

# THE SUMMER OF YES



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**COURTNEY WALSH**

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THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

*The Summer of Yes*

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Chapter 1

KELSEY

*BEEP. BEEP.*

*Click. Drip.*

*Whirrrrr.*

*Click. Drip.*

My eyes flutter open, from murky to gray to light and back to gray, like the shutter on a camera taking pictures in the dark.

*Head spinning. Voices muffled. Low, steady beeping persists.*

*Am I . . . in a hospital?*

I force my eyebrows up, hoping they help crack my eyes open. The movement sends a searing pain through my head, splitting it like an ax.

I try shifting my position and a sharp spasm cuts through my side. I gasp.

“Welcome back.”

My eyes struggle to focus, but eventually I see a nurse who looks approximately fifteen years old fussing with a tube.

The tube that I now see is attached to my arm.

*What in the world . . . ?*

My mouth is crusty and dry, and my voice croaks out, “Am I . . . ?”

“You’re in the hospital.” She smiles. “I’m Cecelia, and I’ll be

taking care of you.”

Thanks to my parents, her name triggers an automatic Simon and Garfunkel response, and I find myself trying hard not to get down on my knees to beg her please to come home.

Flashes of coffee. And a car.

*A car. But . . . did it? I can't remember . . .*

I try to sit up, suddenly alarmed. The room spins and I slump back on the bed.

She lays a hand on my shoulder. “It’s okay. Take it slow,” she says.

Slow. Yeah, right. This child doesn’t know me at all.

She gently fluffs a stiff pillow behind my head. It’s one of those plastic ones with a pillowcase that does nothing to stop it from feeling like I’m lying on a bag of potato chips.

“Um . . . water?” I whisper-croak. “How am I here?”

“Let’s take it slow. What do you remember?” She pours water from a pink plastic pitcher into a Styrofoam cup and sticks a bendy straw in it. “You were in an accident. You were brought here unconscious with head trauma two days ago.”

*Two days ago? Head trauma?*

Another flash of a car. *I was hit by a car.*

My first thought is: *I don't have time to get hit by a car.*

My second thought, which I speak out loud, is: “Wh-what?”

She leans over and holds the cup up to my lips. “Take it slow. Drink this.”

I take a sip, struggling to swallow, and to remember. It seems like being hit by a car would be imprinted on my brain, but I’m foggy. The last thing I remember is walking out of Starbucks toward the office. And the only reason I was in Starbucks at all was because one of the assistants, Tess, called in sick.

“It was a car accident,” she says, confirming my hazy memory. “The vehicle jumped the curb and ran right into you.” Cecelia takes the cup back and sets it down on a rolling tray. “It was all

over the news.” Then, after a pause, “You’re really lucky.”

“I don’t feel lucky,” I say, my sense of humor struggling to stay intact. “I feel like I got hit by a car.”

My head throbs. I instinctively reach up to rub it, dragging along the tube from my IV, which I realize now stings up my arm like icy fire.

Her hand rests on my shoulder again. “Is there someone you’d like us to call?” she asks.

I feel strangely soothed. This teenager has some incredible bedside manner.

“No, I . . .” My head is killing me, and I shut my eyes, wincing through the pain. “There’s no one.”

It’s odd—that is my first thought. It’s not exactly true, and yet, for some reason, I feel so detached.

When I crack my eyes open enough to glance at Cecelia, I find her watching me, pity in her stare. “I mean, I have *people*, you know. Friends. Family. Just”—I close my eyes and sink into my bag of chips a bit farther—“No one I want to see me in the hospital.”

“Well, having someone here may help,” Cecelia says. “It would be better not to be alone.”

“Oh, I’m not alone,” I say. Though something about it doesn’t ring true. Sitting here, in this hospital room, I feel weirdly alone. For some reason, I don’t want to surround myself with anyone, not even Ravi. I know I’ve been bad about communicating with him, and it feels wrong to reach out now that I’m in a bit of trouble.

Wait . . . *two days*?

“Two days? You said I’ve been here . . .” I try to sit up again, and Cecelia is over to my bed quickly, hands on me to slowly back me down from trying to vault out of the room.

“No sudden movements.”

“I have to go,” I plead.

“I’m afraid that might not be possible,” she answers. “Not yet.”

“But . . .” Trying to focus with this headache is like trying to read *War and Peace* through the bottom of a root beer float glass. “But I have a meeting. An important one.”

Chase Donovan will not wait. She has other offers. We aren’t the only publishing house courting her.

Cecelia pushes a button on the wall and shakes her head at me emphatically. “You’re here at least another night. Maybe two. You’re concussed, major subcutaneous contusions on your left side, and the doctor wants to evaluate to make sure it’s not something more serious.”

“I’m fine,” I lie firmly, vision cloudy and a weird metallic taste in my mouth. “Where’s my bag?”

I need my phone. I need to reach out to Chase’s agent. And my boss, Charlie.

What time is it?

*What day is it?*

I have a fleeting thought that waking up after an accident should be more *While You Were Sleeping* and less *A Quiet Place*.

Cecelia takes my non-IV hand. “Miss Worthington, you have to take it easy.”

These words don’t compute. I laugh and then wince—hard. “You’re breaking my heart, Cecelia. Chase Donovan will not wait. And please call me Kelsey.”

“Chase Donovan? From TikTok?”

I slowly nod, my head a buoy in rough seas. “She’s got two other publishing houses interested. If I stand her up—”

There goes everything I’ve worked for.

“I’m sure once you explain that you’re in the hospital because you got hit by a car, she will understand.” Cecelia takes on a firm tone, and I want to applaud her for it. She may look young, but she’s obviously no pushover.

“I’ll grab your phone. Tell her you’re sorry, but you’ll have to



reschedule.”

I know Chase is in the city meeting with other publishing houses. I know I have one shot to convince her that I’m the best person to edit her book. I know I cannot be stuck in this bed with this stupid tube jabbed into my hand for another second.

Before I can protest any further, though, a doctor comes into the room. Maybe he’ll have better news.

“You’re awake. That’s great.” He’s holding a clipboard with a folder attached to it, and he opens it up and starts flipping through pages.

“I am,” I say, even though I’m feeling like my head has a spear sticking out of it.

He smirks. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel great. I think the accident even fixed my lower back problems.”

He chuckles. Sense of humor. Also good. “Okay, follow this with your eyes.”

He pulls a pen from his coat pocket and holds it vertically in front of my eyes. I focus on it, but when he moves it from side to side, the room tilts and my vision goes fun-house mirror, and I grab the sides of the hospital bed to keep from falling out of it.

“Yeah, you’re not going anywhere anytime soon.”

He flips the pen around, which turns out to be a flashlight, then he shines it in and out of my eyes. It makes my head sway and nausea wash over me.

“We’ll wait for the CT scan to make sure there’s no additional swelling,” he says, finally clicking the light off. “You were involved in a serious accident. Plus, there’s an officer outside waiting to get your statement.”

I frown, blinking away the phantom spots left in my eyes from the light. “What? Why?”

“He has a few questions.”

“I’m fine, really, I—” But before I can finish whatever it was I



planned to say, the nausea worsens. Cecelia might look fifteen, but she recognizes immediately what's about to go down . . . or out. She sticks a plastic container under my mouth and stands there patiently, holding my hair back while I puke my guts out.

"I'm so sorry," I sputter and spit, hoping I didn't get anything on her.

I lay my head back and Cecelia holds the cup for me again. I swish some water and spit it into the container, which she then whisks out of the room like a magician's assistant.

"I have work." I mutter this half-heartedly, because at the moment I can't imagine being able to convince anyone that I'm the best person to work on anything.

"No screens for you, I'm afraid. Work will have to wait," the doctor says. "It'll be there when you're better."

"But Chase Donovan won't be."

The doctor starts. "From TikTok?"

I feebly open an eye and raise a thumbs-up.

"Well, as cool as that sounds, what you need is rest. Is there someone else you want us to call?"

I should probably let the office know where I am. I should probably text Tess and tell her that, while she might have a stomach bug, I shook hands with a Toyota. I should probably call Ravi and my parents and let them know that I'm not dead. Everyone will be concerned.

But that's just it. Everyone will be concerned. And they'll fuss over me. And this is not a big deal. I'll be out of here in no time.

So I don't do any of those things.

Instead, I lean back, the pillow crunching as I do, and shake my head no.

"Very good." He nods. "You sit tight. Cecelia will be back to prep you for the scan. I'll let the officer know you're not able to talk right now. Get some rest."

"I really do need to get out of here, Doc—" But the thought goes unfinished and the world fades to black.

Chapter 2

KELSEY

I DON'T WANT to go in here!"

I must've dozed off, but at the sound of a woman's angry voice, I'm awake. And I think I have a new roommate.

"I'm paying you thousands of dollars—the least you can do is consider my needs!"

My eyebrows shoot up, but I quickly learn the woman isn't finished. I don't want to sit up and stare, but I'm very curious who they are wheeling into my room.

"You mean to tell me there is nowhere else in this entire hospital for me to rest comfortably? Alone?"

"I'm so sorry, every room is occupied tonight. We're hoping we can move you tomorrow when something else opens up." That sounds like Cecelia.

"Get someone in here who can actually *do* something. You look like a child." *Definitely Cecelia.* "I cannot believe they're entrusting my care to a *child*."

"I'm twenty-five, ma'am," she says.

"Like I said," the woman says. "A child. Where's Dr. Fisher?"

"I'll see if he's on call." Cecelia turns and looks at me. When she sees I'm awake, her eyes go wide, and I can almost feel her apologizing to me. "Oh, Kelsey, you're awake. You kind of fainted."

“How does a person *kind of faint*?” the older woman on the other side of my room barks. “You either faint or you don’t faint. I would think nursing school would’ve taught you that.”

Cecelia closes her eyes in what appears to be a calming exercise, then opens them and focuses on me. “Dr. Fisher will want to know you’re awake. How are you feeling?”

“Thirsty.” I press a hand to my temple. “And my head hurts.”

“Okay, just stay still.”

At that, a police officer appears in the doorway. “Miss Worthington, do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

“I’m sorry,” Cecelia says. “She just woke up.”

“I’m in a room with a criminal!?”

I shift my position and see the woman, sitting up in a bed identical to mine on the opposite side of the room. She’s wearing a silk robe and her hair is perfectly styled, her face made up like she’s got a date to the opera.

And I recognize her instantly.

“Oh. My. Goodness.” I sit up fully now. “You’re Georgina Tate.”

She raises a neatly manicured brow at me, but says nothing until she directs her attention to Cecelia. “Are you getting Dr. Fisher or do I need to make a call?”

Cecelia makes a face like she deals with this kind of thing every hour of every day, and leaves as the officer steps inside and smiles at me.

“This won’t take long, Miss Worthington,” he says. “I’m Officer Truman. I just need to know what you remember about the accident.”

I shift my position in the bed, feeling slightly self-conscious. “I don’t remember much of anything.”

“Maybe something prior to the accident? Where were you headed?”

“I remember walking out of Starbucks and then . . . waking up here.”

“Okay, good. That’s a start. What did you order at Starbucks?”

“What difference does that make?” Georgina barks.

I’m starting to get the sense that, like a large boulder dropped in a pool, when this woman jumps in, everything else just kind of gets pushed out of the way.

Our circles likely never would’ve intersected if it weren’t for this accident, and it’s strange that my life is the pool to her boulder.

Everyone in New York knows Georgina. She’s a legend.

“Ma’am, I apologize; this is a private conversation,” the officer says.

She leans forward. “We’re literally in the same room. The only way to make it private is to take up sign language or *take me to my own room!*” She shouts this last part at the door.

This doesn’t feel like a good time to smile, but I’m struggling not to. I wonder if this ability to say whatever the heck you’re thinking is something that comes with age.

I hope so.

And maybe not *everyone* knows Georgina Tate. Officer Truman obviously doesn’t realize he’s talking to one of the most successful women in the country. Georgina started her cosmetics company back when women didn’t do such things, and now people are writing books about her. Business professors are studying her. She hasn’t met an intact glass ceiling.

I’m wondering if a little bit of that devil-may-care attitude could rub off on me. I’m a thirty-two-year-old assistant editor at a New York publishing house with a small client list and a whole lot of insecurity. I want to be Georgina when I grow up.

We all want to be Georgina when we grow up.

And yet, I didn’t *always* want to be Georgina . . . I used to have different dreams altogether.

The thought startles me. Where it came from, I have no idea.

Officer Truman turns back to me. “I asked what drink you or-

dered in case it jogs your memory.”

“Ah. Makes sense.” I furrow my brow, which hurts, and try to remember. “I ordered a skinny vanilla latte for Charlie—”

He starts to write. “Charlie?”

“Goldfarb,” I say. “My boss.”

Truman scribbles something in a notebook. “What do you do for Mr. Goldfarb?”

“Basically whatever he tells me,” I say without thinking.

“Are you Mr. Goldfarb’s assistant?”

“No, I’m an editor,” I say, then correct myself. “Assistant . . . editor.” I pause, and maybe it’s Georgina’s tilted glare, but I suddenly feel like I have to shine up my story. “I’m working my way up.” I tap his notebook where he’s writing his notes. “Make sure that gets in there.”

He looks at me funny.

“So you’re not his assistant, but you do certain duties an assistant would perform?”

“Yes, but not an errand-running assistant,” I say, trying to laugh it off and wincing instead. “That’s what Tess does.”

“And Tess is . . .”

“His assistant.”

Georgina cackles one singular “Ha!” and we both turn to look at her. “Goldfarb doesn’t need two assistants. He needs a better toupee artist and some Nicorette gum.”

We turn back to each other, and it’s not lost on me that she described my boss to a T.

“Then why were you getting the coffee, and not Tess?”

“Because she called in sick,” I say.

Georgina flicks a perfectly manicured hand in the air. I’m not sure what she’s getting at,

but the police officer doesn’t give me time to interpret it.

“Is your boss, Mr. Goldfarb, a well-known person? Would anyone have a grudge against him for any reason, former employee

or . . . ?”

“Nobody mowed me down on the sidewalk to try to get to Charlie, if that’s what you’re

thinking. I work in publishing, and nobody’s spilling trade secrets—” Then I frown. “Wait, are you asking me questions because you don’t know who did this?”

“It’s an ongoing investigation,” he says. “We’ve got a few leads, but the car was stolen. The driver left it at the scene.”

“Wow,” I say. “So I’m, like, a victim.”

“Or a criminal,” Georgina says.

“Ma’am, please,” Officer Truman says. Then back to me. “You don’t remember seeing a person behind the wheel?”

I shake my head, looking down, trying to visualize things. It’s all so hazy. “I was on the phone confirming my meeting. I wasn’t paying attention. I guess I—” I shut my eyes, willing myself to remember the details, but . . . nothing.

And then another wave of nausea and I have to rest my head back on the bed. Things start to go swimmy, and it takes all of my willpower not to lose it on the nice officer’s uniform pants.

“You’re very lucky,” the officer says. “The doctor said you don’t even have any broken bones.”

“Oh yeah,” I muse, smacking my dry mouth. “Lucky.”

“Your guardian angel must be worn out.” He chuckles.

“Her guardian angel must be taking the week off,” Georgina quips.

“Ma’am”—he turns to Georgina—“With all due respect, she could’ve died.”

“I could’ve died,” I repeat. And if I’d died right there on 42nd Street, who really would’ve cared? It would’ve been one of those *do you believe what happened?* stories people share at parties, but without my name attached.

Because nobody knows my name. Not even Charlie half the time.

I suddenly realize that in all of my thirty-two years of being on this planet, I've never done anything remarkable at all.

I haven't been out of the country. I haven't taken a road trip or skipped out on work just for fun. I've never gone skinny dipping or skydiving or horseback riding. I've never had a margarita. Or had dinner with a stranger. Or gotten the courage to write again. Or . . .

A long list of things I've never done races through my mind as Officer Truman snaps his notebook shut. He pulls out a card and hands it to me. "If you remember anything else, give me a call. Unfortunately, it's pretty rare that we find the perpetrator of a hit-and-run, but we'll do our best to catch whoever it was that did this to you."

I take the card, the tube of the IV pulling against my skin as I do. "Okay."

He glances over at Georgina, then back at me. "And . . . um . . . good luck." Then he walks out.

The two biggest thoughts I'm left with are: *Georgina Tate is in my room* and *I could've died*. Oddly, these things are equally hard to believe.

I can't keep my eyes open, and that's a good thing, because frankly I don't know what to think about either one of those thoughts right now.



Chapter 3

KELSEY

*I'VE NEVER DONE anything.*

That's all I'm thinking about as Cecelia wheels me down the hall for a CT scan.

It's all I'm thinking when she rolls me back into my room afterward. And it's all I'm thinking now, as I lay in this stiff bed, staring at the ceiling.

Of course, I always planned to have a big, full life—more than just work—but I know I have to pay my dues before I get there. Earn the right to time off.

Across the room, Georgina is propped up on pillows that don't look crunchy—the kind she probably brought from home. Why didn't I think of that?

Oh. Right. I woke up here.

And I have very few friends.

I wonder what she's here for. She doesn't look injured. Or sick.

Outside the room, a nurse is telling another nurse about “the time her one brother shot her other brother in the privates with a BB gun.” They're laughing and joking and being all *normal* while I'm in here contemplating my place in the world and wondering when I'm going to get out of here.

How did I let this happen to me? Not the accident, but the rest

of it. My life rolls out in front of me like an art film that nobody understands.

It wasn't supposed to go like this.

Plus, my head still feels like the Lord of the Dance took up residency there.

"Time to go back in."

"Ugh, already?"

I tune in to the conversation just outside my room. Apparently, the nurses are done talking about "the BB in the PP" and are now back to talking about work. I can hear the dread in their voices.

Is that because of me? Or my surly roommate?

"I have to check her vitals," the other one says. "I can't believe she's back already."

"I know," a voice says. "It's really sad, isn't it? And nobody's come to visit her. I think that's why they put her with the car crash victim."

I blink three times. Now they're talking about me.

"No visitors for either one of them."

"I know, I feel sad for them."

A sigh. "Okay. Wish me luck!"

The door to our room opens and I quickly slam my eyes shut, like a tween caught flashlight reading after bedtime. The nurse enters and walks over to Georgina's bed. The older woman must be sleeping because there's no angry berating going on.

I resist the urge to snag my phone and text everyone I work with to come in and make me look popular.

See? I have people! I have visitors!

I want the nurses to know I'm not a charity case. I'm not some loner.

I'm an editor.

Well, *assistant* editor. I'm working my way up. It's officially in a police notebook.

I know I'm trying to convince myself. Hopefully I'll be gone

tomorrow, and I can put this whole stupid experience behind me.  
And maybe I can work a little harder on getting a life.

.....

### *Georgina*

Another morning and I'm still alive.

Another morning and I'm back in this godforsaken hospital.  
Would it kill them to change the curtains once in a while?

My criminal roommate is clicking away on her laptop like she's just cracked the code to solve world hunger. And I know for a fact she's not supposed to be looking at screens because I've heard the nurse tell her so every time she's asked.

I've been in the hospital so many times this past year, you'd think they could've at least found me my own room.

JP, my assistant, has a call to make to Michael at McKenzie Capital Management, the company that owns this particular hospital.

Someone's going to lose their job.

I sit up in the bed, still attached to that ridiculous machine.

Still waiting to die.

It's not unlike that period between 5:00 p.m. and bedtime, where you're just waiting for sleep to take you so you can be done with the day.

Still waiting. *Still full of regret.*

I glance at the young woman across the room. "What in the world are you doing?"

She stops typing and looks at me. There's something familiar about her. Not familiar like I've seen her before—familiar because she reminds me of me.

Though a little self-confidence and some makeup would go a long way.

“Working,” she says. “I really don’t have time to be sitting in this stupid bed.”

I understand that on a spiritual level.

I’m not going to wax poetic about my being here, though. Unfortunately, it’s given me more than my fair share of time to think. More time than I wanted.

Regrets are more in focus when hindsight is 20/20.

Her gaze flits back to her laptop, a line of worry etched deep in her forehead.

I know that look.

I’m confronted with a memory of a younger version of myself, moments after giving birth, barking orders at my then assistant because “*I cannot fall behind.*”

There was always another deal to be closed. Another meeting to lead. Another point to prove. I didn’t have the luxury of relaxing, something Dylan never understood. In the early years, I let him whisk me away for a day on the boat, a weekend up north, anything to, as he called it, “help me recharge.”

When he left, I thought I was finally free to spend my time as I saw fit. I told myself that was a good thing.

But now, with the benefit of a lot of years and Death peeking at me through the curtains, I’m starting to see things differently.

Even now. This whole waiting thing is a complete waste of time.

If only my kidneys would fail already.

The woman’s phone buzzes beside her.

“I thought they told you no screens,” I say.

“Work won’t wait,” she says, her tone defensive. “And I texted my parents and work and a friend that I’m here.”

“You don’t have to tell me,” I say. “I’m not your doctor.”

She frowns. Her phone is still buzzing.

“Are you going to answer it?”

The woman pauses for a split second, then picks it up and clicks a button. “Tess.” A pause. “You saw it on the news?” A sigh. “I was

just drafting an email to explain to Charlie that I'll be out for a few days." She presses her fingers into the bridge of her nose. "I don't know—I hope later today?"

A nurse walks in. Her name is Belinda. She's a tall, heavysset Black woman, and I know they've sent her here to deal with me because she is the only one who doesn't put up with my attitude.

"You're back," Belinda says, busying herself with one of the machines.

"Disappointed?"

"That depends," she says. "Did you find me a Rum Berry lipstick in your stash?"

Regardless of how much I like her, I wish I didn't have a familiar relationship with this

woman. I'd rather be known by the barista in my neighborhood coffee shop, but JP always gets my coffee, and here we are.

I nod toward my Kate Spade bag. "It's in there."

"Ooooh! You remembered!" She puckers her lips. "You are so good to me, Miss Tate."

I pretend to be annoyed, but really, I like Belinda. I like that I can count on her to dish back whatever I give her. Very few people in my life have the guts to do that.

She picks up my bag and brings it over to me.

"It's in the inside pocket."

She starts rummaging through it, then pulls out the gold tube. The packaging on my cosmetics really is top notch. I want my customers to feel like they have something elegant, something that will make them feel a little richer than they are.

"You really did me dirty discontinuing this color." She opens the tube and presses the lipstick on her lips. "Bring it back?"

I raise a brow. "I'll think about it."

"Bring it back but rename it . . . *Belinda Berry*." She laughs that loud, hearty laugh.

"You've been thinking about that one for a while, haven't you?"

I try not to let on that I'm amused.

She responds with a fake air-kiss, then tucks the tube into the pocket of her scrubs and finds the blood pressure cuff that's hanging on a machine behind my head. "Did you call your son?"

I glance across the room, aware that my roommate is now off the phone and pretending *not* to listen. "You're nosy," I say to Belinda.

She waits for the cuff to tighten on my arm and flashes me a look. "And you're stubborn."

"There are things about my life you can't possibly understand."

She pulls the Velcro apart and rolls her eyes. "I understand you almost scared our new night nurse into quitting last night."

"She needs a thicker skin," I say. "The world I live in would eat her alive."

"We're not in your world, are we?"

"No, we are not," I say. "My world isn't nearly so *beige*."

"At least you brought your own pillow this time." Belinda rolls a little tray toward me. "They're bringing you breakfast. And you're going to eat it." She points a finger in my face. "Or I'll force-feed you."

"I'll have JP bring me something," I say. "This could be my last meal—I am not eating powdered eggs."

"You're so high-maintenance." Belinda rolls her eyes again. "And so dramatic."

I glance up at the clock. It's after eight and JP isn't here yet.

I hope he didn't also get hit by a car on the sidewalk.

Belinda turns to my roommate. "And how are you today, Miss Worthington?"

The younger woman wears a pained look. "I'm fine. I just need to get out of here. Do you know when I can go?"

"The doctor needs to come see you," Belinda says. "Did you fill out your breakfast preferences?"

I study the girl. I can't remember her first name. Kailey? Carrie?

Something with a *K* sound. Her dark hair falls past her shoulders, and her nails are manicured and bright red. I have a feeling she's as hard on herself as I was all those years ago, and for a fleeting moment, I want to tell her it's okay to relax once in a while.

Which would be completely hypocritical. Relaxing is the last thing on my mind. Contrary to my wishes, this trip to the hospital won't be my last. However, it is the most recent interruption to what I really need to be doing—choosing a successor and ensuring that everything I've built lives on long after I'm gone.

My thoughts turn to Hayden. I wasn't delusional enough to think that he'd want to take over my company, but I thought maybe he'd at least want a piece of it.

Being my son and all.

Belinda finishes with my roommate and leaves the room. The woman glances over at me. She knows who I am, which means there's a danger of my illness getting out once the woman is discharged. Which would be a disaster.

Better play nice.

"You know me," I say without looking at her.

"Yes," she says. "I do."

"How?"

"I saw the profile a few months ago in *New York Magazine*. But also, I use your entire skincare line."

"That's why you have a flawless complexion."

She blushes. "Thanks."

I eye her. "More of a compliment to myself."

Her face falls.

"You work in publishing."

She presses her lips together. "Yes."

"And some talented person is off your hook now that you're laid up?"

"We're trying to reschedule."

"I see," I say. "And this is someone important?"



“Could be,” she says. “I’m trying to prove to my boss that I have what it takes to

recognize talent. Instead of just managing people he brings in, which is all he’s really let me do.”

“Waiting for a man to let you do anything is pointless.”

She stops moving and looks at me.

“If I’d waited for permission, do you think I’d have my own company today?”

“Probably not.”

I look at her.

“Definitely not,” she amends.

I nod.

“Can I ask you something?” she asks.

“That depends.” I sigh. “I’ll only answer if I feel like it.”

She seems to be working up the courage for a moment, then finally asks, “Is it worth it?”

Well now.

I didn’t expect *that* question.

I fold my hands in my lap, realizing I need to cancel my manicure this week, unless Belinda can spring me from this prison. Maybe I can find someone to come here to do my nails. If there’s any chance of me dying this week, I’m not doing it with chipping polish.

I must have stayed silent for too long, because she adds, “The profile I read said you’d had to give up a lot to get where you are.”

“Success comes with a price,” I say, refusing to think about what success has cost me.

“So?”

I look over, and she’s watching me.

“Was it worth it?”

A short man pushes a tray into the room, saving me from having to confess anything real to this perfect stranger.

“Good morning, ladies,” he says. “Breakfast.”

“Breakfast implies edible,” I say. “That is not breakfast.”

“I know it’s not gourmet,” he says, trying to smooth things over, “but it’s what we have. And you still have to eat it.” He puts a plate covered with a plastic dome on the woman’s tray, then walks one over to me.

“You can take that away. I told the nurse I would have my meal delivered.”

“Apparently, she ignored you.” The man smiles, lifting the dome off the plate. “Biscuits and gravy! That should be nice and filling.”

“That would kill me even quicker,” I say. “If you think I’m eating that, you’re as big an idiot as you look.”

The man smiles without so much as a flinch. “Take it up with your nurse.”

He’s good. He might be tolerable.

“Believe me, I will.”

After he walks out, the doctor comes in to talk with the crash test dummy in the bed across from mine. She’s likely only got a few more hours locked up in this place—lucky stiff. Meanwhile, I’m here indefinitely with cursed food and offensive décor and contemplating what’s-her-name’s question.

*Is it worth it?*

I really, really wish I could say that it was.

But given my current circumstances, I’d be lying to myself if I did.

## About the Author



photo credit

COURTNEY WALSH is a novelist, theatre director, and playwright. She writes small town romance and women's fiction while juggling the performing arts studio and youth theatre she owns with her husband. She is the author of thirteen novels. Her debut, *A Sweethaven Summer*, hit the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestseller lists and was a Carol Award finalist. Her novel *Just Let Go* won the Carol in 2019, and three of her novels have also been Christy-award finalists. A creative at heart, Courtney has also written three craft books and several musicals. She lives in Illinois with her husband and three children.

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