

## Rachel's Summer Adventure

*What If there is such a thing as a holiday romance? A moment of mystery, a moment of stepping away from who you are and enjoying the freedom of being whatever the moment lets you be.* These thoughts consumed me as we travelled to Canada for our family summer holiday. My school year had been good, but trying, with bizarre twists and turns in school friendships. I needed a few weeks of not being *that* Rachel. Perhaps it wasn't so much the thrill of a holiday romance that filled my teenage daydreams, but a longing to have a break from myself and the complications that seemed to follow me around. My best friend, Anna, always tells me I make life complicated, but I'm pretty sure other people have a hand in it too. So maybe it wasn't so much holiday romance as holiday escapism I was dreaming of...

After a long day of travelling we finally arrived at our holiday home, a beautiful condo complex surrounding a large swimming pool area. From every part of the resort there were breath taking views of tree covered mountains, the tops of which still glistened white with snow, despite the fact it was July and roasting hot. I decided I was going to like this holiday. Mountain scenery inspires me and helps me feel closer to God; exactly what I needed.

The next morning, however, my enthusiasm for the holiday was tested when the dreaded jet lag had us all up at 5am. Ben and Amy, my younger brother and sister, were wide awake and jumping around the condo, full of questions about how to work the TV, and what food was available for breakfast. By 9am we were down by the pool. And that's when I first saw him. He was tall, athletic looking and the right level of 'boy next door' good looks. I guessed he was round about my age, maybe a few years older. I sat up straighter and kept looking over in the hope that he would glance my way. He was with his mum and dad, at least that's who I assumed they were, at the other side of the pool. It looked like he was heading out somewhere with his dad, and his mum was going to be staying by the pool. She waved them off then came over to where we were.

"Morning, you're here early, have you just arrived?" asked the woman.

"Yes, we just flew in from Glasgow yesterday," said mum, more than happy to engage in conversation with this stranger. "The jet lag hit us hard this morning, we've all been up since 5am. What about you? Have you been here long?"

"We have our own place here, we drive up from Vancouver as often as we can. We love it."

"It is beautiful. It's our first time here."

And with that the two mums engaged in a long conversation. Finding out which condo number each family was staying at, how long both families were going to be here, and the usual life stories. I phased out from their conversation.

Between the jet lag and the heat my body was totally confused. It was only 10am and already the Canadian sun was burning through the sun tan lotion covering my white, freckled Scottish skin. My body was crying out to get into the pool and do something about cooling down, but the mums' conversation had just got interesting.

"How old is your son?" asked my mum. Isn't it great when your mum acts on your behalf without even realising it? I lay on the pool side sun lounger pretending I wasn't listening in, but eagerly awaiting more details.

“Tyler’s sixteen, he’s my youngest. How old is Rachel?”

“She’s just turned fifteen, and then Ben is twelve and Amy is nine.”

They chatted some more about the families, all very blah blah blah, then eventually, just as I was about to give up and go for a cooling dip, the conversation returned to Tyler. Apparently he was brilliant at sports, and everything else. Oh joy just what I needed, another *good at everything* guy in my life!

I didn’t need to hear any more, it was time to listen to my body and step into the pool, and just as I did I heard them make arrangements for our families to have a BBQ together. As I floated around in the pool I couldn’t decide if I was happy about that or not.

We arrived at Tyler’s at the appointed time. Their condo was amazing, it was similar in layout to ours, but bigger, with a den and a further bedroom. The décor was beautiful, with really nice finishing touches. Our condo was well equipped and comfy, but this had real homely touches: extra cushions; bookshelves full of books and family games; photos of the family on the walls. You could see from the photos that it wasn’t just Tyler that had been blessed with looks and talent, there were many sporting accomplishments displayed on these walls.

Tyler’s mum was lovely. She had a real gift of hospitality, making us feel welcome and at ease in their home. Her and mum clearly enjoyed spending time together and the dads looked to be following suit as they headed onto the veranda to bond over the BBQ.

“Tyler why don’t you set up the TV system for the kids and they can watch something or play games?” said his mum. Tyler obligingly set up everything for us.

“What music do you like, Rachel?” Tyler asked, as he directed me through to the den. It seemed the TV set up was for the younger two and I was going to get Tyler to myself. A year ago I would have been a quivering wreck at having a guy talk to me, but after getting to know David and Andrew at school, I had a new found confidence in being able to chat to guys, and I was feeling quite excited at getting to be on my own with Tyler. There were a couple of potential problems though, the mum chat earlier had made me wary of Tyler; being such an achiever did he have that David-type character trait of being full of himself and his achievements, and would he even notice me beyond his Canadian politeness? Spending some time with him would hopefully answer these questions.

“I’ve got a pretty wide ranging taste in music, so I’m sure I’ll like whatever you want to listen to. Something rocky or soulful singer/songwriter music is my favourite.”

“No it’s not,” Ben helpfully shouted over, “don’t listen to her Tyler, she only listens to boy bands.”

The sound of his juvenile laughter followed us through to the den.

“Ben knows nothing; he lives to wind me up.”

Tyler laughed, “I’m the youngest in my family, so that’s the kind of thing I used to do to my sisters too.”

Ben was right, I do like boy bands, but I had the feeling that if I wanted Tyler to really notice me I’d need to be more interesting than plain, boring Rachel Anderson.

“Do you play any instruments?” I asked Tyler, trying to turn the conversation back to him.

"I play guitar and can do a bit of keys as well. What about you?"

"Pretty much the same, I've done some guitar lessons and piano lessons too." Okay, so I was just referring to music classes in school, but I'm sure that technically they are music lessons. The fact that I am completely useless at all things musical would not be included in this conversation.

"Shame we don't have any guitars here, or we could jam together."

"Aww that is a shame." Phew, I had better be careful, how awkward would that have been if he'd produced a couple of guitars for us to strum away on?

We chatted more about music and school while we waited for dinner. Tyler also told me about their church and some of the antics their sporty youth group got up to. The conversation highlighted further that Tyler was a popular guy; sporty, brainy and the fun extrovert that everyone wants to be around. However, despite all that he really didn't seem full of his own importance; it looked like at least one of my concerns had been addressed. I was liking Tyler more and more.

"Have you got plans for your time here?" asked Tyler, as we started to sample the delights of the BBQ.

"I'm not sure, my mum is overseeing that side of things."

"I'll be out with my friends most days mountain biking. You should come join us."

"Mountain biking?"

"You can mountain bike, can't you?"

"Of course! I am from Scotland, we do have our fair share of mountains too you know."

Could I mountain bike? Okay, so I've never actually been 'mountain biking', but I've been on mountains, I've been on my bike, I've just never combined the two things together. But how hard could it be? I wasn't prepared to sit back and let Tyler be the only sporty one here, even if that was the case, no, I needed to exert some sporty know-how too.

"Great, let me know when you've got some free hours and you can head up the mountain with us."

"Just one problem though," I said, thinking I'd found an easy way out of the mountain biking unknown. "I don't have my bike here, or any of my gear."

"No problem, we can rent stuff, or between my friends and me we can gear you up, and my sister's bike is in our storage, you can use her bike."

"Oh no! I couldn't possibly take your sister's bike out, what if something happened to it?"

"Don't worry, we won't do any of the crazy runs, we'll start you off on the regular trails and then you can decide how crazy you want to take it."

"Great," I said, with as much confidence as I could muster through my increasing levels of sleepiness. Jet lag and my body were still at war. I needed to get away from Tyler and this conversation.

"Sorry Tyler, I'm feeling really tired now, think the jet lag is telling me to call it a day."

But my exit strategy failed me completely when I turned round and bumped into a side table with the dads' drinks on it. It wasn't even so much a case of bumping into the table, more like falling onto

it and knocking off the glasses. They both went smashing to the floor. This was not the impression I was hoping to create with Tyler.

“Rachel!” shouted mum. “I’m so sorry, Lynn,” she said to Tyler’s mum. “Where’s your mop and I’ll get it cleaned up?”

“Don’t be silly, it’s not a problem, I’ll sort it out,” said Tyler’s mum.

But mum was not going to let it go, she wouldn’t hear of Tyler’s mum cleaning up any of it, and ordered me around to help her clear up the broken glass and spilled drinks.

Thankfully Tyler’s mum was more patient than mine. “It’s fine, I’ll clear this up, why don’t you guys head back to your place, you must all be exhausted after being up so early this morning? You go sleep, I’ll clear this up, please don’t give it another thought.”

We left Tyler’s family condo in embarrassed exhaustion. Well mum and I did, the other three seemed oblivious to any tension in the air. But Tyler’s mum had been right, we were all flagging from the jet lag.

I’d never felt happier to flop into bed, but even though I was exhausted I couldn’t sleep. My mind wouldn’t settle down. All I could think about was making a fool of myself spilling the drinks at Tyler’s. If that had been the only thing to concern myself with it would have been bad enough, but my sleepless mind took delight in reminding me of my behaviour: the times I’d laughed too much or too loud; and the things that I’d said that weren’t quite true, like my ability to mountain bike or play guitar. I pulled my lovely soft pillow out from below my head, put it over my face and screamed into it. Sleep was definitely not coming easily to me tonight, I got out of bed and went in search of my phone and headphones, hopefully some good music would ease me to sleep.

The spilled drinks forgotten (or at least never talked about again), we went on to have a few amazing days of touring round the area, getting familiar with the layout and taking part in the more sedate pastimes of hiking and swimming at the nearby lake. We didn’t see Tyler’s family for the next few days; I had enjoyed getting to know Tyler, and I really liked him, but with all his friends and sports I wasn’t convinced he’d even noticed me. Part of me almost hoped they had gone back home to Vancouver, spilled drinks, guitar and mountain biking all forgotten. However, with my luck that was never going to be the case.

“We’re going to have a free afternoon today,” said mum, as we were eating breakfast a few days later. “We need to go to the town centre this morning for some supplies, but this afternoon you can relax by the pool if you want. Rachel, didn’t Tyler invite you to go out with him and his friends if you had some free time?”

How on earth did she know that? Had she overheard Tyler talking to me at the BBQ? She must have superhuman hearing.

“I’m sure he was just being polite, mum. He’d probably rather hang out with his friends.”

Mum smiled and picked up her mobile phone.

As we were about to have lunch, Tyler arrived at our door.

“Hey Rachel, you want to come to ours for some lunch then we’ll head up the mountain on the bikes?”

“Yeah, that would be amazing!” I replied, hoping I sounded more confident than I felt. Oh great, mum must have told his mum I was free. I decided I wasn’t so sure I liked her help with Tyler anymore. A big part of me really liked him, but another part of me sensed that with Tyler disaster lay ahead.

Lunch with Tyler and his friends was great fun. Like him, his friends are all Canadian and most of them seem to come here regularly. I had a lot of fun hanging out with them, and for once I felt like I was getting to be part of the cool group.

After lunch we headed over to the hire shop to get me kitted out with a bike and gear. I had insisted with Tyler that my dad would arrange a hire bike for me rather than use his sister’s, I’m far too accident prone to borrow a bike from anyone, even I know that.

But when I saw the amount of protective gear I had to put on I felt my panic levels rise. This obviously wasn’t a safe sport if you needed this much protection

“All set?” asked Tyler, as he helped me fasten my elbow pads.

“Yeah, but could we start off on the smaller slopes till I get back up to speed, and get used to the trails here.”

“Of course, we’ll go over and get the chair lift to the first of the trails.”

Gear, bike and chair lift! How did that even work? I went on a ski holiday once and the chair lifts alone terrified me, I was always scared of it tipping me out, or that I’d get stuck and not be able to get out of the chair in time. How was I going to manage a bike and me on a lift?

“I love riding these tracks, Rachel. You’re going to love them. Especially when you get up to the higher runs, the views are awesome as you come speeding down the tracks.”

I could barely take in his words, my mind was completely absorbed with worrying about the chair lift. “Sounds fab, but how does it work on the chair lifts here?” I asked, trying to cover the fact that I didn’t have a clue what I was doing and any issues were down to the differences between Canada and Scotland.

“We put the bikes on the back of a chair lift, we get on the next one and the attendants take the bikes off for you at the top of the lift.”

“Great, just checking.” At least that was one less thing for me to worry about. Now I only had to concern myself with getting on and off a chair lift in one piece, and then making it down the slope with my dignity and body intact!

The chair lift proved easy enough, and I was almost able to enjoy the ride up, the scenery surrounding us was spectacular, with mountains in every direction.

“I don’t think I could ever get bored with these views,” I said, more as an outward thought than as part of a conversation.

"It sure is beautiful here," said Tyler. "We've been coming up here for ten years now, and I still love coming back."

But the moment of peace and contentment was at an end, it was time to collect the bikes and start the trail. Tyler's friends had all gone down already, so at least I wouldn't have the embarrassment of them seeing how bad I was.

"Why don't you lead the way, Tyler? You know where you're going and how to take the trail, I'll follow your lead."

"Okay, just shout if you have any problems." And with that he took off; it was all downhill from here! With Tyler in front I just had to try and keep up with him and follow his line. The bike felt huge, and with all the safety gear on my movements felt restricted, keeping up with Tyler was a challenge.

The first section of the track went okay, it was nice and open and I could see what lay before me. I focussed on Tyler and watched how he took the course. I could almost feel myself relax into it, well as much as you can when you're hurtling down a mountain side.

"That's us about half way down the run," said Tyler as he pulled over to the side. "How is it so far?"

"Great!" I replied. "Starting to get my bike legs back, it's been a while since I was last on my bike."

"You've started off well. Do you want to pick up the pace now and get on to the next track?"

"Of course, that would be amazing." Why had I said that? Of course it would *not* be amazing! What was I thinking, I had got this far unscathed, why was I tempting fate this much?

Tyler led off again, only this time going faster. I couldn't keep up with him. My fear of flying over the handlebars gripped me and there was no persuading my legs to go faster. In this lower section the track wound its way through trees, the more limited visibility meant that I soon lost sight of Tyler and didn't have much warning as to which way the turns would take me. I could hear cyclists coming up behind me. I needed to speed up.

*'You can do this Rachel. Make those legs go faster. You've done fine so far, you can do it.'* I said to myself, trying to psych myself up. Having lied my way into this with Tyler, I was going to have to lie to myself to get out of it, and tell myself I could do it.

With a bolt of determination I pushed my legs to a higher gear and decided to go for it. But mountain biking isn't something that requires speed alone, you also need to be able to control the bike.

The dusty, turning paths were really challenging my control of the bike. As the track got steeper the bike went faster - I was losing control. I could feel my heart beating faster and faster as fear consumed me. I turned a corner and only just managed to stay on the bike. As I came out of the turn the back of the bike spun out. The back wheel was further down the mountain than I was. Facing the wrong way up the track I panicked! In trying to correct my positioning I ended up sliding down the slope sideways. I jerked the handlebars in a desperate attempt to get the front of the bike facing downhill. I was so focussed on turning the bike I didn't notice the large stone in front of me. As I tried to turn the front wheel it collided with the stone. The wheel buckled. The stone stayed where it was. And I went flying off the bike.

I lay winded on the ground; not sure which part of my body was hurting most. I was very grateful for all the protective gear. I lay for a few moments, not sure what to do. The bike had slid further down the slope from where I lay, I could see the front wheel was buckled and in no condition for any more riding. Maybe if I stayed here no one would even notice I was missing; one could always hope.

But lying flat out on a bike trail on a busy resort is not the place to avoid being seen. No more than a few seconds could have passed before some cyclists were stopping beside me.

“Rachel, are you okay?” Oh great it was a couple of Tyler’s friends.

“I think so.”

“Girl you were flying down that track, we’ve never seen anyone take that corner the way you did!” Oh no, they had seen the whole thing, the trees hadn’t hidden me as much as I’d hoped they would, and from the tone of their voice I could tell they knew I had no clue what I was doing.

As the guys were helping me up I could hear Tyler shouting for me through the trees.

“We’ve got her,” the guys shouted down to him. “Come and give us a hand with her bike.”

Tyler soon appeared round the corner, concern showing on his face as he took in my ramshackle appearance and the busted bike.

“Rachel! What happened? Are you okay?” The concern in his voice was the final straw in bringing on the tears.

“I’m fine,” I said, as the tears started spilling down my cheeks. “You guys keep going, I’ll take the bike back. I’m done.” I walked over to my damaged bike, pulled it upright and tried to push it downhill. But the wheel was so badly buckled I couldn’t manage it on my own. “I’ll get that,” said Tyler, with a gentleness of voice that I didn’t deserve. My last tiny little bit of self-respect evaporated as Tyler took the bike.

“Thanks,” I said, as new waves of tears came crashing over me.

“Hey, it’s okay. The bike can be repaired and you’ve not broken any bones or twisted any joints. You’re fine.”

I was almost feeling okay, almost feeling as if Tyler wasn’t judging me, when one of the other guys burst my bubble. “Tyler, you should have seen the way she took that corner, it was mad, thought you said she’d done this before.”

I looked away, too ashamed to look Tyler in the eyes, I couldn’t even run away as we had to deal with the damaged bike and I couldn’t push it back on my own. Why, why, why did I get myself into these situations? Tyler’s silence communicated volumes. I’d lied to him and embarrassed him in front of his friends.

After what felt like an eternity we got the bike back to the rental shop.

The guy in the bike shop didn’t seem too phased when he saw the bike. He merely informed us that repairs would be charged against the credit card used for the booking. Dad would be happy!

As I took off my knee protectors I noticed a gravel graze down the side of my leg. Tyler noticed it too. “You’ll need to get that seen to.”

“I’m sure my mum will have some medical supplies with her to clean me up.”

His friends shouted over, "Tyler, you coming back up the mountain?"

He looked over at me, as if trying to gauge if it would be okay to take off with his friends, or if he needed to help me further. "Do you want me to help you back to the condo, help you explain to your parents?" I could see the struggle within him; part of him felt obliged to make sure I was okay, but for the most part he must have wanted nothing more than to get back to his friends, and away from this person who had lied to him.

"Go, I'm fine."

I walked slowly back to our condo complex, only too aware that once again careless actions from my side meant I had to explain myself to so many people. Why do good things go unnoticed, while the wrong stuff requires so many apologies and explanations?

"I'm back," I said as I joined my parents by the pool side.

"What happened to your leg?" asked mum. I think mum has a special Rachel radar that immediately picks up my pains, both physical and emotional.

"Mountain bike stuff. I was on one of the trails with Tyler and lost control."

"And where is Tyler now?" said dad, his question suggesting that Tyler should have brought me back after such an accident.

"There was no point Tyler losing out on his afternoon fun too, he's still up in the mountains with his friends. I'm fine, just a bit sore. Plus I kind of buckled the front wheel of the hire bike, so I couldn't bike anymore today."

"And how much is this going to cost me?" asked dad.

"Don't be too hard on her, I think she's already beating herself up enough," said mum. "Go up and have a shower, and see if you can get that leg cleaned up."

The water from the shower stung the graze on my leg, but I stood for as long as I could, letting the water carry away the bits of gravel that had embedded themselves in my leg. If only the water could wash away the whole of the afternoon.

I finished the shower and dried my sore leg off as best as I could. As I walked through to my bedroom mum came into the condo. "How's your leg?"

"Sore."

Mum looked at my leg and then got out her holiday first aid bag, I'm sure she was thinking of me when she packed it. She carefully wiped over the area with an antiseptic wipe, the alcohol of the wipes stinging the wound they were supposed to be helping. Then she put a big dressing over it.

"I'm afraid you'll need to stay out the pool today."

"That's okay, I'll just stay here."

"What's happened? It's something more than just falling off a bike isn't it?"

My mum has a scary way of picking up on my emotions. "I kind of let Tyler think that I could mountain bike already, so he took off down the hill assuming I would be okay."

“Oh Rachel,” said mum, in the voice that communicated ‘here we go again’. “You need to learn that being yourself is what really counts.” And then she leaned over and gave me a big hug.

“I don’t know if this will be what you want to hear, but we’re spending tomorrow afternoon with Tyler and his family.”

“Oh no! Mum, I can’t. Please let me stay here.”

“You can’t mope about indoors. It’s too beautiful to spend a whole day inside.”

“Then let me head over to the lake, I’ll be okay on my own there.”

“Rachel, you’re in a strange place, how could we possibly let you go to the lakeside on your own?”

“Please mum, I couldn’t bear to be with Tyler tomorrow. There’ll be lots of other people around the lake, I’ll be fine.”

“You know this thing is bigger in your head than the reality of the situation.”

“No it’s not; I’ve messed up and made a fool of myself in front of Tyler and all his friends.”

“I still think you’re making too much of this, but I’ll speak to your dad about tomorrow,” and with that she headed back to the pool to talk to dad.

I just couldn’t spend tomorrow with Tyler. I couldn’t. And I knew he wouldn’t want to spend the day with me either.

The next morning I felt much better, my leg was still sensitive to the touch, but my embarrassment levels had decreased. Mum and dad were okay about the repair costs from the bike rental shop, or at least weren’t making too big a deal about it. And even more amazing they were okay about me being out on my own for the afternoon. My parents really do surprise me at times. Although dad gave me strict instructions: yes I was allowed to go to the lake; I had to have my phone with me (as if I needed to be told that one); I wasn’t allowed to go in swimming, I could only paddle in the lake to keep cool; I wasn’t to go off anywhere with strangers (I’m a teenager not a child!).

The condo had a couple of regular city bikes available for resident use. Despite my bad bike experience of yesterday I was keen to get out on a regular bike, and be on my own for a while. I packed a towel, my Bible, a book and some snacks and headed out to the lake, hopeful I would be able to find a secluded, tranquil spot. Somewhere I could be myself without offering up false expectations to anyone. So much for being on vacation from myself, real life just doesn’t work that way I guess.

It didn’t take me long to get to the lake, the first beach I came to was fairly busy, so I cycled further on round until I found a little cove that I could have all to myself. The beach area wasn’t that big, so I was confident I would be left on my own.

I spread out my towel and sat down, enjoying the feeling of the warm sun on my body and the tickly sand between my toes. Whenever I got too hot the cold, glacier fed lake, would cool me down perfectly. From where I lay I couldn’t see anyone, with the exception of some people out on the lake

enjoying the hot, sunny afternoon. This really was an amazing place; if I hadn't messed things up I would be having the perfect holiday.

Surrounded by spectacular mountains, the majestic trees and the sparking turquoise lake I wanted to read some Psalms, to read poetical words about God's creation. As I picked up my Bible a leaf fluttered down beside me, I picked it up and twirled it round in my fingers. I looked at the leaf against the backdrop of lake and mountains. God is in everything; in the great and the small, from the awe-inspiring mountains to the whisper of a falling leaf; a whisper of healing and encouragement. I let life get out of control so often that I probably miss a lot of these healing whispers. I need times like this, time to focus on my faith, time to step away from people, a place where my words have nowhere to go and can't get me in bother.

I placed the leaf in my Bible and lay back on my towel. I put my earphones on and selected a playlist to be my companion as I enjoyed my seclusion. The Psalms, the heat and the peace did a lot to calm me and almost helped me forget the whole mountain bike episode, but then a few drops of cold water landed on me, bringing me back to reality.

"Now I see why you didn't hear me calling to you," said Tyler, as he pointed to my headphones.

I won't deny it was lovely to see Tyler, but I had just got myself to a place of being over him and the events of yesterday.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. Why was I so blunt with him? I was the one who had messed up, not him.

"Sorry, didn't mean that to sound so blunt," I said, as I tried to recover. Tyler laughed.

"Our parents were hanging out, and your mum said you were coming over here. I'm not intruding am I? You seem to have a nice set up here." As he talked he picked up my Bible and flicked through it, he took the leaf out and twirled it around in his fingers.

"No please, sit down. Why were you looking for me?" Why would my brain not engage in small talk with Tyler today?

"I wanted to get the chance to say goodbye to you."

"Goodbye? I didn't realise you were leaving already."

"My mum and dad need to get back home for some work stuff for a few days and then we'll be back here, we're not sure how long that will be, maybe you'll be gone by the time we get back."

I wasn't sure how I felt about this news. Was I happy he was going or not? I was surprised he'd searched me out after yesterday. In some ways maybe it would have been easier if he had left without saying goodbye.

"I'm sorry I left you alone yesterday afternoon instead of making sure you got home okay."

"I'm sorry I lied," I replied, both of us seemed to have our regrets about yesterday, but only one of us was responsible for it having happened in the first place.

Silence filled the gap that words didn't know how to bridge. The diversion that presented itself was a group of 20 somethings, probably hotel staff that had completed their early shift for the day and were making the most of the weather to swim and splash at the lake. Their loud laughs and show off behaviour in noisy contrast to the awkward silence between Tyler and myself.

Tyler started laughing. What could he find to laugh about in this sad situation? “It was funny though. Now that we can look back on it and you didn’t get hurt.”

“Glad I could bring you all such pleasure.” Even to me my words sounded huffy.

“Come on don’t take it like that. You know the guys reckon with a bit of training you could be a really good mountain biker. They’d never seen anyone take a corner like that before.”

“Why doesn’t that sound like a compliment? No my days of mountain biking are over. I learned my lesson.”

“It’s not a bad thing to try something new, Rachel.”

“That’s very true, I had a great time when I went in for the school play last year.”

“I can imagine.” Now was that another non-compliment?

“Have you ever swam in this lake before?” asked Tyler as if completely changing the conversation.

“Yes.”

“But you’ve never been swimming with me before, here’s a great chance to try something new and cool yourself down at the same time. But I better double check, can you really swim?”

I ran into the lake and splashed icy cold water back in Tyler’s direction. The awkwardness was gone and we were friends again.

For the next hour we swam in the lake or lay out at our little private beach. We chatted and laughed and my holiday was perfect again.

Perfect in every way except for a sadness that had crept over me. Sadness that we were only now getting to know each other. Maybe if I had been honest from the outset we would have had several afternoons hanging out together, I could imagine Tyler being the kind of guy that would have taken the time to teach me to mountain bike if I’d told him up front that I’d never done it before. But a combination of romantic notions and comparing him to David had distorted my reality and taken me down the wrong path. A path that led to only one good afternoon with Tyler rather than several. However, there was no point in ruining this one perfect moment wishing for the ‘might have beens’.

“What are you thinking? You’re miles away,” said Tyler.

I certainly wasn’t going to share all these thoughts, but perhaps it was time to start being real. “I’ve had a great afternoon, Tyler. I’m sorry for ruining your day yesterday and not being honest with you.”

“It is what it is. Stop beating yourself up over it. Don’t think of the mountain biking, just think of the swimming.” As always Tyler had the friendly comeback, and the voice of sense.

“I need to head back now and help my mum get packed up. I’ll leave you to get back to enjoying the quietness.” Tyler was obviously dismissing me here rather than inviting me to cycle back with him. We’d just had a great afternoon, but it was clear that was all it was for Tyler; he still wanted to keep me at arm’s length.

As he was about to walk away, Tyler paused then stepped towards me and gave me a hug. Not just a little hug, but a big, this-means-something kind of hug. I snuggled into the hug, never wanting it to end. “Maybe we’ll get to see each other again,” he whispered in my ear, as the hug came to an end.

I watched Tyler walk away. He looked back and waved before he turned the corner. My holiday romance was a great big Canadian bear hug!

*What If there is such a thing as a holiday romance? A moment of mystery, a moment of stepping away from who you are and enjoying the freedom of being whatever the moment lets you be.* These thoughts consumed me as we travelled back home from Canada. Tyler and his family didn't make it back to the resort before we left. He did friend me on social media, and we messaged each other a few times. I'd allowed holiday romance to fill my head and persuade me I should be someone else. At the lake side all pretences had gone and I was the real Rachel. That had been my best time with Tyler. I took the leaf out of my Bible and twirled it around in my fingers, smiling at the memory of that hug. Life is full of lessons, hopefully I've learned something about being true to who I am. But somehow I can't shake the feeling I've still got so much more to learn...