



PRECIOUS  
*Embrace*

**DONNA B. SNOW**

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## Dedication

To my best friend, who supports me in all that I do.  
She knows who she is. Love you!



## Endorsements

### *Daffodils*

What a beautiful story of love refound despite daunting circumstances. Donna B. Snow has created memorable characters that leap off the page, and she illustrates clearly that one of the most precious gifts we are given in life is the gift of a second chance. It takes a deft writer to dance the line between loss and hope and clearly demonstrate the varying—but equally special and important—degrees of love we feel for the people in our lives. Ms. Snow has done so. The idea that we cannot out run ourselves, nor God and His plan, is beautifully executed, and I look forward to her next release! - Marianne Evans, author

I would highly recommend this story to anyone who enjoys a quick and very sweet story with a nice happy ending. - Long and Short of It Romance Reviews





# 1

*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about its own things ~Matthew 6:34*

Laura Senton blew the bangs out of her eyes as she leaned forward to peek into the oven. Just another minute and the cheese would be crusted perfectly. The haddock would still be good and moist. She glanced at her watch, pulled the pan out, and then slid it into the warming oven seconds before the timer went off. A smile twitched on her lips.

This really was her little piece of heaven, running her own kitchen, deciding what the specials were each day, doing things the way she wanted them done. Accepting Trina's offer of a partnership was almost the best decision she had ever made—second only to accepting Christ as her Savior.

She double checked the stoves and burners and then looked over the whole kitchen area. All the food preparation for morning was done and put away, and most of the counters had been wiped down as she worked. Clean up shouldn't be bad tonight. In another half hour, she could close the kitchen, sit down with a nice latte, and enjoy Trina's last few songs while the dishwasher ran. Who would have guessed little Pingree, Maryland, would keep them this busy?

What a crowd tonight. Granted, it was Friday, but this was their biggest night yet.

Thank goodness, she had prepared an extra tray of the haddock—as well as having the salmon for back up. Both dishes would be gone by the end of the night. Fish Fridays had been popular from the start, but tonight was just over the top for their projections.

Maybe Jared was right, and the time to expand had come. She stirred the chowder, and then reached in the fridge for three salads to fill the order Mandy had just posted. She set them on the counter, and glanced over her shoulder at the rice maker—just a few more minutes and she could layer the spinach over it. Reaching for a spoon, she stirred the Alfredo sauce and set out the black olives, ready to assemble her latest salmon dish.

Hmmm, almonds or sesame sticks would add a nice touch...she couldn't wait to try the Wild Salmon Spinach Alfredo. It had just popped into her head this afternoon. Luckily she had broiled salmon on the menu tonight so she had all the makings and could assemble a small sampling.

The ringing of the bell let her know there was another new order in the system. Wow, they just kept coming.

She peeked out the kitchen window. Customers were being seated at a table. Maybe a game or other event had finished.

Mandy came into the kitchen to pick up the tray of salads.

"What's going on tonight?" Laura asked as Mandy reached into the refrigerator for the salad dressings she needed to complete her order.

"Sounds like a baseball game just ended. Whatever it is, looks like we'll be busy right until closing." She walked out of the kitchen.

Trina's voice carried in over the sounds of the crowd.

Laura set four salads onto the tray to fill the next order while she hummed along with the song. She loved this version.

How amazing God's grace really was. Not even a year since they opened the doors to *A Piece of Heaven* and already they were talking about expansion.

Well, Jared was talking about expansion, probably because he would be doing the construction. But Trina, as usual, was dragging her feet. Getting that girl to commit to change was about as quick as tapping sap from a maple tree.

And Laura knew just how quick that was. After growing up in Vermont with forty maple trees to tap, she had learned patience when she was young, patience she had needed as she grew up.

Lise swept into the kitchen next and grabbed her dressings out of the fridge. "Can I have the bowl of chowder now, please? They want it with their salad."

"How are you holding up tonight?" Laura asked as she ladled chowder into a bowl and turned to set it on the tray, placing a sprig of parsley on top and a crust of bread beside it.

Lise had only been with them for a few weeks and this was definitely a trial by fire.

"I'm OK," she answered. "I've seen worse. The last place I worked was like this almost all the time, but I had to dodge grabbing hands while I delivered meals. That was the worst." She laughed as she lifted the tray and headed for the door. "So, as long as I don't have to worry about that part, I can handle busy, no sweat. Plus it's not like this all the time, so—piece of cake."

"No, silly. *A Piece of Heaven*," she said and laughed

as Lise went out the door.

The answering chuckle bounced back through the swinging door.

Laura ladled chowder into another bowl and set it on a tray. She put a sprig of parsley on a plate, added a scoop of rice and vegetables, and positioned the last piece of lemon chicken. She'd have to get someone to cross it off the board if she couldn't sneak out there.

The last dish for this order was easy. She pulled the sheet of haddock au gratins out of the warming oven and set one on the plate with a baked potato and some green beans, and then turned to set out plates for the next batch of meals.

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Orders trickled to a stop over the next half hour.

Wow. So much for a quick and easy clean up. Laura wanted nothing more than to put her feet up on a chair and relax. She pulled her apron off, hung it on the back of the door, and stepped out into the restaurant.

Trina wasn't playing—must be on her last break.

Laura grabbed a mug and stepped over to the latte machine. She looked over the crowd.

Lise was just clearing off a small table by the wall.

The seat was Laura's favorite. Maybe because she Jared had proposed to Trina there. Or maybe because it had a good view of the stage but was out of the way.

"Excuse me. Could I get a cup of coffee? The other waitresses look pretty busy."

"Sure, I'll..." She lifted her gaze past the broad chest and shoulders to a neatly trimmed beard and startling blue eyes. Eyes she would know anywhere.

She swallowed hard. "Sean?" Her first crush.

"Sorry, do I know you?"

No, he wouldn't know the blonde, curly hair, or the body that was half the size it used to be. She shook her head. "Sorry, I thought you were someone else. I'll get your waitress for you. What table are you —"

He touched her arm. "You look vaguely familiar. Are you sure we don't know each other?"

Of course, he had no idea. But she knew him. Sean Laylor, high school quarterback, team captain senior year...why would he remember the fat girl with glasses and long, stringy hair who tutored him to get his English grade up so he could stay on the team and get into college?

She snapped back to the present. "Let me get your waitress for you."

He stared a moment longer, his gaze covered her from head to toe, a frown creasing his forehead. He pointed to table three.

"I'll send her right over to you." Laura set her coffee cup down.

Mandy was talking with a customer who was obviously settling their bill. No sense distracting her.

Lise was clearing another table off.

"Hey, would you mind checking with table three?" Laura asked Lise. "He'd like some coffee, and I don't want to mess up anyone's tab."

She glanced at the man at table three. "Sure thing. I'll just have to be careful not to drool in it when I set it down." Her gaze slid back to Laura's. "You sure you don't want to bring it over since it seems he's got eyes only for you?"

Laura's gaze collided with midnight blue eyes surrounded by long black lashes. The smile that

creased his face deepened the laugh lines and set the dimple in his left cheek. He tipped an imaginary hat before turning back to his table companion, a teenage boy—the spitting image of Sean twenty years earlier.

*“Thanks for the help with my essay – and for the study tips...”*

*“Hey Sean, ditch the pumpkin and get a move on. We have to get to practice!”*

*Laura glanced down at her orange top and realized the comment was aimed at her...*

*Sean touched her sleeve. “Sorry for that. I’ve got to go. Thanks again for your help.”*

*“I’ll go see what he wants,” Lise mumbled.*

Laura smiled and turned to her table before she made a fool of herself.

## 2

*But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first. ~Matthew 19:30*

"Who's that?"

"Hmmm?"

"You know, the cute blonde you're staring at."

Sean smiled and turned back to his nephew, Derek. "I don't know, but I intend to find out. I haven't been gone from here that long that I don't have a few contacts left. Someone will be able to tell me who she is."

"Hi. I hear you'd like a coffee?"

Sean glanced up at the young waitress he had just seen talking with the blonde woman. "Yeah, thanks. I'd like a mocha latte if it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all. Anything else?"

"Can I have a piece of that cherry pie?" His nephew pointed at the bakery case.

She jotted it down with a smile before turning away.

"I don't know how your parents can afford to feed you," Sean said.

"The same way yours did," Derek answered with a laugh. "So, why didn't you ask her?"

"Ask her what?"

"Duh, who the other lady is." Derek shook his head in disgust. "Sometimes I wonder how you get

along when you're on your own. And when I go away to college what are you gonna do without me coaching you along?"

"College, huh." Sean ruffled the boy's hair. "You'll be washing plates in the back room of this restaurant if you're not careful."

Derek laughed. "Go ahead and tell that to the guys from Florida State who were up here last week."

Sean faced Derek full-on. "You know you still need to figure out what you want to study. You may have a free ride while you play, but you have to plan for your future—and you have to keep up your grades."

Derek snickered. "I plan on playing a lot longer than college."

"Yeah, and so do a few thousand other kids who are just as good as you."

"Gee, thanks."

"You know what I mean. I know you're good. And there's nothing wrong with having that dream and hoping it will come true, but there's no saying it will, either. An injury early in your career can end things pretty fast."

The waitress set down the coffee and pie.

"Thank you." Sean glanced at Derek, who already had a forkful in his mouth.

"Thanks," he said, grinning around a mouthful of pie.

"I know his parents taught him better than that." Sean smiled at the waitress. "Hey, could you tell me who the owners are here? I don't remember this place being here the last time I came through town."

The waitress stared at him for a minute before covering her mouth. Her eyes grew into round circles

of surprise. "You're Sean Laylor. Didn't you play for the..." she tapped her head, "the Eagles—no, the Falcons. Yeah, that was it, the Falcons. My brother used to talk about you all the time. Said you could throw a bullet pass better than anyone else in the league—and he was always proud that you were from somewhere around here."

He'd rather be known as a good lawyer since he was planning to set up his practice here in Pingree, the place where his roots were. He smiled and held out his hand. "One and the same but those days are over. Now, I'm just planning on coming home and opening up a quiet law office down the street."

"Oh, but would you mind signing an autograph for my little brother, Danny? He is so gonna freak out when he hears I met you." She floundered around in her apron for a piece of paper.

No one seemed to be paying too much attention to them except the blonde who was headed their way.

She put a hand on the waitress's arm when she got to their table. "Everything OK, Lise?" She looked straight at him. "Is there a problem?"

"No problem, we were just—" Sean started to say.

"This is Sean Laylor. He's—" Lise gushed.

"I know who he is, Lise. From the look on his face he doesn't want any extra attention, so try to keep it down."

"I'm sorry. I was just so excited. You don't know my little brother. He is such a football fanatic that he would just die for an autograph—"

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"I'm sure you go through this kind of thing all the

time," Laura said.

"Not so much, since I don't play anymore."

"You don't?"

"I retired a few seasons ago." He held out his hand. "And I seem to be at a disadvantage. You obviously know my name, but I don't know yours." The challenge was evident. He wouldn't drop his hand without a response.

She reached out, intending to pull her hand back quickly.

He wrapped his other hand around hers, staring at her expectantly.

"Her name is Laura. If you could just sign this to Danny, I'll leave you to get to know each other," Lise said as she set a piece of paper on the table in front of Sean.

He took his right hand away but set his left forearm to hold the paper while he held onto Laura's hand. A slight tug gained her a glance, but not release.

His son was engrossed in the cherry pie. The last she remembered reading about Sean was that he was divorced but no mention of a child. This boy was surely his, and not a youngster, by any means. He must be a junior or senior in high school.

"Thank you so much." Lise backed away. "Just let me know if you need anything else."

"We're fine now, but thanks."

"OK, then. I'll finish clean up now, Laura."

"I'm sure Danny will appreciate that." She turned back to the table only to find her hand trapped between both of his once again.

His gaze was also turned back on her, full strength. But only for a second, thank goodness.

"Do you mind if I go talk with some of the other

guys?" Derek asked with a nod towards another table. He was already pushing out his chair.

"I'll come get you when it's time to go." Sean turned his gaze back on her again. "So, Laura-no-last-name, care to join me?" He pushed the chair out with his foot and let go with one hand so he could guide her into it.

"I really should get—"

"You really should spend some time with your newest customer. After all, word of mouth is the best advertising."

"Let me just go get my coffee."

"I'll get it for you. Wouldn't want you to get sidetracked and not make it back."

That was exactly what she would have done. She couldn't begrudge him a little credit for figuring her out so easily.

"So, Mr. Sean Laylor, what are you doing back in Pingre?" she asked when he returned, before taking a sip of her coffee.

"Not another word about me until you tell me your last name."

The wide-eyed look she gave him seemed to spark his curiosity.

"OK, I know you're not a groupie. As a matter of fact, it wasn't the fame that made you know who I was. So how do you know me? And I'm assuming since you recognized me, that I should probably know you."

"You'd have no reason to remember me. I hope you enjoyed—"

Sean took her coffee cup, set it back down, and tugged on her hand again. "I have no idea what has you so spooked, but I'd really like to know your last name. So unless you're in a witness protection

program or something, you're really just making this worse than it needs to be." He stared at her with a measuring glance. "If you'll just tell me your name, I promise I won't try to stop you again from leaving."

"Senton, Laura Senton." She pushed back her chair. "It's been a pleasure seeing you again, Sean. But I really have to help with cleanup before closing time. I hope you enjoyed your first time here at *A Piece of Heaven*, and we hope you'll come back soon." She dashed into the kitchen, leaving the door swinging wildly.

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Laura Senton, hmmm, that name did sound familiar. He'd give Dave a call in the morning. Chances were pretty good that Dared Construction had been involved, since this was an old building with a new remodeled front, and Dave had mentioned updating the buildings on the Square.

He dropped cash on the table and stopped to get Derek on the way out.

### 3

*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. ~ James 5:17*

Laura hummed along as Trina sang another one of her favorites. It had been days since she sat down while at work and just enjoyed the music. She'd been hiding, when she wasn't looking over her shoulder for a certain ex-quarterback. But there'd been no reappearance of Mr. Sean Laylor. Thank goodness. Laura sighed and took another sip of her latte.

A hand dropped on her shoulder. "Hey, beautiful."

Laura covered her mouth with a napkin, a squeak escaping. Hoping coffee wouldn't dribble down her chin, she gulped down her surprise.

Dave, the co-owner of Dared Construction, smiled down at her before taking a seat at the table.

"I hear you've stirred up some interest in the locals."

"What are you talking about?"

"The local golden boy, the prodigal come home, if you will, has been asking a lot of questions about you."

*Sean.* Laura groaned.

"Ah, I see you know to whom I am referring."

Laura rolled her eyes and started to rise.

"Oh, no, you don't." Dave tugged her back down. "The way I hear it, you practically ran away from him—"