

Stay

Also by Deb Caletti

*The Queen of Everything*

*Honey, Baby, Sweetheart*

*Wild Roses*

*The Nature of Jade*

*The Fortunes of Indigo Skye*

*The Secret Life of Prince Charming*

*The Six Rules of Maybe*

# Stay

by DEB CALETTI

Simon Pulse

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real locales are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



SIMON PULSE

An imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division

1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

First Simon Pulse hardcover edition April 2011

Copyright © 2011 by Deb Caletti

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

SIMON PULSE and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949 or [business@simonandschuster.com](mailto:business@simonandschuster.com).

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event.

For more information or to book an event contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-248-3049 or visit our website at [www.simonspeakers.com](http://www.simonspeakers.com).

Designed by Mike Rosamilia

The text of this book was set in Scala.

Manufactured in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Caletti, Deb.

Stay / by Deb Caletti.—1st Simon Pulse hardcover ed.

p. cm.

Summary: In a remote corner of Washington State where she and her father have gone to escape her obsessive boyfriend, Clara meets two brothers who captain a sailboat, a lighthouse keeper with a secret, and an old friend of her father who knows his secrets.

ISBN 978-1-4424-0373-4 (hardcover)

[1. Fathers and daughters—Fiction. 2. Secrets—Fiction. 3. Islands—Fiction. 4. Dating (Social customs)—Fiction. 5. Stalking—Fiction. 6. Washington (State)—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.C127437St 2011

[Fic]—dc20 2010021804

ISBN 978-1-4424-0375-8 (eBook)

To Jen Klonsky—

For all that you do to bring our books into the world, and for doing it with such respect, care, and sisterly good fun . . . my thanks. This one's for you, Pal.

# Chapter 1

First off, I've never told this story to anyone. Not the entire thing anyway, and not entirely truthfully. I'm only telling it now for one reason, and that's because an untold story has a weight that can submerge you, sure as a sunken ship at the bottom of the ocean. I learned that. This kind of story, those kind of things kept secret—they have the power to keep you hidden forever, and most of all from yourself. The ghosts from that drowned ship, they keep haunting.

So here is the story. Sit back and make yourself comfortable and all that.

I met him at a basketball game.

Wait. You should also know that another friend of mine, Annie Willows, had asked me to go with her and her friends to El Corazon that night to hear some band and that I didn't go. If I had gone, all this might never have happened. The way

two people can end up in the same place, find each other in a crowd, and change their lives and the lives of the people around them forever . . . It makes you believe in fate. And fate gives love some extra authority. Like it's been stamped with approval from above, if you believe in above. A godly green light. Some destined *significance*.

Anyway.

My school was playing his, and I was there with my friend Shakti, who was watching her boyfriend Luke, number sixteen, who was at that moment sitting on the bench and drumming his fingers on his knee like he did when he was nervous. Inside the gym there was that fast, high energy crackle of competition and screaming fans and the squeak of tennis shoes stopping and starting on shiny floors.

He was with another girl; that was one thing. I was aware of her only vaguely as she moved away from him. She maneuvered sideways through the crowd, purse over her shoulder, heading to the bathroom, maybe. His eyes followed her and then landed on me, and by the time she came back, it was over for her, though she didn't know it. That sounds terrible, and I still feel bad about it. But something had already been set in motion, and I wonder and wonder how things would have been if I'd have just let that moment pass, the one where our eyes met. If I had just taken Shakti's arm and moved off, letting the electrical jolt that passed between us fade off, letting the girl return to his side, letting fate head off in another direction entirely, where he would have kept his eyes fixed on the girl with the purse or on another girl entirely.

## Stay

My father, Bobby Oates\*, said that love at first sight should send you running, if you know what's good for you. It's your dark pieces having instant recognition with their dark pieces, he says. You're an idiot if you think it means you've met your soul mate. So I was an idiot. He looked so *nice*. He *was* nice. After Dylan Ricks, I was looking for nice. Dylan Ricks once held my arm behind my back and then twisted so hard that I heard something pop.

"Thirsty!" I yelled to Shakti, and she nodded. I moved away from her, followed the line of his eyes until I was standing next to him. I wish you knew me, because you'd appreciate what this meant. I would never just go walking up to some guy. I would never ignore the fact that his girlfriend was right then in the bathroom putting on new lip gloss. Never. I was nice and my friends were nice, which meant we lacked the selfish, sadistic overconfidence of popularity. But I didn't care about that girl right then. It's awful, and I'm sorry, but it was true. I kind of even hated me for it, but it was like I *had* to do what I was going to do. I can't explain it. I wish I could. He was very tall and broad shouldered, white-blond hair swooped over his forehead, good-looking, oh, yeah, with those impossible, perfectly designed Scandinavian features. Still, it wasn't just his looks. It was some *pull*. The ball hit hard against the backboard, which shuddered and clattered. The ref's whistle shrieked and the crowd yelled its cheers and protests.

I held my hands up near my ears. "Loud," I said to him.

He leaned in close. His voice surprised me. He had this

.....

\* It sounds familiar because you *have* heard of him. Crime writer, or, as the critics say, "contemporary noir." *Her Emerald Eyes*, among others. Yeah, you saw the movie, too.

accent. It was lush and curled, with the kind of lilt and richness that made you instantly think of distant cities and faraway lands—the kind of city you’d see in a foreign film, with a snow-banked river winding through its center, stone bridges crossing to an ornate church. Ice castles and a royal family and coats lined with fur. The other guys in that gym—they watched ESPN and slunked in suburban living rooms and slammed the doors of their mothers’ minivans. See—I had already made him into someone he would never be, and I didn’t know it then, but he was already doing the same with me, too.

“I don’t even know what I’m doing here,” he said. “I actually hate sports.”

I laughed. “How many people here are secretly wishing they were somewhere else?”

He looked around. Shook his head. “Just us.”

I was wishing that, all right. I was wishing we were *both* somewhere else. A somewhere together. A warm heat was starting at my knees, working its way up. “I’ve got to . . .” I gestured toward Shakti.

“Right,” he said.

I made my way back to Shakti, who was standing on her toes at the sidelines, trying to see Luke, who had been called in to the game and who was now dribbling the ball down the court in his shiny gold shorts. “He’s in,” she said. “Oh, please, God, let him not do what he did last time.”

But I was too distracted to actually watch and see if Luke would accidentally pass the ball to an opposing teammate as he had during the last game. My focus had shifted, my whole

## Stay

focus—one moment he wasn't there and then he was, and my mind and body were buzzing with awareness and hope and uncertainty. You have ordinary moments and ordinary moments and more ordinary moments, and then, suddenly, there is something monumental right there. You have past and future colliding in the present, your own personal Big Bang, and nothing will ever be the same.

That was the point, there, then, when I should have shaken it off and gone on. I see it like an actual road in my mind, forking off. I should have kept my eyes on Luke with his sky-length legs and skinny chest; I should have cheered when he passed that ball just as he should have, to number twenty-four, who shot a clean basket. I should have stayed in that moment and moved on from *that* moment, when Shakti grabbed my arm and squeezed. Instead, I watched him as he headed through the crowd, and he looked back at me and our eyes met again before he disappeared.

It was already too late. Basically, two springs and two summers and the sea and the haunting had all already happened.