**Summer at Cache Lake**

**Chapter 161: Leaving the Hospital**They talked for a few minutes more, Jill mentioning how it had been decided that she was going to leave shortly to go and get the Jeep. **“**The key!?” said David. **“**Don’t worry. I have it,” she said. “It was in the backpack with your wallet.” For some reason, she still did not want to reveal that she had her own key hidden in the Jeep. “And back at the lake, I’ll be striking camp. Mom and dad want me to take care of your tent, sleeping bags, clothes, everything.” **“**I’m sorry you have to do that.” **“**It won’t be fun, but I don’t want anyone else to have to do it.” **“**Just be aware . . . the pornography you find in our tent . . . all Ryan’s” **“**Pornography?” **“**He showed you a swimsuit issue. Just the tip of the iceberg.” **“**Ugh,” she said, rolling her eyes in disgust. **“**Just put it in with his clothes . . . or burn it for all I care.”Jill shook her head and took a deep breath. It was bad enough that she was going to have to pack up their clothes and all their camping gear. **“**I’m glad that you warned me, but now I have to go talk to him.” **“**And you need to try and be nice so that he won’t feel the need to retaliate.” **“**I’ll try,” she said.They then said their goodbyes. It seemed as if they probably wouldn’t be seeing one another until they were both back home in Holden. **“**Now I’ve got to go and say goodbye to Ryan,” she said to the group as she came out of David’s room. **“**Not without a chaperone,” said Britt. **“**Why would she need a chaperone?” asked her mother. **“**I don’t, Mom,” she replied, glaring a Britt. **“**I’ll tag along just in case,” said Britt.A few minutes later, Jill, Britt, and Jenna walked into Ryan’s room. **“**Hey, Ryan,” she said, walking up to his bed. “Scoot over again? I won’t bite.” **“**Last time I’m going to fall for that trick,” he said, showing no inclination to move. **“**No, really. I don’t know what came over me last night.” After a long pause, she continued, “Actually I do. It was such a shock to see myself naked on TV. It made me mad. I felt the need to get back at you.” **“**I understand.” **“**None of it would have happened if you hadn’t…” **“**I get that.” **“**Truce,” she said, holding out her hand. **“**Okay . . . what do you want from me?” he asked suspiciously. **“**You’re on to me,” she said with a sigh. “Have the news people been in?” **“**Not today.” **“**Well, they probably will be. There’s this girl named Jane. Tarzan and Jane . . . get it?”He studied her, a puzzled look on his face. “I guess I don’t get it,” he replied.Glancing up, Jill saw that his TV was off. She did her best to explain the circumstances; how Jane and her friends had been the group to witness the Tarzan show, how she’d met them briefly on her way to Stanton, and how Jane had since been interviewed, **“**Okay,” said Ryan agreeably. “If they come in here and ask me about all this, what would you have me say?”Jill had been so focused on getting Ryan to agree, that she’d put little thought into what he might say that would be helpful. **“**I don’t know,” she said, “but whatever you say, please don’t tell them that I bit your ear.” **“**Why would I say that?” **“**I don’t know, but the darndest things do occasionally come out of your mouth,” said Jill. “But if we can’t think of a way to make the Tarzan thing go away, at least don’t make it worse by bringing up the fact that I bit you.” **“**And whatever you do, don’t bring up that Jill was roped,” interjected Britt. **“**Oh, my God,” said Jill. “Certainly not that! But he’d never bring that up.” **“**I wouldn’t be so sure,” said Britt. “Yesterday he brought up his interest in marrying you. That was random.” **“**Good point,” said Jenna.After a little more discussion, Jill remembered something that she wanted to say to Ryan. It would allow them to end the discussion on a positive note, something she felt was important given what she had done the night before. **“**Ryan, I do have something that I need to say. Up on the mountain, while we were carrying you in the stretcher, a certain helicopter pilot was suggesting that David and I might be engaging in, you know, incestuous activities.” **“**That woman . . . she was so rude!” **“**Right?! And you stuck up for me.” **“**And for David.” **“**I’ve been wanting to thank you for that. You don’t know how much I appreciated not having to go it alone in that moment.” **“**What a bitch! Just because you were naked and she saw you holding hands.” **“**I mean . . . in her defense, the circumstances must have looked pretty suspicious to someone on the outside looking in.” **“**So! No one should jump to conclusions.” **“**Agreed. I just wanted to make sure you know how much your words to her meant to me in that moment. You vouched for me . . . for us. Thank you so much for doing that.”Jill could tell that Ryan was unaccustomed to having people thank him. “You’re very welcome,” he said at long last. “Anything for you!”A short time later, Jill and Kyle were in the backseat of the Copelands’ car on their way to recover the Jeep. In the end, they’d had no good idea for what Ryan should say if he were asked about Jill doing a Tarzan yell on top of the summit. Jill thought he should deny everything. Britt thought that he should mumble incoherently as they’d never put that on the air. And Jenna thought that he should simply refuse to be interviewed.They all agreed that there probably wasn’t anything that he might say that would lead the reporters to believe that Jane had fabricated the story. Indeed, she’d had four friends with her. For all they knew, every one of them might have talked about seeing Jill portraying a naked Tarzan, pounding on her chest and calling to her jungle animals at the top of her lungs.Jill ended up brooding for the early part of the drive. All she could think about was that everyone was going to find out everything. If Jane had come forward to be interviewed, there was no telling how many others might do the same. She had a list of fifty-six people who had seen her naked that day alone. The possibilities for follow-up interviews seemed almost endless.She imagined she might go home to Holden only to be accosted by hundreds of people with thousands of questions. She’d been a person that everyone had mostly ignored. She found herself hoping that somehow she might be able to return to that existence; however, she feared that her anonymity might be gone forever.She found herself questioning her interest in returning home sooner rather than later. Maybe she should just hang out at the lake as long as possible. Maybe she should ask Britt and Jenna if she could go home with them. Maybe she should just leave for college early, not that the dorms would be open for her to move in. There did seem to be options – none of them especially good. In her heart, she knew she had to go home before going off to college – at the very least, she needed to pack.Fortunately, Britt managed to discover that Kyle was training to become a sonographer. As soon as she learned that, she started asking him everything she could think of related to ultrasound. The woman’s thirst for knowledge was on full display. That was ideal as far as Jill was concerned. It allowed her to wallow in her state of despair without anyone bothering her.As they approached Agency, Jill came out of her shell long enough to suggest to Britt and Jenna that they spend the night with her on the point. She’d empty out David and Ryan’s tent. They’d be able to use it, saving them the trouble of carrying their own tent all the way out there and setting it up.To her delight, they accepted the offer. At that point, Jill decided to invite Kyle to join them for dinner. As his canoe was there, he’d have to come to the point with them anyway. Jill decided that a dinner invitation was the best way to tell him that she didn’t want to go to the movie, which she didn’t.Truth be told, she did want to see the movie; however, it was playing in Stanton. She was sure that she’d be recognized wherever she went – especially in Stanton. The braids did alter her appearance somewhat, just not by enough, she feared. She wanted to avoid all encounters in which she might be recognized from the Channel Five news program.They stopped at the grocery in Agency for supplies. Britt and Jenna had put themselves in charge of dinner. Jill was glad about that. I allowed her to stay in the car, hiding out in the backseat.While Kyle and the twins were in the store, she exchanged a few texts with Nick. He was working at Skyline Adventures. As it was a Friday in August, a typically busy day, his boss had been unwilling to give him the day off.Jill struggled with the decision of inviting him out to the lake for dinner. On the one hand, she wanted to see him again; she’d kissed him the night before. But on the other hand, she realized how awkward it might be if both he and Kyle were there. They were both obviously interested in her, even though she’d been doing her best to politely discourage them. In the end, she decided that she ought to invite him. If she didn’t, he would probably come out to the lake anyway, she realized. After inviting him, she sent Britt a text – just in case Nick affected how much food they needed to buy.A short time later, the twins and Kyle returned. Once the groceries were in the trunk, they were again underway.The Jeep was just as they’d left it, and Jill asked Kyle to ride with her. With the Copelands following in their sedan, she led the way back to the east side of Cache Lake where they parked near the Airstream. Less than thirty-six hours had elapsed since she’d been there, but so much had happened. **“**What a nice camp! What an enchanting view!” Britt exclaimed when they reached the point. They had managed to transport everything they would need in one trip, Jill and Kyle carrying groceries while Britt and Jenna brought what they needed to spend the night.Jill looked around. Britt was right. Their spot on the lake was indeed a slice of heaven, made all the more gorgeous because it was a perfect sunny afternoon. Tiny ripples in the lake’s surface lapped against the beach. The deep blue of the lake, the forested hills, the stone-grey mountains in the distance, and just the right number of snow-white clouds all added up to an idyllic setting. **“**I love it here,” Jill replied. “Every spring I can’t wait to come back. And every fall, I can’t bear to leave.” **“**And you’re leaving tomorrow?” Britt asked. **“**Yep. That’s what I’ve decided.” **“**Okay, then. Strip!” Britt commanded. **“**What?” asked Jill, taken aback. **“**You heard me. Every stitch . . . now! Chop-chop!”

**Chapter 162: Back in Camp  
  
“**This is your last chance. Can you walk around naked at home?” Britt asked. **“**No, but…” **“**Will you be able to walk around naked at college?” **“**No, but…” **“**But, nothing. Strip! Now!”Jill looked over at Jenna, hoping she’d come to her assistance. **“**Don’t look at me,” she said. “Britt’s right. This is your chance. Carpe diem!”Jill looked at Kyle. **“**And don’t look at Kyle,” said Britt. “No doubt he wants to see you get naked. What do you say, Kyle? You’ve seen her naked before, right?” **“**Umm . . . yeah.” **“**Any reason she shouldn’t spend the rest of the day naked?” Britt asked.Kyle looked as if he didn’t appreciate being put on the spot. “Not that I can think of,” he replied tentatively. **“**Thanks a lot, Kyle!” said Jill, doing her best to make her disappointment in him sound genuine. **“**So, Jill. Three against one. You lose . . . or win, depending on how you choose to look at it. Are you going to go willingly, or are you going to make us strip you.” **“**Umm . . . neither,” she said as she noticed that Britt and Jenna seemed to be moving so as to encircle her. **“**Wrong answer,” said Britt. “Last chance to take off your clothes yourself.” **“**Kyle, please,” she pleaded. “Just this morning you told me you’d stick up for me again.” **“**And I would,” he replied. “However, I think that Britt’s probably right. I think you want this. I recall our conversation. Are you forgetting what you told me? Maybe . . . it’s just that you don’t want to go willingly!? Maybe . . . deep inside, you want the experience . . . of being stripped.”Jill saw Britt give Kyle a thumbs up. **“**I do not!” she exclaimed.Sensing that the gap between Britt and Jenna probably represented her best chance, she charged for it.They had anticipated her move. They were able to slow her down enough that Kyle was able to grab her from behind. He held her around the waist and lifted her up, her flailing legs meeting with nothing but air. **“**No fair! No fair!” she shouted.While Britt and Kyle held her, Jenna dropped down and went for her shoes. Jill struggled, but she wasn’t willing to actually kick her. The battle wasn’t worth someone getting hurt. **“**Okay, Kyle. Now you hold her legs while Jenna and I remove the shirt. We don’t want it to get torn.”Jill knew that she might be able to keep Britt and Jenna from stripping her, but with Kyle on their side, the odds were decisively in their favor. She also knew that she wasn’t necessarily opposed to being naked. She wasn’t sure she wanted to be stripped, but she also wasn’t sure she didn’t want to be. **“**Are you sure we should be doing this?” asked Kyle, suddenly sounding as if he might be getting cold feet. **“**It’s fine,” said Britt. “She wants it. We all know that.” **“**I do not,” Jill yelled. **“**She does,” said Britt. “…but Kyle, absolutely nothing sexual. Can you restrain yourself? Don’t touch her anywhere where you know you shouldn’t.” **“**I won’t, but I’m no longer sure she wants to be stripped,” he said as the shirt went up and off over her head.Jill tried to hold on to it, but she also didn’t want to see it get torn. She was now on the ground – in the area between the tents and the water’s edge – right where the sand, the dirt and the weeds all met. **“**Now her shorts, Kyle,” Britt instructed. “We saved the best for last; you can do the honors. But stripping, right? No touching!”Jill glared at him. She saw him hesitate as if he were trying to read her mind. She knew he wasn’t the sort of guy that would go along with this sort of thing under most circumstances. Jill had decided that she wanted to be naked, but being overpowered and stripped was unsettling – to say the least. It reminded her too much of the time Ryan had yanked off her top the summer before. That had been so demeaning. Girls shouldn’t be treated like that – like this.In a split second, Jill realized that it was a catch-22. She wanted to be naked, but she didn’t want to have to undress willingly – especially not with Kyle watching – nor did she want to be stripped.Realizing that Kyle seemed as if he might be considering switching sides, Britt said, “I can prove to you that she wants this, Kyle.”Kyle stopped to listen. Jill too was paying close attention. Even she was curious how Britt might attempt to prove that. **“**She hasn’t used her safeword,” said Britt.Jill looked at Kyle. Their eyes met. Jill was racking her brain. Did she have a safeword? That seemed to be all that Kyle needed to hear. A second later, he’d unsnapped her shorts. **“**Kyle, no, means no!” she shouted as he started pulling her shorts down.He hesitated. Turning his attention to Britt, he asked, “Is that her safeword?” **“**Kyle,” Jill yelled at him to get his attention. “It’s every woman’s safeword. Duh! Think for yourself! No, means no!”Kyle pulled Jill’s shorts back up. “I don’t want any part of this,” he said in no uncertain terms. After snapping her shorts, he turned on Britt. “Let her go and give her back the shirt.”The mood had changed drastically. Both Britt and Jenna released their grip. Jill suddenly found her feet again on the ground. Jenna extended Britt’s grey cotton shirt to her. Jill grabbed it as she backed away.Just as it had been a surprise to be attacked, Jill was surprised to suddenly find herself in this new situation. Maybe being stripped hadn’t been a direction that was to her liking, but she also didn’t want to be just topless. And she certainly didn’t want to put the grey shirt back on. Being fully clothed wasn’t at all something she was interested in.What was she to do? As she turned her back on her companions to look out at the lake, she realized that Britt and Jenna had been right. This was her chance! **“**Carpe diem!” she announced resolutely as she reached down and unsnapped her shorts. Turning back around to face the group, she slid them down her legs and stepped out of them. **“**I knew it!” said Britt triumphantly.Jill realized that this was a watershed moment. She’d experienced a lot of nudity that summer, both partial as well as full, but until that moment, she had always been telling herself that she didn’t want to be seen – and she had been working carefully to keep others from thinking that she was willingly nude.By removing her shorts rather than putting the top back on, she was suddenly being much more honest about the girl that she had become. Even though this Jill would have been unfathomable to the version of herself that she had been when the summer began, this is who she now was. She did want to be nude because they were absolutely right; once she was home or off at college, nudity was going to no longer be an option. With Britt, Jenna, and Kyle – there on the shore of Cache Lake – it was an option – an option that she needed to take advantage of. **“**You’re all dirty,” said Britt, looking her up and down.Jill looked at herself. It was true. She’d been rolling around in the dirt, fighting to keep her clothes on. Glancing back up, she saw that Kyle was staring between her legs. Britt noticed it too. **“**Like what you see, young man?” Britt asked teasingly. **“**Of course he does,” said Jenna. “What guy can resist shaved pussy?” **“**Leave him alone!” said Jill, resisting the urge to cover up. Doing so would make little sense, given that she’d just taken off her own shorts. But even though she was voluntarily naked, she couldn’t keep her cheeks from turning red. That was an involuntary reaction. **“**Thank you for coming to your senses, Kyle,” she said. **“**Why don’t you rinse off?” proposed Britt, lifting her arm to indicate the lake. “You’re sweaty . . . gives the dust something to stick to.”Jill made her way into the water. Britt was again right; she needed to rinse off. **“**I’ll take a swim,” she announced. **“**Go with her, Kyle,” Britt encouraged.Glancing back, Jill saw him remove his shoes and then his shirt. He waded in after her, wearing just a pair of shorts. **“**Take off the shorts, Kyle,” added Britt. “Three ladies here. We all want to see what you’re packing.”Jill’s jaw dropped. “Don’t listen to her Kyle. She’s gone off the deep end.” She definitely wanted him to keep his shorts on. “And I never had a safeword. She was trying to trick you.” **“**It was for you, Jill,” said Britt. “Later . . . when you’re off at college . . . you’ll thank me.”Jill looked away. She was already grateful – not because of how it had gone down – not because she was naked – because she had finally come clean. By removing the shorts, she had admitted – to herself as well as a small, hand-picked group – that she was willing to be nude under the right conditions. Indeed, the conditions were almost ideal.Even though they had attempted to overpower and strip her, she felt safe around these individuals. Even though she’d just met them that summer, these were her friends. They probably really did have her best interests at heart.She dove in and took a few strokes out into the lake. Spinning around, she looked back towards shore to see if Kyle was following. To her surprise, he wasn’t. She was hoping he would.Looking at him, she wondered why he seemed to be taking his time. What young man wouldn’t pursue a naked girl into the water, especially one that he had asked to kiss in the recent past?Glancing back occasionally to keep an eye on him, Jill reached deep water and started stroking out into the lake on her back. She saw Kyle hesitate at the point where he was going to need to pick up his feet and swim.Jill tried to recall if she had ever seen him swim. They’d been out on Sunken Island together but had gotten there in the canoe. Not wanting to embarrass him if he were not a strong swimmer, she changed directions and headed back in. She couldn’t imagine anyone whose family had a cabin at the lake not being a good swimmer, but it didn’t really matter.As Jill put her feet back on the bottom near Kyle, he asked, “Jill, would you mind doing me a favor?” **“**Umm . . . depends,” she replied, being conscious of the fact that a naked girl might not want to sound too agreeable.Kyle laughed. “You don’t have to worry about me.” **“**Says the guy who mere moments ago was trying to pants me.” **“**Sorry about that…” he replied, “I’m glad I finally clued in.” **“**We both are,” she said. “It’s better this way.” She didn’t want him to feel bad. She knew he wasn’t the sort of guy that a girl needed to be concerned about. Britt was more to blame for what had almost happened than he was. Standing up such that her nipples came right to the surface of the water, she continued, “To be completely honest, I am more comfortable nude than I am with letting people know that I am comfortable nude. The hardest part about taking off my shorts just now had nothing to do with baring my body. It had everything to do with baring my soul.”

**Chapter 163: A Visit to the Island  
  
“**I guess that makes sense,” he replied. **“**It does?” she asked. She wasn’t so sure. **“**You’re worried about what people will think.” **“**I guess that’s it.” **“**You’ve grown comfortable with your body. Now you’re mostly worried about what that comfort level says about you.”Jill was surprised. “You might be right. All this insight . . . where’s it coming from?” **“**Just trying to connect the dots. Indeed, you explained most of it to me in the hospital this morning. You described yourself as an ‘ordinary’ girl, a girl who had been suffering from low self-esteem, and then you told me about your ‘transformative’ summer.”Jill was struggling to piece together what exactly she had told him. **“**So now your self-consciousness is no longer so much about your body. Now your main concern is what people will think when . . . if . . . they find out that you are comfortable with being naked. In short, you’re still self-conscious, just in a different way.”Jill looked down at her exposed breasts. Indeed, she knew she was no longer very concerned about having them seen – at least not by people that she knew fairly well. They were small; that was more or less a fact. However, whether they were covered or not, no longer seemed like the big deal it once had. Either way, they looked small. **“**Are you guys swimming or talking?” said Britt, shouting at them from the shore. **“**We’re talking,” Kyle yelled back.Jill laughed. “You started to ask me for a favor,” she reminded him. **“**Right . . . the rock in the middle of the lake. Could you show me how to find it? I went out there the next day . . . no luck.”Jill laughed happily. “Not a matter of luck. Umm . . . your canoe?” **“**Sure, let’s take the canoe.”Jill would have preferred swimming. She felt as if she needed the exercise; however, she didn’t want to put Kyle on the spot.A short time later, the two of them were paddling out into the lake. Jill was sitting in the front of the boat. She’d swum naked toward the cabins on the far side, but this time she was much more exposed. Sitting up meant that her breasts were on full display, her nipples pointing dead ahead, indicating the way to Sunken Island. And from where Kyle sat, her entire nude back and bottom were completely visible. **“**Is it any wonder I’m concerned about what people might think?” she asked. “I mean, I remember your mother’s words . . . all too well. I was a drug addict. I was a loose woman with sexually transmitted diseases. And for no reason other than that I had been seen nude.” **“**I’m so sorry. I know my mom said those things, but in her defense, she was just repeating what she’d heard Mrs. Hooper say.” **“**Doesn’t matter. What’s important is that even if one becomes comfortable enough to be naked, the world around us will never share that comfort.” **“**I suspect that’s true,” he admitted. “But I am sincerely sorry for my mother’s words. I hope you’re not holding that against me.” **“**Certainly not. My feelings were hurt. Badly hurt. I hope you know I am none of those things. I’m not a druggy. I’m not a slut. Simply being naked surely doesn’t make a girl a slut. As I said, I’m an ordinary girl. I was being completely honest.” **“**Hardly ordinary. But it’s apparent that you lead a clean life.”Jill didn’t know what to say. She was becoming more concerned about her breasts being on display as the populated area ahead grew closer. **“**A little to the left,” she directed. **“**How do you know?” **“**Once we’re there, I’ll show you. I look at distance markers . . . the lake itself looks the same everywhere out here. You can only see the island when you’re right above it.”As she climbed out of the canoe and placed her feet on the rock’s uneven but slippery surface, she realized that it was probably about exactly one year since she’d had her top taken from her – on that very spot. At that time, losing her top had felt like the end of the world. Now, she was entirely nude, and not only that, but she’d also shaved her pussy such that even the most intimate details were conspicuous. And, she was alone with a guy, a guy that she felt she could trust even though she had only known him a matter of weeks.Kyle stood behind her as she pointed out the distant features that she and David used to find the island. As she was finishing, she felt a hand on her shoulder. **“**May I kiss you, Jill?” he asked politely.The fact that he had again asked made Jill feel safe, but she took a step away as she turned to face him. **“**Kyle . . . I’m sorry, but no. We’re friends,” she replied matter-of-factly. Being naked, she was conscious of the need to be especially clear. Since they were alone and she was nude, it was not a moment to sound less than resolute. However, she very much wanted to be kind about it. “I like you, Kyle. I do. A different year? Different circumstances? Maybe. But this year? No. However, thank you for showing me the respect that asking demonstrates. You are a gentleman.” **“**That’s fine, Jill,” he replied. “But I have to ask. Are you a lesbian? You seem to have made quite a connection with Britt and Jenna.”Jill sucked in a breath and let it out slowly, her cheeks puffing out in the process. All the while, she was eyeing Kyle carefully. **“**That’s true, but I’ll be completely honest. It’s not because I’m a lesbian . . . or because they’re lesbians. The bond we have formed has nothing to do with sexual orientation. They are simply intelligent women that I’ve come to respect and admire. Sure they’re feisty, especially Britt, but I’ve even come to enjoy that aspect of her personality. Whatever you do, don’t tell her I said that.”Kyle chuckled. “So, you hang out with lesbians, but you’re straight . . . that’s fine. Actually, it’s cool. But if you’re straight and you like me, what gives? You’re not dating anyone.” **“**I think I’ve been clear about that. In a few weeks’ time, I’ll be off at college. It wouldn’t make any sense to start something here . . . now.”Jill saw the dejected look in his eyes, but she stuck to her guns. As they paddled back, she felt very proud of herself. She’d been very assertive, but also quite friendly about it. It had indeed been a transformative summer. She’d made significant progress on a number of fronts. **“**Have fun kids?” asked Britt as they pulled the canoe ashore a short time later.Jill could tell by the look in her eye that she was suspecting that some hanky-panky might have taken place during their excursion. **“**We did!” said Jill enthusiastically. “You’ll be disappointed to learn that Kyle remains a complete gentleman . . . despite your efforts to lead him astray.” **“**Glad to hear it. Who’s complaining,” said Britt. “I got my way. But as you know, it was all for you.” **“**Well, be that as it may, I’ve got some work to do,” Jill said.She got her towel from the line, and after drying herself off, she hung it back up. She considered tying it around her waist, but she didn’t really want to. What purpose would it serve?After handing one of the other towels to Kyle, she walked over to David and Ryan’s tent and unzipped it. Tying the fly wide-open, she knelt down to get a sense of the project before her. It looked as if packing everything up was going to be a little time-consuming.Deciding to dig in, she pulled out their sleeping bags and hung them on the line. With them airing, she returned to the tent to tackle their clothes and other belongings. In certain instances, she wasn’t positive if an item belonged to David or Ryan. She decided to not sweat it; they could sort things out later themselves. **“**How can I help?” asked Kyle.Jill glanced up and saw that he’d put his shirt on. He was now dressed; she was still nude. **“**I’m fine,” she replied. “I’m just going to stuff their clothes into their bags. It’ll be a mess, but everything will have to be washed when we get home, so it doesn’t matter.” **“**I’ll take care of the sleeping bags,” he volunteered. **“**Sure . . . thanks,” she said, locating the stuff sacks for him.As Kyle took care of the bags, Britt and Jenna sipped wine from a box they’d gotten at the store. They did have some dinner preparations to get to, but there was plenty of time. They seemed quite content to just relax and watch what Jill and Kyle were doing. Jill felt a little self-conscious. It wasn’t really possible to work on emptying out the tent without having her butt sticking out, mostly pointed in the general direction of the others, but she did her best to not think about that.A time or two, she glanced back only to catch Kyle staring. She thought it was humorous as much as anything, but she couldn’t really blame him. He was male. She was female. If she was going to be voluntarily nude and have her butt angled in his general direction, how could she fault him for looking? Did she want him to look?That was certainly a new concept for her to consider. She’d spent the summer telling herself (and others) that she didn’t want to be seen. Now, however, she was no longer sure. Did that represent a change or had she simply needed a little time to get in touch with her true feelings on the subject. Had she been this way all along and unwilling to confront the issue – unwilling to admit it – even to herself?Considering that, she decided that, no, at one time she really had not wanted to be seen. She hadn’t wanted anyone to see her flat chest – or the rest of her body, for that matter. That had indeed changed. She still wasn’t sure that she actually wanted to be seen, and yet she knew that she no longer minded it all that much. It was okay as long as those involved were people that she felt comfortable around. And she was feeling so much better about herself that it was becoming increasingly easy to achieve a level of comfort around others – while clothed, of course, but surprisingly, also while nude. **“**Wat ‘cha got there?” Britt asked. **“**Pornography,” she replied, holding up a couple of magazines that she had been about to stuff into Ryan’s bag. **“**Ooh . . . can we see?” asked Britt. **“**Umm . . . be my guest,” said Jill, rising up on her knees and extending the pile toward Britt who walked over to take them from her. “David warned me that Ryan had porn in here.” **“**Probably David’s,” said Britt. “He just doesn’t want you to think that he’s every bit the pervert that Ryan is.” **“**Probably more so,” said Jenna. “He’s probably degenerate numero uno . . . always doing his best to pretend otherwise.”Britt took the magazines back to where she and Jenna had been sitting at the fire circle. She handed Jenna a couple of them as she picked up her wine and sat back down.Jill took a moment to study the two women as they sipped their wine and flipped through the magazines. They seemed so much at ease, and yet, it seemed so unusual. She’d never really considered that women looked at pornography, but maybe they did. Maybe she had just led a sheltered existence – or maybe just lesbians had an interest in that sort of thing. She found herself wondering if she’d be looking at porn in the future. At one time, she would have said ‘no, never,’ and been quite certain of her answer. Now, however, she didn’t know. It had turned out to be a ‘never say never’ summer.She glanced over at Kyle and noticed that he too was observing the twins. They exchanged a smile, but then Jill returned to the task at hand.Once she’d cleaned out the tent so that Britt and Jenna could move in, Kyle helped her carry a load out to the Jeep. They mostly walked along in silence. Jill sensed that he had things on his mind. She imagined that he was not ready to give up. She was glad that he didn’t again bring up his interest in giving a relationship a go; however, he seemed genuinely sad.A short time later, Jill was all alone near the Airstream. She had walked back taking a small load of things to put into the storage shed: camping gear that stayed there year round.Suddenly she heard a vehicle. Instantly in a state of panic, she attempted to get into the shed even though it was so full that there wasn’t room for her inside. She knew it couldn’t be her grandparents; they had been planning to spend the night in Elk Bend. They were going to be spending the night with her parents in the hotel room they’d all been in the night before.Peeking out, she recognized Nick’s truck. Chastising herself for being so jumpy, she realized that she should have known it would be him.Feeling quite relieved, she extracted herself from all the stuff she’d become intimate with inside the shed. She walked over to greet him as he climbed out. **“**Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes,” he said, a broad smile on his face.To Jill’s surprise, he grasped her gently by the shoulders and leaned down for a kiss. **“**Nick!” she said indignantly, straight-arming him to thwart his effort. **“**Really?” he said, surprise evident in his voice.

**Chapter 164: Evening**Suddenly Jill was remembering how they had parted the night before, just outside the restaurant where she had been drinking sake. They had shared not just one but two kisses followed by a rather tender hug. **“**I’m sorry, Nick,” she said, relaxing and letting her gaze fall. **“**It’s okay,” he said reassuringly. “I just thought we were past that.” After a pause, he continued, “You’re just not sure what you want, are you?” **“**Not true,” she said, finding her voice. “I know exactly what I want.” **“**But last night?” **“**A weak moment. Maybe a genuine expression of gratitude. I’m sorry I let that happen.” **“**Please don’t be sorry. I thought we shared something.” **“**We did. We shared a lot yesterday. But I’m still going to college…” **“**I know, I know . . . completely unencumbered by a relationship back home.”Jill smiled; she recognized the line. “Friends?” she asked, extending her right hand.Appearing quite reluctant, Nick took her hand and shook it. **“**It’s fine,” he said. “You’re just hard to figure out. Please don’t hold it against me that I’m a bit confused.” **“**I don’t. I wish I wasn’t confused . . . confusing. I’m not trying to be,” she said. And it was true. She’d always found it difficult to send consistent signals – that summer especially. Her nudity, she knew, was a major factor. It changed how men responded to her. It also meant that she was typically experiencing a level of arousal that men might be able to hear in her voice. Possibly they were noticing via other means. Indeed, her heightened libido might affect how she came across.A short time later, she and Nick headed out to the point. As it was a single-file path, she led the way.Jill was expecting that the evening had the potential to be quite awkward, especially given that she intended to remain naked and had two would be suitors present. Fortunately, she had just clarified things with both of them. In hopes that it would help, she told Nick about Kyle on their way out to the lake. As she had expected, Nick didn’t think he had ever met him.Out at the lake, Britt and Jenna had begun meal preparations. Both of them greeted Nick more warmly than she might have expected, with hugs and even what had looked to be kisses on the cheek. She felt bad that she had straight-armed him. He hadn’t even gotten so much as a hug from her ¬– and yet she was nude. That fact alone meant that a hug was considerably more intimate.Britt offered Nick wine in a plastic cup, which he graciously accepted. “None for Jill,” Britt reminded him. Jill stuck out her lower lip in a mock pout, but she wasn’t in the mood for wine.A minute later, Nick was seated next to Kyle at that fire circle, the two of them making small talk. As Jill imagined it, they were each discreetly trying to size up the competition.An awkward situation for Jill ensued. She didn’t need to help the women at the picnic table, but she also didn’t want to join the guys. She stood in between the two groups, not knowing what to do with herself. The guys were both eyeing her, while at the same time doing their best to pretend they weren’t. **“**Maybe it’s time for a fire,” suggested Britt. **“**Right . . . a fire,” said Jill, wishing she’d thought of it.Of course, she needed to make the fire. This was her campsite. These were her guests. She was the hostess. She’d just gotten so used to letting David make the fires. However, there was plenty of wood, and she was just as adept as anyone when it came to building a campfire.She was more than happy to have something to do – to take her mind off the fact that she was naked and hanging out with four fully-clothed individuals, all people who she had only met that summer.Even though there was plenty of kindling, Jill decided to split some. She didn’t want the task of fire making to be too quickly accomplished. **“**Careful with that ax!” Jenna cautioned as Jill started making little ones out of big ones. **“**What?” said Jill stopping what she was doing to look over at her. “I know what I’m doing.” **“**But you’re naked and that looks sharp.” **“**She obviously knows what she’s doing,” said Nick, coming to her defense. **“**Thank you, Nick. This might be the first time I’ve split kindling while nude, but it’s all the same. I’ve never relied on my clothes to keep me safe around sharp instruments.”Both Nick and Kyle found that funny, but Jenna frowned. “Just be safe, that’s all I’m asking. You’re the only one from this campsite not in the hospital. Let’s keep it that way.”Jill decided to ignore her and go back to what she had been doing. Just because splitting wood in the nude looked dangerous didn’t mean it was.Once the fire was roaring, Jill observed as Britt and Jenna positioned a big pot. She’d learned that they were making ratatouille. The Copelands had quite a laugh at her expense because she’d never heard of ratatouille other than in reference to the animated movie by the same name. Jill felt vindicated when it came out that neither Kyle nor Nick had either.From that point on, Jill no longer felt nearly as self-conscious. She had vowed to herself that she was going to remain nude for the entire rest of her stay at the lake. Keeping her word had been starting to seem challenging until she’d built the fire. That task, as well as the ensuing conversation about ratatouille, had been distracting enough to again make her goal something that she felt she ought to be able to achieve. Unlike up at Big Aspen Lake, she had a tent full of clothes right there, so she could do what she wanted.Quite a bit later, after the sun was setting behind the hills to the west, the ratatouille was bubbling hot and Jill got a plate from the table. She smiled as she remembered bending over at the waist to dish up when they’d been camped at Big Aspen Lake. She made a point of not repeating that mistake. She felt a little proud of herself for how she as starting to adjust to what still seemed like very strange circumstances.As she considered that, she realized that such new ‘skills’ weren’t something she was destined to get much use out of in the future. Back in the civilized world, she wouldn’t be dishing up from pots down at ground level, and more importantly, she wouldn’t be nude, so bending over in that way would no longer result in a pornographic display of genitalia.The next day, she’d depart and reenter that so-called ‘civilized world.’ She’d go back to being fully-clothed all the time. She was excited about her future, but she wasn’t necessarily looking forward to that particular aspect. In fact, it made her sad. However, that was irrelevant; it was how she knew it had to be. This had been the last summer of her youth. David and Ryan’s injuries aside, it had mostly turned out to be a marvelous summer. Henceforth, she was going to be an adult, a clothed adult. That was the way it had to be.A while later, after the stars had come out and they were about to start roasting marshmallows, Jill heard voices behind her. She turned and stared out into the dark lake. Had she been hearing things? But as she strained her ears, she heard the unmistakable sound of a paddle. **“**Guys,” she announced in a hushed but apprehensive voice. “Someone is coming.” She felt a strong urge to dash to her tent for clothes, but she hesitated. What purpose did it serve to make a vow if she abandoned it at the first provocation? However, she knew she might be able to rationalize a change of plans. When she had made the pledge, she had not been imagining the possibility of visitors. One of her companions shone a light out into the lake and she caught a glimpse of an inbound canoe. **“**Kyle . . . you’re here, right?” she heard a voice call out from the darkness. **“**Hey, Patrick. What’s up?” Kyle responded.So it was Patrick. Jill breathed a limited sigh of relief. This was destined to be a challenge, but not one that would result in her breaking her vow. She didn’t know Patrick all that well, but she did know him. And he was someone who had already seen her naked. Quite a big difference from how she would have reacted earlier in the summer, she considered.But a second later, she heard another voice. It was a female voice.Struggling to decide what to do, Jill slid into a position behind Jenna and Britt. She peeked around them anxiously as Patrick and a girl she did not recognize waded ashore.Jill studied the girl as she emerged from the darkness and approached the glow of the fire. She was about their age, a fairly ordinary looking girl with long dark hair. Jill quickly detected an accent. Still doing her best to keep to the shadows behind the Copeland twins, Jill heard it mentioned that the girl was from Peru meaning that Spanish was her mother tongue. **“**Jill, I’d like you to meet my girlfriend. This is Maria,” said Patrick, making it impossible for her to remain hidden any longer. **“**Um… Hi . . . I’m Jill,” she said meekly, peeking around from behind the Copelands and waving with one hand.As if to be helpful, Jenna and Britt stepped to the side, allowing the fire’s orange light to illuminate her nude body. Jill froze, all the while doing her best to not panic. She and the girl simply stood there staring at one another. Jill noticed that the situation looked to be about as uncomfortable for Maria as it was for her. **“**She’s naked,” said Maria, covering her mouth with her hand and whispering to Patrick. Even though she might have been intending that only he hear, everyone heard. **“**Apparently so,” said Patrick as everyone laughed.Jill could tell by the expression on his face that he was almost as surprised as Maria to find her naked. **“**So, another skinny dipping mishap?” he inquired.Jill didn’t know how to reply. That was indeed how she had explained things that fateful day she’d found herself up in the tree on the other side of the lake. **“**Join us and roast some marshmallows?” asked Kyle. “You guys don’t mind if they stay, right?”Jill didn’t really want them to stay, and yet there was universal agreement that they should.

**Chapter 165: Campfire on the Point**  
  
“Maria and I saw the fire and decided on a starlight canoe ride,” said Patrick as if an explanation might be needed. Looking at Kyle he continued, “After you disappeared this morning and no one showed up for the weekly basketball game, I figured you had to be over here.” Jill saw Maria nudge him, “…and we were curious. Rumors have been flying. Word has reached Cache Lake West of two guys being injured in a rockslide . . . and of a daring young woman who went for help even though she was naked.”  
  
“So you have heard,” said Kyle.  
  
“Third and fourth hand information,” said Patrick. “Several different versions. We don’t know what to believe.”  
  
“Well, Jill would be the daring young woman,” said Kyle, “and David and Ryan would be the injured hikers. They were airlifted to the hospital in Elk Bend.”  
  
Everyone tried to talk Jill into telling the story. It seemed as if they were interested in hearing it from start to finish. She refused. Even though she knew that Patrick and his girlfriend probably deserved to hear what had happened, she didn’t feel as if it were her responsibility.  
  
“Will you give them the short version, Nick?” she asked. “You know what happened. But please . . . the short, short version. It will be hard on me to be reminded of everything . . . such a traumatic day.”  
  
“Sure,” said Nick with a smile.  
  
However, just a minute into the tale he was describing how David had torn off her dress as he’d fallen. She interrupted him. “There was no dress. I don’t wear dresses, certainly not hiking.”  
  
Nick was surprised. “But I thought…”  
  
“Patrick, you may as well know, I was nude . . . willingly nude. I didn’t lose anything in the rockslide. Nothing to lose.”  
  
Jill had decided that she didn’t want her nudist inclinations to turn her into a liar. She imagined herself having closely guarded secrets. That was different. Secrets seemed preferable to lying.  
  
“You go girl!” said Britt.  
  
Jill looked over at her and saw a proud smile on her face.  
  
“Patrick, Maria, can I trust you with the truth?” Jill asked. Seeing them nod, she continued, “The version that made it onto the TV news . . . that was a lie.”  
  
“A white lie,” Nick protested.  
  
“But a lie nonetheless. I took off my clothes myself yesterday morning . . . before leaving camp. I stowed them in my tent,” she said pointing at it. Jill paused; she was having second thoughts. Was she really going to admit all this? She looked around the group.  
  
“It’s all right, Jill. You don’t have to,” interjected Jenna.  
  
Finding her resolve, Jill replied. “But I feel I need to . . . for me . . . so where was I? Right . . . into my tent. I was so nervous. It was scary . . . beyond scary, but I headed out naked . . . right from here. I’d like that fact as well as any specifics about the girl that I’ve become to remain secret, but I don’t want to have to lie in order to protect myself.”  
  
“Wow!” said Patrick. He looked stunned.  
  
Jill glanced over at Maria. She looked as if she couldn’t believe what she had heard, her wide eyes hinting at profound amazement.  
  
“Nick, tell the rest of the story, but remember . . . long story short. And leave out the thrift store. Just to the helicopter.”  
  
“Okay, boss,” said Nick with a quick salute as he started back in.  
  
Jill tried to tune him out, but it was impossible. She couldn’t help but relive what had happened as he related it. Her profound concerns for her brother’s wellbeing came flooding back, and then as her run down the mountain came up she found her heart racing. She was glad that Nick was unable to say much about the encounters she had experienced on the trail; he hadn’t been there.  
  
One scene that he did describe in detail was the moment Jill had commandeered the bike to get to the ranger station more quickly. His depiction was somewhat accurate, but Jill realized that it was based primarily on what he had seen on TV. Whenever she felt her emotions or libido rising, she would tell Nick, ‘Enough of that,’ to get him to hurry along.  
  
She noticed that Nick’s story became more detailed as he started describing the drive up to the ridge with Hicks in the Forest Service Jeep. That only made sense. He’d actually been present after that point. She told him to mention but not spend time on the gates or the tree that they’d been forced to saw up. In Jill’s opinion, getting medical help to David and Ryan was the important aspect, and that was the part of the story that Nick needed to get to.  
  
“I don’t know what to say, Jill,” said Patrick, after Nick had related how the helicopter had lifted off and swooped off down toward the valley. “You sure are one badass, brave girl!”  
  
“I’ll say,” Nick agreed.  
  
“Badass or bare ass?” asked Britt.  
  
“Badass!” said Jill assertively. But then with a shrug, she added, “And bare ass. And I’ve got a sweet tooth. Who’s ready to roast marshmallows?”  
  
Standing up, she went over to a box on the table to get out the roasting forks. Her thoughts were focused on how important it was to her that her last evening at the lake include s’mores. She wanted it to be as perfect as possible.  
  
Jill wasn’t surprised that Maria seemed fascinated with her, but she was surprised by the form that her fascination took. She came right up to her and started asking questions at machine gun rate. She had so many questions that she hardly seemed to pause to give Jill an opportunity to respond.  
  
Jill deflected the barrage by focusing on the marshmallows. To Jill’s surprise, that worked better than she might have imagined. Maria was very interested in all such ‘foreign’ customs, including the concept of roasting a sweet over a fire. Cooking meat – that made sense to her – but marshmallows – not so much. Maria claimed that not only had she never roasted a marshmallow, but that she had never even tasted one.  
  
Jill reached up and popped one into her open mouth, muffling what she had been saying midsentence. “There . . . cross that off your bucket list,” she said, “but they’re much better roasted . . . especially with melted chocolate in a s’more.” Jill was having a hard time believing that someone might not have ever tasted marshmallows; they were ubiquitous in her world.  
  
While Jill took Maria under her wing and showed her how to roast her marshmallow, she learned that Maria had been in the country a year; she’d be a sophomore that fall at a university in California. That was where she had met Patrick.  
  
It was with considerable trepidation that Jill asked her which university they were going to. She imagined that it might be a big problem for her if someone who knew of her penchant for nudity happened to attend the same school as the one she’d be starting at that fall.  
  
She breathed a sigh of relief when she learned that it was one of the big UC system schools in Southern California. Jill’s school was in Northern California.  
  
Just as she had done during her encounter with Austin, Jill didn’t name the institution. She needed a clean break from her summer of nudity. Friends and teachers back in Holden knew where she would be going to college, but the only people she had told that summer were Britt and Jenna. Other than those two, no one at the campfire knew which college she had selected.  
  
One thing that puzzled Jill about Maria, was that she was Caucasian. She didn’t think she’d ever met another person from Peru, but she had been imagining that they would most likely have brown skin like those of Mexican heritage that she was acquainted with in Holden. Maria explained that there certainly were people in Peru with dark skin, but there were many whites. Like the U.S., Peru had been settled by large numbers of Europeans.  
  
Maria seemed to have a bubbly personality, and Jill had little trouble getting her talking. To avoid talking about herself, Jill found that all she had to do was respond to Maria’s questions with questions of her own.  
  
In that manner, Jill learned that Maria was from Milaflores, the well-to-do section of Lima. Supposedly there were about one million inhabitants in such areas, but over ten times that many in the desperately poor communities that encircled them. Jill found it very strange to hear that someone who had grown up there was not willing to visit huge swaths of Lima out of concerns for personal safety.  
  
Maria had just returned from nearly two months at home. She’d talked her parents into allowing her to fly back to the U.S. early so that she could visit Patrick at Cache Lake before the fall semester started.  
  
Because Maria was asking questions about nudity, Jill learned she thought the U.S. was a very liberal country. “See, look at you,” she said. “No one could ever do that in Peru. Here, girls can just walk around naked and no one says anything.”  
  
Jill didn’t think Maria was right about that. She imagined that she had very little ability to go anywhere naked, at least not in populated areas. However, Peru did sound more conservative. According to Maria, around ninety percent of the population was Catholic. Maria also claimed that there was not a single nude beach in the entire country. Jill wasn’t so sure. She suspected that Maria had never tried to find one.  
  
Occasionally, Jill and Maria went to the table to turn their marshmallows into s’mores. Jill also tended the fire, adding a log now and then as needed. In a way, she was amazed at herself, wandering around naked with six other people in the camp. In a way, it was surreal – exhilarating and nerve-racking at the same time. She tried to relax, and yet it was too stressful to relax completely. Her best course of action seemed to be talking to Maria because it kept her mind occupied.  
  
Jill asked Maria about her name. It seemed like a logical thing to bring up, given the Catholic makeup of the county. Maria listed off her entire name. It was so long that it went in one ear and out the other. Supposedly 73% of the girls in her school had the name, 'Maria.' She said that she liked the name Maria and had decided to use it in the U.S., but had never done so in Peru. There, girls either went by one of their other names or used a name combination such as Ana Maria or Julieta Maria to avoid confusion. She herself had used the name Carmen while growing up; it was one of her middle names.  
  
“Sometimes ‘Maria Carmen’,” she had related, “...but mostly just, ‘Carmen.’”  
  
Jill ended up enjoying her one-on-one conversation with the newcomer from Peru. Everyone else seemed to be engaged in their own conversations; however, a few of them were eavesdropping occasionally.  
  
Jill was so engrossed in their discussion that, for long stretches, she would forget that she was naked. But then she’d think about it and glance down. In such moments, she’d notice just how far apart her legs were or weren’t. After a time, she stopped bringing her knees together. Even though she knew that the guys on the other side of the fire had their eyes glued to her, it seemed like a non-issue just how much of her labia minora might be visible at any given moment. At least no one had attempted photography. That was the important thing.  
  
And just as her time with Maria had begun, it came to an abrupt end. Patrick stood up and announced that he and Maria were leaving. Maria scurried to his side taking his hand, and that was that. A minute later they were back in their canoe and paddling out into the dark lake.  
  
It all made complete sense to Jill. They’d spent the summer apart; they were ready for some alone time. She imagined that they’d be having some one-on-one fun as soon as they got back to Cache Lake West. She imagined that the presence of a naked girl at the campfire might have made it a sexually charged atmosphere for the two of them. She doubted that she was the only one experiencing a heightened libido. Considering that, she decided that it was probably more arousing for her than anyone else.  
  
Turning her attention back to the others, Jill remembered that Nick had a nice voice. She asked him if he would sing something, Tumbling Tumbleweeds, perhaps.  
  
“What’s in it for me?” he asked.  
  
His tone caught Jill by surprise, but as she thought about it, she decided that it made sense. They’d kissed the night before, and then she’d invited him out to the lake. While it hadn’t been intentional, she’d mostly been ignoring him that evening. She imagined that he’d gotten his hopes up and that things had not been working out at all like he might have hoped.  
  
“Never mind,” she said in her most conciliatory voice. “If you don’t want to, you don’t want to.”  
  
A while later, Jill was considering what she might need to do to get Kyle and Nick to leave so that she could go to bed. It was destined to be difficult. She didn’t know if she would ever see them again, certainly not that summer. The goodbyes were bound to be a bit strained. As if the situation wasn’t challenging enough, Britt suddenly decided to complicate her world.  
  
“Okay, Jill. It’s time to decide,” she said. “Both of these guys are hoping that they’ll be chosen to spend the night with you in your tent. They both seem like acceptable candidates.”  
  
“What?” she asked indignantly.  
  
“Just look at you . . . ripe for the picking. You are the bachelorette. These two young men are vying for your affection. And Cache Lake here . . . this is paradise! Time to give one of them your rose and send the other packing. That’s how it always ends.”  
  
Jenna laughed but fortunately, came to her defense. “Britt, don’t put her on the spot like that. You wouldn’t like it if someone did that to you.”  
  
“Hey, I said ‘rose.’ I didn’t say ‘cherry,’” replied Britt defensively.  
  
“Still,” said Jenna.  
  
“It’s not going to be like that at all. I’m sleeping alone!” Jill announced resolutely.

**Chapter 166: Campfire, continued**  
  
“I get what’s going on here,” said Nick. “You’re trying to get her to chase us off so that you ladies can . . . what did you say . . . ripe for the picking. They’re hoping to take advantage of you, Jill.”  
  
Britt laughed. “What are you more afraid of? Losing out to Kyle, or losing Jill to someone who doesn’t have a dick? Someone who doesn’t need one because she knows how to satisfy a woman.”  
  
“Hey, hey, hey,” said Jenna, standing up to intervene. “Jill has said she’s sleeping alone. We’ll all be respecting that. Britt and I were not planning on seducing her, but even if we had been, we’d respect her wishes.”  
  
“I’m sleeping alone!” Jill said to drive the point home.  
  
“And I respect your choice,” said Nick.  
  
“As do I,” said Kyle.  
  
“Thanks,” she said. “Not that a girl needs to thank anyone for allowing her to decide who she sleeps with . . . or doesn’t.”  
  
“Come on, Nick,” said Jill. “I’ll walk you to your truck. That will give us a few minutes to ourselves.”  
  
After Nick said goodnight to Kyle, Britt, and Jenna, Jill took his hand and led him down the path toward the Airstream. It felt nice to hold his hand as they made their way into the darkness. She enjoyed his company and had not had enough contact with the opposite sex; the circumstances just weren’t right for anything more. Nick offered to turn his flashlight on, but Jill knew the way and preferred to walk in the dark. She took it slow, savoring the moment.  
  
Along the way, Jill remembered something that she wanted to bring up. “Might you do me a favor, Nick?” she asked. “Patty’s jacket. Could you return it to Mrs. Brooks? If not, I’ll take it in tomorrow. A trip to Stanton would be out of my way, but it is important to me that she gets it back as soon as possible.”  
  
“Already taken care of!” he replied amiably. “I dropped it by the ranger station first thing this morning.”  
  
Jill thanked him. She was very glad to hear that it had already been returned.  
  
Once at Nick’s truck, they took a few minutes to talk about the future. Jill suggested that they keep in touch. They had each other’s cell phone numbers, so it would be easy. She also promised to get together with him if she ended up back at Cache Lake the following summer. They discussed a tentative pizza date. Nick was encouraging her to come back, but she knew she couldn’t commit. She didn’t know what opportunities might present themselves.  
  
After they had said what needed to be said, with her hands on his shoulders, Jill angled her face up and their lips met, pressing together. It was much like the kisses they had shared the evening before, however, it was a single kiss. And yet, it was clearly a goodbye kiss. There was no way to construe it as anything but.  
  
Jill stood in front of the truck as Nick backed out of the driveway. The headlights were blinding, but she stood in them waving so that he’d be able to see her until he reached the road and drove off.  
  
She turned and silently made her way back to the point. Barely a month earlier she had snuck quietly along the same path topless, doing her best to avoid detection. Now she walked along the small track deliberately; she was nude and had nothing to hide.  
  
Back at the fire, the farewell scene repeated itself. Jill took Kyle by the hand and waded into the lake with him as he went about launching his canoe. They chatted quietly, but she expected that Britt and Jenna back at the fire might be able to overhear their conversation. She didn’t really mind. What she and Kyle had to talk about didn’t contain any secrets. She was just saying goodbye. They too planned to keep in touch, but Jill doubted that she’d ever see him again.  
  
Jill had decided to finally relent, and they shared a kiss. It was a kiss that stretched on and on, but Jill kept her lips together as did Kyle. With one final verbal ‘goodbye’ and a squeeze of Jill’s hand, Kyle started paddling for the western shore, which was dark except for a number of cabin lights.  
  
Jill attempted to follow him with her eyes, but it was impossible; there was no moon. After a minute, she turned and waded ashore. She visited the clothesline to use a towel to dry her legs, and then she joined Britt and Jenna back at the fire.  
  
For a long moment, no one spoke. No one seemed to want to break the peaceful silence. Jill didn’t know if she wanted to linger at the fire or go straight to bed, but Jenna indicated a chair, so she sat down.  
  
“Damn, Jill. You’re such a player!” remarked Britt teasingly.  
  
“So many men, so little time,” added Jenna wistfully.  
  
Jill’s first inclination was to object; however, there seemed to be little point. Given what Britt and Jenna had observed, she knew she’d be hard pressed to convince them otherwise.  
  
“First Ryan, then Nick, and today Kyle,” said Jenna. With a faux Southern twang, she continued, “How many more would-be lovers you got hiding in dese here woods, Sweet Cheeks?”  
  
Jill chuckled. “I think three is plenty. I was always jealous of the girls that had guys noticing them. Now I know that it presents its own set of problems.”  
  
“You really didn’t have guys clamoring for your attention in high school?” Jenna asked in a puzzled tone.  
  
“Nope. I led a fairly meek existence. I studied. I played basketball. I was the captain of the team, but who goes to the girls’ games? Almost nobody.”  
  
“But you went on dates, right?”  
  
“A few . . . not that many.”  
  
“Your life has changed, girl! There ain’t no going back,” said Britt.  
  
Jill found herself pondering that statement.  
  
“Part of me thinks that it has, but mostly I think that it was just the nudity . . . and therefore, an anomaly. That I’ll put on my clothes. That I’ll go off to college . . . no one will know me . . . no one will notice me. And things will return to normal . . . Jill normal. I’ll go back to being invisible.”  
  
“What do you want to happen?” asked Jenna.  
  
“Maybe something in between,” said Jill thoughtfully.  
  
“That’s good . . . because that’s probably how it will go down. Guys will notice you, but there will be lots of competition. Lots of pretty girls in college. Fortunately, a great many attractive guys as well. Probably enough to go around.”  
  
“That’s what I’m hoping! I only need one. Three’s awkward!”  
  
Jill had thought that she’d go to bed relatively soon, but she ended up staying up and talking to Britt and Jenna for almost another two hours. Jill had never had a big sister, and suddenly it felt as if she had two. They were both very conscientious when it came to helping her picture what lay ahead. They talked about all aspects of college. They discussed majors, academic success, roommates and dorm life, as well as all the relationship issues that she would probably have to deal with at some point or another on her journey to finding Mr. Right.  
  
Jill couldn’t really believe that she was listening to their advice about men, considering that they were lesbians, but she was. They seemed to know what they were talking about. They had had some girl-boy dating experience, not that it was important. Relationships were relationships.  
  
“I had a steady boyfriend in high school,” admitted Britt. “So I do know a thing or two about men.”  
  
Jenna laughed. “And now they’re both gay.”  
  
Jill laughed, too. For some reason, she suspected that it was true.  
  
“Well, there is that,” replied Britt with a shrug.  
  
By and large, the late night conversation ended up making Jill feel very good about herself. Her initial impression, dating from the weekend they’d met, had been that the Copelands didn’t think much of her. She remembered Britt calling her the boys’ ‘topless stooge’ at one point. Both Britt and Jenna now seemed to have a great deal of respect for her. She decided to ask about that.  
  
“That’s true,” Britt admitted. “I didn’t think much of you at first. Initially, it seemed as if David and Ryan were taking advantage of you . . . forcing you to be naked . . . or worse. And you were defending them. I started to think that they had you completely brainwashed. It still seemed as if the situation needed to be reported to the authorities. But you kept claiming that you were a nudist. Saying that you were voluntarily nude . . . wanted to be nude.”  
  
“We were both suspicious of that assertion,” Jenna interjected, “but as we’ve gotten to know you, we’ve come to realize that you do know what you are doing. That you are in fact in charge . . . possibly more so than you realize.”  
  
Jill was listening carefully. It was interesting to hear their take on things, as well as, what they really thought of her.  
  
“I have an analogy for you,” said Britt. “I’ve come to picture you as a surfer.”  
  
“A surfer?” asked Jill.  
  
“A surfer,” replied Britt. “All your life, you’ve stayed inside the bay. You’d become very proficient at riding the small one- and two-foot waves in the bay. Suddenly you find yourself in the ocean. A monster wave appears on the horizon. You have a choice to make. Paddle for home, for safety? Or trust in yourself and see where the wave takes you?”  
  
“So, nudity was the wave?” she asked.  
  
“More or less. Ryan and David presented you with their idiotic, immature ultimatum. You didn’t paddle for home. You were too curious to choose that alternative. You also didn’t give yourself over to the wave and let it dash you against the rocky shore. Instead, you hopped up on your board and started steering your course.”  
  
“I did?” asked Jill. She was struggling with the analogy. “In keeping with your nautical analogy, I might have described myself as flotsam, drifting aimlessly at the mercy of the currents.”  
  
“I’m still with the surfer analogy,” said Britt. “As I see it, you were charting your own course much more than you realized at the time. You chose your line and you carved the wave. That’s the reason that I believe you are so content with the outcome . . . you chose it . . . unwittingly perhaps. But the bottom line is that you got yourself here.” She waved her hands indicating Jill’s nude body lit by the glowing embers of the fire.  
  
While Jill sat there trying to decide if Britt’s theory was remarkably deep or tremendously shallow and inane, she continued, “Nature threw all it had at you this summer . . . both in terms of what the boys subjected you to as well as what the rockslide presented you with. You lost your clothes; you almost lost your brother. But through it all, you held your head high and kept your wits about you. You’ve earned my respect, and you saved David . . . Ryan, too. You didn’t merely survive, you rose to meet the challenge head-on, becoming a better person in the process. You’re ready to take on the world!”  
  
“I am?” said Jill. Britt’s analogy was growing on her, but she didn’t really feel as if she were ready to take on the world. She felt about as she imagined all kids did just before they left home for college – a bit unsure of herself and rather uncertain about the future.  
  
“Sure there will be challenges ahead,” added Britt, “but you’ll again rise to the occasion . . . each and every time . . . I’m certain of it!”  
  
In the end, Jill decided that Britt’s take on things had merit. The most significant turning points had been more of her doing than David and Ryan’s. She was the one who had gone out to spy on them in nothing more than a pair of black panties the night they’d caught her. Similarly, she’d been the one who had gone skinny-dipping the morning that her world had been turned upside down. Would she one day come to regard those events as how she had been steering the course that the summer had taken? She didn’t know. It seemed like quite a stretch of the imagination.  
  
But one thing that Britt had said did ring true. She was content with the outcome. She was still worried about how the repercussions from the TV news might play out, and she was still concerned that David might not recover fully, but considering just the nudity aspect – she was feeling more content with that. It wasn’t like she was glad to be a nudist. It was more like she was glad to be more in touch with her inner self.  
  
In Jill’s opinion, it didn’t seem as if the summer had turned her into a nudist. It was more like it was a part of her that had been lying dormant and undiscovered. She hadn’t changed so much as she had been enlightened. And in the process, she’d discovered that there was nothing wrong with her appearance. That had ended up being a most welcome side effect. She was a beanpole, but so what? That was simply her lot in life. To her surprise, there seemed to be men who were attracted to a slender athletic girl – even one that was flat-chested – plenty of them in fact. It was time to stop thinking about her shape and instead focus on the more important things in life: who she was on the inside and what she wanted to do with her life, what she wanted to make of herself.  
  
A bit later, while they were discussing her ‘clothed’ future at college, Britt suggested that she might be able to go on some nude walks or hikes down in California. In fact, Britt was encouraging it.  
  
Jill dismissed the idea. “Too many people in California. I doubt there are primitive areas . . . places to go where I wouldn’t run into anyone. I’d have to be completely alone, or with people I trust . . . trust completely.”  
  
“People like us?” asked Britt.  
  
Jill laughed. “As if I’ve ever been able to trust you, Britt! For example, I remember the time you let me down . . . literally . . . in the midst of a group of people.”  
  
“I guess you’re right,” Britt acknowledged with a smile and a shrug.  
  
“But down in California . . . it’s not going to happen.”  
  
“You didn’t think it would happen here, and yet it did.”  
  
“I guess,” agreed Jill. “But I could never risk it at college. What if word got out?”  
  
“That would be a big wave,” said Britt with a wink. “I imagine you’d find a way to ride it!”  
  
“I’d have to change colleges,” Jill replied.

**Chapter 167: Saturday Morning**  
  
Jill was up early the next morning. She would have preferred staying snuggled inside the warmth of her sleeping bag a bit longer, but Britt and Jenna had a long drive ahead of them and were planning on an early start.  
  
In keeping with her vow, she did not dress. To combat the chilly morning air, she immediately went about building a fire. In short order, she had flames leaping waist high from the fire circle. David had always taken charge of the fire, but that had nothing to do with Jill’s abilities in that regard. She could build a campfire with the best of them. She also had skill when it came to making cowboy coffee. Both girls complimented her upon taking their first sips.  
  
It didn’t take Britt and Jenna much time to get their things together. Jill was a bit sad as the time to say ‘goodbye’ approached. The sudden reappearance of the twins in the aftermath of the rockslide had been a godsend. Dealing with all the complexities of the hospital environment as well as her sudden notoriety would have been much more difficult had she not had them with her for moral support.  
  
They offered to help Jill with the guys’ tent, but she declined. As it was, they were leaving two full days later than they had been intending. The Copelands were only just barely going to be able to get home before Britt had to report for her residency.  
  
Less than an hour after crawling out of her sleeping bag, Jill stood alone on the point looking out at the lovely lake. The morning mist floated in the air just above its glassy surface. Glancing down at her bald mound, she examined Fuzzy Wuzzy’s former roost. It was still discernable; however, it was getting close to blending in. Another day of nudity and all evidence of the furry caterpillar would be gone, she decided. Not that there would be another day of nudity.  
  
She considered what she wanted to do next. She thought of Kyle across the lake. She could easily imagine him paddling across for another visit – even though he was under explicit instructions not to. She’d told him in no uncertain terms the night before that they were saying their final goodbye of the summer; however, she imagined that he might be struggling with that. It seemed rather strange to her; even though she liked him, she didn’t want to see him and go through that again. There was no point.  
  
She thought about swimming out to Sunken Island and back. She knew it would be a nice swim, and yet she decided quickly against such a course of action.  
  
Even though her summer at Cache Lake was coming to a premature end, she needed to confront that reality head-on. Her summer was over; it was time to go home. Doing her best to keep her thoughts away from the big picture, she busied herself with the basic tasks of striking camp. She put her remaining belongings into her bag, stuffed her sleeping bag into its sack, and started pulling tent stakes.  
  
While making several trips to the Jeep and storage shed carrying their gear, she tried to feel upset at David and Ryan because of all the work they were getting out of. She wasn’t very successful with that. She knew that either one of them would do the same for her were the circumstances reversed. But even though she knew that, she made initial plans to have David make it up to her by doing some of her chores back home. She was in charge of loading, running and emptying the dishwasher. She’d have him do that for the week and a half that remained before she’d be departing for college. She found herself hoping that he’d be on his feet and able to perform such menial tasks.  
  
Not too much later, she stood next to the Jeep. Everything was in its place. It was time to say goodbye and leave. It was particularly hard to do that without her grandparents there; they were at the hospital. It was a melancholy moment. The only thing that remained was getting dressed. Deciding to delay the start of her clothed future just a bit longer, Jill plopped her naked butt onto the driver’s seat and started the motor.  
  
Just before crossing the bridge, she stopped the Jeep and hopped out. She walked over to the post that held her panties. She’d already decided to leave them where they were. She chuckled to herself recalling that David had known about them all along. Did that mean that she needed to forgive him for how he had pushed her that summer? She didn’t know, but it certainly changed how she now viewed some of the things that he’d said and done. Via the panties, she’d inadvertently revealed to David very early in the summer that she might have an interest in being completely nude. That had surely been an important factor in how things had progressed.  
  
Knowing that she’d never again wear that particular pair of panties, she left them there. She also decided to leave the bag with the spare outfit just where it was, hidden under the bridge. Given how well it was wrapped, she knew it would survive. And then it would be there waiting for her the following summer, not that she expected that things might develop such that she might need it. However, it seemed fitting to leave it where it was. Both it and her panties could remain – as monuments to the summer that was.  
  
She attempted to take a selfie of herself with the panties on the post. The best that she was able to do was to get her top half in the shot, but that seemed fitting enough. Anyone seeing a photo of a topless girl with a pair of panties tied to a post would probably assume that the girl was bare below. As a bonus, she’d succeeded at getting Sharp Tooth in the background.  
  
Knowing that she was only delaying the inevitable, she glanced back through her photos. For some reason, she found herself watching the video taken the morning she’d been hitchhiking in that very spot. Her smile had been broad and toothy. How happy she looked! At that moment in time, she had not had even the slightest inkling of what lay ahead for the three of them that day.  
  
Shortly thereafter, she was back in the Jeep and driving towards Agency. Just a half mile from the outskirts of town, she pulled over. After making sure that the coast was clear, she got out and retrieved an outfit from her bag in the back of the Jeep. Reluctantly, but completely without ceremony, she put on a pair of shorts and a top while standing in the road behind the Jeep. Nothing made it seem more like summer had come to an end than the simple act of getting dressed.  
  
A few minutes later, she’d cleared Agency and was on the road to Elk Bend. She was considering driving right on through without visiting the hospital. Indeed, she could pull over and call to get an update from her parents on David’s condition. She hoped that he was continuing to improve.  
  
But then she remembered that he’d been airlifted to the hospital wearing nothing more than a pair of shorts. Parking in the hospital parking lot, she pulled some clothes out of his bag. Remembering that Ryan was in the same boat, she dug some clothes out for him as well. With her arms full, she headed in. Just inside the lobby, she looked around apprehensively, but there were no news crews present.  
  
Her family was delighted to see her, David in particular. It seemed as if the rockslide and subsequent events had made the two of them even closer, not that it seemed possible; as twins, they’d always been extremely close. Her grandparents were there as well. They were planning to return to Cache Lake that afternoon.  
  
Jill did everything she could to keep her visit short. She learned that Ryan was being discharged; however, she didn’t go and see him. Knowing that she wanted to get on the road, Jill’s mother volunteered to take Ryan the clothes she’d brought in for him.  
  
David’s prognosis was quite different; he was being kept in the hospital a few more days. He was showing strong signs of recovery, but his doctors preferred to be on the safe side. Because of that, her parents were planning to stay in Elk Bend to bring him home.  
  
After less than twenty minutes in the hospital, Jill returned to the Jeep. While she couldn’t explain it, she felt drawn to Holden. The summer was over. It was time to go home.  
  
As she drove along, she tried to picture what she might do with her time once she was back in town. She needed to pack for college, but she didn’t need ten days to accomplish that. She was looking forward to seeing her friends, Dani and Amber. She thought about pulling over and texting them to let them know that she was on her way; however, realizing that they might have seen the news reports on the web, she decided not to. She was hoping that people in Holden were not aware that she had been a naked hero, but she wasn’t holding out much hope. Once one person from their high school found out, the news would travel like wildfire. Everyone would go online and see the clips.  
  
She found herself imaging that she’d have to lay low until it was time to depart for California – or alternately, she’d have to pack quickly and leave early.  
  
After a brief stop for lunch, Jill found herself pondering a different question. She’d been regarding her summer at Cache Lake as the last hurrah of her youth. Henceforth, she’d need to be an adult and focus on doing adult things. To her surprise, nudity had ended up being a large component of this ‘final summer.’ Did that make it part of her youth – something that would now be relegated to her past?  
  
Indeed, that seemed as if it were the logical conclusion. As a much younger girl, she’d swum in the lake and wandered the forests topless. Of course, this summer, she’d gone fully nude, but possibly that might be viewed as an extension of the arc that had been her youth.  
  
However, there was a second possibility. Might it have been her transition summer? Maybe the nudity was a precursor of what lay ahead. Possibly nudity would be a component of her adult future. Just maybe, it couldn’t be dismissed as part of her youth.  
  
And yet, how could that be a possibility? Adult women didn’t venture outside of their bathrooms or bedrooms naked. And yet, she’d been an adult all summer. She’d been telling herself all summer that she was still a kid, and yet she was all of nineteen. She knew that things didn’t add up. She’d known that all along.  
  
Reminding herself of what lay ahead, Holden and then college, she told herself that her foray into nudity was indeed at an end. The canoe ride to Sunken Island with Kyle, the campfire, as well as her morning with the twins – that had been her swan song. Maria had raised her tally to 95. Ninety-five! Maria needed to be the last addition to the list.  
  
It might be somewhat difficult, but Jill knew that she was going to have to go cold turkey. She needed to go back to being the girl she had been prior to that summer – the well-behaved girl who kept her clothes on. The nudity was behind her; it had to be.  
  
A few hours later, she approached the outskirts of the small city of Holden. Knowing that a sighting of their Jeep might alert her friends that she had returned, she turned off the main drag before entering the city limits. Following a small farming road, she avoided the most populated areas, arriving into their neighborhood after passing only a handful of vehicles.  
  
Once in front of their house, she hit the button on the garage door opener. To her relief, the door went up. She hadn’t been positive that the batteries would be fresh enough after spending the summer in the hot glove box. Once the Jeep was inside, she again hit the button. Suddenly, it felt as if she could relax. It seemed as if she’d reached home and gotten the Jeep hidden without being seen by anyone that would alert those that knew her.  
  
She was thirsty, so she headed in with the intent of going straight to the kitchen for a drink of water. The route into the house from the garage passed through the laundry room. There she hesitated. Without giving it any real thought, she kicked off her shoes and peeled off her clothes, tossing them into the washing machine. It had been a hot dusty ride in the open Jeep. Even though she’d just put them on that morning, her clothes were filthy.  
  
A moment later, she was standing at the kitchen sink gulping down a glass of water. As she refilled the glass, she thought about being nude. She didn’t think that she’d ever been in the kitchen naked before, but being there meant that she’d already violated her best intentions. She’d been planning to stay dressed. She realized that she needed to go upstairs to her room and put on some clean clothes.  
  
Leaving the kitchen to do that involved passing by the living room. The curtains were wide open; she could see the front yard and beyond it, the street. Walking bent over with a hand across her chest, she made a beeline for the curtains and closed them. Even if she had been dressed, she didn’t want anyone seeing into the house and noticing that she was home. She quickly made her way through the downstairs, closing the rest of the curtains and blinds on the street side of the house.  
  
A minute later, she was back in the kitchen. It too had windows, but they looked out into the backyard. Mindful that she needed to follow through and get dressed, she studied the backyard. Curiosity was getting the best of her. She’d never really considered just how private their backyard might be. With that foremost in mind, she went to the backdoor and stepped out. It was a very nice late August evening. In general, Holden had more mosquitos and flies than Cache Lake, but she wasn’t noticing any right then.  
  
She glanced around at the tall board fences as she ventured a few steps out onto the patio. “What are you doing, Jill?” she asked herself quietly as she started exploring cautiously along one of the fences. “You decided that you weren’t going to do this, remember?”  
  
Within a minute, she’d figured out that she could probably go anywhere in the yard without being seen except for the back corner on the left. There were some windows on the Tanaka’s top floor that would be visible over the fence form that part of the yard. That meant that something like three-quarters of the yard seemed to be nudity-safe – unless one of the neighbors went to the trouble of finding and looking through a knothole. That seemed unlikely.  
  
Wondering if her current behavior meant that nudity was going to be a part of her future rather than relegated to her past, she went back into the kitchen and made herself some ramen noodles for dinner. Once they were done, she was back outside, sitting with her feet up on their glass patio table while enjoying her dinner.

**Chapter 168: Alone Time**  
  
As she ate, she contemplated how quickly and completely she’d violated her decision to say goodbye to her summer of nudity. With that in mind, she realized where she had gone wrong. It had been the point at which she had concluded that summer was over. Indeed, it was still summer. As a matter of fact, Holden, by virtue of being lower in altitude, was warmer, on average, than the Cache Lake area.  
  
Reaching the conclusion that it would be okay to remain nude a few more days, provided that she stayed within the confines of the house – at least until David and her parents came home – she decided to relax and enjoy herself. Being nude was stressful when others were around, but not so much when she was by herself.  
  
Going back inside, she began noticing all the evidence of just how quickly her parents had departed. There were dishes in the sink as well as on the counter. There was even an open container of milk sitting out. Somehow they had been in such a hurry that they hadn’t even managed to get it back into the fridge. After pouring it out, she spent the next hour or so throwing out leftovers, tidying up the kitchen, and getting the dishwasher started.  
  
While doing that, she thought about how Ryan had been scheduled to be released from the hospital. Realizing that he would probably tell anyone and everyone all that had happened, she called his house phone.  
  
Jill hadn’t yet spoken with Mr. and Mrs. Perkins, Ryan’s parents, since the mishap, but she knew she needed to. They were just as likely to reveal to friends or acquaintances that she had been nude while going for help. As their son had a broken leg, there were destined to be many opportunities to talk about how he had gotten hurt.  
  
As anticipated, the conversation ended up being exceedingly difficult for Jill. Part of her wanted to tell them that it had all been Ryan’s fault, thereby letting herself off the hook; however, she had already decided that taking the conversation in that direction would be counterproductive. She felt that it would be best to tell them straight up what she hoped they would do for her.  
  
As it worked out, both Mr. and Mrs. Perkins got on the phone once they found out who was on the line. That suited Jill as it meant that she wasn’t going to have to repeat the conversation. They both had numerous questions, several of them pertaining to how she had come to be naked. Jill found herself referring them to their son for an explanation. She was concerned about what Ryan had already told them; whatever it was, she didn’t want to contradict it. That would get messy very quickly.  
  
What was of greatest importance to her was that they not mention to anyone in Holden that she’d been naked. They’d have to talk about the rockslide, of course, and it was okay with her if they told people that she had gone for help. She just wanted any and all mention of the fact that she hadn’t been dressed omitted from conversation – as well as, any mention of news coverage.  
  
Both of Ryan’s parents were quite appreciative of what Jill had done – something that they went on and on about. “I did what I had to do,” Jill explained. “Ryan was bleeding and his leg was obviously broken. He was in pain, and David was unconscious. It was up to me. Ryan would have done the same, had he been the one unscathed by the rockslide.”  
  
“I’d like to think so,” Mrs. Perkins had replied unenthusiastically.  
  
As Jill had hoped, she was easily able to get them to agree to do their best to keep the fact that she had been naked throughout a secret. That said, they expected that the word might have already gotten out.  
  
Once she was done speaking with them, they handed the phone to Ryan who was reportedly in bed with his leg elevated on a pile of pillows.  
  
“So, Ryan,” she said, deciding to call him by his name rather than ‘Jerk-boy.’ That had almost slipped out. She needed to be nice as she was hoping for his cooperation.  
  
“You’re home?” he asked.  
  
“Yep . . . according to your parents, I beat you to Holden by a couple of hours.”  
  
“And you’re naked, aren’t you?”  
  
“I . . . umm,” said Jill, being caught off guard by the bluntness of his question. Remembering that she had decided that she didn’t want to be a liar, she continued, “None of your business.”  
  
He laughed. “I knew it!”  
  
Jill felt her cheeks grow warm. Was she really that predictable?  
  
“I still can’t believe you bit my ear,” Ryan continued.  
  
“And I can’t believe you sucked my nipple!”  
  
“And I can’t believe you followed me . . . spied on me while I was taking care of my needs!”  
  
“And I can’t believe you tore off my skirt and burned it! Truth be told, I can’t believe half of what happened this summer.”  
  
“And I can’t believe how much fun we had!”  
  
Jill laughed. “We did have some fun, didn’t we?!”  
  
“A lot of fun!” Ryan agreed.  
  
“Not sure we’ll ever have fun like that again,” Jill admitted.  
  
“Well, come over. We can pick up where we left off.”  
  
Jill ignored his suggestion. She’d had more than enough of Ryan that summer. Instead, she decided to get to the purpose of the call, asking him to help her keep the fact that she had been nude a secret.  
  
“What’s in it for me?” he asked.  
  
Jill had been expecting a response like that. “Seriously, Ryan?” she asked. “After what I did for you? I mean, do you know anyone else that would have gone for help . . . butt naked . . . to get your sorry ass the medical attention you so desperately needed? I mean, it wasn’t just David that I saved that day.”  
  
“You’re right, Jill. You don’t owe me a thing. I’ll do what I can to keep people from finding out that you were naked . . . and that you murdered Fuzzy Wuzzy.”  
  
Jill didn’t know how to respond. She was doing her best to have a serious conversation, but Ryan was Ryan. His mention of Fuzzy Wuzzy only proved what she already knew. He was destined to spend his life trapped in adolescence.  
  
“Should I send my dad over for my things?” he asked after thanking her for packing them up.  
  
“Oh, no . . . please don’t,” she replied. She didn’t want any visitors. Among other things, that might reveal to her neighbors that she was home. “I’ll bring you your stuff . . . just not this evening, alright?”  
  
“Sure. No rush. Take your time. By the way . . . what did you think of the second Channel Five news report . . . the Tarzan and Jane segment?”  
  
“Haven’t seen it. Pretty sure I don’t want to,” Jill admitted. “But tell me . . . how bad was it?”  
  
“I loved it!”  
  
“Oh, brother,” said Jill. “If you loved it, then I’m going to hate it.”  
  
Ryan laughed. “Tarzan and Jane . . . what a great story . . . they sure had a lot of fun with that!”  
  
“I’m sure they did,” said Jill, doing her best to not think of the angles that Channel Five might have exploited to enhance the entertainment aspect of the story.  
  
“Even played a few Tarzan yells . . . probably downloaded from YouTube . . . none of them as good as yours!”  
  
“I should think not!” said Jill, trying to sound undisturbed by it all even though it was just an act.  
  
“Well, are you going to watch it? Come over and we can watch it together.”  
  
“I’m good,” said Jill. She just wanted to be alone – and she didn’t want to get dressed.  
  
“Should I send you the URL?”  
  
“I’m sure I can find it . . . when I’m ready. Don’t know if I’ll ever be ready.”  
  
“I think that you should look up Jane. The two of you two should hook up . . . be lesbian lovers.”  
  
“Give me a break!” said Jill, again biting her tongue to avoid calling him ‘Jerk-boy. “You know I’m not a lesbian. She probably isn’t either.”  
  
“How do you know?”  
  
“Because I’m not . . . I mean, she’s not! Now stop it!”  
  
“Probably both Bi!” he laughed.  
  
At that point, Jill realized that she’d accomplished the purpose of her call. As she was saying goodbye, Ryan again invited her to come over. He suggested that they might watch a movie together. Jill did her best to be polite, but she really did want to be alone. She certainly didn’t want to see any more of Ryan.  
  
“Next order of business . . . a shower!” she announced to the empty house after hanging up.  
  
Once she was in the upstairs bathroom, she fished a new razor out of her drawer. If she was going to be a shaved-pussy girl, she needed to stay on top of it.  
  
Looking at herself in the mirror, she tried to decide what she wanted to do about the braids. She liked them and wanted to keep them in; however, she was feeling dirty after the long drive in the open Jeep. She wanted to get her hair really clean. She undid the ends and started taking them out as the water warmed up.  
  
A minute later, she was basking in the warmth of the shower. Her grandparents’ Airstream certainly had a shower, something she was thankful for; however, it wasn’t at all like their shower at home.  
  
Once she was done in the bathroom, she wandered nude down the hall to her bedroom. She switched on her light and advanced into the middle of the room. Everything seemed so familiar and yet so strange, especially in one regard. Why did her room suddenly seem to be a little girl’s room? Because it was, she realized. It was as if her summer away was opening her eyes to things she had been too close to to notice.  
  
She looked at the pink curtains. They dated from elementary school. For some reason, she’d never felt the need to do anything about them – or the cute little butterflies on the ends of the curtain rods. Her room had been her comfort zone, and she’d never felt the need to make changes as the years had gone by.  
  
There was even an Aladdin poster that dated from the same timeframe in her life as the Princess Jasmin pillowcase that Ryan had burned. The poster made her chuckle as she used a finger to trace the outline of her bare pussy, remembering how it had come out of hiding that morning. She started toward the poster with the intention of taking it down when the futility of that action struck her. Making changes to her room was much too big of a project for that point in time. Maybe when I’m home for winter break, she decided.  
  
Not everything in her room predated high school, she was delighted to note. One shelf held athletic trophies, some of them fairly new. There was also a photo of her basketball team on the wall as well as a pennant in the school’s colors.  
  
She found herself studying the pictures on her bulletin board as well as the few that she had framed and hung on her wall. It was almost as if she were looking back at her school years for the first time, seeing them in the rearview mirror. However, as she looked them over, she realized that something was missing. There was not a single photo of a boy that she’d actually dated. The only photo at all like that was one of a boy she’d had a crush on in the eighth grade - but that had been the eighth grade; they’d never actually gone out on a date.  
  
Deciding to do something about that, she started rummaging around in the bottom drawer of her dresser. It took almost a minute, but ultimately she found what she was looking for: the one photo of Tyler that she’d framed.  
  
As she pulled it out, she realized just how amazing it was that she still had it. Her intentions had been to throw it away. It had only found its way into the drawer as she hadn’t wanted her parents to see it in the garbage and ask about it. She’d always meant to throw it away, but she’d been planning to do that by taking it elsewhere, somewhere out of the house so that its disposal would go unnoticed.  
  
After studying it briefly, she restored it to its former location on her nightstand. She hadn’t decided how she might go about it, but she’d been feeling the beginnings of a desire to normalize relations with Tyler before leaving the state for college. Just as she didn’t want there to be an actual relationship back home, she also didn’t want any breakup baggage that might hamper her ability to start fresh. Her feelings about the acrimonious way things had come to an end with Tyler were something that she still spent too much time thinking about. Somehow, she needed to lay that all to rest.  
  
She’d been thinking that the grownup thing to do would be to forgive and forget. Maybe by speaking to Tyler – possibly even negotiating a friendship of sorts – she might be able to let bygones be bygones – finally freeing herself to move on.  
  
From there, Jill went across the room to her closet. “Oh, brother,” she said aloud, realizing the enormity of the task that she faced as she considered what she might pack for college.  
  
Like her room, her closet seemed to be a time capsule that represented the life of a former self. There were many items that she had outgrown but had hung onto for sentimental reasons. In addition to those, there were things that she had outgrown from the standpoint of the girl she had become. Just because something fit did not mean that she would ever choose to again wear it.  
  
Turning off the light, she exited her room and went back downstairs. She wasn’t ready to dress, certainly not in anything from that room, nor was she ready to take on the project of deciding what to donate. Dealing with her room could wait. For the time being, she wanted to continue pretending that it was still summer.  
  
Realizing that sleeping under the stars would be the best way to do that, she went out to the Jeep for a few things, her sleeping bag among them. After studying which location had the best view of the heavens, she unrolled it in the middle of her backyard and lay down.  
  
With her fingers interlaced between her head and her pillow, she stared up at the starry sky. The stars were beautiful, but this was a far cry from the sky above Cache Lake. It was hard to ignore the contrast. Street lights in the vicinity, as well as lights on neighboring houses, decreased drastically the number of stars that were visible.

**Chapter 169: Alone Time, continued**  
  
After making a quick trip back inside to empty her bladder, brush her teeth, and turn off the one light she’d left on, Jill again stretched out on top of her sleeping bag. How heavenly it felt to be nude in the night air! How had she managed to go so many years without discovering such a basic source of joy? And to think, had it not been for that summer, she might have spent her entire life never learning how wonderful it felt to be naked in the great outdoors.  
  
As she lay there, her mind drifted to something her parents had brought up in the hospital. They had told her that one of the physicians had mentioned to them that she might experience symptoms of PTSD in the coming days or weeks. They were told to be on the lookout for signs: panic attacks, nightmares, or other unusual behavior. They wanted her to know that she might start reliving what she had gone through as the responsibility of saving David and Ryan had fallen squarely on her shoulders.  
  
She wasn’t feeling it. She’d asked Britt about it and had learned that personality played a big role in whether or not a person experienced such symptoms. Sure, it had been traumatic, but that wasn’t all there was to it. She’d always been the resilient type. She was relatively good at taking things in stride. Indeed, if she wasn’t that way, wouldn’t she have been more likely to crumble rather than rise to the occasion as she had done?  
  
She decided then and there that she was going to be fine. David seemed to be healing apace, and she had her whole life ahead of her! She wasn’t going to let what had happened mess up the opportunities that lay ahead.  
  
Having given that due consideration, her thoughts shifted back to how she was stretched out spread eagle on top of her sleeping bag in their dark backyard. Something about being naked in the context of their suburban home had her thinking about just how comfortable she had become in her skin. That as much as anything made the bedroom upstairs seem as if it belonged to a different person. She had never been comfortable with her physical self prior to that summer.  
  
Lying there and thinking about that, she brought her hands to her breasts. Cupping them and massaging them gently, she tried to take her thoughts back to just how dissatisfied she’d been with them. It was nearly impossible. Somehow, over the course of the summer, she’d learned just how beautiful they were. She’d watched innumerable pairs of eyes light up upon seeing them in the flesh.  
  
She chuckled at that thought, for ‘innumerable’ wasn’t the right word. Indeed, she had a count; she knew exactly how many people had seen her bare breasts.  
  
With her thumbs and forefingers, she started twisting and pulling on her two diamond-hard nipples. Yep, everything about her chest was lovely. Once she had been so unhappy with the size of her breasts. The only regret that she now felt was that she had not come to this new realization earlier – much earlier.  
  
Thinking back, she even remembered how Tyler’s eyes had lit up upon seeing her bare breasts. Even Tyler! And yet her insecurities had resulted in her finding a hurtful insult where surely none had been intended. And yet her reaction that night belonged, like her bedroom with the pink curtains and the Aladdin poster, to the person she had been. That was all in her past. It was time to move on and embrace her future!  
  
Pulling on her nipples made her realize what she’d shortly be doing. It was orgasm time! Considering her penchant for vocalizing, she gave some thought to going inside. She didn’t want to, but she also didn’t want the neighbors to hear moaning coming from the Wahlund backyard.  
  
As it was a warm summer evening, and not yet particularly late, it was possible that others might be outside. As their yard was completely dark, she’d never be seen; however, she might be heard. Knowing that she didn’t want to go inside, she picked up her phone to relive, via the images and clips, her summer at Cache Lake.  
  
How badly she’d wanted Britt to delete those photos but how delighted she was to have them now. With the fingers of one hand gently caressing her clitoral hood and her other hand holding her damaged phone, she went moment by through her day with the Copelands, starting with the images that had been taken just after they’d braided her hair.  
  
Once she got to the images of herself having those mind-blowing orgasms in the forest near the falls – just still images – she rolled over and buried her face in her pillow. On her knees, her butt way up in the air, she squeezed her eyes shut to travel back to that moment in time. She continued rubbing, again imagining that it was Jenna’s tongue on her petals. How embarrassing it had been to be caught by the twins with her fingers in the proverbial honeypot, and yet how the memory of that excruciating moment served to send her flying off the precipice. Her entire body trembled and shook as she gave herself over to the pleasures of the flesh.  
  
Thrusting her face into her pillow, she did her best to muffle what she knew were loud moans of orgasmic bliss as she used both hands on her pussy to send herself over the edge a second time. How wonderful it felt to surrender so completely to such animalistic behavior. How amazing that she’d not known that she could achieve such gratification in that way until her summer had started spinning out of control.  
  
Thinking about how wanton she must look, ass in the air, knees apart, a finger in her vagina and the other hand on overdrive rubbing her clitoris with abandon – just thinking about that and what it would be like to get caught in that position, caused her to go off the cliff a third time, orgasmic spasms again rocking her world.  
  
Feeling as if a fourth orgasm might be in the cards but leave her pussy sore, Jill rolled over and lay on her back to catch her breath. She patted her pussy lightly, trying to help in calm down. Wondering if she had managed to adequately muffle her moans, Jill gulped air and then held her breath, listening to the night. She didn’t hear anything out of the ordinary nor did there seem to be flashlights shining around the adjoining yards. It seemed as if she might have gotten away with allowing her raging hormones to run wild, but worrying about that had broken the spell.  
  
Jill awoke with the sunrise. Somehow during the night, she’d found her way into her sleeping bag. She might have rolled over and gone back to sleep; however, her bursting bladder wouldn’t allow it. She gave some thought to doing what she would have done at Cache Lake, relieving herself in the grass. Deciding that peeing in their suburban backyard seemed just a bit too uncivilized, she slipped inside and made use of a toilet. A minute later, she was snuggling back down into her sleeping bag. It was too early to get up.  
  
A few hours later, she was again in the kitchen. While waiting for the coffee to brew, she gave some thought to what she ought to have for breakfast. Her grandmother had spoiled her. She’d grown quite accustomed to having a cooked breakfast, but without milk or eggs, her options were quite limited.  
  
She considered going out to breakfast but dismissed the notion instantly for several reasons. First, she was planning to stay hidden in their home for as long as possible. No one in Holden needed to know that she was in town. And, second, possibly at least as important to her, she didn’t want to get dressed. Going out would require clothes. That in and of itself was enough to make her decide to live on what food was already in the house.  
  
She poured herself a big bowl of cornflakes and ate it dry at the table in the backyard. A short time later, after realizing how hungry she still was, she was back in the kitchen going through the cupboards. Selecting a large can of fruit cocktail and opening it, she returned to the patio.  
  
“This is living!” she declared quietly, making fun of herself for eating straight out of the can while sitting naked in the backyard.  
  
After consuming the entire can and having a third cup of black coffee, she decided that her belly felt full enough to move on with her day.  
  
Choosing to do something productive, she started a list of what she was going to need to accomplish to be ready to leave for college. Once her list was part way complete, she realized that the majority of what she needed to do involved dressing and leaving the house – the two things that she didn’t want to do.  
  
Examining the contents of her closet the day before had left her feeling the need for a new wardrobe. Those clothes had been purchased by a girl very self-conscious about being flat-chested. Now, not only was she no longer embarrassed about being flat, but also, she didn’t want people to think that she might be. She was going to dress as if she loved how she looked – because she did. She was going to show off her body, not by being naked, but rather, by dressing attractively. ‘Flat and Proud!’ seemed destined to become her new motto!  
  
She felt as if her mom would go along with her spending a little money. Especially considering that she’d never been one who had needed much in terms of a clothing budget. Besides, she was heading for California. The climate difference alone justified new clothes. As far as she knew, it never snowed there, at least not where her college was located.  
  
And another item on her list, once she’d gotten her stuff packed into boxes, she’d need to ship them. Like clothes shopping, shipping her things would entail dressing and leaving the house. She didn’t yet know which dorm she’d be in, but she had an address she could ship boxes to such that her things would be waiting for her when she arrived. She decided that everything on her list that involved getting dressed and leaving the house could wait.  
  
A short time later, she was in the garage getting more of her stuff out of the Jeep. After getting a load of laundry started, she returned to the backyard with her diary in hand. A lot had happened since her last entry.  
  
As she opened it to find her place, a slip of paper fell out. She laughed, studying it. It was the small notebook page that Austin had written his phone number on. It was funny that he had drawn her a robot. Wondering about that, she set it aside on the table as she went about recording not only the details of the rockslide and the ensuing rescue but also the thoughts and feelings that she had experienced throughout.  
  
Every page or two, she’d look up and see the note lying there; other than her diary, it was the only thing on the table. Remembering that it had been Britt’s opinion that Austin deserved one of the photos of the two of them together in the trees above the Lupine Lakes, Jill found herself wondering if Britt might have actually sent one. She didn’t think that she would have, and yet she couldn’t be certain. The note had certainly been in her possession long enough for her to have recorded the number.  
  
A bit later, Jill was down in the basement. She had been feeling stir crazy, so she had pumped up her basketball and taken it downstairs. She’d considered dribbling on the back patio, but given how much noise that would make, she’d decided not to. If anything might alert the neighbors that the Wahlunds were home, it would be the sound of a basketball. She also knew better than to dribble in the house. She and David had done that on many occasions. Her mom seemed to hate nothing more. It made the dishes rattle.  
  
She’d never attempted playing basketball in the basement; the ceiling was much too low; however, the fact that the neighbors wouldn’t hear her down there meant that it was the only place that she might be able to do that.  
  
After moving some stuff to make room, she spent the next half-hour or so bouncing the ball. Even though the floor was concrete, it didn’t end up being very satisfying. First and foremost, there was no basket. And second, dribbling while naked had her thinking about just how close she’d come that summer to playing naked basketball with a group of guys.  
  
Actually, not close at all, as she’d never even played topless. However, she realized that had it not been for the rockslide, there would have been at least two more games. Given how her summer had gone, it was fair to assume that she would have ended up playing topless. There was maybe even an outside chance that she would have ended up playing fully nude.  
  
Part of her thought that there was no way that she would have let that happen, and yet, that part of her was the same part that would have said quite confidently that there was no chance that ninety-five people would see her naked during the month of August – with her complicity no less. She’d had emergency clothes in the Jeep; she’d never put them on. The Jeep hadn’t always been nearby, but that was beside the point.  
  
Once she’d had her fill of dribbling, she made her way back upstairs to the kitchen. Surprisingly, it was lunchtime. She picked out a can of soup from the pantry and opened it. Deciding that eating out of the can was not something to be proud of, she poured it into a bowl and popped it into the microwave. While it was heating, she set herself a place at the patio table complete with a placemat and a napkin. Her diary, as well as the note from Austin, was still there.  
  
As she ate, she found herself debating sending Austin a text. She knew she wouldn’t send him a photo, but a text from ‘Lola’ seemed harmless enough. It would be essentially anonymous; he wouldn’t be able to track her down with just her phone number, right?  
  
In addition to that, she considered how he had reacted when he had felt reprimanded and what that said about his character. She felt certain that she didn’t have anything to fear from him. Her main concern had been, and still was, the nude images.  
  
On a lark, she picked up her phone and entered his number. Having no idea why exactly she might be doing it, she entered a message, “Hey, Austin. Lola here. Remember me?” Without hitting ‘send,’ she set the phone down to give the ramifications of contacting him a little thought. A few minutes later, she erased the message. There was no reason to contact him. There seemed to be little risk, but he had seen her naked.  
  
She placed Austin’s note back inside the cover of her diary and carried her dishes into the kitchen.

**Chapter 170: Venturing Out**  
  
A short time later, Jill was back at the patio table with three of the books that she still needed to read. One was Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. She had started reading it earlier in the summer but had set it aside due to its sad nature. It was on the list, so she knew that she was going to have to find the strength within herself to get through it. The other two were The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and The Mismeasure of Man by Stephen Jay Gould.  
  
Deciding that it seemed the most interesting, she chose The Mismeasure of Man. She had come up with a guess for why the book was on the list. From the information on the back cover, she’d learned that it dealt with ‘biological determinism,’ the historical idea that differences between races, classes in society, and the sexes had their basis in inborn differences and that, therefore, distinctions in society were merely a reflection of biology. The list that she had been working her way through contained a number of books that dealt with different races. This particular book seemed as if it might be intended to give form to how racism might be discussed in class.  
  
Discovering that Stephen Gould wrote in an engaging style, she found herself quickly getting into the topic. As a matter of fact, she read for an hour and a half before getting up to get something to drink.  
  
Upon returning to the backyard, she picked up her phone. It opened to what she had last been doing, preparing to send a text to Austin. She re-entered the message, “Hey, Austin. Lola here. Remember me?” and hit send without hesitation. She knew exactly why she was doing it; she was feeling lonely and craving a little human interaction.  
  
She set the phone aside and returned to her book. Within a minute her phone buzzed, signaling a reply. She smiled as she picked it up.  
  
“Lola! I’d given up hope of ever hearing from you,” read the reply.  
  
“Why? It hasn’t been that long,” she answered.  
  
“Well, hmm. Maybe because I don’t make a very good first impression. I don’t look like everyone else.”  
  
“So. We all look different.”  
  
“You know what I mean!”  
  
“That day . . . I looked especially different,” she replied.  
  
“You did!” he agreed. Jill expected him to mention her nudity. He didn’t.  
  
“Well, we are all unique,” she said.  
  
“And I’ve regretted drawing a robot for you that day.”  
  
“Why? I like it.”  
  
“It seems childlike. If you can’t communicate like everyone else, then there are those that assume a lower mental age . . . unfortunately. For that reason, the robot seemed like a poor choice. I just happen to like robots.”  
  
“I never assumed a lower mental age. You did get into Baylor.”  
  
“Surprised you remember that.”  
  
“Baylor’s on my radar. One of my friends applied there. Didn’t get in. But you did!”  
  
Jill was realizing how great texting must be for deaf individuals. The two of them were communicating without any difficulties whatsoever.  
  
“But above Lupine Lakes, you seemed to take pity on me. By having our photo taken together.”  
  
Jill tried to return to that moment to recall exactly what she had been thinking. “Not pity,” she replied. “I felt bad about the misunderstanding. That’s different. I didn’t mind taking a photo. I just couldn’t let you leave with one. Sorry.”  
  
“No, I understand. Wanted a photo. Not willing to share.”  
  
“Hey! That was such an unusual day. I don’t know how to explain.”  
  
“You don’t have to.”  
  
They continued trading texts for quite some time. Jill found Austin to be an interesting, amicable person with an upbeat perspective on the world. She was delighted to be able to have an in-depth conversation with him. She recalled her decision to learn some sign language. Maybe texting was better.  
  
As the conversation seemed as if it might be winding down, Jill received a text from him that read, “Well, I'm not dumb but I can't understand. Why she walk like a woman and talk like a man. Oh my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”  
  
Jill had no idea what to make of that. “???” she replied. She added, “I talk like a man?”  
  
His reply was equally strange. “Her name was \_\_\_\_\_\_, she was a showgirl. With yellow feathers in her hair and a dress cut down to there.”  
  
“You lost me.”  
  
“Fill in the blanks!”  
  
She studied the two texts, reading them both out loud. “Poems? Songs?” she asked.  
  
“Try harder!” he encouraged.  
  
“I give up.”  
  
Final chance.”  
  
“Just tell me.”  
  
“Okay. Lola. Both cases. Your name’s not really Lola, is it?”  
  
“Must be oldies,” she replied. She really couldn’t remember ever having heard songs with those lines in them.  
  
“Yes, but ones I think a girl named Lola would know. Or have been teased about. First one is ‘Lola’ by the Kinks. Second one is ‘Copacabana’ by Barry Manilow.”  
  
Jill didn’t reply. She set her phone down. She didn’t know what to say. Maybe someone named Lola would have heard of those songs. She decided she’d look them up later.  
  
Her phone buzzed. She picked it back up. “I doubt there is an Austin alive who has not heard of ‘Austin Powers.’ Just the way it works.”  
  
“I suppose you’re right.” She sighed, thinking of ‘Jack and Jill’ and ‘Jilling off.’  
  
She waited, but no reply came.  
  
After a lengthy pause, she texted, “Please let me be Lola. Given what you witnessed this summer, I feel I need my anonymity. Don’t forget, I can always disappear. Block your number.”  
  
“Please don’t do that. I really mean you no harm. You can of course be Lola!”  
  
“Thanks.”  
  
“I just don’t want to come across as gullible . . . or not very intelligent.”  
  
“So you were showing off?”  
  
“Maybe. Being deaf is not that bad. It’s not that great either. I just like for people to know that I am intelligent. Deaf, otherwise normal! Nothing wrong with my brain, just my ears.”  
  
“I get that.” Jill found herself smiling. It seemed okay that he knew that Lola was an alias. As long as he didn’t know her real name – that was the important thing.  
  
“I expect that you’ve heard those songs. I haven’t. I know of them only because I was googling ‘Lola.’ But they were popular enough. And are still being played by oldies stations. I looked up playlists to be certain.”  
  
“Sorry. I wish you could hear music,” she replied. She realized that she should have noticed that it was odd that a deaf individual would be familiar with songs.  
  
“Me too. Not much any of us can do about it. I accept it. I focus on what I can experience, what I can do. Which is plenty.”  
  
“Glad to hear that. Smart.”  
  
From there the exchange shifted, progressing through a variety of topics. Even though Jill needed to protect her anonymity, Austin didn’t seem to have any concerns about what he told her. He told her that he lived in Gadsen Falls. It was a town that she was familiar with; it was located about sixty miles from Holden.  
  
It’s a small world, she thought, remembering that they’d played a basketball game at the high school there each year. There was even a minuscule chance that Austin had seen her play. She decided not to bring that up. He didn’t need to know about basketball, and she certainly didn’t want him to learn that she lived in Holden.  
  
She remembered what she had heard about those who were missing one of the five senses: that their other senses improved, stepping in to try and fill the gap. Somewhat in that vein, she imagined that Austin might be a talented cyber sleuth.  
  
A bit later, just as Jill hit send after entering yet another text, her screen went dark. She’d thought her battery was low but not that low. Regretting that Austin would not know why she’s stopped texting so abruptly, she took her phone inside and plugged it in.  
  
Returning to the backyard, she picked up her book and went out to where her sleeping bag was on the grass. Thinking that she’d had more than enough sun that summer, she’d mostly been keeping to the shade near the house. Even though she had a full-body tan, there was still one spot that needed to catch up. After rigging up two chairs with a blanket over them to create some shade so that she’d be able to read, she lay down, belly up, her legs pointed due south.  
  
The small stripe above her slit was starting to blend in, and yet, it was still visible. With her pussy receiving the full force of the sun’s midday rays, she resumed reading.  
  
An hour later, she went in for a water break. Hoping to send Austin a text so that he would know what had happened, she again attempted to turn her phone on. Nothing. Try as she might, she couldn’t get it to wake up. After giving some thought to how a dead phone affected her plans, she returned to the yard.  
  
With the soles of her feet together, her knees bent and pointed out, her legs flat against the ground, she resumed reading. Might as well be tanning my inner thighs while I’m at it, she had decided.  
  
When evening rolled around, Jill was feeling very bored. Hoping that it would help, she tried to find something to watch. She couldn’t find a movie that was of interest, so she ended up streaming a series of standup comedians.  
  
Eventually, even that got boring, but by then it was bedtime. She returned to her sleeping bag under the stars. After a few hours of not having slept a wink, she was up and wandering about. It was a little past midnight as she snuck around the end of the house, making her way very cautiously toward the front yard.  
  
Just as she had been ever since getting home, she was completely naked; however, she had her basketball with her. She’d been carrying it around a fair amount. She’d been feeling the urge to shoot some hoops, but she knew she couldn’t, not without getting dressed.  
  
Leaving the safety of the backyard was scary, but it was a very stimulating kind of scary. She slipped through the gate in the side yard. From a position near the front corner of their house, she could see up and down the street. There were street lights in both directions. Many houses had their porch lights on as well; however, hers did not. It had been the one light that she could control, so she’d turned it off before venturing out.  
  
She hid in the shadows, her heart rate increasing as she came to terms with what she was doing. It was a warm, windless summer night. All of her senses were on full alert. It was fun to be daring, but she knew she couldn’t allow herself to be seen, not naked, not in Holden.  
  
She gave some thought to heading to the middle school she and David had attended. It was only six blocks away. There was a nice outdoor basketball court there. She thought about how exciting it would be to try and get there without being seen. If she did that, she’d be putting some distance between herself and her clothes, and once there, she could play basketball.  
  
However, even though thinking of that had gotten her juices flowing, she knew she didn’t dare. She’d made mistakes in the past. She couldn’t allow herself to take risks, not in Holden. She could be naked, but she needed to be smart and keep herself hidden.  
  
One careful step at a time, she left the relative safety of the side yard behind. She couldn’t believe what she was doing, venturing out into the front yard. She knew her tolerance for risk had grown, and yet what she was doing seemed safe enough. In two seconds, she could be back in the deep shadows of the side yard. If something, anything moved, she’d be out of there. Slowly, slowly, she made her way toward the center of their yard, carefully moving closer to the street.  
  
She heard a car approaching, and a moment later, its headlights came into view. Resisting the urge to run, she hunkered down low behind a shrub at the base of a tree. The car passed without consequence. A minute later, she was sitting in the walkway that led to their front door; she was about fifteen feet back from the sidewalk. Even though she wasn’t hidden, she didn’t think that she’d be noticed where she was, at least not by someone in a passing car. Mustering her courage, she decided to test that theory when a second car appeared.  
  
Sitting cross-legged with her bare butt on the cool concrete, she wrapped her arms and legs around the basketball, making herself as tiny as possible. With her face angled down, she waited motionless as the car approached. Believing that it would be movement as much as anything that might catch a driver’s eye, she watched the car without moving her head, her heart pounding in her chest.  
  
Scarcely daring to breathe, she fought the temptation to get up and run as the headlights fell full upon her naked body, an infinitely long shadow stretching out in the opposite direction. And then in an instant, it was again dark. The vehicle continued on down the street. Had there been any sign that she’d been noticed, had the car slowed, she would have disappeared into the backyard. She’d left the gate open.  
  
But the car hadn’t slowed and neither did the next one a few minutes later. However, realizing what a big chance she was taking, she got up and moved along the walk a few feet closer to the house. Being daring was fun, but that would all come crashing down if she got caught. A shiver passed through her as she recalled the day she’d gotten herself trapped out on Sunken Island – naked.  
  
As the concrete had not been comfortable, this time she sat on her basketball. She’d always been a basketball-sitter. Whenever her coach would say, ‘take a knee,’ she’d always grab the nearest basketball and sit on it. However, she quickly discovered that sitting on the basketball was different this time. All those other times, she’d been clothed. This time, not only was she naked, but she was also experiencing an elevated state of arousal.  
  
At first, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to do this to her basketball, to christen it in this manner with her female nectar. Deciding that it felt too good and that it would wash off, she stayed where she was. Even though she was a bit further from the street, she was much more on display than she had been as the two cars had passed. Then, she’d been curled up like a ball. Now she was sitting upright, kneeling actually – kneeling astride her ball.  
  
Her entire front, from her neck down to where her bare labia were pressed against the faux-leather, was completely uncovered. Her hands, resting on her upper thighs, were keeping her back straight and her shoulders high. It was only the relative darkness of the suburban environment and the fact that it was past midnight that was keeping her from being seen. Had someone been there, they would have seen all.  
  
Jill’s eyes relaxed closed as she allowed herself to enjoy the sensations her pussy was emitting. It felt unbelievably nice to have much of her weight being borne by the rough and suddenly slippery surface of her basketball. Her hips started rocking in time to a rhythmic tune that existed only in her head. Her excitement rose as the depth of her breathing increased.