

Rainbow's End Excerpt

by Cara Putman

(EXCERPT)

Reagan Graham pressed against her brother's side, trying to avoid the crush of bodies. When Garrett had invited her to spend the summer on this crazy geocaching adventure, she hadn't considered it because it sounded crowded. She needed time and space to recover from the chaos, stress, and intensity of tax season. Spending an extended vacation with hundreds of strangers did not strike her as a good time. At all.

But when an unwanted admirer showed up at her condo hidden in the shadows, accompanying her brother to Osage Beach seemed like a good idea. No, make that a great idea. If the police hadn't arrived when they did. . .she shuddered at how close the stalker had gotten.

Her brother tightened his grip on her. She glanced at him, his athletic frame lending her comfort. He would do anything he could to keep her safe. She knew that. Then her glance landed on his roommate.

Colton Ryan was an enigma. Gorgeous, but an enigma. He seemed friendly, yet after a week she knew less about him than the day they met.

He stood apart from them, yet watchful, his gray eyes constantly surveying the crowd. He stood an inch or so shorter than Garrett, but erect and alert. And the way his dark hair curled around his ears made her fingers itch to brush it in place.

Colton was her age, a few years older than Garrett. He planned to start classes at Washington University School of Law in the fall along with Garrett. He called enrolling in

law school “seeing the light.” She called it a sign that he still hadn’t decided what he wanted to be when he grew up if he was changing course a few years into his engineering career. He and Garrett had met through the admissions office and decided to room together during the year. But now he’d attached himself to their summer plans. She hadn’t wanted him as a tagalong for her summer away, but there he stood.

She didn’t need the complication.

And his presence in the smaller, neighboring condo couldn’t be called anything but.

All she wanted was a couple months to forget about the fright that crowded her back home. A shiver shook her at the thought. And if she got to do it with a camera in her hand, all the better. She’d leave spreadsheets behind and focus on finding God’s beauty and creativity in the midst of the Ozarks.

She sucked in a calming breath and closed her eyes. The crowd noise rolled over her until someone grabbed the microphone and started talking. Even then, she tuned out, the sun warm on her face. Garrett could take notes for both of them.

In fact, she’d let Garrett and Colton plot all kinds of strategies to win the race. She’d focus on her camera. Relax as she saw the world through the narrow focus of her lens. Avoid all the pressures and stresses of a life out of control. For two months she’d pretend she was someone else. Someone without a constant shadow.

The thought brought a smile to her face.

She’d try to relax and return to St. Louis ready to reenter her career. As long as she fixed real food a couple times a week, Garrett would be thrilled. And if he didn’t let the condo disintegrate to a bachelor pad’s level of cleanliness, she’d make do.

She opened her eyes as the speaker stepped away from the microphone.

That’s all she had to do to survive the summer. Slip under her stalker’s radar and return home in August, ready to resume her life. Hopefully, she’d find herself energized from the time in nature, exercising her creative muscles. She touched the camera dangling around her neck. Maybe she should snap some photos of the crowd. She could document the entire hunt. A snicker slipped out at the thought of handing Garrett a photobook at the end of the summer.

“What’s up?” His eyebrows arched over clear blue eyes as he studied her.

“Nothing important. You ready to find your first cache?”

“Only if Colton gets that gizmo figured out. You’d think I could make it work without help from my buddy the engineer. Noooo.” Garrett rolled his eyes. “Should’ve known.”

Reagan had to laugh. Her brother had the simplest cell phone because he chose to remain “technology adverse,” as he called it. Yet he’d rushed out to buy an iPad the moment Apple released them. She couldn’t make sense of his quirk. Then her gaze landed on Colton. His eyebrows met over his nose as he studied the small GPS unit.

He must have sensed her gaze, because he looked up and smiled, the kind of smile that could stop the heart of a lesser woman, one hunting for romance. With his rugged movie-star looks, it wouldn’t be hard to lose perspective when he flashed the dimple in his chin.

Too bad for him, she didn’t want anything to do with men other than her brother right now. Not if there was the iota of a chance Colton could move into position as the next weirdo who fixated on her. She shivered at the thought of inviting anyone into her life right now.

Nope, it was safer to stay far away. His smile shifted as if he could read her thoughts.

What she wouldn’t do to get that adorable dimple back in place. . .if only.