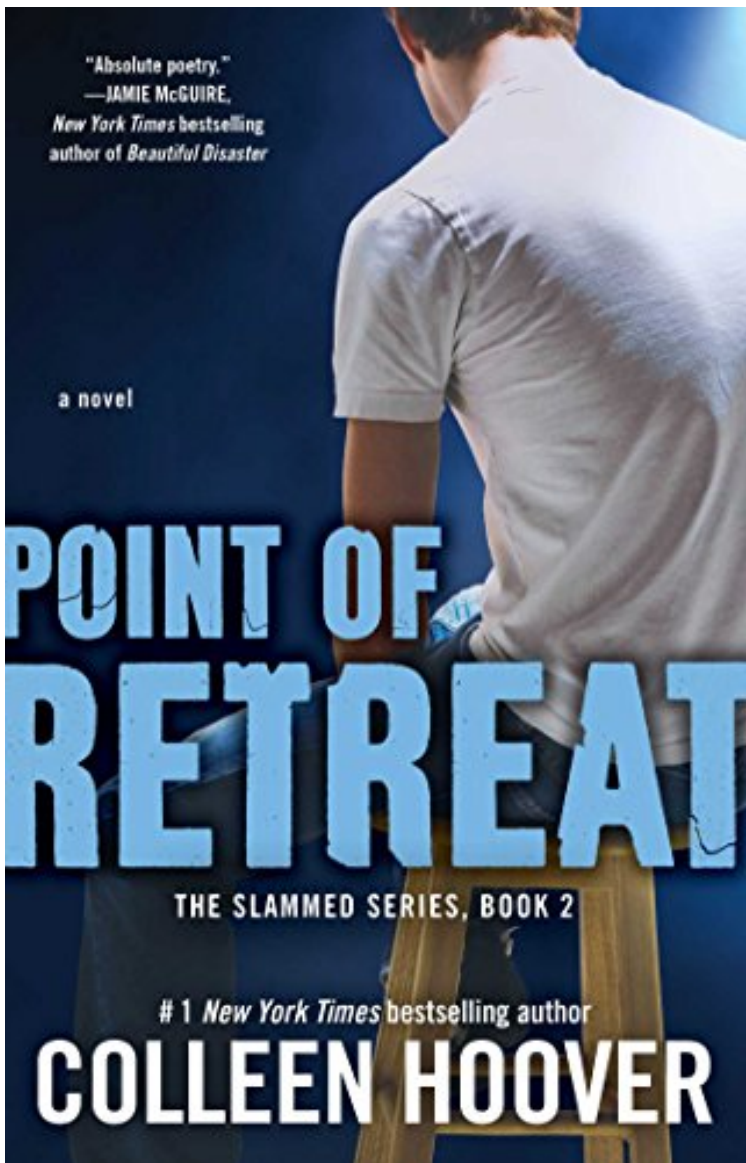


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# Point of Retreat: A Novel



*Par Colleen Hoover*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSometimes two people have to fall apart to realize just how much they belong together. Colleen Hoover entranced readers everywhere with her bestselling novel Slammed, the book that introduced Layken and Will, a young couple whose love overcame devastating hardships to emerge stronger and more resilient than before. Now, as Layken and Wills emotion-packed story continues, a stunning and unforeseen revelation about Wills past leaves them questioning everything that they thought they knew about each other. With the foundation of their relationship at risk, they must decide whether they are willing to fight for a future together, or to retreat back into solitude and heartache. How far does Will have to go to prove to Layken his love for her will last forever? It will require something truly extraordinary to keep this couple

together, and the decisions they make and the answers they find will change not only their lives, but the lives of everyone around them. Colleen Hoover's second novel is just as brilliant and entertaining as Slammed.

Point of Retreat is absolute poetry. Jamie McGuire, author of Beautiful Disaster  
Point of Retreat 1.  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 5 I registered for classes today. Didn't get the days I wanted, but I only have two semesters left, so it's getting harder to be picky about my schedule. I'm thinking about applying to local schools for another teaching job after next semester. Hopefully, by this time next year, I'll be teaching again. For right now, though, I'm living off student loans. Luckily, my grandparents have been supportive while I work on my masters degree. I wouldn't be able to do it without them, that's for sure. We're having dinner with Gavin and Eddie tonight. I think I'll make cheeseburgers. Cheeseburgers sound good. That's all I really have to say right now... IS LAYKEN OVER HERE OR OVER THERE? EDDIE ASKS, peering in the front door. Over there, I say from the kitchen. Is there a sign on my house instructing people not to knock? Lake never knocks anymore, but her comfort here apparently extends to Eddie as well. Eddie heads across the street to Lake's house, and Gavin walks inside, tapping his knuckles against the front door. It's not an official knock, but at least he's making an attempt. What are we eating? he asks. He slips his shoes off at the door and makes his way into the kitchen. Burgers. I hand him a spatula and point to the stove, instructing him to flip the burgers while I pull the fries out of the oven. Will, do you ever notice how we somehow always get stuck cooking? It's probably not a bad thing, I say as I loosen the fries from the pan. Remember Eddie's Alfredo? He grimaces when he remembers the Alfredo. Good point, he says. I call Kel and Caulder into the kitchen to have them set the table. For the past year, since Lake and I have been together, Gavin and Eddie have been eating with us at least twice a week. I finally had to invest in a dining room table because the bar was getting a little too crowded. Hey, Gavin, Kel says. He walks into the kitchen and grabs a stack of cups out of the cabinet. Hey, Gavin responds. You decide where we're having your party next week? Kel shrugs. I don't know. Maybe bowling. Or we could just do something here. Caulder walks into the kitchen and starts setting places at the table. I glance behind me and notice them setting an extra place. We expecting company? I ask. Kel invited Kiersten, Caulder says teasingly. Kiersten moved into a house on our street about a month ago, and Kel seems to have developed a slight crush on her. He won't admit it. He's just now about to turn eleven, so Lake and I expected this to happen. Kiersten's a few months older than he is, and a lot taller. Girls hit puberty faster than boys, so maybe he'll eventually catch up. Next time you guys invite someone else, let me know. Now I need to make another burger. I walk to the refrigerator and take out one of the extra patties. She doesn't eat meat, Kel says. She's a vegetarian. Figures. I put the meat back in the fridge. I don't have any fake meat. What's she gonna do? Eat bread? Bread's fine, Kiersten says as she walks through the front door without knocking. I like bread. French fries, too. I just don't eat things that are a result of unjustified animal homicide. Kiersten walks to the table and grabs the roll of paper towels and starts tearing them off, laying one beside each plate. Her self-assurance reminds me a little of Eddie's. Who's she? Gavin asks, watching Kiersten make herself at home. She's never eaten with us before, but you wouldn't know that by how she's taking command. She's the eleven-year-old neighbor I was telling you about. The one I think is an imposter based on the things that come out of her mouth. I'm beginning to suspect she's really a tiny adult posing as a little redheaded child. Oh, the one Kel's crushing on? Gavin smiles, and I can see his wheels turning. He's already thinking of ways to embarrass Kel at dinner. Tonight should be interesting. Gavin and I have become pretty close this past year. It's good, I guess, considering how close Eddie and Lake are. Kel and Caulder really like them, too. It's nice. I like the setup we all have. I hope it stays this way. Eddie and Lake finally walk in as we're all sitting down at the table. Lake has her wet hair pulled up in a knot on top of her head. She's wearing house shoes, sweatpants, and a T-shirt. I love that about her, the fact that she's so comfortable here. She takes the seat next to mine and leans in and kisses me on the cheek. Thanks, babe. Sorry it took me so long. I was trying to register online for Statistics, but the class is full. Guess I'll have to go sweet-talk someone at the admin office tomorrow. Why are you taking Statistics? Gavin asks. He grabs the ketchup and squirts it on his plate. I took Algebra Two in the winter mini-semester. I'm trying to knock out all my math in the first year, since I hate it so much. Lake grabs the ketchup out of Gavin's hands and squirts some on my plate, then on her own. What's your hurry? You've already got more credits than Eddie and I do, put together, he says. Eddie nods in agreement as she takes a bite of her burger. Lake nudges her head toward Kel and Caulder. I've already got more kids than you and Eddie put together. That's my hurry. What's your major? Kiersten asks Lake. Eddie glances toward Kiersten, finally noticing the extra person seated at the table. Who are you? Kiersten looks at Eddie and smiles. I'm Kiersten. I live diagonal to Will and Caulder, parallel to Layken and Kel. We moved here from Detroit right before Christmas. Mom says we needed to get

out of the city before the city got out of us... whatever that means. Im eleven. Ive been eleven since eleven-eleven-eleven. It was a pretty big day, you know. Not many people can say they turned eleven on eleven-eleven-eleven. Im a little bummed that I was born at three oclock in the afternoon. If I would have been born at eleven-eleven, Im pretty sure I could have got on the news or something. I could have recorded the segment and used it someday for my portfolio. Im gonna be an actress when I grow up. Eddie, along with the rest of us, stares at Kiersten without responding. Kiersten is oblivious, turning to Lake to repeat her question. Whats your major, Layken? Lake lays her burger down on her plate and clears her throat. I know how much she hates this question. She tries to answer confidently. I havent decided yet. Kiersten looks at her with pity. I see. The proverbial undecided. My oldest brother has been a sophomore in college for three years. Hes got enough credits to have five majors by now. I think he stays undecided because hed rather sleep until noon every day, sit in class for three hours, and go out every night, than actually graduate and get a real job. Mom says thats not trueshe says its because hes trying to discover his full potential by examining all of his interests. If you ask me, I think its bullshit. I cough when the sip I just swallowed tries to make its way back up with my laugh. You just said bullshit! Kel says. Kel, dont say bullshit! Lake says. But she said bullshit first, Caulder says, defending Kel. Caulder, dont say bullshit! I yell. Sorry, Kiersten says to Lake and me. Mom says the FCC is responsible for inventing cuss words just for media shock value. She says if everyone would just use them enough, they wouldnt be considered cuss words anymore, and no one would ever be offended by them. This kid is hard to keep up with! Your mother encourages you to cuss? Gavin says. Kiersten nods. I dont see it that way. Its more like shes encouraging us to undermine a system flawed through overuse of words that are made out to be harmful, when in fact theyre just letters, mixed together like every other word. Thats all they are, mixed-up letters. Like, take the word butterfly, for example. What if someone decided one day that butterfly is a cuss word? People would eventually start using the word butterfly as an insult and to emphasize things in a negative way. The actual word doesnt mean anything. Its the negative association people give these words that make them cuss words. So, if we all just decided to keep saying butterfly all the time, people would stop caring. The shock value would subside, and it would become just another word again. Same with every other so-called bad word. If we would all start saying them all the time, they wouldnt be bad anymore. Thats what my mom says, anyway. She smiles and takes a french fry and dips it in ketchup. I often wonder, when Kierstens visiting, how she turned out the way she did. I have yet to meet her mother, but from what Ive gathered, shes definitely not ordinary. Kiersten is obviously smarter than most kids her age, even if it is in a strange way. The things that come out of her mouth make Kel and Caulder seem somewhat normal. Kiersten? Eddie says. Will you be my new best friend? Lake grabs a french fry off her plate and throws it at Eddie, hitting her in the face with it. Thats bullshit, Lake says. Oh, go butterfly yourself, Eddie says. She returns a fry in Lakes direction. I intercept the french fry, hoping it wont result in another food fight, like last week. Im still finding broccoli everywhere. Stop, I say, dropping the french fry on the table. If you two have another food fight in my house, Im kicking both of your butterflies! Lake can see Im serious. She squeezes my leg under the table and changes the subject. Suck-and-sweet time, she says. Suck-and-sweet time? Kiersten asks, confused. Kel fills her in. Its where you have to say your suck and your sweet of the day. The good and the bad. The high and the low. We do it every night at supper. Kiersten nods as though she understands. Ill go first, Eddie says. My suck today was registration. I got stuck in Monday, Wednesday, Friday classes. Tuesday and Thursdays were full. Everyone wants the Tuesday/Thursday schedules. The classes are longer, but its a fair trade, having to go only twice a week rather than three times. My sweet is meeting Kiersten, my new best friend, Eddie says, glaring at Lake. Lake grabs another french fry and throws it at Eddie. Eddie ducks, and the fry goes over her head. I take Lakes plate and scoot it to the other side of me, out of her reach. Lake shrugs and smiles at me. Sorry. She grabs a fry off my plate and puts it in her mouth. Your turn, Mr. Cooper, Eddie says. She still calls me that, usually when shes trying to point out that Im being a bore. My suck was definitely registration, too. I got Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Lake turns to me, upset. What? I thought we were both doing Tuesday/Thursday classes. I tried, babe. They dont offer my level of courses on those days. I texted you. She pouts. Man, that really is a suck, she says. And I didnt get your text. I cant find my phone again. Shes always losing her phone. Whats your sweet? Eddie asks me. Thats easy. My sweet is right now, I say as I kiss Lake on the forehead. Kel and Caulder both groan. Will, thats your sweet every night, Caulder says, annoyed. My turn, Lake says. Registration was actually my sweet. I havent figured out Statistics yet, but my other four classes were exactly what I wanted. She looks at Eddie and continues. My suck was losing my best friend to an eleven-year-old. Eddie laughs. I wanna go, Kiersten says. No one objects. My suck was having bread for

dinner, she says, eyeing her plate. Shes ballsy. I toss another slice of bread on her plate. Maybe next time you show up uninvited to a carnivores house, you should bring your own fake meat. She ignores my comment. My sweet was three oclock. What happened at three oclock? Gavin asks. Kiersten shrugs. School let out. I butterflying hate school. All three kids glance at one another, as if theres an unspoken agreement. I make a mental note to talk to Caulder about it later. Lake nudges me with her elbow and shoots me a questioning glance, letting me know shes thinking the same thing. Your turn, whatever your name is, Kiersten says to Gavin. Its Gavin. And my suck would have to be the fact that an eleven-year-old has a larger vocabulary than me, he says, smiling at Kiersten. My sweet today is sort of a surprise. He looks at Eddie and waits for her response. What? Eddie says. Yeah, what? Lake adds. Im curious, too. Gavin just leans back in his seat with a smile, waiting for us to guess. Eddie gives him a shove. Tell us! she says. He leans forward in his chair and slaps his hands on the table. I got a job! At Gettys, delivering pizza! He looks happy, for some reason. Thats your sweet? Youre a pizza delivery guy? Eddie asks. Thats more like a suck.

You know Ive been looking for a job. And its Gettys. We love Gettys! Eddie rolls her eyes. Well, congratulations, she says unconvincingly. Do we get free pizza? Kel asks. No, but we get a discount, Gavin replies. Thats my sweet, then, Kel says. Cheap pizza! Gavin looks pleased that someone is excited for him. My suck today was Principal Brill, Kel says. Oh Lord, whatd she do? Lake asks him. Or better yet, what did you do? It wasnt just me, Kel says. Caulder puts his elbow on the table and tries to hide his face from my line of sight. What did you do, Caulder? I ask him. He brings his hand down and looks up at Gavin. Gavin puts his elbow on the table and shields his face from my line of sight as well. He continues to eat as he ignores my glare. Gavin? What prank did you tell them about this time? Gavin grabs two fries and throws them at Kel and Caulder. No more! Im not telling you any more stories. You two get me in trouble every time! Kel and Caulder laugh and throw the fries back at him. Ill tell on them, I dont mind, Kiersten says.

They got in trouble at lunch. Mrs. Brill was on the other side of the cafeteria, and they were thinking of a way to get her to run. Everyone says she waddles like a duck when she runs, and we wanted to see it. So Kel pretended he was choking, and Caulder made a huge spectacle and got behind him and started beating on his back, pretending to give him the Heimlich maneuver. It freaked Mrs. Brill out! When she got to our table, Kel said he was all better. He told Mrs. Brill that Caulder saved his life. It would have been fine, but she had already told someone to call 911. Within minutes, two ambulances and a fire truck showed up at the school.

One of the boys at the next table told Mrs. Brill they were faking the whole thing, so Kel got called to the office. Lake leans forward and glares at Kel. Please tell me this is a joke. Kel looks up with an innocent expression. It was a joke. I really didnt think anyone would call 911. Now I have to spend all next week in detention. Why didnt Mrs. Brill call me? Lake asks him. Im pretty sure she did, he says. You cant find your phone, remember? Ugh! If she calls me in for another conference, youre grounded! I look at Caulder, whos attempting to avoid my gaze. Caulder, what about you? Why didnt Mrs. Brill try to call me? He turns toward me and gives me a mischievous grin. Kel lied for me. He told her that I really thought he was choking and I was trying to save his life, he says. Which brings me to my sweet for the day. I was rewarded for my heroic behavior. Mrs. Brill gave me two free study hall passes. Only Caulder could find a way to avoid detention

and get rewarded instead. You two need to cut that crap out, I say to them. And Gavin, no more prank stories. Yes, Mr. Cooper, Gavin says sarcastically. But I have to know, he says, looking at the kids, does she really waddle? Yeah. Kiersten laughs. Shes a waddler, all right. She looks at Caulder. What was your suck, Caulder? Caulder gets serious. My best friend almost choked to death today. He could have died. We all laugh. As much as Lake and I try to do the responsible thing, sometimes its hard to draw the line between being the rule enforcer and being the sibling. We choose which battles to pick with the boys, and Lake says its important that we dont choose very many. I look at her and see shes laughing, so I assume this isnt one she wants to fight. Can I finish my food now? Lake says, pointing to her plate, still on the other side of me, out of her reach. I scoot the plate back in front of her. Thank you, Mr. Cooper, she says. I knee her under the table. She knows I hate it when she calls me that. I dont know why it bothers me so much. Probably because when I actually was her teacher, it was absolute torture. Our connection progressed so quickly that first night

I took her out. Id never met anyone I had so much fun just being myself with. I spent the entire weekend thinking about her. The moment I walked around the corner and saw her standing in the hallway in front of my classroom, I felt like my heart had been ripped right out of my chest. I knew immediately what she was doing there, even though it took her a little longer to figure it out. When she realized I was a teacher, the look in her eyes absolutely devastated me. She was hurt. Heartbroken. Just like me. One thing I know for sure, I never want to see that look in her eyes again. Kiersten stands up and takes her plate to the sink. I have

to go. Thanks for the bread, Will, she says sarcastically. It was delicious. Im leaving, too. Ill walk you home, Kel says. He jumps out of his seat and follows her to the door. I look at Lake, and she rolls her eyes. It bothers her that Kel has developed his first crush. Lake doesnt like to think that were about to have to deal with teenage hormones. Caulder gets up from the table. Im gonna watch TV in my room, he says. See you later, Kel. Bye, Kiersten. They both tell him goodbye as they leave. I really like that girl, Eddie says after Kiersten leaves. I hope Kel asks her to be his girlfriend. I hope they grow up and get married and have lots of weird babies. I hope shes in our family forever. Shut up, Eddie, Lake says. Hes only ten. Hes too young for a girlfriend. Not really, hell be eleven in eight days, Gavin says. Eleven is the prime age for first girlfriends. Lake takes an entire handful of fries and throws them toward Gavins face. I just sigh. Shes impossible to control. Youre cleaning up tonight, I say to her. You, too, I say to Eddie. Gavin, lets go watch some football, like real men, while the women do their job. Gavin scoots his glass toward Eddie. Refill this glass, woman. Im watching some football. While Eddie and Lake clean the kitchen, I take the opportunity to ask Gavin for a favor. Lake and I havent had any alone time in weeks due to always having the boys. I really need alone time with her. Do you think you and Eddie could take Kel and Caulder to a movie tomorrow night? He doesnt answer right away, which makes me feel guilty for even asking. Maybe they had plans already. It depends, he finally responds. Do we have to take Kiersten, too? I laugh. Thats up to your girl. Shes her new best friend. Gavin rolls his eyes at the thought. Its fine; we had plans to watch a movie anyway. What time? How long do you want us to keep them? Doesnt matter. We arent going anywhere. I just need a couple of hours alone with Lake. Theres something I need to give her. Oh... I see, he says. Just text me when youre through giving it to her, and well bring the boys home. I shake my head at his assumption and laugh. I like Gavin. What I hate, however, is the fact that everything that happens between me and Lake, and Gavin and Eddie... we all seem to know about. Thats the drawback of dating best friends: there are no secrets. Lets go, Eddie says as she pulls Gavin up off the couch. Thanks for supper, Will. Joel wants you guys to come over next weekend. He said hed make tamales. I dont turn down tamales. Were there, I say. After Eddie and Gavin leave, Lake comes to the living room and sits on the couch, curling her legs under her as she snuggles against me. I put my arm around her and pull her closer. Im bummed, she says. I was hoping wed at least get the same days this semester. We never get any alone time with all these butterflying kids running around. You would think, with our living across the street from each other, that we would have all the time in the world together. Thats not the case. Last semester she went to school Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and I went all five days. Weekends we spent a lot of time doing homework but mostly stayed busy with Kels and Caulders sports. When Julia passed away in September, that put even more on Lakes plate. Its been an adjustment, to say the least. The only place we seem to be lacking is getting quality alone time. Its kind of awkward, if the boys are at one house, to go to the other house to be alone. They almost always seem to follow us whenever we do. Well get through it, I say. We always do. She pulls my face toward hers and kisses me. Ive been kissing her every day for over a year, and it somehow gets better every time. I better go, she says at last. I have to get up early and go to the college to finish registration. I also need to make sure Kels not outside making out with Kiersten. We laugh about it now, but in a matter of years itll be our reality. We wont even be twenty-five, and well be raising teenagers. Its a scary thought. Hold on. Before you leave... what are your plans tomorrow night? She rolls her eyes. What kind of question is that? Youre my plan. Youre always my only plan. Good. Eddie and Gavin are taking the boys. Meet me at seven? She perks up and smiles. Are you asking me out on a real, live date? I nod. Well, you suck at it, you know. You always have. Sometimes girls like to be asked and not told. Shes trying to play hard to get, which is pointless, since Ive already got her. I play her game anyway. I kneel on the floor in front of her and look into her eyes. Lake, will you do me the honor of accompanying me on a date tomorrow night? She leans back into the couch and looks away. I dont know, Im sort of busy, she says. Ill check my schedule and let you know. She tries to look put out, but a smile breaks out on her face. She leans forward and hugs me; I lose my balance, and we end up on the floor. I roll her onto her back, and she stares up at me and laughs. Fine. Pick me up at seven. I brush her hair out of her eyes and run my finger along the edge of her cheek. I love you, Lake. Say it again, she says. I kiss her forehead and repeat, I love you, Lake. One more time. I kiss her lips. And love. I kiss them again. And you. I love you, too. I ease my body on top of hers and interlock my fingers with hers. I bring our hands above her head and press them into the floor, then lean in as if Im going to kiss her, but I dont. I like to tease her when were in this position. I barely touch my lips to hers until she closes her eyes, then I slowly pull away. She opens her eyes, and I smile at her, then lean in again. As soon as her eyes are closed, I pull away again. Dammit, Will! Butterflying kiss me already!

She grabs my face and pulls my mouth to hers. We continue kissing until we get to the point of retreat, as Lake likes to call it. She climbs out from under me and sits up on her knees as I roll onto my back and remain on the floor. We don't like to get carried away when we aren't alone in the house. It's so easy to do. When we catch ourselves taking things too far, one of us always calls retreat. Before Julia passed away, we made the mistake of taking things too far, too soon a crucial mistake on my part. It was just two weeks after we started officially dating, and Calder was spending the night at Kels house. Lake and I came back to my place after a movie. We started making out on the couch, and one thing led to another, neither of us willing to stop it. We weren't having sex, but we would have eventually if Julia hadn't walked in when she did. She completely flipped out. We were mortified. She grounded Lake and wouldn't let me see her for two weeks. I apologized probably a million times in those two weeks. Julia sat us down together and made us swear we would wait at least a year. She made Lake get on the pill and made me look her in the eyes and give her my word. She wasn't upset about the fact that her eighteen-year-old daughter almost had sex. Julia was fairly reasonable and knew it would happen at some point. What hurt her was that I was so willing to take that from Lake after only two weeks of dating. It made me feel incredibly guilty, so I agreed to the promise. She also wanted us to set a good example for Kel and Calder; she asked us not to spend the night at each other's houses during that year, either. After Julia passed away, we've stuck to our word. More out of respect for Julia than anything. Lord knows it's difficult sometimes. A lot of times. We haven't discussed it, but last week was exactly a year since we made that promise to Julia. I don't want to rush Lake into anything; I want it to be completely up to her, so I haven't brought it up. Neither has she. Then again, we haven't really been alone. Point of retreat, she says, and stands up. I'll see you tomorrow night. Seven o'clock. Don't be late. Go find your phone and text me good night, I tell her. She opens the door and faces me as she backs out of the house, slowly pulling the door shut. One more time? she says. I love you, Lake. *Revue de presse*'As brilliant and entertaining as *Slammed*, *Point of Retreat* is absolute poetry.' - JAMIE MCGUIRE, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Beautiful Disaster*'I finished reading *Slammed* at 1am on Sunday... I couldn't wait to start reading *Point of Retreat* so I bought it right then and there!' -