

Two women trade jobs for one summer.

What could go wrong?



A NOVEL

# Just for the Summer



MELODY  
CARLSON

## **Praise for *Second Time Around***

“The uplifting latest from Carlson follows a fortysomething empty nester who moves from her stylish Victorian to a fixer-upper. This is perfect for fans of clean romance.”

*Publishers Weekly*

“This read is the perfect book to cuddle up with during a stormy weekend.”

*Interviews and Reviews*

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*Library Journal*

“Melody Carlson paints a vivid yet beautiful tale of finding old love and of forgiveness.”

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*Publishers Weekly*

“*The Happy Camper* is a cute, fun story filled with family drama and romance. Carlson’s writing pulls readers in and keeps them invested in the drama.”

*Life Is Story*

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for the  
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MELODY CARLSON



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Melody Carlson, *Just for the Summer*

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# one

## HOTEL JACKSON, SEATTLE

Ginny Masters rarely blew her temper. Today could prove the exception. She silently counted to ten while studying her boss's frosty expression. Diana Jackson, owner of Hotel Jackson Seattle, had to be one of the most difficult people on the planet. And working in the high end of the hospitality industry, where most guests at this boutique hotel acted overly entitled, Ginny had met more than her fair share of thorny people.

"I *know* I already informed you of that reception, *Genevieve*." Diana's nostrils actually flared. "I'm absolutely certain of it."

"If you *had* told me, I would've scheduled it accordingly." Ginny fingered the edges of her tablet, standing her ground, but knowing full well that Diana would win. Never mind that Diana had totally blanked on her best friend's daughter's last-minute wedding reception. It made no difference now. Ginny would receive the brunt of the blame for Diana's blunder—and be forced to pick up the pieces.

"Oh, I'll admit it was short notice when I told you." Diana's voice softened ever so slightly as she placed a placating hand on

Ginny's shoulder. A familiar gesture when Diana was about to manipulate the opposition to her advantage. "Poor Vivian was so distraught that her dear Rebecca planned to elope, I promised her the Skylight Room as a way to coax Rebecca back to sanity. After all, they are a very influential family in Seattle." Diana paused to stare up at the chandelier, rubbing her chin as if deep in thought or perhaps inspecting for dust.

Ginny decided to try empathy. "I can understand you wanting to help your friend out, but I—"

"I am certain Vivian booked this in early April. Maybe even March. And I told you about it the same day." Diana's softness turned brittle as she locked eyes with Ginny. "Rebecca's reception will be held right here. On Saturday night." Her hand slipped from Ginny's shoulder. "I will try to overlook your negligence to schedule it as you were instructed. It's not the first time you've let me down. *Now fix this!*"

"But the Bremmers' fiftieth wedding anniversary is booked here on Saturday night. It's been locked in since early February." Ginny tapped her tablet, pointing at the date.

"Then *unlock* it." Diana stepped back with a stony expression. "I don't care how you do it, just straighten out your mess!"

Ginny watched as Diana briskly crossed the ballroom, her clicking heels echoing up to the high ornate ceiling. To argue was pointless, but Ginny's heart went out to the Bremmers. The sweet couple attended her church. She'd known them for years. The most undemanding folks, always helping others. And although the Bremmer children had planned this wingding, she knew how much the elder Bremmers were looking forward to it. She also knew they'd be completely gracious about this double-booking. But their children . . . not so much.

As she hurried back to her office, she formulated a plan to "fix this" as Diana had commanded. And since Diana had said she didn't care how it was done, Ginny did what she often did. She took the matter completely into her own hands. By the end of the

day, she had convinced the oldest son, Thomas Bremmer, to accept the Skylight Room, gratis, for a rescheduled early afternoon celebration. To sweeten the deal, she promised if their festivities wrapped up by five o'clock, hotel drinks and hors d'oeuvres would be on the house as well. Knowing this was mostly a church crowd, she wasn't too worried about the bar bill, which is where most tabs ballooned.

"And the wedding reception flowers will be delivered Saturday morning," she told Thomas before hanging up. "So your party can have the enjoyment of those as well. I can assure you they will be gorgeous." And expensive, she thought, as she looked at the name of the florist in charge.

"Well, that's an offer that's hard to refuse," Thomas admitted. "I'll let my younger sister handle the task of notifying the guests."

"I'm truly sorry for this inconvenience. Thank you for understanding."

"Mom and Dad and their older friends will probably appreciate the earlier time anyway. No night owls in that crowd." He chuckled. "I hope you'll be able to join us, Ginny. I know my parents would love to see you there."

"I'll do my best," she said. "But that'll be a busy day for me." She closed her tablet. Thomas Bremmer was a nice enough guy and a successful CPA with his own firm. She'd even dated him a couple of times a few years ago. But he just wasn't her type. As she thanked him again and hung up, she vaguely wondered . . . What exactly was her type? Even if she found her type, would she ever have time for a real romance? Not as long as she was managing Hotel Jackson for its cantankerous owner. Diana Jackson assumed that Ginny was gratefully married to this job. Always treating her like it was such a privilege to be the head manager here. Maybe it was at first. But that was more than ten years ago.

"Ginny?" Adrian Jackson poked his head through her cracked open door. "Busy?"

“No more than usual,” she told him.

He grimaced. “So Mom told you about Rebecca’s wedding reception?”

She nodded grimly.

He entered her small, cluttered office and, leaning against the edge of her console table, folded his arms in front of him in a totally Adrian pose. “So you’re okay, then? I mean, I tried to warn Mom you already had something booked. I even had it on my schedule.” He shrugged with a furrowed brow. “But she seemed pretty determined. Sorry.”

“It’s all worked out now, Adrian. Don’t worry about it.”

“Oh, good. I figured you’d handle it, Ginny. You usually do.” He brightened. “I don’t know how you do it though, and I’m sure I could use some customer service lessons from you.” He chuckled. “But I’m just the bean counter here. I don’t have to be nice. Especially when it’s time to shake someone down.”

She couldn’t help but smile. Adrian wasn’t the type to shake anyone down. Sure, he was a reliable CFO for the hotel, but not highly motivated. Growing up rich probably hadn’t helped him in that department. Although she suspected even if he’d grown up like she had, his lackadaisical nature would still be laid-back. In a way, it was probably one of his best qualities. He was always calm. Sometimes irritatingly so.

“Any dinner plans tonight?” He stood up straight. “I know you’re supposed to get off at seven. I could probably get us into Le—”

“No thank you, Adrian.” She checked her watch. “I, uh, I already have a date tonight.”

“You do?” He looked just as crestfallen as he usually did when she turned him down. Wouldn’t he have gotten used to it by now? “Who with?”

“My bathtub.” She shoved her notepad into her bag.

“Aw, come on, Ginny. When was the last time you did something *just for fun*?”

She considered this. Of course, he was right, but she didn't plan to let him know that. "I'm exhausted, Adrian. It's been a long day, and I have to come in early tomorrow."

"How about a rain check, then?" He grinned. "It even goes with the weather."

"Oh, I don't think—"

"But my buddy Jean Pierre is managing Le Jardin now. I can make reservations for—"

"No, please, *don't*."

"Okay, how about this? I'll give you a ride home," he offered. "Then I'll call Ono's for takeout."

As tempting as that sounded, she knew she had to decline. For Adrian's sake. "No thanks."

"I don't get you, Ginny. Honestly, you're the worst workaholic I've ever known. Don't you remember what happens when you're all work and no play?"

"Yeah. Ginny's a dull girl." She forced a smile. "So you've told me before. Thanks."

He brightened. "So I can make us a reservation for, say, next week? I know you're going to love what Jean's done to the menu."

"As lovely as that sounds, please, let me think about it." She wouldn't have to think too long but didn't want to let him down too hard all at once . . . again.

"Okay, fine. If you don't want to go out tonight, why can't I bring sushi by your place?"

"No thanks, Adrian." She gave him her sternest look.

"Is this because of Mom?" His lower lip protruded slightly. "Has she said something to you recently?"

"No . . . I'm just really tired."

"Then just let me get you sushi." He reached for his phone. "I'll call it in now. I can still drive you home, and then I'll bring it back to you. I won't even stay to eat with—"

"No thanks." She grimaced and grimly shook her head.

"I know this is because of Mom."

“I’m just really tired,” she tried again. “Sorry to be such a party pooper.”

“Oh, Ginny.” He leaned forward, peering into her eyes. “Why do you let Mom keep you under her thumb like this?”

How many times had she told Adrian she liked him but wanted only his friendship? Yet he continued to blame Ginny’s coolness on his mother. To be fair, he wasn’t entirely wrong. Diana vehemently opposed Ginny dating her only son. Not that Ginny had ever wanted to seriously date Adrian. She simply tried to be politely friendly with him. “Look, Adrian,” she kept her tone gentle. “You know as well as I do that your mother doesn’t approve of—”

“What Mom doesn’t know won’t hurt her.”

“But it might hurt us.” Ginny felt relief when her phone rang. Waving Adrian away, she answered it. “This is Genevieve Masters,” she said in her usual courteous but efficient tone. Naturally, it was housekeeping again. Still complaining that the laundry was extra slow today. “I know they’re shorthanded, Rosaria. There’s a flu bug going around down there,” she told her head housekeeper. “I’ll speak to Lindsey again, but *please* try to make do in the meantime.”

“In the meantime, we’re nearly out of towels and pillowcases.”

“Right . . .” Ginny paused to think. “Hey, can you spare a couple of housekeepers? Ones who’d be willing to go down there and lend a hand for a day or two? I’ll even offer a little bonus.”

“That might tempt the Johnson twins. They’re always scrambling for money.”

“Great. I’ll call down to the laundry to arrange it and get back to you ASAP.”

Several phone calls and a little job juggling later, the linen problem was being resolved and everyone was moderately happy. But this was only Tuesday. As Ginny removed her heeled pumps and pulled on her walking Keds, she realized the hotel would get busier by the end of the week, and even more so with graduations and weddings around the corner. It was just life in a popular

boutique hotel in the heart of Seattle. But sometimes it felt exhausting and never-ending.

Not that Ginny was complaining. Managing Hotel Jackson more than ten years was pretty impressive for someone without a hospitality management degree. Something Diana regularly reminded Ginny of—usually right before job review time. Ginny’s educational status always provided Diana with her standard excuse for denying more than a minimal cost of living raise. Ginny knew that managers of similar hotels made more. Much more.

But it wasn’t just about the money. After all, Ginny had learned frugality as a child. Before becoming manager, she’d gotten lots of pinching-pennies practice working her way through the ranks in the hotel. But those experiences in the laundry, housekeeping, and restaurant all proved valuable to her later on. She understood the ins and outs of hotel management personally. And attaining the top management position here was no small deal for a girl with only two years of college.

At least it had felt that way when she was still in her twenties. Sometimes, especially of late, she wasn’t so sure. Diana was notorious for pulling a fast one like she’d done today. Almost as if she derived pleasure from watching Ginny squirm and then scramble to pull a rabbit from her hat. Sure, the challenges could be fun . . . sometimes. Especially when she succeeded.

But the stress was starting to catch up with her. And the demands of an unpredictable work schedule had taken their toll on her personal life. She laughed out loud as she pulled on her trench coat. *What personal life?* Adrian was right . . . Ginny didn’t know how to have fun. Had she ever?

Slipping out the rear employee exit, she frowned to see the deluge increasing the already oversized puddles on the sidewalk. Why hadn’t she worn her rain boots this morning? Wet weather wasn’t unusual for Seattle in spring, but the low clouds loitering atop the Sound looked gray and dreary . . . and gloomy and cold.

She was almost to her apartment complex when her cell phone

chimed. Seeing it was her baby sister, she eagerly answered. Gillian was Ginny's only flesh-and-blood relative in this world. And although Gillie was ten years younger, they had always been close. Even more so after their single mother died when Gillie was only eleven. That's why Ginny quit college and went to work full-time. It was the only way to take guardianship of her kid sister. But it had all been worth it. Especially now that Gillian was just finishing her last year of med school. The light at the end of their long, dark tunnel.

"What's up, sis?"

"Best news ever," Gillian gushed. "You're not going to believe it, Ginny!"

"Tell me!" Had Gillie already gotten a job?

"I've been invited to work at the Howard Institute."

"The Howard Institute?" Ginny stepped under an awning to avoid the rain and hear better. "A real job? Already?"

"Yes! The Howard Institute is this amazing cancer research clinic."

"That's awesome, Gillie! Congratulations!" Ginny was suddenly imagining the two of them moving into nicer housing outside of the noisy city.

"But one thing, Ginny. The institute is in Boston."

"Boston . . . really?" Ginny tried to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

"I know it's a long way off, Ginny, but this is a huge opportunity for me. The Howard Institute is renowned for its cutting-edge research."

"I know you've always wanted to specialize in oncology."

"And Dr. Billings is one of the most respected oncologists in the country."

Ginny took in a deep breath, willing enthusiasm as she stepped out from the protection of the awning. Feeling the cold runoff water going straight down the back of her neck, she hurried toward her apartment building just a couple doors down. "Then

even more congratulations are in order, Gillian. I'm so happy for you. You go, girl!"

"*Go girl*—across the country? So you're really okay with this, Ginny? I mean, we always talked about getting a house together after I finished—"

"Oh, those were kid dreams. The new dream is for you to go to Boston. Become a world-famous oncologist. And save lots of lives. We can always get a house together when we're old women with nothing better to do." Ginny forced a tinny laugh as she hopped past a mud puddle. Stopping by her apartment building, she ducked under its frayed canvas awning.

"I'm so glad you're okay with it, Gin. I promised to give them my answer by the end of the week. They want me to start right after graduation. This summer I'll be a research doctor!" She let out a happy squeal. "I'm so excited."

"I'm really, really proud of you."

"You know I never could've done it without you. As soon as I'm in a place where I can, I plan to pay you back for all—"

"Don't be silly. The way you pay me back is by succeeding. And I get bragging rights. I can tell everyone my baby sister is a famous oncologist."

Gillian laughed. "I'm so relieved you're okay with this. I have to go now. I'm on night shift at eight."

Ginny told her goodbye and went into her building. The cold lobby, damp with rain, smelled mustier than usual. One of the light fixtures appeared to be burned out, and the other flickered as if it were about to join it. As she removed and shook out her soaked trench coat, she tried not to think of how eagerly she'd been waiting to escape this dreary place. They'd moved here after Mom died. Mostly because of the proximity of Ginny's job. Plus, it was cheap.

Ginny would never tell Gillian, but she'd been perusing real estate websites lately. Printing a few photos out, filing them in a folder . . . and dreaming of the starter house they would buy

together as soon as Gillian started to practice medicine. Ginny had even managed to accrue a meager savings account to contribute to a down payment. She knew they'd have to start small. But she'd hoped for a little house with a big view, a cook's kitchen, and a real wood-burning fireplace. Well, that dream, like the rest of her life, would have to remain on hold for now.