

Stacey Matson

Eleven
out of
Ten

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Chapter 1

YECC

At the end of June, I was reading on our back deck when Lake flopped onto the deck chair beside me. I didn't have to look at her to know she was in a mood. I could feel it, could hear it in her long sigh.

"What's wrong?" I asked, not looking up from my book.

"Mom says we have to do something this summer," she said. "Like, something educational. She said, and I quote, 'You can't just laze around the house all summer, Lake. You and Albie need to do something educational.'"

"Oh. That," I said. "My mom said that too. They must have talked about it yesterday." I wasn't too worried about it. My parents had a very broad view of what was educational, and basically anything could count. We had switched to home-schooling during the pandemic and never went back to regular school. It was great. Lake and I got to hang out all day, every day. I never needed to find a best friend: I had one built in. And as an added bonus, Lake's property backed onto ours, so there was just a small fence with a gate and 186 steps between our houses.

"But we shouldn't have to do something educational during

the summer. It's the summer. The summer!" She pounded her fists against the seat fabric. "The summer isn't for being educated. Everyone knows that. How are we supposed to enjoy the pool if we're learning? We'll never be in it."

I thought maybe Lake was exaggerating, but I didn't want to tell her that, so I put down my book and sat up. "You're right," I said. "We should swim right now. We have our best ideas swimming."

Lake had gotten an above-ground pool in May, and we were totally obsessed with it. It was perfect: a huge circle of turquoise, and we could almost touch the bottom, but not quite. We had been in it every day since they installed it, even when it was freezing and rainy out. It didn't matter. The pool had taken over as our fort, and my old tree house sat abandoned.

"No," Lake replied. "I'm too mad to swim. Mom said I have to research some options so we can talk about them at dinner, but she's the one who wants me to do it, so shouldn't she research options?"

"Yes. Totally. It's unfair."

"It's almost July already. Like, thanks for giving me lots of time to find something, Mom." Lake was on a roll now. "Will you help me?" she asked. "Whatever we do, we'll do together."

"Of course," I said. This was something that went without saying. I would happily do whatever Lake wanted to do.

Maybe if we found something fast, we could go swimming

before dinner, so I ran inside and grabbed my phone. “What should I search?” I asked.

Lake had lain down on the lounge and shielded her eyes with my book. “I don’t know,” she mumbled from underneath the book. “Boring stuff for kids Comox Valley summer?”

I typed it in. “The only thing that comes up is Goose Spit Park.” I laughed. “I mean, it’s definitely boring.” I looked around some more. “There’s a day camp.”

Lake groaned. “Ugh. We are not day-camp kids. That’s basically daycare. We’re almost twelve — even if our parents aren’t around all day, we can still take care of ourselves.”

“Ourselves and Lincoln,” I amended. Link was only six, and he was generally not annoying, so we let him hang out with us as long as he didn’t whine. Lake was right, though; we weren’t day-camp kids. We weren’t even public-school kids.

Lake sat up suddenly and threw a pointer finger in the air. “I have an idea!” she said dramatically. I laughed. Everything Lake did was dramatic. “Let’s think in the pool!”

I didn’t tell her that was the same idea I had suggested before, I was just glad to go. We didn’t have to speak. We just both got up and went to get into our swimsuits, me upstairs and her at her house. We weren’t allowed to swim unless our parents knew we were there, so I poked my head into Mom’s office.

“Maman? We’re going swimming,” I said.

She nodded. “Auntie Claire’s home?” she asked me in French,

so that's how I knew she was in work mode. All our parents are originally from Quebec, and there was a lot of French spoken around the house, although Mom and Dad mostly spoke English to Link and me.

I looked out the window. Auntie Claire was watering something in their yard. "Yup."

"Okay, have fun. Oh, I'm leaving in twenty to pick up Lincoln from theatre group."

"Sounds good." I grabbed the towel I'd used the day before off the drying rack in the bathroom and made my way downstairs.

Mom went back to her computer. She worked part-time as a consultant making maps, which meant she worked from home. She and Auntie Claire split home-schooling duties for me, Lake and Lincoln, driving us to houses, classes and programs and supervising our individual project time.

I ran over to Lake's property. She was already in the pool. I threw my towel on the deck and climbed up the outside ladder.

"Any ideas in there?" I asked, jumping off the top rung and splashing into the cool water.

"Nothing," Lake said. "I'll look on the bottom." She dove down for a handstand. I followed. We did this for a long time, judging each other's handstands and roundoffs. We were almost to getting ten out of ten every time.

When we both came up for air, Auntie Claire was standing

beside the pool. “Lake, I wasn’t joking. I do want you to have a plan for this summer. Look, there’s lots of programs at the rec centre.” She held out a paper catalogue. “Can you come out and see if any of these sound interesting?”

Lake groaned, but we got out of the pool and laid our towels next to each other. We put the catalogue between us.

“Baby, baby, baby, toddler, toddler, adult, adult . . .” Lake listed the audience for each class as we flipped through the pages. “Day camp, again. Oh—”

She stopped and pointed at one. “What about this?”

“Youth Entrepreneur Club of Courtenay? What does that even mean?”

“You, like, build a business and sell stuff, I think. Jules was talking about how her grade-six class did an entrepreneur fair thing at school, remember?”

Jules was on Lake’s soccer team, and she annoyed me a lot, so I tended to tune her out whenever I had to see her. I played along though. “Oh, yeah. Kinda.”

“She said it was fun. She sold earrings and stuff. And you get to keep the profits from whatever you sell.”

I perked up more. “That’d be cool.”

Lake read more. “Albie, this might be it. Listen to this: ‘Participants in the Youth Entrepreneur Club of Courtenay will have the chance to create their own businesses and sell products at the Comox Valley Country Fair. The top sellers will have

the chance to participate in the Young Makers' Fair as part of the PNE in Vancouver, BC.” Lake looked over at me, eyes shining. “We could win a trip to Vancouver! To the PNE! Think of the rides! We could go on the Beast!” The PNE was a summer fair that took place in Vancouver every August. There were food trucks, rides, shows, concerts, games. It was like a way bigger, way cooler version of the Comox Valley Country Fair.

“That’d be awesome!” I seconded. The secret was, I didn’t care all that much about the PNE or the rides, but I dreamed of going to Kits Pool, one of the biggest pools in the world. And since it was also in Vancouver, maybe we’d get to go there if we won.

“Yes! Oh man, Albie, we have to win this thing. We are going to join the Youth Entrepreneur Club of Courtenay and make stuff and sell it and go to Vancouver, just you and me.” Lake sighed, content. “There has to be a better thing to call it though, isn’t there?” she asked. “The Youth Entrepreneur Club of Courtenay sounds so boring.”

“The letters spell yecc,” I said. “Sounds about right.”

Lake laughed. “That sounds awful, but funny. Yeah.” She leaned towards the screen door. “Mom! Albie and I are going to be Yeckers!”

“Yecc for life!” I shouted. We high-fived.

“I don’t know what that is, but good?” Auntie Claire called back. “Let’s get you signed up.”