

THERE YOU ARE. THE REAL YOU. I've always loved what summer brings out of you. Like a window into your deepest heart, we get to see your beauty so clearly. In the way your hair lightens up and you smell like soil and salt, like some great adventure was shared with your friends down the street.

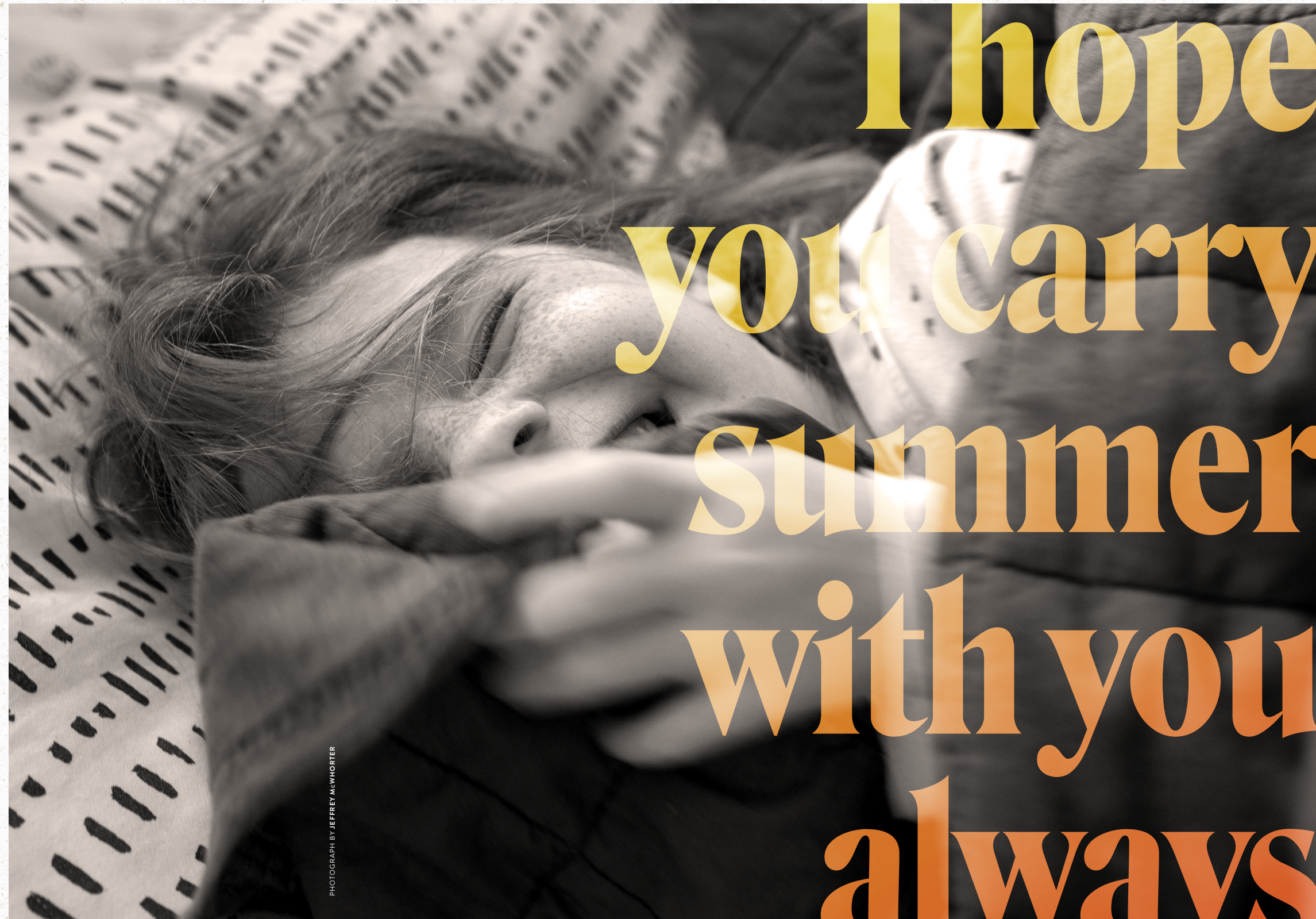
I see that beauty when freckles come out as a spread of stars on your skin. Your toes grip the edge of the high dive, and another freckle appears on your cheek. You collect a bundle of wildflowers, and another appears. You race your bike with abandon, and another appears. A great big laugh at the drive-in movie. A leap into the river. A skinned knee. With each moment, another freckle and another window into your beauty that's forever pouring out of your heart and your mind.

You're beautiful. Truly. Completely. And I don't want you to forget. That's the only reason that I worry about you growing up and leaving these summers behind, even though I can't wait to see which mountains you move in the years to come. But I've also noticed how time can start to convince people that maybe those freckles are imperfections—that maybe what's inside of them isn't enough or isn't quite right or isn't as good as everyone else—and those lies start to add up if we're not careful. My darling, never believe it.

You're the standard. No one else. And with every day that goes by, I see you turning into someone who is courageous for the right reasons. Who believes that fortune favors the kindhearted just as much as it favors the bold. Who is willing to jump into the unknown, trusting that there is love enough to hold you up. Those freckles are proof of the song that's growing stronger inside of you. Evidence that an endless summer is always within reach.

WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T FORGET.

story by CRAIG CUNNINGHAM



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY MCWHORTER

I hope
you carry
summer
with you
always