

Love Is All You Need: Wild Roses; The Nature of Jade

By Deb Caletti



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Love may or may not be all you actually need, but it's easy to feel that it is when you're wrapped up in one of these two stories from Deb Caletti.

In *Wild Roses*, Cassie is in love, but she can't let her stepfather know. Her mom's husband is a beloved public figure, but a private nightmare whose manic phases and paranoia are getting worse. Cassie begins to fear for the safety of her boyfriend...and herself.

In *The Nature of Jade*, Jade struggles with Panic Disorder. Her boyfriend is a calming influence...until she learns that he's hiding a terrible secret. A secret that will force Jade to decide between what is right—and what feels right.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Deb Caletti is an award-winning author and National Book Award finalist. Her many books for young adults include *Stay*; *The Nature of Jade*; and *Honey, Baby, Sweetheart*, winner of the Washington State Book Award and the PNBA Best Book Award, and a finalist for the PEN USA Award. Her books for adults include *He's Gone* and her latest release, *The Secrets She Keeps*. She lives with her family in Seattle.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter One

To say my life changed when my mother married Dino Cavalli (yes, *the* Dino Cavalli) would be like saying that the tornado changed things for Dorothy. There was only one other thing that would impact my life so much, and that was when Ian Waters drove up our road on his bicycle, his violin case sticking out from a compartment on the side, and his long black coat flying out behind him.

My stepfather was both crazy and a genius, and I guess that's where I should start. If you've read about him recently, you already know this. He was a human meteor. Supposedly there's an actual, researched link between extreme creativity and mental illness, and I believe it because I've seen it with my own eyes. Sure, you have the artists and writers and musicians like my mom, say, who are talented and calm and get things done without much fuss. The closest she gets to madness is when she gets flustered and calls me William, which is our dog's name. But then there are the van Goghs and Hemingways and Mozarts, those who feel a hunger so deep, so far down, that greatness lies there too, nestled somewhere within it. Those who get their inner voice and direction from the cool, mysterious insides of the moon, and not from the earth like the rest of us. In other words, brilliant nuts.

I guess we should also begin with an understanding, and that is, if you are one of those easily offended people who insist that every human breath be politically correct, it's probably best we just part company now. I'll loan you my copy of *Little House in the Big Woods* (I actually loved it when I was eight) and you can disappear into prairie perfection, because I will not dance around this topic claiming that Dino Cavalli was joy-impaired (hugely depressed), excessively imaginative (delusional), abundantly security conscious (paranoid as hell), or emotionally challenged (wacko). I'm not talking about your mentally ill favorite granny or sick best uncle—I'm not judging anyone else who's ill. This is my singular experience. I've lived it; I've earned the right to describe how it felt from inside my own skin. So if your life truths have to be protected the same way some people keep their couches in plastic, then ciao. Have a nice life. If we bump into each other at Target, I'm the one buying the sour gummy worms, and that's all you need to know about me.

Anyway, madness and genius. They're the disturbed pals of the human condition. The Bonnie and Clyde, the Thelma and Louise, the baking soda and vinegar. Insanity just walks alongside the brilliant like some creepy, insistent shadow. Edgar Allan Poe, Virginia Woolf, Charles Dickens. William Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Cézanne, Gauguin. Tolstoy, Sylvia Plath, Keats, and Shelley. Walt Whitman and F. Scott Fitzgerald and Michelangelo. All wacko. And we can't forget the musicians, because this story is about them, especially. Schumann and Beethoven, Chopin and Handel, and Rachmaninov and Liszt. Tchaikovsky and Wagner.

And, of course, Dino Cavalli.

In that group you've got every variety of creation: the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and *Farewell to Arms* and the epic poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which, if you ask me, finds its true greatness as a cure for insomnia. You've also got every variety of crazy act. You've got the gross—van Gogh slicing off his earlobe and giving it to a woman (you can just hear her—*Damn, I was hoping for chocolates*), and the unimaginable—Virginia Woolf filling her pockets with stones to hold her down in the river so that she could do an effective job of drowning. And even the funny—the reason our dog is named William, for example, is because Dino Cavalli bought him during a particularly bad bout of paranoia and named him for his enemy and former manager and agent, William Tiero. He liked the idea of this poor, ugly dog named William that would eat used Kleenex if he had the chance. He liked yelling at William for getting too personal with guests. I can hear his voice even now, in his Italian accent. *Get your nose out of Mrs. Kadinsky's crotch, William,* he'd say with mock seriousness, and everyone would picture William Tiero with his bald head and beetle eyes, and they would laugh. Man, oh, man. You didn't want to get on Dino Cavalli's bad side.

Some people think the brilliant have been touched by God, and if this is true then Dino Cavalli got God on the day he was wearing black leather and listening to his metal CDs, feeling a bit twisted and in the kind of mood where you laugh at people when they fall down. God wearing a studded collar. Because, sure, Dino Cavalli was a world-renowned composer and violinist, a combination of talent virtually unheard of, but there were days he didn't get out of bed, even to shower. And, sure, he wrote and performed *Amore Innamorato*, said to, "have moments of such brutal tenderness and soulful passion that it will live forever in both the hearts of audience members and the annals of modern composing,"1 as well as the unforgettable *Artemisia* ("breathtaking and heart-stopping work with the brilliance of the seventeenth-century masters."2), but he also had the ability to make you feel small to the point of disappearance. His perfectionism could shatter your joy like a bullet through a stained glass window.

What I'm saying is, he possessed magnificent and destructive layers. Either that or he was just plain possessed. I mean, it all got toned down in the papers, but we all know what could have happened to William Tiero that day. We all now know what happens when you self-destruct. Yet I've got to say, listening to his music can make you cry. Goose bumps actually rise up along your arms.

Everyone wants to get close to genius and fame, claim pieces of it, mostly because it's the closest they'll ever get to fame themselves. You learn this when you live with someone renowned. Those who know that Dino Cavalli was my stepfather think I'm near enough to fame to call it good. Fame, the nearness of it, the possibility of it rubbing off, seems to turn people into obsessed Tolkien characters, hypnotized not by a ring but by the thought of getting on TV. Luckily at my school, most of the kids who hear the name Dino Cavalli will think it's some brand of designer shoes. To the majority I am just Cassie Morgan, regular seventeen-year-old trying to figure out what to do with my life and hoping my jeans are clean and swearing at myself for cutting my own bangs again. Few know my stepfather was once on the cover of *Time* magazine, or was also well known for the journals in which he wrote of his sexual adventures as a young composer in Paris. Everyone is too involved in the school game of How Orange Is Tiffany Morris's Makeup Today to care, even if they did. But the teachers and orchestra students, they know who I am, and I see what it means to them. Once during a school concert this kid was staring so hard at me that he accidentally stepped into an open viola case and wore it like an overgrown shoe for a few seconds on the gym floor.

And then there's Siang Chibo, who used to follow me home every day. She would walk far behind me and duck behind trees when I turned around, like some cartoon spy. She once tripped over a tree root in the process and spewed the contents of her backpack all over the place. You couldn't find a more incompetent stalker. I went over to her after she fell, and her palms even had those little pockmarks on them from landing on gravel. Now we have a Scrooge–Tiny Tim partnership of reluctant giving and nauseating gratitude. To Siang, I'm second in line in the worship chain of command, right after Dino. If people look at the famous as

if they've been touched by God, then they look at those close to the famous as the ones who have seen Jesus' face in the eggplant.

You would have never recognized the Dino I lived with in the books that had been written about him before the "incident." No one had a clue. No one seemed to see what was coming. His demons were the real truth, but those who clutched at his fame made him into someone else. Just listen to Irma Lattori, a villager from Sabbotino Grappa, interviewed in Edward Reynolds's *Dino Cavalli—The Early Years: An Oral History*, the much-quoted source of Dino's childhood. It's his only authorized biography, in which the people who knew him then tell the events of his life.

Everyone in Sabbotino Grappa knew Dino Cavalli had that special light, Irma says in the book. From the time he was an infant. I would see his mother, Maria, walk him around in his carriage. She was a beautiful woman with round, warm eyes. She always dressed elegantly, oh, so rich. She had tucked a peacock feather in the back of his carriage. It rose up, like a grand flag. You want to know where he got Un Cielo Delle Piume Del Peacock? That was his inspiration. Maria always appreciated the unusual. She wore hats, even when no one wore hats. Stunning. No wonder he became a ladies' man. He was born, you see, taking in the world and using it in his work. Born to beauty and greatness. He couldn't have been more than six months old, this time I am remembering. He reached his hands up to me when I bent to look at him. He wanted me to hold him. He wouldn't let my sister Camille go near him.3

And Frank Mancini, gardener, another one of the villagers from tiny Sabbotino Grappa: A beautiful garden, beautiful. Four hundred years old. Magnolias in the spring. Plumbagos, hibiscus in the summer. Lemon trees and figs. An olive garden. I worked my fingers to the bone. Now I cannot tie my own shoe, my fingers are so crippled. But it was a beautiful garden, and you could hear the child playing the violin through the open window. Small boy, not more than four years old, and he played the violin! A divine gift. His mother played the piano. Music was in his veins. And the smell of lemon trees. I didn't mind that the father was cheap and barely paid me enough to buy food.4

All in all, as gagging as a dental X-ray.

"No one ever mentions that he is a wife-stealing psycho," my father said once after Dino was featured in the entertainment section of the newspaper—FAMED MUSICIAN SEEKS LOCAL INSPIRATION. He tossed the paper down on his kitchen table. "With bad breath."

"You haven't even been close enough to him to smell his breath," I said.

"Who says you have to be close," my father said. Let's just say my father didn't read the divorce books that say you are not supposed to talk badly about the other parent and the other parent's partner. Actually, I think he probably did read them, but has somehow convinced himself that only my mother is required to follow these rules. He ignores the other Divorced Parenting Don'ts too, the ones where you aren't supposed to grill your kid about what happens in the other home. Sometimes he tries to be casual about his fishing around, and other times it's like I'm in one of those movies where the criminal sits under the bare lightbulb in a room and after twelve hours confesses to a crime he didn't commit.

My parents were divorced three years ago, and my mother married Dino five days after the divorce was final. Do the math and figure out what happened. If you've been through this, you know the vocabulary. Parenting plan, custody evaluation, visitation, court orders, mediation, transfer time. And can anyone say *restraining order*? I can talk with my friend Zebe about these things. Ever since I met her in Beginning Spanish we've spoken the same language, in more ways than one. Her new stepfather may not be famous, but we

understand the most important things about each other. She knows that you really don't give a crap about who gets you on Labor Day, that *no-fault divorce* are the three stupidest words ever spoken, and that you are not split as easily as your parents' old Commodores albums, and there was even a war over those.

"Barry Manilow, in my house. Not Commodores," Zebe told me once. "Which they both hated, by the way. For a week they were flying e-mails at each other over the goddamn F-ing *Copacabana* LP. They each accused the other of taking it. 'Did your mother find my "missing" album yet?' 'Next time you go to your father's, look for my stolen record.' God."

"Was anyone hurt?" I asked.

"Aside from the e-mail bloodbath, the only thing that was hurt was both of their egos when one of them finally remembered that they brought the album to some party back in the seventies and left it there on purpose."

"You wonder why they ever got married."

"Mi mono toca la guitarra," she said. *My monkey plays the guitar*. It's what she wrote on every Spanish test question she didn't know the answer to. I cracked up. Zebe's the greatest.

If my father treated my time at my mother's house as if he were the gold miner panning for The Dirt of Wrongdoing, my mother, on the other hand, would listen to any news of my father the same way someone who had plans to stay inside listens to a weather forecast. Hearing just enough to make sure there was no tornado coming. This is one difference between the leaver and the left, the dumper and the dumpee. The dumpee has the moral righteousness, and the desire to hear every dirty fact that will prove that *You get what you deserve in the end*. The dumper has the guilt, and wants to know as little about the other party as possible, in case they hear something that will make them feel even more guilty.

"Dad's got a new client. Some big Microsoft person," I told Mom once. It was after she and Dino had first gotten married, and I was starting to get a real clear picture of what she'd gotten us into. I guess I was hoping she was seeing, too, and that a little nudge in Dad's direction might help along the underdog. I hadn't learned yet that in terms of divorce, your only real hope is not to play team sports.

"Oh, really. Good for him," she said. She was braiding her long hair. She had a rubber band in her teeth. *Oh, weewy. Ood for him.* She finished the braid, put her arms down. "I need to find my overalls. I'm planting tulip bulbs today. Planting just calls for overalls." She went to her closet, flung open the doors.

"It'll bring him a lot of money," I said. My father was an accountant. He was a white undershirt in a world of silk ties and berets and pashmina. He was a potato amongst pad Thai and curry and veal scallopini. He was still madly in love with my mother. He didn't have a chance.

"Great," she said. "My God, look at this mess. The man is incapable of hanging anything up." She said this with a great deal of affection, poked a toe at a pile of Dino's shirts. "Overalls, overalls. Bingo." She held them up.

"You're not even listening."

"I'm listening, I'm listening. You're just making me feel like I'm in some *Parent Trap* movie. You're not going to put frogs in Dino's shoes or something, are you?"

Mom's unwillingness to get involved may have also had to do with her own experience of her parent's divorce. Thirty-two years after the end of their marriage, she still can't tell one of her parents that she's visiting the other, or she'll be punished with coldness, hurt, and upset. Thirty-two years later, and her mother still refers to her father's wife as That Tramp.

"I thought you'd like to know. Jesus, Mom."

"Good. Thanks for telling me. You're not the *Parent Trap* type anyway. What was the name of that actress? Started with an H. Heather. Hayley! Mills. God, how'd I remember that? You, girl, are not Hayley Mills. I'd like to see them put you in a remake. Disney'd ditch the hemp bracelet. Don't you think? Too edgy."

"I hope squirrels dig up your tulip bulbs," I said.

She socked my arm. "You know how much I respect you. I like your hemp bracelet."

Respect—that was what was lacking in the other member of our household. Dino didn't respect me, or my mother, either, for that matter. Or anyone who wasn't his own perfect self. See, Dino hadn't always acted crazy. For a while, he was just plain arrogant. Dino was fluent in criticism, as generous in spirit as those people who keep their porch lights off all Halloween. If my mom was dressed up to go out and looking beautiful, he'd point out her pimple. If you opened the wrong end of the milk carton, he'd make you feel you were incapable to the point of needing to be institutionalized. After I'd bought this jacket with fur around the collar and cuffs at Old Stuff, Dino had pointedly told me that people who tried to make some statement of individuality were still only conventional among those of their group.

"I'm not trying to make a statement," I said. I was trying to keep the sharpness out of my voice, but it was like trying to hold water in your hands—my tone was seeping through every crack and opening possible.

"I didn't say you were. Did I say you were? It was a commentary on dress and group behavior," he said in his Italian accent. He chewed a bite of chicken. He was a loud, messy eater. You could hear the chicken in there smacking around against his tongue. His words were offhand, casually bragging that they meant more to me than they did to him. "By avoiding conventions, one falls into other conventions." He plucked a bit of his shirt to indicate someone's clothing choice. I felt the ugly curl of anger starting in my stomach.

"I'm sorry, I just don't want to be one of those See My Thong girls who bat their eyelashes at boys, rah rah rah, wearing a demoralizing short skirt and bending over so a crowd sees their butt," I said. "That's convention." Anger made my face get hot.

"Be who you like. I was simply making an observation. You don't need to bite me with your feminist teeth."

Honestly, I don't know how my mother didn't poison his coffee. Certainly I wondered what the hell she was thinking by loving him. If this is what could happen to a supposedly charming, romantic guy, then no, thank you. And this was before everything happened, even. Before Dino's craziness became like a roller coaster car, rising to unbelievable heights, careening down with frightening speed; before he started teaching Ian Waters; before he began composing again and preparing for his comeback after a three-year dry spell. But in spite of what must have been perfect attendance in asshole classes, Dino was one of those people who got under your skin because you cared what they thought when you wished you didn't. So after that conversation I did the only thing I could. I wore the coat the next day, too. The truth was, I wasn't sure I liked it either. It was vaguely Wilma Flintstone and Saber Tooth Tiger. Little hairs fell into my Lucky Charms.

Because I wanted his approval and hated that fact, I did what I could to make sure I didn't get it at all. One of those things you should be in therapy for. Before I met Ian Waters, for example, I had no interest in music, which was an act of will living in a house where my mother was a cellist and my stepfather a prominent violinist and composer. But Ian Waters changed that about me, and everything else, too. Before I met Ian the music I liked best was something that sounded, if Dino was right, *like your mother hunting for the meat thermometer in the drawer of kitchen utensils*. My interest was in astronomy—science, something that was mine and that was definite and exact. I felt that the science of astronomy existed within certain boundaries that were firm and logical. If you think about how vast the universe is, this gives you some idea of how huge and wild I thought the arts were.

After three years of living with Dino Cavalli, I had had enough of people of passion. Passion seemed dangerous. I'd seen the tapes of his performances, the way he had his chin to his violin as if he were about to consume it, the way his black hair would fly out as he played, reaching crescendo, eyes closed. It made you feel like you needed to hold on to something. I'd never felt that kind of letting go before. It all seemed one step away from some ancient tribal possession. And that crescent scar on his neck. That brown gash that had burned into him from hours and hours and hours of the violin held against his skin. He had played until the instrument had made a permanent mark, had become part of his own body. If Chuck and Bunny are right, and everyone should *hunger for life and its banquet*, I would rather have the appetite of my neighbor Courtney and her two brothers, over Dino's. All Courtney and her brothers hungered for in life was a box of Junior Mints and MTV, fed straight through the veins. Dino, he could inhale an emotional supermarket and still be ravenous.

Right then, the only thing I was hungry for was to have Dino Cavalli, this flaming, dying star, out of my universe. It was the only thing I would dare be passionate about. That is, until Ian Waters veered into our driveway on his bike, his tires scrunching in the gravel, scaring Otis, the neighbors' cat, who ran across the grass like his tail was on fire. Otis was running for his life. In a way, that was when I began finally running to mine.

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