

Snowy Carolina

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Duplication or distribution via any means is illegal and a violation of International Copyright Law, subject to criminal prosecution and upon conviction, fines and/or imprisonment. This eBook cannot be legally loaned or given to others. No part of this eBook can be shared or reproduced without the express permission of the publisher. **DEDICATION** To Jaedyn, Aniyah and Autumn, my three beautiful granddaughters: Stay strong, be respectful, love yourself and never give up on your dreams. And thanks to my new editor Lawan Williams for the very nice and friendly phone call and for the great job she and the other editors did on "Snowy Carolina." **CHAPTER ONE** "Why are you being so stubborn?" Sean Nichols asked Palin James as he looked down at her. She was trying to drive away from the grocery store when he'd waylaid her. She had stopped in to stock up on food to make it through the next week while she finished redecorating some of the rooms of the mountain farm house left to her by her uncle Jake. "My answer is still no. I want to keep the place." For the last two weeks since she moved to Piedmont from New Orleans, Sean, his young brother Pete, and various employees of Nichol's Construction Company and Real Estate had tried to get her to sell the property to them. "It's too much for you to handle," Sean insisted. Palin started up the engine of her Jeep. "Why? Because I'm a girl?" "Yes," Sean answered not even bothering to hide the annoyance or his chauvinistic view from her. The big lummoX just glared down on her defiantly with those sexy green eyes and she wondered how she had ever fantasized herself in love with him when they were kids. "Apparently my uncle didn't see it that way, or he wouldn't have left the place to me." "Jake left it to you because you were his only living heir and felt obligated." Part

of that was so not true. Her uncle loved her and knew she loved that farm. It was where she had spent every summer vacation since she was able to walk, there where she made fond memories with friends, and where she met him. Sentimentality washed over her about her uncle taking her fishing and teaching her how to swim in the creek and she'd be damned if she'd let Sean take that away from her because he wanted to turn it into some type of winter resort. Besides she had her own plans for the place. "Will you please move? I have groceries in the back that I need to refrigerate." Sean sighed and leaned off the car. "Just think about the offer, will you? It is very generous." Yes, it was. Far more than the place was worth in its present state. Her uncle had let it go in his declining years. But she planned to restore it to its original state with the money from her inheritance and the money she earned from her song-writing. "Okay, I'll think about it." Sean stepped aside. But she didn't say how long. She put her foot on the accelerator and drove away from him leaving him in her dust. It was hard enough looking at him, feeling the way she did about him. She continued to drive past the other local merchants. Piedmont was the place where waterfalls first appeared on streams and rivers and consisted of gently rolling countryside broken by hills and low mountain ridges. But it had changed a lot since she was a child. Most of the rural farms were gone; now replaced by shopping centers, housing, and corporate offices. She turned on her radio trying to get anything but static. Country music filtered out the speakers. Palin tried to find something else. "Ooh, Beyonce." She put both her hands on the wheel and rocked in her seat as she continued down the highway. She passed the local Wal-Mart, and began to breathe a little easier once she was far enough away from Sean. Being in love with someone and hating them at the same time worked on her heart and her nervous system. Why did he have to be so damn irresistible? Or insistent? Didn't he understand that the farmhouse was all she had left in the world to remember her family? Moments later she turned off the highway and onto a dirt road that not only led to her home but also to Sean's. His parents were now dead had left the house to him and Pete. Why didn't they turn it into a resort instead of bothering her? Why be greedy? Her new home sat on fifty acres of land, nestled amongst the oak trees. The farmhouse, a sprawling twelve room home dated back to the early eighteen hundreds, but had been restored by her great-grandfather who had bricked the place, adding to its beauty. There were several out-buildings, a barn, a storage shed, and two or three car garage. Once a powerful tobacco farm, her uncle had decided selling trees was more lucrative. The property also had a pond teeming with trout, a small natural waterfall, and several picnic areas. Palin sighed looking over at it as she drove in. It was all hers and she'd be damn if she'd allow Sean to get his hands on it and turn it into a tourist trap. Palin parked her Jeep just outside the main house, got out, and began unloading her groceries from the back. Once she had it all inside, she started putting the meat in the freezer and the rest of the groceries into the cabinets. She left out the fixings for dinner, and then went into the parlor to light the fireplace. Christmas was rapidly approaching and the weather had turned cold. The meteorologist had predicted snow for later and Palin looked forward to it with mixed emotions since she'd never seen snow before except for on television and in magazines. Maybe she should have chopped more firewood, she thought as she looked down at the small stack in the basket next to the hearth. And maybe she should have picked up more flashlights and batteries in case the farmhouse lost power. Oh well, she thought, there is always tomorrow. Palin added another log to the fire and went upstairs to her bedroom to change her clothes and put on a sweater until the heat circulated throughout the house. Maybe next year she might have central air and heating installed. It would be costly but she felt she was worth it and it would bring up the value of the property. Right now her plans were just to fix herself something to eat and then get back to song writing. A couple of award winning singers had asked her to compose something for them and she was working on something special for Ashton Mayfield, a red hot singer who captivated last year's American Music Awards with his debut album. Palin turned on the television in the kitchen and got busy peeling shrimp for her gumbo before she started the roux...the flour and oil base used to make the brown liqueur of the seafood dish. Getting all the ingredients had been a challenge, especially the crabs. She had to settle for lumped crab meat in a can and luckily she had brought enough filé with her to season the gumbo once it finished cooking. She made sure she brought along enough hot sauce, Tabasco, Blue Plate Mayonnaise, and grits to last for a while until she'd

have her best friend Janice send her some more. Palin added flour and oil to the bottom of the big deep pot and began stirring. She kept it up to make sure it didn't burn and then began adding the seafood stock and chicken and continued stirring. Once the allotted time had passed, Palin started adding the seafood...oysters, shrimp, crab, and then the smoked sausage, chicken gizzards, and ham chunks. Finally she turned the pot off, removed it from the hot burner, and placed it aside on a wooden chopping board to cool before transferring most of it to containers to freeze it. Palin steamed some rice next and began preparing the homemade French bread. It was nearly dark by the time she finished. She went upstairs for a quick hot shower to get the seafood smell off of her and to warm up. The temperature had dropped dramatically over the last couple of hours since she returned home from the grocery and it had started to sleet. Palin turned on the radiator to warm the upstairs level of the house and then went downstairs for dinner. There was a knock at the door the moments her foot hit the bottom of the stairs. Palin went to answer it. She opened the door to find Pete and Sean Nichols standing outside the screened door. Palin ran her eyes over the tall handsome blonds. "Yes?" she asked. "We came to check on you," Pete said. "It's starting to snow and we know you've never seen the stuff before." "I'm okay," She said to them through the screen. "We brought some wood to stoke the hearth too." She opened the screen, looking at Pete standing there struggling with wood. "That's mighty neighborly of you." Pete carried it inside. Sean hesitated for a minute and then decided to enter with the rest of the wood. Palin closed the door and followed them into the parlor. "Something smells good," Pete said. "What are you cooking?" "Seafood gumbo," Palin answered. "Would you like to join me for supper?" "No," Sean answered quickly. "Yes," Pete answered. Palin smirked at Sean. She didn't care one way or the other if he ate or not. "Well, it's the least I can do since you brought me all this wood. Come on, it's ready." "I can't," Sean replied. "I have a meeting." "Can't it wait until you've eaten?" Palin asked. "No," he said abruptly. He turned and left the parlor, leaving Pete with her. She heard the door open and shut. "His loss," Pete said with a smile. "Looks like you're stuck with me." Palin smiled back at him. "I don't consider you joining me for dinner as stuck." She led him out of the parlor and walked with him to the kitchen. "You're much better company anyway, even when we were kids." While Sean and some of the other guys in the area treated her like a nuisance, Pete stuck to her like glue, taking her exploring in the wood, pushing her on the make-shift swing her uncle erected for her, and even taking her fishing. Hmm, so how did she end up falling for Sean? "You've done some redecorating," Pete said as he washed his hands at the kitchen sink. Palin handed him a towel to dry his hands. "I just painted the walls and changed the curtains. My uncle had zero decorating skills." She pointed to a chair and Pete sat down. She pulled two deep white bowls from the cabinet, spoons from the drawer, and began setting the table for two. Minutes later she sat across the table from Pete eating. "Oh my God, this is delicious," Pete said. She had added the filé to both their bowls right before serving. "Thanks, my grandmother taught me how to make it." "And is that homemade bread?" Palin passed the basket over to him. "French bread. It goes great with gumbo." He sliced the bread with a knife, buttered it, and bit into it. "Yummy," he moaned in-between chews. He swallowed. "You baked this yourself?" Palin's gaze wandered over to Pete. He'd changed a lot from the boy she used to play with. He stood about five foot eleven and had a thin muscular frame. The over-head light brought out the golden highlights of his short blond hair. Yet she saw a glimpse of the younger Pete in those mesmerizing green eyes. Palin sighed. Pete had turned into a total babe. And what a great smile. It made her heart flutter. She nodded. "My grandfather owned a little bakery. I used to hang out with him when the arguing at home got too much." It was no secret that her parents didn't get along, which was one of the reasons she loved visiting her uncle. "He used to sit me on this tall stool and show me how to make bread. I never forgot." "You're a very good cook," he said finishing his meal. "Would you like dessert? Homemade bread pudding." "Bread pudding?" Pete asked. "It's different than the name implies," she assured him. She sliced him a generous piece of the sweet dessert and placed it before him. Pete cut into the dessert and sampled. "This is simply delicious. What's in it?" "Bread, of course, raisins, and other ingredients." "Sean is going to be so disappointed that he missed this. You know how he likes sweets." She kind of remembered. His loss, she mused. Maybe she'd send him some with Pete. After dinner, Pete helped her with the dishes and then they retired to the parlor to chat and

catch up. Of course she had a million things she could have been doing, but every now and then it was just good to sit down and talk a spell with old friends. § § § Where is he? Sean paced the floor in the den at home. How long did it take to eat a bowl of gumbo? He heard the key in the lock several minutes later. Pete had finally come home. He looked over at the clock on the mantle. Nine o'clock. What could the two of them have been doing for three hours? Wait. Pete had a serious crush on Palin, always had since they were kids. He'd kill him if he took advantage of her. Sean left the room to meet him. Pete entered carrying a bag. Sean followed him into the kitchen. "Where have you been?" Pete put the bag down on the kitchen table. "At Palin's. Remember, you left me there because you had a meeting?" "But that was three hours ago." "So," Pete replied taking a large plastic container out and placed it on the table, followed by bread, and something sweet smelling. "I didn't realize there were limits to how long she and I could visit." "Don't be a smart ass," Sean said. "What do you have there?" "Your dinner," Pete said. "Palin sent it as thanks for the wood."

All song-writer Palin James wanted was to return to Piedmont, North Carolina, a place where she always felt safe. She planned to raise her future kids away from the hustle and bustle of city life. But her dreams could be shattered if construction owner Sean Nichols got his hands on her uncle's land.

Sean Nichols always dreamed of opening a winter resort on a patch of land owned by his deceased neighbor. He'd always thought his younger brother Pete shared his dream until Pete fell in love with the land's new owner. Was blood thicker than water? Or was love more powerful?

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