she asked.

“A few broken bones, I’m thinking,” he replied, grimacing. “At least my leg . . . it’s broken for sure.”

She nodded. That would hardly be surprising given how far down the hill he had slid, rocks accompanying him.

“But David . . . his limbs . . . how do they look?” Ryan asked.

“Terrible,” she said. He seemed to have scrapes and cuts everywhere. Hiking boots and a pair of shorts were hardly the ideal way to dress for a rockslide, she realized. She slid her hands gently along his arms and legs. “Nothing obviously broken,” she added.

Not knowing what more to do, she made her way carefully over to Ryan to assess his condition. He was twenty-five or so feet away. He was all scraped up and bleeding from numerous small cuts just like David.

“I’m so glad your section of trail held,” he remarked.

Jill looked up the slope to where the trail had been but didn’t reply. She didn’t know what to say. In some ways, it seemed unfair that she had been singled out.

“You’re probably right. It must be broken,” she said. There was a large purple swollen area on the side of his leg between his knee and his ankle. “Can you feel your hands and feet?” she asked. She was relieved that Ryan seemed to be able to wiggle everything. He tried to sit up. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” she remarked.

“It looks as if you’ll have to go for help,” Ryan said with a sigh.

Their eyes met. Jill nodded. She had been realizing that. She’d just been trying not to think about it, at least not yet. There did not seem to be an option.

For thirty seconds, they both just looked at one another. Jill was processing all the ramifications. She was going to have to go for help. They were way up in the mountains, and but for her boots, she was nude. She glanced at Ryan’s shorts, and then back at David. Two pair of shorts among the three of them. All the clothing they had, unless…

**Chapter 128: Back to the Ridge**

“What’s in David’s backpack?” she asked, thinking wishfully.

“I’m not sure,” said Ryan. “A few snacks and water. That towel. Maybe a first aid kit.”

Jill went back to David. He had not moved, but fortunately, he was still breathing. She could see his chest rising and falling.

She was able to unzip his backpack without taking the straps from his shoulders. The contents were pretty much as Ryan had described. She opened the first aid kit. Nothing seemed particularly useful. There were bandages, a few small packets with antibiotic cream, alcohol wipes, as well as some ibuprofen. There was a small pair of scissors, some tweezers, and a snake bite kit.

While she examined the rest of the contents of his pack, she used the towel to wipe her face. It was hardly clean, but it was still moist and it felt nice on her skin. She wanted to wet it, but she knew that they had to be very careful with their remaining water.

“You should eat a chocolate bar,” suggested Ryan.

There were several. Jill looked at them, and then looked over at him. “Yes, I probably should,” she agreed. Tearing the wrapper, she popped a square into her mouth.

“Help me get over there,” said Ryan.

“Why?” she asked.

“I’m going to have to look after David while you go for help.”

There it was again . . . another mention of her going for help. She knew it was time to face facts. She was going to need to be the grownup. David’s life seemed to be hanging in the balance. She needed to rise to the occasion. She was always good in a pinch. That was why her coach always instructed her team to give her the ball in the final seconds. He knew that if anyone could accomplish the impossible, it was Jill.

But that was in games. This was real life. She’d been challenged before, but never like this. But she knew instantly that she would find a way. If David could be saved, she was going to do it. She swore herself an oath. She was not going to let him die. She was not going to be a twinless twin. With a level of determination she’d never before experienced, she stood up.

“Yes, you’re going to have to look after David until I get back,” she said to Ryan.

Taking a bottle of water and the ibuprofen, she went back to him.

“Here, take a few of these,” she suggested. “I can tell you’re in pain. Unfortunately, they won’t take effect in time for what we have to do.”

Ryan gave that some thought and took several of the tablets.

Jill then reached under him. With an amount of strength that surprised even her, she lifted him up. He was not a slender guy. He let out a sharp cry of pain as his injured leg left the ground, but he managed to stifle it, reflexively wrapping his arms around her neck and pulling her close. The two of them were skin on skin, but Jill wasn’t particularly conscious of the fact; there were just too many important things to be thinking about.

He kept his good leg down dragging on the ground as if for balance, but Jill carried the rest of him. She placed him in front of David. Not until he was back on the ground did the grimace on his face start to relax. Jill felt sorry for him, but she didn’t know how to make him more comfortable. She started moving their belongings from the backpack over within his reach.

“He’s bleeding . . . from a head wound,” commented Ryan.

“I know.”

She looked in the back pocket of the backpack. It contained David’s wallet, a knife, her sunscreen, some matches, and paper.

“Well, we might be able to make a fire,” she remarked.

“Wrong emergency . . . it’s not cold.”

“I know,” said Jill, but the idea of a smoky signal fire crossed her mind. Realizing that they almost never saw airplanes, she dismissed the thought.

“Where are your cell phones?” she asked.

“David made me leave mine in camp,” he replied.

“Oh, my cell phone!” she said, suddenly remembering it. She knew there wouldn’t be cell reception where they were, but at some point, there would be as she got closer to civilization.

“My back pocket,” said Ryan.

Together they managed to pull it out.

“I guess I shouldn’t have had it in my back pocket,” Ryan said once he’d gotten a look at it.

The screen was shattered. Jill tried to turn it on. There was no response.

“Oh, well,” she said with a heavy sigh, tossing it into the backpack.

“Maybe we should see if we can get some water into David,” Ryan suggested.

“I don’t know,” she said. “We’d have to turn and tilt his head. Not a good idea if he has a neck injury.”

“I’m sure you’re right,” he said.

“But if he wakes up, then you can give him some,” she said. After a moment to consider, she decided to sprinkle a little water on his forehead and face. She was thinking that doing so might make him come to, and if it didn’t, there would be no harm done. It would probably be good to keep him cool.

She wet a small corner of the towel and bathed David’s face with it lovingly.

“Come on, David,” she said softly. “You’ve got to make it. You’ve got to pull through. I need you.”

“You’re the best sister a guy ever had,” said Ryan.

Jill didn’t know what to say. She was experiencing so much emotion, but she needed to ignore her feelings and be strong . . . and smart. She ate the rest of the chocolate bar.

She stood up, preparing to leave. She was trying to decide if there was anything there she ought to be taking with her. She wished there was a pillowcase to use as a skirt, but there wasn’t. She thought of the backpack and then of the little towel, hardly bigger than a washcloth. She then thought of David and Ryan’s shorts.

Taking David’s shorts off of him was not something that could be considered. She’d have to move him too much in the process. Given the possibility of a spinal injury, it was out of the question. Ryan’s shorts were, however, an option. He’d probably have underwear on underneath. Taking off his shorts would be painful for him, but he’d likely agree. But then she found herself wondering how she’d keep them up. Ryan’s waist size was around twelve inches larger than her own.

She pictured herself trying to run while holding up a pair of oversize shorts. In addition to the time involved in getting them off of him, running like that was likely to slow her down. It might also be hazardous to run holding up a pair of shorts; she wouldn’t have her arms swinging for balance . . . or to catch herself should she fall. And, of course, she’d still be topless.

Unfortunately, nothing seemed as if it would quickly become the clothing that she wished she had . . . and time was of the essence. Every second counted. Taking David’s wallet out of the backpack, she opened it and removed a couple of twenties. She folded them and stuck them down into one of her socks.

Good idea,” said Ryan.

“I have no idea what I might need money for, but it could come in handy,” she said with a shudder, picturing herself going into a store naked to buy something. She did her best to chase those images back out of her head. She didn’t know what lay ahead, but she hoped it didn’t include naked shopping.

“Take a bottle of water,” suggested Ryan.

There were just three. Jill looked at them. One was empty. One was half full, and the third was full.

“I’ll take a drink,” she said. “I want to leave the rest for you.”

Jill took a good long drink. She knew that her wellbeing was just as important as theirs. It wouldn’t do them any good if she got dehydrated and collapsed before she had accomplished her mission. After all, it was a very warm day.

“Okay, I’m ready,” she announced.

She leaned down and kissed David’s forehead. “Fight for me, brother! Fight for me!” she whispered emotionally into his ear, getting choked up in the process.

She looked over at Ryan who had been watching. She leaned over him and kissed him on the forehead, as well. “Look after each other,” she said softly. “I’ll be back as soon as I can . . . with the cavalry.”

“We’ll be right here,” he replied, a look of distress on his face.

“Don’t worry . . . I’ve got this,” she said getting up to leave. She had attempted to sound much more confident than she felt. In truth, she was as scared as she had ever been, but for Ryan’s sake, she had been doing her best to be reassuring.

“Take care of yourself,” he called out after her. “Don’t go too fast. Whatever you do, don’t fall. Don’t panic and don’t fall!”

As Jill took off in the direction of Stanton Ridge, less than a mile away. She realized that Ryan had just given her important advice. She needed to hurry, but this time, if she fell, there would be no one to give her a piggyback ride. She needed to keep her wits about her and make good decisions.

It was rough going, but eventually, she was able to climb back up to the trail, the very same trail that was now missing its middle section. Being on the trail allowed her to start running.

**Chapter 129: Back to the Ridge**

As Jill raced along, her mind was going a mile a minute. In an instant, her world had been turned completely upside down. One minute, the three of them had been walking along in the mountain sunshine; a minute later, two of the three were lying injured at the base of a steep rocky slope. It had naturally fallen to her to go for help. It was a dizzying development for her to wrap her mind around. As she considered her mission, she realized her goal was to minimize the impact of the change that had been visited upon them that afternoon.

David was seriously injured – unconscious. Ryan was hurt, as well. Her objective was to get them the medical attention they needed so that their lives would be as unchanged as possible. In David’s case, that seemed to mean, so that he would live. She was doing her best to not think about that. The possibility that he might not survive this mishap was beyond what she thought she could deal with. At the very least, she knew that she couldn’t rise to the occasion if she were to allow herself to become preoccupied with the potential downside of his injuries.

Similarly, people were going to see her naked. That seemed unavoidable. She wasn’t happy about that. How could she be? And yet it was secondary to all else. It was the price she was going to pay to accomplish her primary objective: obtaining medical assistance as quickly as possible.

She didn’t like the idea of paying a price, sacrificing herself, and yet the stakes were simply that high. She knew that she’d gladly trade her modesty for David and Ryan’s wellbeing. She knew that if she allowed her concerns about being seen, and how that might alter her future, to influence the choices that she made, she would likely end up with serious regrets – regrets that would probably last for the rest of her life.

She could, of course, take a detour along the way to try and find herself some clothing. Such a detour would take time, an unknown amount of time. If David were to die or end up in a vegetative state because of how long it took help to arrive, she’d have herself to live with.

If things didn’t turn out well for David, and she’d focused all her time and energy on getting him help – hadn’t made any side trips – it would still be very difficult. However, she would always know that she had done everything that she could. That would, at the very least, make the outcome a little easier to live with – at least in theory.

Racing toward Stanton Ridge, she thought ahead to the choice she would be making there. Down one trail lay Stanton and help. Down the other was the Jeep. Her emergency stash was in the Jeep. Clothes! How she wanted those clothes! The only problem with going to the Jeep was that it was parked on the wrong side of the mountain range. She’d have to drive all the way around.

From where it was parked, it was well over an hour drive to get help, less if she drove as fast as she dared. That drive meant that it would take her over two hours to get in contact with authorities via that route. The direct route, straight down into Stanton, would have her in touch with authorities in less than an hour. That route had an additional advantage. Along it there was the possibility of meeting someone with a phone, allowing her to call 911 even sooner.

Even though she was weighing the option that the Jeep represented, she knew she would not be exercising that option. Over two hours versus less than an hour – she’d take the quicker trail down the other side of the ridge – she’d head directly for Stanton. Just the thought of what she was going to do scared the hell out of her.

She couldn’t remember the exact population number printed on the sign as one entered Stanton; however, she knew it started with a four. That meant more than forty-thousand but less than fifty-thousand inhabitants. As frightening as that was, the true significance of that number lay in that it indicated that in Stanton she would be able to find the assistance she desperately needed.

Trying to block out her concerns of the staggering number of people she would be running toward, she focused her thoughts on what lay immediately ahead. She thought about the trail itself. She’d never taken it, but she knew it to be a wide, well-constructed trail. Unlike the route to the Jeep, it would be suitable for running. She’d reach Stanton in quite a bit less time than it would take her to get to the Jeep.

The idea of running naked into Stanton was daunting, to say the least. It was not exactly something that she thought she would be able to do, certainly not under ordinary circumstances. Hopefully, a better option would present itself before it came to that. She’d have to keep her eyes peeled and her mind open to recognize just such an alternative if it came along.

However, it was clear that Stanton had to be her initial objective. As the county seat, it was the largest town in the area. There was a hospital; indeed, she’d had her knee stitched up there. There was a ranger station. There were fire stations. There were police stations. Any one of those seemed like a suitable point of first contact. As she considered that, she realized that the Ranger Station might be best. Forest Rangers would be familiar with the backcountry. The responsibility of rescuing injured hikers surely fell to them.

Unfortunately, she didn’t know Stanton very well. David and Ryan had been to the Stanton Ranger Station several times that summer. They had gone there to investigate hikes, and they had been there to get the backcountry permit required for their Broken Canyon hike. She’d never gone along. She kicked herself for never having made the trip with them.

Just as she was going to do everything in her power to minimize the ultimate impact of David’s injury, she was also going to try and minimize the impact of the exposure that seemed to be her destiny. That was important, she knew; however, it was going to have to take a back seat to getting help to David as quickly as possible.

Considering that, she realized that she needed people . . . anyone she could find. Help might come from an unexpected quarter. She might encounter a paramedic or a doctor out for an afternoon hike. That would be lucky . . . too lucky . . . certainly too much to hope for. She knew better than to get her hopes up; however, if it happened, it might serve two purposes. If she met someone like that before reaching Stanton, she might be able to get help to David more quickly AND she might be able to minimize her own exposure. However, a person with medical training might not be able to do much without equipment. There was that to consider. The boys needed to be transported to a hospital; that much seemed clear.

As she approached the ridge, she kept her eyes peeled, searching everywhere for people. As she was above the tree line, she could see a great distance in every direction. She’d had a lot of practice that summer looking for strangers. In the past, her reason for doing so had always been to avoid them. That had been flipped on its head. Now she needed to make contact with them. The thought of doing so, running naked toward strangers, was frightening. However, she needed help. Help required people.

With her eyes, she searched along the ridge for the group of five who had cheered and clapped after her Tarzan routine. She had hoped to never meet them face to face. Now she wanted desperately to find them. And yet, they were nowhere to be seen. She hoped it wasn’t going to be her misfortune to encounter no one, now that she needed help so urgently.

She realized that it had been a long time since they had observed her little performance on Spaghetti. That was before they had climbed Pimple Peak and eaten their lunch there. They’d had more than enough time to hike down Spaghetti and head back toward Stanton.

Arriving at the ridge, she spun around, looking in all directions – searching desperately – but she was completely alone. She called out at the top of her lungs . . . no reply. With a longing glance toward the trail that led to the Jeep, she turned and raced for the trail that went down into Stanton.

She couldn’t believe that she was going to go that way, and yet she had no choice. She was David’s only hope. She needed to get there as quickly as she could. Alternatively, she needed to find someone with a cell phone once she got within range of a cell tower. She hoped that an opportunity to call 911 from the trail would present itself. That possibility had several distinct advantages over talking to the authorities face to face in Stanton. First and foremost, it would mean that a rescue could be initiated sooner.

Just barely over the lip of the ridge, she encountered a simple Forest Service sign. She broke stride to get a good look at it. It read simply, “STANTON 3.4 MI.”

Three point four miles, she thought. Certainly over an hour walking; well under an hour running. She knew that her knees and her quads were about to take the beating of a lifetime. She reminded herself that she needed to be careful. Nothing would slow her down more than a fall. She didn’t need to end up limping into town with a bloody knee – or worse.

As the trail angled down, heading laterally across the steep slope, she looked over the edge. Shortcutting did not look like a wise choice, certainly not where she was. A little further on, she looked down and saw two individuals on the trail below. They were headed up. She considered calling out to them but then realized that it would serve no purpose. She needed to get to them so they could have an actual conversation.

She pressed on ahead toward the switchback. The familiar feelings of dread surged within her. Even though she had to do this, she really didn’t want to. She tried thinking of David as a method for dealing with her shyness; however, that didn’t help. It didn’t make her any less shy. It only made her feel sad.

She tried to plan out what she was going to say. That was only a partial success. She quickly realized that their responses would govern what needed to be said next, making it impossible for her to script the encounter. At that point, it became clear to Jill that she was overthinking the issue, stressing way too much. However, her need for help was so great and she was utterly naked. Why in the world had she shaved the last little bit off? But she blocked that out of her mind; thinking about that was unproductive.

Instead, she tried to think of a believable explanation for why a girl might be naked, one that could be relayed quickly. It didn’t even have to be true. The ends would justify the means. However, nothing came to her. There simply was nothing she could say in a sentence or two that would satisfy two strangers so that they could talk about what was important.

Knowing that she wouldn’t be able to talk without catching her breath, she stopped running when she was about a hundred feet from the approaching pair. She bent over, placing her hands on her knees, gulping air, all the while eyeing the hikers for clues.

She had imagined that, upon seeing a naked girl in the trail before them, they’d close the gap quickly. She was wrong. They slowed significantly, even appearing to be apprehensive. It was two men. There was an obese, sweaty man in a wife beater tank. The other guy was shorter in stature and of slight build; he was bare from the waist up and appeared to be quite fit. They both looked to be in their thirties.

After a few breaths of air, Jill thought that she’d be able to talk. She stood up and walked briskly toward them, trying not to think about how embarrassing it was to have her pointy nipples and her bald pussy on display.

“Hi,” she said with a forced smile once she was close enough. Inside she was hardly smiling; however, she hoped that doing so might put them at ease. It was so awkward. She couldn’t help but blush, but she didn’t cover up. Even though she felt the need, it seemed as if it would only serve to draw attention to her nudity. She hoped to avoid that as a topic of conversation.

“I must be dreaming,” said the large man. “Whatever you do, Jim, don’t wake me up. I just have to find out how this one comes out.”

More like a nightmare, thought Jill, but what she actually said was, “My brother and a friend have been hurt in a rockslide.”

“We felt that!” said the fit guy, the one whose name had to be Jim.

“You did?” she asked in surprise. She’d been so focused on the consequences of the rockslide that she hadn’t given much thought to what might have triggered it.

“Yeah. Fifteen minutes or so ago we felt an earthquake. Not a big one. A pretty small one actually,” said Jim.

**Chapter 130: Jane**

“That would explain it,” she said. She realized that she had been thinking that they had somehow caused the slide by being on the trail. However, that made little sense. The slide had started lower down. “Do either of you have medical training?”

“Why are you naked?” asked the large man. “I mean, I don’t mind. You’re gorgeous. You should be naked.”

Jill felt her face flush. “Naked happens,” she replied glancing down bashfully. “But . . . I don’t have time to talk about that.”

“From the looks of you, I’d say it happens a lot,” he replied. “What a gorgeous tan! …everywhere, except right there.”

Jill saw the man raise his hand and point. Realizing what he was pointing at, she couldn’t keep herself from looking down at the white line just above her slit.

Being reminded of her nudity, not that it had been forgotten, Jill took a look at the guy’s sweat-soaked tank. On her a tank top of that size would be dress-like, albeit quite loose and revealing, especially the giant arm holes; however, it would be a lot of clothing relative to her present naked state.

She ruled out that possibility as soon as she had thought of it. The guy was so very sweaty that just the idea of putting on his shirt was repulsive. Looking at his man-boobs, she decided that talking him out of his shirt might be difficult, not that she wanted to. Two good reasons not to ask for the shirt – best to just remain focused on getting help, she decided.

Doing her best to ignore where he was pointing, she said, “I’m sorry, but this is an emergency. Medical training?”

“I know everything there is to know about diabetes,” said the large man. “But that is only because I have it.”

“No,” interjected Jim. “Sorry. We both work retail.”

Realizing that they weren’t going to be of much assistance, Jill asked, “Do either of you have a cell phone?”

“Why didn’t I think of that?” said the big man, pulling a phone out of his pocket.

A second later Jill saw that he was pointing it at her. She instinctively threw an arm across her chest, the other hand flying into a covering position down below.

“No! No photos!” she snapped. “Don’t you get that this is an emergency? Please!”

She saw Jim reach over and grab the phone from the other man. “There’s no reception here if that’s what you mean,” he said.

Jill realized that she’d learned what she needed to know. She was wasting precious time. “Okay, thanks,” she said, motioning that she’d like to go by.

Even though the trail was wide, there wasn’t an easy way to squeeze past. Jill noticed a rock sticking out of the hillside just above. Not wanting to brush against the two men, she hopped up on it and then on by. That maneuver had placed her pussy up high giving both men the opportunity for a good look, but that moment had lasted little more than the blink of an eye. Right away, she was back down on the trail, and within two strides she was again running at full speed.

She was glad that the smaller man had taken the other guy’s phone. Hopefully, that would mean that she’d be far enough away before he was able to get it back to take a picture. She didn’t look back. At least if he does manage to take a photo now, my face won’t show, she considered.

An earthquake, she thought, a small one. That makes complete sense. Likely the hillside had been unstable due to the big quake earlier in the summer.

As she thought back over what had just transpired, she realized that she had achieved exactly what she had needed to accomplish. It had probably taken no more than thirty seconds. Her nudity had been a distraction, but in that short amount of time, she had been able to learn that they had no medical training and that there was no cell reception. Plus she was relatively certain she’d gotten away before any photos had been taken, at least any in which she’d be identifiable.

She had meant to ask if they had passed the group of five, but that wasn’t really important. Either they were up ahead or they weren’t.

As Jill continued her downhill run, she wondered if she should have asked those guys to climb up to where David and Ryan were lying on the rocks. Doing so would have required spending time telling them how to find them. After a bit of consideration, she decided that she had done the right thing. With no medical training, there would be little that they could do. There was also the possibility that they might decide to ‘help’ in some misguided way, making matters worse.

Jill was trying to avoid thoughts of Stanton itself as she ran, but that was getting more and more difficult. She’d come a significant distance down the slope, and the town was looming large in the valley below.

She could pick out a number of easily recognizable features, among them, the tallest building. It was an eight-story brick hotel right in the middle of downtown, surely more than a century old. The shopping mall on the outskirts with the multiplex in its parking lot was also visible. And in the opposite direction from downtown was the high school, easily recognizable from above due to its oval track encircled football field. A short distance past downtown she could see the hospital, not nearly as tall as the hotel, but unlike the majority of buildings, taller than the surrounding trees. She wondered how long it might take to get David there – and importantly if they had a helicopter.

As she worried about how long it might be before she could get David the medical care he needed, even with her best efforts, her thoughts started to turn sullen. She’d been doing her utmost to rise to the occasion, to respond constructively to an extremely difficult set of circumstances, but things were taking their toll. Realizing that David might no longer be breathing, her mood turned dark.

Whenever her coach would call on her to take the final shot at the buzzer, she would do her best, and then, no matter the outcome, it would be over and she could rest.

This was a much different situation. The circumstances were dire. If David were still breathing, he might have a spinal injury that would leave him paralyzed. There seemed to be so much riding on her performance – and then again – maybe there wasn’t. How long it took her to get help might not end up being a factor. This was a nightmare! A nightmare that seemed destined to go on and on. Even if David survived, it seemed as if his recovery was unlikely to be quick – or complete.

Gloom continued to permeate her thoughts. A short distance before the next switchback, she slowed to a walk. Not so much because she was tired, although she was, but because feelings of depression were overshadowing her more productive thoughts. All of a sudden it seemed as if utter despair was going to result in some sort of an incapacitating mental breakdown.

Thoughts of the man she had met years before, Matthew, the twinless twin, came rushing back. She didn’t want to be him. But considering that, she realized just how selfish those thoughts were. She wanted David to live because of how she would feel if he didn’t, and because of how his death might affect her life.

Shouldn’t her thoughts be for David? If she really loved him, shouldn’t she be hoping for his survival and complete recovery – for his own sake?

Wondering if she was really so selfish as to want David to live because of how it would affect her if he didn’t, her depression found new depths.

At the switchback, she came to a full stop. Her lungs were on fire and her thighs felt about ready to cramp up, but that wasn’t why she stopped. Her mind was starting to go in circles; she was slipping into crisis mode.

Fortunately, her period of self-doubt was brief. She did consider giving up, but then her resolve returned, and it returned with vigor!

“No, I’m going to leave it all on the f\*\*king mountain!” she announced aloud. In an instant, she was again running as fast as she dared. “Everything for David! Everything I f\*\*king have!” Tears blurred her vision as pure unadulterated emotion caused her adrenalin to surge.

She decided that it didn’t really matter who it was for. Even if she had selfish reasons for wanting David to live – what did that matter? She could give her all to saving David for David’s sake, for her own sake – or for both of their sakes. The important thing was to save him! Later, once he was in the ER and receiving medical attention, then she could debate how altruistic she was or wasn’t. At the moment, those thoughts were not conducive to what she needed to accomplish. Take all the time you want to wallow in depression and self-pity – f\*\*king tomorrow – she decided.

Racing down the trail, she realized why it had been so easy to see everything only from her own point of view. David had always been there. All the way back to their playpen days, there had always been a David. He’d played some role, big or small, in nearly every day of her life. He’d always been her best friend, so it wasn’t just that he’d been physically present. It was much more than that. In her darkest as well as her brightest moments, he’d been there with her. She couldn’t imagine what the past would have been like without him, and she couldn’t imagine a future without him.

College was destined to be a challenge in that regard. He wouldn’t be physically there; however, she knew that they’d be in constant contact – provided that he survived. She had to make sure that he did – if it were possible – given his injuries.

He’d always been there for her. She was going to be there for him! As twins, they both needed one another. If he could be saved, she was going to do it!

Once she again had her head screwed on straight, more people came into view just ahead. Okay, here we go again, she thought as she sped toward her next encounter. She tried to think brave thoughts, but the truth of that matter was that she was just as shy as ever. Having an important mission did not change that; however, it did not allow her to waste time thinking about herself. She needed to be bold even though she was wearing nothing more than her hiking boots.

As she raced forward, she decided that this must finally be the group who had witnessed her Tarzan act. As the typical feelings of dread began to set in, images of herself standing brazenly atop the rock on the mountain, knees hardly together, banging on her puffed-up chest, flashed through her mind. Those thoughts only served to make everything worse. She remembered David saying that he had told them that they were twins.

As the hikers were making so much noise, talking boisterously amongst themselves, she managed to sneak up on them, not that doing so had been her intent.

“Hey,” she said, loud enough to get their attention. She’d been walking behind them for a few strides, again working at catching her breath.

The guy in front of her, a tall redhead, spun around in surprise. His eyes lit up as he saw the stark naked brunette just behind him on the trail.

“Guys . . . it’s Tarzan!” he called out happily.

The rest of them stopped and looked back.

“Jane’s been wanting to meet you!” he continued with a broad smile.

Glancing at the other faces, Jill saw that there was one girl in the group. Everyone else seemed to be pushing her forward toward Jill.

“Umm . . . that’s nice,” said Jill, taken by surprise.

“Tarzan, meet Jane,” said the redhead as the girl stepped in front of him.

Jill looked at her. She was behaving quite bashfully, not managing to meet Jill’s gaze, her eyes downcast. Jill saw that she was quite short, five-foot tall if that. She was also very curvy, the exact opposite of herself, in fact. Jill couldn’t help but notice the size of her bust, remarkably large given her height and her narrow waist. Her big breasts were being held in position by a pretty peach-colored bikini top. It looked feminine, but also well-constructed, and yet it had to be given the enormity of its assigned task.

“For years she has been talking about one day running off to the jungle to find her Tarzan,” he continued.

“It’s true,” the girl replied in a quiet voice. “I just always imagined Tarzan would be male.”

“Okay…” said Jill, doing her best to maintain her composure.

She didn’t know what to make of this unexpected development, but time constraints meant that she had to ignore it.

“Do any of you have medical training? My brother and our friend were swept downhill in a rockslide . . . both seriously hurt. My brother is unconscious, plus they both have other injuries.”

Initially, she saw looks of disbelief on their faces. Those quickly morphed into looks of shock and surprise. Jill looked from face to face, waiting for a response. They all appeared to be in their twenties.

After more than a few seconds, the redhead replied, “I’m so sorry to hear that, Lola.”

It was Jill’s turn to be surprised. Lola? Where did that come from? That was the alias that Britt had given her. She hadn’t thought she’d ever hear it again, but then she remembered that David had spoken with them.