



A PIECE OF
Heaven

DONNA B. SNOW

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Dedication

This is for my friends and family who support me in my love for writing, as well as music. This is the story of my dream. Thanks for sharing it!

Praise

For *Daffodils*

Donna B. Snow has crafted a beautiful story of love, forgiveness, and second chances. She writes with heartfelt emotion. I fell in love with the hero and heroine from the first pages. The story moves along at a nice pace, building and pulling the reader in with its intriguing plot and touching scenes. I look forward to more stories by this talented author. ~ Laurean Brooks

1

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.—Proverbs 3:5

Trina Wembly stared at the name painted on the frosted glass, Dared Construction & Design. This was it, the start of her dream. She took a deep breath and pulled the door open. She hoped everything she'd heard about them was true.

She tugged at her gypsy skirt, smoothed a hand along the soft cotton, and then wrapped the other hand around her leather shoulder bag. Heart pounding, she stepped inside.

Classy, but understated. The reception area was a contrast of styles: elegant, not ostentatious; a bit eclectic, but well blended. She eased her grip as she absorbed the warm atmosphere the company had created.

Framed prints hung on the walls, one by M.C. Escher. She recognized her favorite—*Convex and Concave*. Others she didn't recognize with certainty, but would have guessed—Monet and Van Gogh, to name a couple. Intermixed with them were pictures of construction sites, some works in progress, some after completion. All Dared sites. All wonderful pieces of architecture that added to the environment they were in.

From cottage style, to country, to contemporary

with a Mediterranean flair—color and texture and style surrounded her. Oh yeah, they could help her create the atmosphere she wanted in *A Piece of Heaven*, turn her dream into something real. Still, would they be able to get her vision from her simple drawings?

“Can I help you?”

Trina whipped around, a hand to her throat. “Oh, I didn’t hear you.” She looked up, past broad shoulders covered by a white dress shirt that tightened around the man’s upper chest as he crossed his arms. Guaranteed, he didn’t spend all his time behind a desk.

Serious gray eyes stared back. His face settled into a quiet smile as he raised his brows. “Can I help you?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I have an appointment with...” She fumbled through her bag, searching for the slip of paper she had written on. What was wrong with her? She was never this scatterbrained.

“Are you Ms. Wembly?”

“Yes.” She paused in her search to meet his gaze. “Is it you I’m supposed to meet with?”

This time the smile reached his eyes. He held out his hand. “I’m Jared Larou. You spoke with Dave, but he had to go out of town today, so I’m covering the office. He told me you’d be coming in.”

Her hand was swallowed by his, and a mild shock ran up her arm. “Should I reschedule?”

“No, this is fine. We’re partners and cover for each other, plus work together on every project anyway, so it doesn’t much matter which one of us you meet with initially. We’re both involved in every project eventually.”

“Oh, well, I told him I would bring my rough sketches,” she said as she tugged a folder out of her bag.

He stepped over to the windows and gestured her to a seat at the table as he accepted the folder. He set aside the unsigned blank check she had tucked in and then flipped through the drawings. He glanced up once or twice, but didn't comment until he reached the last one.

"So this is going to be..."

"A coffee house restaurant."

"Do you have a location picked out?"

She leaned forward, trying to control her grin as she searched for words to share her dream. "Actually, my grandparents owned a storefront on Center Street. I inherited it—one of the brownstones where there are still cobblestone sidewalks."

He raised his eyebrows, glanced down at the drawings and back up. "And you want to demolish and renovate?"

"No, no, actually, I want to reconstruct and restore, or whatever you want to call it, so the outside looks like it originally would have—well, other than my sign. I always loved it when I came to visit, and now that it's mine, I'd like to help breathe a little life back into the area, but leave it looking quaint."

He closed the folder and sat back. "Are you aware of how many restaurants end up closing within the first year?"

"Due to undercapitalization and high overheads, yes, I am." She straightened in her chair. "But I don't intend to fall into either of those quagmires."

"And do you have the experience to make a go of it during a slow start up?" He lowered his chin to his steepled fingers.

"Look, that's my problem to deal with. Not yours." She picked up her bag, blinking her eyes as

heat flooded her face. No one was going to steal her dream. “If you don’t want the job you can just say so.” She pushed her chair back, ready to grab her drawings and leave. “I know those aren’t professional drawings—”

He half stood and gestured for her to stay. “Please. I didn’t mean to insult you. We just see so many people with great intentions start on projects like this and either lose interest or financing, or both. In the current economy, it can take some time for a business to become solvent.” He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “I’m sorry. Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything, but I hate to see anyone lose a dream because of bad timing or poor planning.”

She took a deep breath and slowly settled back down with her bag in her lap. “I assure you, financing is no problem. Between me and my partner, we have restaurant management and culinary aspects covered. We’ve taken all that into consideration and feel we can make this work.”

He flipped open the folder and started asking pointed questions about what her vision entailed, jotting notes as she answered. Finally, he leaned back and met her gaze.

“I’ll have the rough drawings ready in about a week. In the meantime, we’ll start filing for permits to get some of the basic cleanup done since the property’s been vacant...” He glanced at the paperwork again. “For over a year.”

As a smile spread across his face, she sent a prayer of thanks heavenward that he’d accepted the job. She could barely control the urge to clap her hands.

This was really happening—and with the firm she wanted to work with. Their reputation was excellent,

and the work she had checked out spoke very highly of their abilities—and one of them was a Christian who attended her church.

After filling out the check for the initial portion of the architectural fees, Trina walked out the door...or maybe floated. When she reached her car, she pulled the cell phone out of her bag and hit speed dial.

"We're in business. I hope you meant it when you said you were ready anytime. I just signed the papers with the construction company and by this time next year you will be the proud partner of our new coffee house, A Piece of Heaven."

For what seemed like the hundredth time—and maybe it was, Trina stepped into the waiting area of Dared Construction. After months of meetings and hours spent going over drawings and making changes, it looked like things might finally get moving...she hoped.

Pingree, Maryland wasn't a very large town, but their building codes seemed nearly impossible to decipher.

She wiped damp palms down her skirt.

Lord, please let this be good news and not another roadblock.

"Trina, so good to see you," Jared said as he and Dave both stepped into the waiting area. Jared extended his hand first, and Dave nodded his greeting.

"Nice to finally meet you in person," Dave said as he shook her hand, too. "I'm looking forward to getting this project off the ground, not to mention having a place we can go to relax once you open."

"I'm praying that will happen soon, too."

Dave squeezed her hand one more time, and then headed towards the door. "I wish I could stay and chat, but I have to get to a meeting at another site. I'll see you soon, I'm sure."

Trina watched him leave then turned back to Jared as he pushed the cuffs of his dress shirt up to his elbows as usual, showing off well-muscled forearms. He looked every inch the businessman whenever she saw him in the office. What would he look like on the job site? His movements were fluid, like a dancer or a gymnast. Near six feet tall, with those broad shoulders, Trina felt herself staring.

She smiled and cleared her throat as she searched his face for a clue as to why he had called her in today. "So, good news, I hope?"

Jared's gray eyes twinkled. "Come on back to my office. We can talk there. I have something to show you."

"Said the spider to the fly," she whispered to herself.

Jared slowed his pace, grinned, and then leaned sideways to whisper back at her. "I'd love to show you my etchings, but unfortunately I have no web to hold you there."

Trina felt her cheeks heat up. She cleared her throat again. "Sorry."

Jared burst out laughing. "Oh, if you could only see your face." He grabbed her hand and pulled her along more quickly, making her take two steps to his one.

Thank goodness she was wearing her low-heeled pumps, something she had learned after the first couple of meetings. She never knew where they might

be going, from construction sites to empty lots. It was always an adventure with a lesson to be learned.

“I do have some drawings to show you, and I think you’re going to like what you see.”

Trina’s heart was pounding when they reached the door to his office. Surely, it was because of the pace, not that he’d kept hold of her hand the whole way.

He set his hand on her lower back to guide her into his sanctum.

The mock-up of her building was sitting on his desk. It wasn’t the first time she’d seen it, but it looked more complete.

“Oh...” She stepped forward and reached out to touch it, fingering the mock sign that would dangle over the entrance.

The plans had undergone so many changes since they first started—more on the inside than the outside. Rebuilding the front brick facing and cobblestone entryway was crucial, along with the wooden sign over the door—a touch of old world atmosphere. Thank goodness those things had been approved without any problems.

“Did we get...”

He raised his eyebrows and blinked. Innocence personified. He stared back at her, not volunteering the answer to her unasked question.

“Well, did we?”

His mouth crept up into a full-fledged smile. “Did we what?”

She put her hands on his shoulders and shook him gently. The soft cotton of his shirt slid under her fingers, a fresh spring scent wafting around her. “Did...we...get...final...approval?”

Trina was off her feet before she noticed Jared’s

gentle hands tightening around her waist. “We can start building tomorrow, sweetheart.”

Trina laughed as he swung her in circles.

Their laughter rang together through the room, slowly fading as they stared at each other.

Trina’s breath caught as he slowly set her back on her feet. She took a step back, hoping to quiet her fluttering nerves. What a heart in this man. He seemed to find so much joy in pleasing others. Surely it wasn’t anything personal.

Jared brushed a hair off her cheek and lifted her braid from her shoulder to smooth it down the center of her back. “Let’s make your dream come true,” he said with a smile.

Her dream? For a moment, she didn’t realize what dream he was referring to. Every time she met with him, he starred in her dreams for many nights to follow—walking with her, talking with her, holding her...Trina would have fanned herself if she could manage to pull her hands from his chest where they still clung to his shirt.

She didn’t react this way to anyone. Over the past couple of years, she had begun to wonder if God meant for her to spend her life alone. Like the apostle Paul, perhaps it was the life she was meant to live. She had never met anyone who truly made her feel that spark, the connection she could see between other couples. Until now...and she hardly knew him.

She mentally shook herself and stepped away. She could feel her cheeks heating again, and she stared at the button on his shirt.

“So what do you think of a grand opening in September?” he asked.

She flung her arms out to hug him. “Oh, thank

you, thank you! When do we start?"

Jared grinned. "Tomorrow. Bright and early. You want to meet us there at six AM?"

Thank You, Lord. Thank You, thank You, thank You.

She couldn't keep the smile from spreading across her face. From the look on his face, he obviously expected a no. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

Jared stared down into Trina's glowing features. The feel of her in his arms, the happiness shining in her eyes...after months of sitting across a table from her going over drawings and plans, rearranging her dream, he couldn't believe he was actually holding her.

He glanced down at her lips. No, he wasn't entitled to that, but seeing the joy he had a part in was enough. At least he could bring joy to someone.

Finally, after all the little setbacks, the plans had been approved. There was no reason to think there would be any further delays. There was still plenty of time to spend in each other's company. To watch her dream come to fruition, to help bring it to life, made him happier than he had been in a long time. But when his part in it was done, when her dream was finally a reality, where would that leave him?

But that was for the future to worry about. The present was all about the joy of creation—something he intended to enjoy to the fullest.

Trina set the large coffee urn on the floor in the back of her car and pushed the fold-up table over a

little further. She went back in the house for the coffeecake and strudel she'd baked. One more trip for the paper plates, cups, sugar, and cream. Had she forgotten anything?

She knew Jared liked his coffee black and had a sweet tooth for pastries. She made sure there was plenty for the crew, too.

Finally, she started the car and headed into the darkness. Thank goodness she was a morning person. The clock in the car showed it was only five fifteen. Hopefully she would be the first one there so she could set up. With traffic still light at this hour, she hoped to beat the crew.

When she turned down Center Street, construction vehicles were everywhere, traffic reduced to a single lane. She pulled over and was about to get out of the car when a traffic officer headed towards her, gesturing for her to keep moving.

Trina caught sight of Jared just as the officer reached her car. "I just need to unload some things here, officer."

"I don't care what you have. I need you to move this—"

"Excuse me, officer," Jared said. "She's with the crew from my office." He glanced in the back seat, and then back at Trina. "Thanks for bringing everything. I'm sure the officer wouldn't mind helping to unload so we can get your car out of the way."

Trina smothered her chuckle as Jared opened the back door, handed the folding table to the officer, and then followed with the coffee urn and bag of paper products.

She bent over to reach in for the pastries. A hand dropped on her shoulder. "I'll take that, ma'am. I think

you'd best move your vehicle on down the road a piece where it won't be blocking traffic."

Jared sounded like a lawman from the old West, so she answered with her best western twang. "Why, thank you, sheriff. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. I wouldn't want to stand in the way of progress." She turned and batted her eyelashes, and then handed him the box of pastries. She grinned at the sight of the policeman on the sidewalk setting up the table.

She shook her head and glanced at Jared. "I guess it's true."

"You guess what's true, ma'am?"

"That police are drawn to coffee like bees are to honey."

"Well, I've never heard it put quite that way, but I think you might be on to something. And from the smell of this platter I'd say he'll have a little something to go with that coffee."

He closed the car door after she got in.

"Thanks for saving me from having to lug it all back here—and having to drag your guys away to help me."

Jared smiled and touched the imaginary brim of his hat. "We aim to please, ma'am. Now you hurry on back now, y'hear?"

Trina laughed and then merged into traffic. She chuckled again as she drove a few blocks away to park the car. She couldn't wait to see what else this day would hold.

Jared stepped outside and jogged across the road.

He handed Trina a pair of safety glasses, a hardhat, and a pair of earplugs. "You want to check it out before we start tearing it all down?"

Trina glanced at the earplugs in her hand as Jared took the safety glasses and set them on her head. "Is it safe for me to go in there?"

"As long as you wear the protective gear and stick by me, you'll be fine," he said with a wink and a glance at the hard hat in her hand. Jared wrapped a hand around her elbow and looked both ways before tugging her across the street.

Trina set the hard hat on her head.

"Ready?" Jared asked as he pulled the door open.

"Now you ask me," she answered with a laugh.

He put his earplugs back in, stepped inside, looking around to be sure it was safe, and then held the door open for her.

Trina looked all around as the old drywall was being prepped to come down.

Even with his earplugs on, the explosive sound of the rear wall collapsing was loud, drowning out the sound of banging.

Trina's hands covered her ears, the earplugs still clutched in one hand.

He shook his head and grabbed the earplugs from her, and pushed them into her ears as another wall crumbled in, filling the air with dust.

Jared tugged on her arm and stepped outside. He pulled his earplugs out and turned to her, anger simmering. "What did you think I gave them to you for?"

He watched her take one out and wiggle a finger in her ear.

"Can you hear me?" He watched her face for any

sign of distress.

“You sound like you’re in a tunnel.” Trina frowned and met his look. “But I can’t hear myself at all.”

He shook his head, turned, and tugged her across the street. “We need to get you to the doc to be sure your ears are OK.”

Trina only caught every other word or so. She wriggled a finger in her ear again. It was so odd. There was no pain, just this muffled sound. Wouldn’t it hurt if an eardrum had ruptured?

“I’ll be fine. I just need to give them a little time to recover.” The fact that she couldn’t hear herself speak was disconcerting. *How will I be able to sing?* She tapped the side of her head as if to shake water out of her ear.

Jared took hold of her arm and led her to one of the construction trailers.

She didn’t even have a chance to read the sign on the door before he pushed it open and urged her up the steps.

Medical instruments lined the countertop in covered trays, with a sink in the middle. To her right a chair sat next to a medical table, complete with a white paper covering.

Trina looked from Jared to the other man and frowned. Neither said anything.

Jared stepped closer, touched her cheek, and then slid his hand to her ear, turning her head slightly with a gentle nudge. He pulled the earplug out of her other ear.

“How’s that?”