**When in Rome...**

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Shari and Kate saved all junior year for the trip. Extra shifts at work, fewer frills at home. No new clothes. No spring break trip. By the end of the school year, they knew they would have enough by the end of summer, and so when August came, they were on a plane to Paris and ready for two weeks in France.  
  
It was glorious, a perfect trip for two twenty-one-year-old girls: by traveling light and frugally, with backpacks, hostels, and Eurail passes, they saw more of France than any package tour ever could. Shari convinced Kate not to head off to Germany or Italy; "you'll take another trip sometime and go there," she said. "Let's just concentrate on one country and really see it."  
  
She was right, of course; there was no shortage of sights to see or places to go in France. They spent several days at museums in Paris, and hiked through Burgundy, Bordeaux, and Champagne.   
  
Now, having made it through Lyon and Cannes by train, they had arrived in Marseille for their final full day in France. Early tomorrow morning, they would get on a train back to Paris and an evening flight back home from de Gaulle. Kate knew that the coming day would be a long travail, and that the following days would be spent recovering from jet lag while getting ready for senior year, and so was determined to relax today. "Let's just go to the beach," she said. "Let's soak up the sun and watch the waves on the Mediterranean, and rest up for the final leg of the trip." They put on bikinis, wrapped beach towels around their waists, got their sunblock, and headed for the beach.  
  
The Mediterranean was bluer than they could have imagined, and the combination of its beauty and the hot sun above made them almost dizzy. Kate scanned the busy beach for a spot to lay out, and was amazed at how comfortable the French were with showing their bodies; some women wore one pieces or still had their bikini tops on, but most were topless and unshy. Most of the men wore Speedos, whether they had the body for it or not - so prevalent were the tight man-kinis that she assumed anyone wearing boxer-sized trunks must be visiting from England or the States. And surely, seconds after this realization, she saw a flash of pasty white flesh run by her, yelling "oi, lad, come back 'ere!" to his red-headed friend.  
  
"Wow..." Shari breathed. "I don't think I've ever seen so many boobs at once..."  
  
"Remember not to stare!" Kate told her.   
  
In their freshman year dorm, there had been a wide range of body-consciousness among the girls. Some girls thought nothing of walking through the halls in just panties and a tank top to go to a friend's room; Kate wasn't as open as that, but liked that the no-boys-above-the-first-floor-lounge rule meant she could just wrap a towel around her torso to walk from the shower. Shari was one of the more bashful girls then - she'd get dressed under her bathrobe if Kate was in the room, and Kate suspected she would even if she wasn't. Shari had loosened up a little since then - losing her v-card had helped - and sometimes, she actually showed some cleavage these days.  
  
It looked like toplessness wasn't required on the beach - "Look," Shari said, "I even see some Muslim girls in burkinis!" - and everyone at least had bottoms on. When they found an open spot, they laid out their towels and sat down. They sunblocked each other's backs, and Kate thought about tan lines, about the backless sundresses she loved to wear, and how good she'd look naked if her breasts were tanned too...  
  
"I'm going to do it," she said. Shari looked quizzical. "I'm going topless. I don't want tan lines."  
  
Shari giggled, scandalized. "Really? Really? You wouldn't."  
  
"When in Rome..."  
  
"We're not in Rome..."  
  
"You know what I mean," Kate said, undoing the front-clasp. "You?"  
  
"Oh, no, no way..." Shari said. "And you'd better sunblock the hell out of your chest! You really don't want a burn there."  
  
She was right, of course, and Kate spread SPF50 liberally over herself. She was not busty, but not flat-chested either, and frankly, she thought she looked pretty good. Maybe this year she'd have a little more time for a social life, and would find someone to appreciate her pert figure.  
  
They lay down and baked in the sun, talking idly about the trip, the upcoming year, plans for after graduation, and the like. It was a wonderful way to spend their final day in Europe, Kate thought; she'd always remember this feeling.  
  
Just then a kid ran by, chasing a friend, and kicked a fairly large amount of sand over the girls. They stood up, grumbling, to brush what sand they could off of themselves and their towels, and as they did so, Shari stopped and looked at someone a few yards away down the beach. "Kate, is that... you know him, what's his name?"   
  
Kate looked up and locked eyes with their friend Josh. Not a close friend - someone they'd both had a few classes with, knew well enough to say hello to on the street or talk to at a house party. But overseas, you recognize any familiar face quickly. Kate picked Josh's face out of the sea of flesh around him, and Josh clearly knew in an instant it was Kate and Shari and started walking over.  
  
"Oh, for God's sake," Kate muttered, "It figures that I'm halfway across the world, half-naked among total strangers, and I run into someone I know..." Suddenly aware of how bare she was, she crossed her arms in front of her boobs, but that felt even more uncomfortable. She thought, oh, what's the use, he's seen 'em, she'd just have to deal with it, and put hands on hips as he strolled up. "Kate!" Shari giggled...  
  
Josh talked with Kate and Shari talked for a quite a while, asking where they'd been, when they'd be heading back. He'd been in Rome and then northern Italy, in Milan and Turin, and like them had come to Marseille to see the Mediterranean Sea before heading home. Upcoming school year - last semester's grades - summer internships - and other typical college topics. The absurdity of it, chatting amiably as if they were at a Wednesday afternoon wine and cheese while she stood topless and an arm's length from Josh, finally made Kate burst out with a laugh.  
  
"Well, you're the perfect gentleman, aren't you?" Kate said, running a hand through her hair.  
  
"Um, what?" asked Josh. Shari looked confused, too.  
  
"Well, we've been talking for five minutes, and if you haven't noticed, I'm topless. But, I haven't had to say 'eyes up here' even once. So, someone taught you some manners, right?" Kate took a breath, and continued, "Anyway, you might as well go ahead and have one good, long look before you go." She took a little step back and again put her hands on her hips.   
  
Now Shari burst out with an embarrassed laugh, and Josh looked a little bemused. "So, wait a sec," he said. "You think I haven't been checking you out this whole time?" He looked intently into her eyes, and a small smile crossed his lips. "Peripheral vision, hon. I have excellent peripheral vision."  
  
Kate caught a small gasp before it left her mouth.   
  
"Is it getting chillier, you think?" Josh said.   
  
Yep, Kate thought, my nipples are hard, all right. She felt a current, something like electricity, radiate from those hard, pink nipples through her breasts and all around her. She took a shallow breath and had to concentrate on closing her mouth, which she realized was agape.  
  
"So, I have to go," Josh said. "Great to run into you both! I'll see you back in school, in just a few days, right?" Kate remembered to say something - she wasn't sure it made sense, but it was something like "bye, now," and heard Shari saying "have a safe trip home." Then Josh was gone, heading off the beach for home.  
  
"What was that about?" Shari asked as Kate tried to compose herself. "Some history there? Something you're not telling me about him?"  
  
"No, no," Kate said. "He's just a friend... he was just... teasing me..." She lay back down on her towel, slowly, so she wouldn't pass out. Her breathing was still a little shallow, and that electric charge wasn't fading. She wanted to touch herself, but she couldn't do that here. She noticed with her peripheral vision that Shari had stopped staring and laid back down. She took the tube of sunblock and spread some more on her belly; she rubbed it around, down near her bottoms (careful!), and then up on her breasts. That was more like it - anyone watching would just think she was being very, very diligent about not getting a sunburn on her nipples. And underneath, on the bare, pale underside of her beautiful tits...  
  
Was anyone watching? They wouldn't be, right? They're French, they've seen bare breasts on the beach forever, every French film seemed to have naked women in them. What was that like, Kate wondered, to strip down on a movie set... someone must do makeup all over the actresses' body, just like the sunblock, and then Kate would come to the set in a robe and wait for her cue. Or she'd be in costume, but in the scene, the actor would kiss her, and pull her sweater off, with all the crew watching... she'd be braless and he'd kiss her tits as he undid her skirt, she'd throw her head back and play with his hair...   
  
This was not helping her calm down, Kate thought. Not a bit. She took a deep breath and propped herself up on her elbows. She looked around the beach - someone had to be watching, because she felt she was glowing with sex, a bright light of desire in the middle of Marseille, visible from space. The topless women around her made her stifle a gasp - she wanted to walk by each and every one and make sure they each got an eyeful. She'd never even kissed a girl, but she wanted to touch these women, all of them. She wanted to kiss that buxom beauty over there, and play with her nipples while everyone watched. She wanted a speedo-clad Frenchman to sneak up behind her and rub his growing erection on her ass; she'd turn around and pull off his trunks to set his cock free and let the circle of on-lookers have a real show...  
  
Damn it, she thought. I have to stop this. "I'm going for a swim," she heard herself say to Shari.   
  
"Okay," Shari said, "I'll stay here." Kate stood up and walked to the sea. They had to be watching now, though they were trying not to. She'd never felt sexier. Men and women wanted to see her, to touch her, to watch her ride that blonde man over to her left, while he dove his tongue into his wife's pussy and she kissed Kate deeply and told her to climax.   
  
She waded into the water, to her ankles, then up to her calves, knees, and thighs. She dove in and swam out about a hundred yards. Treading water, she reached down and pulled off her bikini bottoms; holding them in her left hand, she floated on her back and showed her naked body to the sky. The waves were carrying her away from shore. She imagined a plane banking overhead and a man staring out the window, seeing her bush and nipples just above the water and touching his girlfriend's thigh - a cruise ship with bored seniors looking over the rail seeing her and suddenly remembering undressing their spouses on their wedding nights.   
  
Forget calming down, she thought. She barely had to touch herself now - she bit down on her bottom lip to keep from screaming, and came instantly.  
  
She floated a few more minutes, and her heart rate finally returned to normal. She slipped her bottoms back on and swam back to shore. Emerging from the water, she lifted her hands above her head, stretching, smoothing her hair, languidly walking back to where Shari waited, sunning herself. Men love to see me, thought Kate. Men and women. They're going to see more of me.