


CARLEY FORTUNE

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

One Golden Summer

a novel

The background of the cover is a painting of a sunset over a body of water. The sky is a mix of blue, purple, and orange. The water is a deep blue with white foam from a wake. In the center, a small yellow boat with a red interior is moving across the water. A woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow swimsuit, is sitting on the edge of the boat. A man with short hair, wearing a blue swimsuit, is sitting inside the boat. The overall mood is nostalgic and romantic.

TITLES BY CARLEY FORTUNE

Every Summer After

Meet Me at the Lake

This Summer Will Be Different

One Golden Summer

ONE GOLDEN SUMMER

Carley Fortune

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To the lake, to the hills, to the sky

PROLOGUE

A great photograph makes you think you know the subject, even if you've never met. A great photo reaches out and pulls you inside the moment, so you can feel, smell, and taste it. And this, by all accounts, is a great photo.

I stare at it, and just like that, I'm seventeen.

I hear them across the bay. It's the end of summer, and those three voices are as familiar to me as the weight of the camera between my hands. The older boy is calling out to the other two—his brother and the girl, who lie on the floating raft in their bathing suits, sunny-side up.

I've been at the cottage since the end of June, watching them swim and flirt and fly around the lake in their yellow speedboat. Each of them is beautiful. So sun-kissed and free.

They climb into the boat. The oldest drives. His brother and the girl sit in the front. I stand on the edge of the dock, adjusting the aperture.

It happens in the shortest blink of time.

I hear the boat. Their laughter over the engine. I look up to see them heading toward me. I bury myself behind the lens. They enter the frame.

Click.

FRIDAY, JUNE 13

They are five of the most stunning women I've ever seen. It has nothing to do with the lighting or how much time they've spent in hair and makeup. It's the genuine smiles on their faces. The fan is blowing, the music is loud, and the photo editor *oohs* as she watches the images load onto my laptop screen. I don't need a glimpse to know they're spectacular. I can feel it with every press of the shutter.

I'll crash later, alone in my empty condo, but right now I'm in my element. When I'm behind a lens, I can draw out a sly grin or a slight tilt of the chin. I'm in command. It's one of the reasons I've been working so much lately. I *need* this feeling. The buzz of a perfectly humming set is my high.

The youngest woman is in her twenties, the eldest in her seventies, and none of them are professional models. It took time to earn their trust when they arrived at my studio. If anyone understands how nerve-racking it can feel to have your photo taken, it's me. Now, the women dance and pose in bathing suits without a shred of self-consciousness. Their stretch marks, wrinkles, and cellulite are on display, emblems of their lives given due reverence in each frame.

"It's going to be impossible to make selects," Willa, the photo editor, says once we wrap. We're standing shoulder to shoulder, scrolling through the images on my computer. The best will run in *Swish*, a weekly style magazine that debuted this spring. "There are so many great shots, Alice."

“I’m glad you think so,” I say, beaming. I’ve never worked with Willa before, and I want to wow her. *Swish* is distributed in the country’s largest paper, and it’s all my industry friends can talk about. This is my first gig for the magazine, and I want to nail it. Magazine work doesn’t pay very well, but it’s far more creative than what I get to do with my commercial clients—it’s also increasingly rare.

I pause on a shot of Monica, a new mom who was the most nervous of the group. Her head is thrown back and her arms are flung out. It’s a moment of pure joy.

“We have two weeks for you to file,” Willa says.

“No problem.” This will be a low-touch edit. The assignment brief described it as a “refreshingly real” swimwear shoot with “regular people” showcasing the looks. It’s another reason I was excited about the job: no aggressive photoshopping. “I’ll just fix the flyaways and blemishes. It’ll be fast.”

“Well, you might have to do a little more than that.” Willa lowers her voice. “I want to keep it authentic, but let’s say the lumps and bumps are more like a *suggestion* of cellulite. I’m sure you can work your magic.”

My smile vanishes. I’ve collected enough euphemisms for digitally altering the female body to fill a thesaurus. I’ve been told to make women look more flattering, appealing, engaging, enticing, attractive, and flat-out more fuckable. But I’ve never been asked to *suggest* cellulite.

“I thought you wanted this to be *refreshingly* real,” I say calmly, like I’m not ready to throw my camera at the wall.

“I mean, yes, *absolutely*.” Willa goes on. “It’s great having different body types represented, but let’s just clean it all up.”

I don’t bat an eye behind my tortoiseshell glasses. On the surface, I’m the picture of polished professionalism. I’ve quieted my auburn curls into a sleek ponytail. My makeup is minimal but effective. There isn’t a single chip in my ruby red nail polish. But underneath, I’m crumbling.

It’s not the first time I’ve been asked to do something I disagree with. Being a freelance photographer means I sometimes need to bend,

compromise, and push my beliefs or vision to the side to please clients. It just happens more often than I'd like at this stage in my career.

"It's your call," I tell Willa, heart sinking. "It's your magazine."

I'm not a combative person, but even if I were, I'm too worn down to argue. It takes a lot of energy to be *on* all day, and I've been on for so long, I suspect my off button is broken.

And it's not just me who's noticed. I met Elyse, my brilliant instructor turned mentor and now friend, for coffee last week, and she told me I looked like a ghost. I'd had the dream the night before—the one where I'm being chased—and I was even more drained than usual.

"You excel at capturing inner light," she'd said. "But I worry you've lost your own. Get it back, Alice. I want to see you shine." Elyse told me to slow down.

For the first time ever, I ignored her advice. Work is what's kept me together these past six months. Or at least I thought so. But as soon as Willa leaves, exhaustion slams in. I sit on the floor of my studio, rubbing my fingertips against my temples. I've taken on so many assignments to keep busy, but I took this one for me. And it backfired.

What I need is a night off. Just one night where I don't curl up with my laptop and color correct until my eyes burn. A few solid hours in which I pretend deadlines don't exist, where I can forget about the group show in August, and the look of concern that flashed across Elyse's face when she saw me. I need an evening where I definitely, one hundred percent will *not* think about Trevor, and that night is tonight. I'm going out with my big sister.

Eventually I peel myself off the floor. I'm locking up when my phone vibrates with a string of texts. I know it's her before I check the messages. Heather almost exclusively sends texts in multiples.

PUT ON YOUR PARTY SHOES! I just scored us a table at Jaybird.

Wait, do you even own party shoes?

I'll buy you a pair on my way to pick you up.

I'm typing out a reply when another message lands. But this time it's not my sister.

It's a message to the Everly family group chat from my father.

Nan is in an ambulance.

My grandmother Nanette Everly—Nan to all, not just her grandchildren—has always been my biggest champion. I was a toddler when she identified my creative streak, and she nurtured it like one of her peony plants. When I was six, she took me to the Art Gallery of Ontario for drawing lessons. We sat among the Henry Moore sculptures, sketch pads on our laps, experimenting with shadows and shapes and lines. She taught me how to use a sewing machine when I was eleven. She gave me my first camera in high school. I've always tried to emulate her poise, the way she makes everyone around her feel seen. Nan's more practical than a road map and has a knack for making the best out of a bad situation. I admire her as much as I love her.

So when she falls in dance class and shatters her hip, drinks with my sister turn into a sleepover at Sunnybrook Hospital. As Nan undergoes an emergency hip replacement, I wipe my schedule clean so I can help her recover. I'm the best option. My father is in the middle of jury selection, and Heather has even less spare time. She's a lawyer like Dad *and* a single parent. Our younger twin siblings, Luca and Lavinia, are...well, they're Luca and Lavinia. I love them endlessly, but they're twenty-four and still take being the babies of the family seriously.

The morning Nan's released from the hospital, Heather comes with me to help take her home.

“You girls have other things to do than dote on me,” Nan says as we guide her into the house with her new walker. For an eighty-year-old who had surgery thirty-six hours ago, she looks good. She gets her short white hair set once a week, is always smartly dressed, and has stayed active. Her posture is immaculate. I find myself pulling my shoulders back whenever I’m in her presence, even now.

“Not at this moment,” Heather says. “But I’m due in court this afternoon.”

“I, on the other hand, will be at your beck and call,” I tell her.

Nan frowns. “I hate to think of you stuck here with me, Alice. You should be out living your life.”

“What life?” Heather mutters under her breath.

“I’m happy to stay here,” I say, ignoring my sister. “You know I love this house.”

Nan lives in Leaside, a leafy neighborhood in midtown Toronto. During those first hectic years after the twins were born, Heather and I slept at Nan and Grandpa’s on the weekends more often than we did in our own beds. Our home was a few streets over, but I loved this house best. The plump peonies that line the walkway. The homemade paisley curtains over the leaded glass windows. The doorbell that tolls as if announcing a newlywed couple. You can hear its thunderous ring in every corner of the redbrick Georgian, but to me, it’s the sound of calm and quiet. No screaming babies. No overwhelmed mother. A bedroom of my own.

“Let me do the stairs by myself,” Nan says sharply when Heather takes her elbow.

It’s not like Nan to be snippy, but I get it. She’s been living on her own since Grandpa died twenty years ago, and she guards her independence like a dragon. Plus, she was supposed to leave for an Alaskan cruise next week. I’d be prickly if I were in her shoes, too.

“Poor Nan,” I whisper as she navigates her walker over the threshold.

Heather shakes her head. “Poor you.”

“We’ll be fine.”

After a good night's sleep, Nan will be back to her optimistic, high-spirited self.

But three days pass, and Nan grows even crankier. I've never seen her so low. On the morning the cruise sets sail without her on board, her silence is as brooding as the clouds that darken the western sky. She hasn't even touched her crossword puzzle. When rain pelts the windowpane, I glance at her. Nan loves a good, "bracing" storm, but not a glimmer of interest brightens her face. I'm caught off guard by how old she looks. It sneaks up on me sometimes—that her hair is white and not gray anymore. And then I remember the peonies.

I run out of the house in my pajamas with a pair of scissors, but the flowers are already bent over, dozens of pink and white heads kissing the mulch, beads of water clinging to their ruffled petals. Under normal circumstances, Nan would be out here in her housecoat before the first drops fell—she prefers the flowers in a vase to seeing them droop like this. I snip quickly, but when I return to the house, my arms full of fragrant blossoms, wet hair plastered to my cheeks, she looks at me vacantly and says, "I didn't realize it was raining."

I need to fix this.



When Nan lies down for a nap after lunch, I sit in the same spot I used to as a kid: at the top of the staircase, staring at the wall of family photos opposite the banister. My niece's first step. Luca and Lavinia's high school graduation dinner. Nan and Grandpa at their best friends' cottage in Barry's Bay. They used to visit John and Joyce there every year. It's Nan's favorite place in the world. I spent just two months at the lake, but it left a mark on me, too.

I turned seventeen that summer. For my birthday, Nan gave me a camera—a very good SLR. I shot frame after frame, teaching myself, trying to get better. I put the best photos in an album that I gave to Nan on our last day at

the cottage. I find it now on the basement shelves, and sit on the red carpet, legs crossed beneath me.

Even before I open the cover, it comes back to me. My first time away from home. My first taste of freedom. Two months of waking to sunlight bouncing off the lake and rippling on the ceiling. Diving off the dock, then swimming beneath the surface as far as I could. Barbecues on the deck. Permanently damp hair. Art projects in the boathouse. Red life jackets. Canoe trips. Picnics on the island. The Harlequins I'd sneak from Joyce's stash. Coconut sunscreen and watermelon slices and my terry cloth bathing suit cover-up. The kids across the bay. And their yellow speedboat.

I flip through photos of shorelines and treetops, wildflowers and rocks, the twins, their heads bobbing in the water, almost impossible to distinguish. There's one I took of myself in the bedroom mirror, my hair sopping wet. I thought it was clever: Alice through the looking glass.

Most are photographs of Nan. My original muse. Nan reading on a hammock, the twins tucked into her sides. Nan mending a rip in Lavinia's shorts, her glasses perched on the tip of her nose. Nan paddling a canoe, waving at me onshore with an incandescent smile.

On the very last page is the photo that started it all.

I slide it from its sleeve and study the faces of three teenagers in a yellow boat. From the moment I took it, I've been chasing this kind of perfection in an image. The emotion. The movement. The sense of timelessness. A whole summer of practice, and I got this shot on one of my last days at the lake. I still can't believe how well I captured them. Even now, I can smell the gasoline, hear their hollers across the water.

The older boy is at the steering wheel and the younger one stares at the girl, who's smiling into the wind. The light is gorgeous, but not because I've bent it to my will. There's a naivety to the image, a lack of artifice. It's been years since I've seen it, but for some reason, I still feel deeply connected to these three kids, preserved in never-ending summer.

The photo is the first chapter of my origin story, the beginning of my love affair with photography. It launched me on the path to becoming the person

I am now.

I flip back to the picture of Nan in the canoe with her star-bright smile, and an inkling of an idea begins to take shape. A way to cure Nan's blues and get her out of the house. A change of scene. Fresh air. Endless skies. Glittering water.

A second trip to the lake.

Our return to Barry's Bay.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18

I find John Kalinski's number in Nan's address book. I haven't seen John since his wife's funeral more than a decade ago, but I remember both him and Joyce well. They were entwined in my grandparents' lives.

John sounds happy to hear from me. "Stay the whole summer if you want," he says when I ask about renting the cottage for a couple of weeks. He tells me he's been thinking about selling it for years—the place is empty.

The offer catches me off guard—both John's unexpected generosity and how appealing a two-month hiatus from my life sounds.

When I relay the conversation to Nan over afternoon tea, she doesn't react with the excitement I expect. Instead, she's silent for a long stretch of time.

"John assured me it was okay with him," I tell her. "He can't visit the cottage at all. He'd prefer if someone was staying there."

And then she smiles—*really* smiles—for the first time since her hip replacement.

I do the math. I check my bank account. I pore over my invoices and am surprised to find that I've already made more than I did all of last year. The silver lining of the breakup is that I've been relentlessly productive.

I think about my last conversation with Elyse.

You're even paler than usual, Alice. You look like a ghost. I'm worried about you.