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"Just breathe," she whispered to him, as she slowly took in a deep whiff. "You smell that?"

He shook his head. "What? Burgers from down the street?"

"No." She laughed; he could be so dense sometimes. "It's the first snowfall." She inhaled another intoxicating aroma of winter air. "It's coming."

"And what's so good about snow? It's just annoying and inconvenient." He pulled his arm away and folded them across his lean frame.

"Snow is beautiful...magical." Her voice came out breathy with the idea of snow making her feel all tingly.

"It's cold, wet stuff that falls from the sky."

"Then there are the wonderful clothes: hats, scarves, gloves..."

"...galoshes, wool socks," he countered.

She continued, not to be undone by his cynicism. "Fresh baked cookies, hot apple cider, hot cocoa, hot toddies...what is a hot toddy?"

Snow Kissed

by

Cindy K. Green

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

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Dedication

I dedicate this story to my dear friends back in California – Jennifer, Elizabeth, and Robynn. I love and miss you all so much. Thank you for your enduring friendship.

Praise for Snow Kissed

Five Cups! "Snow Kissed is an enjoyable read. Cindy K. Green paints refreshing characters that make the reader experience the magic and love that swirls in the air."

~ Coffee Time Romance

Snow Kissed is a sweet, touching romance between two people who love each other, but haven't yet found the courage to say the words.

~Kathy's Review Corner

This is what I wanted. Right, Lord?

Holly Armstrong sighed while refolding a letter and slipping it back into her coat pocket. Her left hand remained nestled inside for a moment longer while the words from the communication swirled around inside her head and her heart beat a quick tempo. It was silly to keep dwelling on it. In a swift movement, she tugged on her gloves while slowing her steps as she walked down the street.

Why couldn't she focus on something else? Something like the winter decorations around town or the nice crisp weather? No, her mind stayed put on the one topic she just didn't want to face today.

Her thoughts came to a sudden and complete halt at the sound of bickering voices carrying through the chilly air and propelling around the town square of Meriden.

"No way! I'm not taking part in this lame example of civic torture."

A smile pulled at Holly's mouth; her previous contemplation temporarily eclipsed by issues far more pertinent at the moment. She snuggled into her warm, fluffy coat and soft scarf as she picked up her pace and approached the auto-body shop. Logan Riley was at it again—arguing with Muriel Potter over the winter carnival, no doubt.

Logan stood outside, without a coat, in a pair of faded jeans and one of his grease-smeared 80s rock and roll T-shirts with a long-sleeved thermal shirt underneath. He'd set himself up in his typical stance with hands on hips and head tilted downward with an irate expression pointed right at Muriel.

Despite her previous perplexing mindset, Holly

struggled to keep down a giggle as she came up next to them. Logan was in one of his fine moods and he might not appreciate her teasing smile. *Poor Muriel.* The middle-aged librarian was only doing her job as festivities director, decorating the town for the Winter Wonderland Carnival.

"Holly, please talk some sense into Logan." Muriel's brow creased in exasperation. "He listens to you."

Holly let out a laugh. "Me? Logan listens to me?" She peered up at him with a smile, almost sensing he wanted to join in with her. He might have if Muriel hadn't been standing there.

Logan shifted his weight onto one foot and crossed his arms; his expression still scowling as the afternoon sun glinted off the red highlights in his brown hair.

"So, what's this all about?" Holly turned to Muriel, toning down her smile.

"As a business owner of Meriden, Logan should be supporting the carnival, but he won't even allow us to hang a banner in front of his shop."

Holly moistened her lips and pressed them together before lifting her eyes back to the guilty one. "Oh, come on, Logan. What's the harm?" She playfully batted her eyelashes.

A flicker of a smile started in the corner of his mouth before he brushed it away. He rifled a hand through his already messy hair and then dropped his arms to his sides as if in defeat. "Fine. Whatever. I don't have time for this. Do whatever you want, Muriel. It's only my shop after all."

Muriel grinned at Holly. "I knew I'd win with you on my side." She smirked at Logan, waved, and headed to the town center where game and snack booths were, at that very moment, being erected.

As soon as she was gone, Logan's mood seemed to shift from irritated to agreeable. His body language became much more relaxed with his

hardened chin softening and a real smile moving onto his face. "So, what are you up to this afternoon?"

Before Holly's expression could waver into a frown, she forced a smile. "I...I'm off for a snow walk." *Possibly my last in Meriden.*

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toddies...what is a hot toddy?"

He nearly laughed at her, a cute smile building in the corner of his mouth as he shook his head. "A hot alcoholic drink. You want to come in for some coffee? I just made a pot."

She shook her head and took in a deep breath before releasing it. "No, remember I'm off to take my snow walk through Meriden." She tilted her head up at him. "I'll be at the carnival tonight, working the booth for the church. Of course, you wouldn't dare show your face there, now would you?"

Pausing, she made a concerted effort to memorize his face, including his subtly uneven eyebrows. This was probably one of the last times they'd be together. A breath hitched in her throat at the thought of never seeing Logan again. They'd shared so many memories over the years: spring picnics at the lake, midnight movies, and disastrous cooking adventures. Life wouldn't be the same without him.

She should tell him she was leaving town for good. This was the perfect moment. Maybe he would respond by telling her she should stay—stay because he loved her too much to let her go. *In my dreams.*

"Goodbye, Logan," was all she could bring herself to say. *Lord, help me.* It was easier than being disappointed.

"Bye, Holly." He said the words as he always did—with genuine warmth, when no one else was paying attention, that is. It warmed her heart to hear it. He released a small smile and Holly got caught in his gaze, a little thrill pulsing in her heart.

Logan was rugged—from the clothes he wore to the tough and edgy persona he showed to the world—but his eyes betrayed his softer side. You would have expected him to have black, beady eyes by the way he barked at everyone, but instead he had these deep, soulful eyes in the most brilliant indigo Holly had ever seen on any person, man or

woman. She would miss those eyes and these stimulating conversations. Well, she'd miss everything that was Logan Riley.

As Holly sauntered off, Logan had half a mind to join her. If he was honest with himself, he longed to join her—longed to be with her at any time of the day or night. But, there always seemed to be one reason or another to put off telling her. Like the time she suddenly started dating one of the guys from her office or when his sister decided to move back home—the list was endless. He tried to push the senseless idea of him and Holly out of his head.

“Was that Holly Armstrong?”

Logan twisted to the right to see James Pruitt, the newly appointed principal of the high school, standing there with his chic frameless eyeglasses and black wool coat buttoned up to his chin. He acted and looked like some ancient academic when he was the exact same age as Logan. They'd graduated together from Meriden High twelve years ago and James was just as, if not more, stuffy and pretentious than he had been then.

“Yeah, that was Holly.” He eyed James, wondering what interest he had in her. He no doubt appreciated her interest in music and art, not to mention her soft, wavy reddish-brown hair and delicate figure.

“I've been trying to get her on the phone all day.” He glanced at his wristwatch. “Drat, I have a conference in a couple minutes.” He looked up and adjusted his glasses. “If you see her again this afternoon, will you tell her I need to see her before she leaves town?”

Logan frowned while his heart thumped a hard beat in his chest. “What do you mean ‘leaves town’?” He narrowed his eyes on James.

“She informed me she's moving to Nashville next week, putting Meriden, Virginia behind her

forever.”

Sickening pangs echoed in the pit of Logan’s stomach and the last person he wanted to be around right now was goody-two-shoes Pruitt. “Well...um, I’ll tell her you’re looking for her.” He rolled his eyes. *Yeah, right.* He glanced at his shop door. “I gotta get back to work now.”

“Certainly. Well, I’m sure to catch her at the carnival tonight.”

Logan lifted his lips to the side with James’ very presence making his right eye twitch. “Sure, maybe.”

After pulling open the door, Logan walked into the warm building, the familiar smell of oil and rubber surrounding him. He turned around and placed his forearm across the glass storefront and leaned his head on it as he watched the activity in the town square. All of a sudden, he was angry. He banged a fist into the glass and screwed up his face in irritation. “Why didn’t she tell me?”

Her sweet face came to mind, looking all whimsical as she spoke about snow. The way her light blue eyes had lit up at the prospect of the first snow made him want to be with her even more.

Since he met her eight years ago when she walked into his shop, it had always been Holly. She’d bought a new battery for her car and didn’t even need help replacing it. That had caught his attention right off the bat. She wasn’t the damsel-in-distress type. How could she be with three older brothers? She was more the type who could take care of herself and yet had a smile for everyone she met. If it wasn’t for her, he’d still be spending Sundays alone with his TV, a bottle of tequila and the hockey game. She took him to church and introduced him to God. His life had changed all because of her.

Dear God, I love her. It was the first time he’d ever admitted it to himself. His pulse picked up at the realization. *She can’t leave.*

He squinted as he stared across the street again.

What did James want with her? It couldn't be something personal. He spoke about her as if she was a business transaction, but then again, James approached everyone that way.

Maybe I'll make an appearance at the carnival tonight after all.

Holly sniffed and dabbed at her eyes with her gloved hands. She'd tried hard not to cry around Logan. The last thing she needed was to start bawling in front of him. Logan never knew what to do when a girl cried, but he wasn't so obtuse as to be unaware that there was a problem. At the moment, she wasn't ready to own up to him.

"And just where are you headed off to on this fine January morning, Holly Armstrong?"

Stiffening her upper lip, Holly plastered a smile onto her face as she raised her eyes. "Hey, Caryn. Bringing your goods to the bake sale booth, I see."

Caryn Hamilton shifted the large plastic container from her right hand to her left and swung an immense black pocketbook over her right shoulder. "Yep, I made lemon bars this year. I know they're your favorite so make sure to come by. Have you seen Greg anywhere this morning?" She glanced past Holly toward the open square. "He's supposed to be building booths." She smiled. "The work of a youth pastor is never done." She continued to search for her husband.

"Uh, no, I haven't seen him." Holly couldn't help another sniff, but she maintained a steady voice. "You might check with Muriel."

Caryn snapped her eyes back to Holly. "You're crying. What happened? It's Logan, isn't it?" She set her lemon bars on the street bench beside them.

"Everything's fine, Caryn. It's just the cold. I think I'm getting the sniffles or something."

"It isn't the cold. Why are your eyes so watery? Don't you dare say it's your allergies because I don't

see a blade of grass anywhere.” She took a seat next to her baked goods. “Holly, we’ve been friends since you moved here. Do you really think you can fool me?” She patted the space beside her. “Come on...spill.”

“You should go and find that husband of yours.”

“Greg can wait. He has his youth group kids to help him out today. I’m not leaving until you come clean.”

“Fine.” Holly sat on the edge of the concrete bench. “I guess I’m just a little misty-eyed over the idea of moving away. That’s all; it’s really nothing.”

“Nothing? This is a big deal. You’ve been a part of this community for eight years. After everything you went through, you were able to make a life for yourself here.”

Holly jumped to her feet. “Caryn, you’re making a bigger deal out of this than it is. Sure, I’m a little nostalgic. I didn’t exactly have the perfect home life with my brothers and me bumping around from one foster home to another. Meriden became a real home for me these past few years, but I’m ready for a change. This is a good thing.”

“Maybe you’re ready for a change but I’m going to miss you.”

Releasing a calming breath, Holly resumed her seat. “I’m going to miss you too, but I’m moving to Tennessee, not the dark side of the moon. I’ll see you. You mean so much to me, Caryn. You made me feel a part of your family and even took me to church.”

They both embraced for a short moment. When they came apart, Caryn brushed away a tear from her eye as she smiled. “Just make sure you don’t forget me when you become a famous songwriter.”

“Like I could forget you.” They both laughed this time.

“Have you told Logan yet?” Caryn asked, straightening her smile.

It felt like Holly's stomach dropped down to her knees. It was the six million dollar question. She should have known it was coming. Caryn had a sense for these things—an odd sixth sense.

“Logan? W-why do you ask?”

“Ple-eease. Are you really going to try to convince me Logan means nothing more to you than the local grease monkey?”

“Logan is...”

“Don't even start.” Caryn came to her feet while waving her hand at Holly. “I don't want to hear it. I know you care for Logan and he means more to you than those dark chocolate truffles that come in the gold-foiled box.”

Holly couldn't help but smile, which faded quickly. She rubbed her forehead, a headache coming on. There was no reason to beat this old horse; it was already dead. “Caryn, Logan and I have a special friendship and he does mean the world to me...”

“And, don't forget, you mean the world to him.”

“That's debatable.”

“What's debatable about it? He's like putty in your hands and Oscar the Grouch to the rest of us.”

“Regardless, if anything more was going to happen between us...well, I just don't think the Lord meant Logan and I to be anything more than friends.”

“The Lord? You're reading the mind of God Almighty now, are you?”

“That's not what I meant. Logan and I are friends; that's all.”

“Now listen here, Holly Jeanette Armstrong, Logan Riley loves you. He might not have said the words. He may not even recognize it himself, but he does just the same. Even more than that, he needs you.”

“Logan doesn't need anyone.”

“That's where you're wrong. If I were you, I

wouldn't traipse off to places unknown without first seeing if the love of my life loves me too." She paused to pick up her plastic tray, balancing it on both hands. "Okay, that's all I have to say on the matter." She smiled. "Just promise you'll pray about this some more. All right?"

Holly nodded. There didn't seem to be anything else she could do. There most certainly wasn't anything else she could say.

"Whatever you decide, you need to tell Logan about your plans. I'd hate for him to find out from someone else. See you tonight?"

"Yes." Holly lifted her mouth into a slight smile.

"Good. I expect to see you eating some of these lemon bars later on."

Caryn hurried across the square and Holly watched her progress as she made her way to where men were building the stands. Greg stepped close to his wife and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Holly looked away and over to Logan's shop for a second and then turned around, facing the opposite direction out of town. Her eyes misted over again. Caryn was wrong. Logan didn't love her—he didn't need her—not in that way.

The evening sky began to darken as Logan scanned the square once again. It did look like it might snow. Maybe Holly was right.

Holly. He still couldn't get over the fact she'd kept something as important as moving away from him. Weren't they close—closer than most friends? Hadn't he shared more about himself with her than any other living person? Why would she do that?

Several men were still at work in the square setting up the lights. He felt a bit guilty not helping out, especially as he watched the activity all afternoon. Now that the sun was just about gone, it had to be frigid outside. He'd actually helped set up the carnival the last several years—at Holly's

insistence—but she hadn't asked him this year. Muriel had been such a pain that his stubbornness got the best of him and he wouldn't budge.

Lord, why am I such a mule? An angry old mule. It was the area in his life he'd been working on for years and he was tired of it. Visions of his angry and prideful father came to mind.

Pride!

The very reason he hadn't helped out today. It needed to end—with or without Holly. He closed his eyes and prayed a quick prayer before moving to the back of the shop.

Fifteen minutes later, he exited into the frosty evening air while carrying a tray of coffee mugs filled with a fragrant brew. He caught sight of Greg Hamilton with some of the local kids setting out a couple chairs.

"Hey, Logan," Greg called.

Logan nodded to him. "I thought you might be a little cold out here and I just made some coffee." He set the tray down in front of Greg.

"Great. That sounds just about perfect." Greg picked up a mug and took a sip. "That's good, Logan. Who knew you could make coffee like this. I bet Holly does, and she's keeping your secret." He smiled but Logan couldn't get himself to return it.

"You think we could talk for a minute." Logan sunk his freezing fingers inside the pockets of his jeans.

"Sure." Greg took a seat in one of the white resin chairs and set his coffee on a nearby table. "Hey, Eric," he called to one of the teens. "Why don't you and Kevin take this tray around and see if anyone else would like some coffee."

"No problem, Pastor Hamilton," the dark-haired kid responded. He picked up the tray and Greg's two helpers disappeared around to the other side of the gazebo.

"So what's up?" Greg crossed his legs and