
WARNING:
MATURE CONTENT
JENNIFER LISS
summer
LAKE

Chapter 1

The Big Idea

Hey, Rayna," Cora said. "Can you hand me the popcorn?"

Cora was on her bed reading. Rayna was sitting on the floor. She was staring at her phone. A few seconds of silence went by.

"Rayna! Popcorn?"

"What? Oh, sorry. Here you go." She handed the bowl to Cora.

"Don't you have homework?"

"Yeah," Rayna said. "I'm just reading a story on social media. Listen to this. Some guys were hiking. They found an old trunk. There were gold coins inside."

"Like buried treasure? That's so cool," Cora said. "Where were they hiking?"

"Near a dried-up river."

"Did the coins belong to pirates?" Cora laughed.

"Not quite," Rayna said. "It just says the trunk is about 100 years old. If the river had water, it wouldn't have been found."

"The drought is good for something, I guess."

The girls lived in the foothills. There were miles of land around them. There used to be so much green. Now everything was brown and dry. There had been many wildfires.

This was the third year of a drought. There was little water. The town had set limits on using it. That meant taking short showers. People couldn't water their lawns or fill their pools.

"Do you think there's more treasure?" Cora asked. "There are so many dried-up places. Like—"

Before she could finish, Rayna had jumped up. The girls were looking at each other.

"Summer Lake!" they called out.

"Let's talk to Lucas," Cora said. "He may know about this."

Lucas was Cora's older brother. Camping was his hobby. Every chance he got, he'd head for the lake. It made him feel close to their dad. He'd died a few years ago.

He taught Lucas all the basics. What gear to pack. How to set up a tent and make a fire. Mostly how to be safe in nature.

Now Lucas was the one to take his sister camping. He'd taught her all the same things. On these trips, they'd fish and hike. Cora really loved to hike.

One time Rayna went with them. At first she hated to be away from her phone. But she started to love being outdoors. It was good exercise. And the photos were great for social media.

After that trip, the girls set a goal. They would hike the Pacific Crest Trail. Not the whole thing. Just a portion. The entire PCT stretched from Mexico to Canada.

They planned to go after graduating high school. That was still three years away. But hiking to the lake would be good practice.

Rayna was reading again. "Part of Summer Lake is dried up," she said.

"Which part?" Cora asked.

"The eastern region, it says here. I'll pull up a map of the area."

"Here," Cora said. She pulled a box out from under her bed. Inside were a stack of paper maps.

"Not those maps. I mean a map app."

"Too late." Cora had a map spread out on the bed.

Rayna rolled her eyes. “I can’t believe we’re friends.”

“What do you think we’ll use on a hike?” Cora said. “An app won’t help us if we can’t get a signal.” She pointed to a spot on the map. “There it is. Summer Lake. Doesn’t it look amazing?”

“Oh sure,” Rayna said. “If you think the world is flat.”

“Whatever. Let’s go see if Lucas is home.”

Chapter 2

Good to Go

Cora and Rayna were on their way down the hall. The front door opened. Cora's mom stepped inside. There were two bags of groceries in her arms.

"Perfect timing," she said. "Can you help me, Cora? There are two pizzas in the car."

"Sure. Be right back."

"Hi, Rayna," Mrs. Evans said. "Can you stay for dinner? We have plenty of food." She put the bags down. "I just need to get plates."

Cora came in carrying the pizzas. Lucas was behind her. He'd been out jogging. They all sat down at the table.

"It was a long day," Mrs. Evans said.

"Here it comes," Lucas said.

Mrs. Evans was an ER nurse. Most of her stories had gory details.

"One man had pieces of glass in his eyes. Another man had a knife stuck—"

"Mom!" Cora said. "Stop! We're eating."

"I have some good news," Lucas said. "You know the wildlife center? I might get a summer job there. They need a lab assistant. My science teacher put in a good word for me."

"That's perfect for you," Mrs. Evans said.

"Right? Last year they rescued a condor. Not many people get to see one up close."

Lucas was starting college in the fall. Ever since middle school, he planned to major in science. After high school, he wanted to work with wild animals.

"Does anyone else have news?" Mrs. Evans asked. "Cora? Rayna?"

The girls looked at each other and smiled.

"Uh-oh," Lucas said. "This could mean trouble. What are you guys up to?"

Cora told them the whole story. How gold coins were found in a dried-up riverbed. "We want to search the area around Summer Lake," she said. "Can you take us, Lucas? Please?"

"Those trails aren't exactly easy," Mrs. Evans said. "And what about wildfires?"

"We'd be with Lucas," Cora said. "He would keep us safe. And it will be good training for the PCT."

"How do you know he'll take you? Not only that, your trip is a long way off. You won't be 18 for another three years. Isn't it early to start training?"

"Actually, no," Lucas said. "They're serious about the PCT. So they should hike as much as they can. It will help them get ready. I'll take them over spring break. If it's okay with Rayna's parents."

Cora jumped up. "Yes! That's in two weeks! Come on, Rayna. Let's start planning."

"Hold on," Lucas said. "I want to warn you. You probably won't find treasure. And even if there were some? That social media story was seen by a lot of people. They could have the same idea."

The girls were halfway down the hall.

"Do you think he's right?" Rayna asked. "We won't find any treasure?"

"He's just trying to spoil the fun. As usual."

Summer Lake

Is there buried treasure at Summer Lake?
Best friends Cora and Rayna can't wait to find out.
The girls are opposites. But they both like to hike.
The trip is a little risky with all the wildfires.
But the idea of finding treasure is too good. It's all set.
Then Rayna backs out. Cora decides to go it alone.
Maybe not the best decision ...



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