



HEARTS HAVEN

LEXI'S HEART

DELIA LATHAM

A SPECIAL
MOTHER'S DAY
ROMANCE

HER HEART. HIS FAITH. LOVE REBORN

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.

Lexi's Heart

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Lexi's Heart

Forty-three-year-old Lexi Carlisle's abusive marriage ended three years ago. Deeply scarred by the experience, and helplessly watching her beloved mother succumb to Alzheimers, Lexi is devastated. After selling her fancy home, she rents a cottage in Heart's Haven, a special place unlike any other. Slowly learning to live again, she despairs of ever delivering the message of love that burns within her heart for her ever-worsening mother. But Mitch Gaynor, a handsome Christian author, reminds Lexi that with

Her Heart. His faith. Love Reborn.

Reviews: Lexi's Heart

Lexi's pain is one that many of us know and understand. The loss of an aging parent to Alzheimer's disease is heart wrenching, watching them drift away. Yet the joy that can be found in those special moments with them are treasures to cling to. And going through it alone is nearly unbearable.

Mitch is so obviously a God-given gift to both mother and daughter that your heart can't help but sigh. You can feel the God's love wrap around you as you read this story.

Kudos to Ms. Latham! Well done!

[Donna B. Snow, Author](#)

This is a sweet and gentle story about the re-knitting of life's raveled ends. Lexi is afraid to love again, afraid of losing the mother who's been her lifelong best friend, but that's where the re-knitting comes in. Delightful!

Amazon Review by [Liz Flaherty](#)

This series has touched my heart in so many ways, thank you Delia, Mary, Tanya and Marianne for all you give us through these characters and Heart's Haven! Friends, your hearts will be filled with so much joy, laughter, emotion and love! Check this series out! You'll be forever changed!

[Amazon review by Sharon Dean](#)

Excerpt: Lexi's Heart

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. ~ Proverbs 3:5-6

Heart's Haven.

The wooden sign overhead stretched clear across the double gates fronting Andrew Hart's property. Huge. And quite an attention-grabber, with its none-too-perfectly hand-carved message. Rumor had it the two boldly scrawled words had been etched by an inebriated man who'd misspelled both of them and given the quaint little apartment complex a brand new name.

Lexi's vehicle passed under the sign, and despite the tinge of bitterness that soured her stomach, she managed a half-grin. Who would have thought, even as recently as a few months ago, that Alexa Martin Carlisle would move into the complex of rental cottages behind Hart's big manor? Her little dwelling in the heart-shaped circle of eight identical ones was a far cry from the mini-mansion where she'd lived in another life. Yet giving up that pretentious showcase hadn't given her a moment's hesitation—the place held mostly awful memories anyway.

Her twenty-three year marriage had fallen apart at the ever-weakening seams three years ago. She kept the house as long as she could, but when her business partner at the salon pulled up stakes to move out of town, Lexi knew she couldn't afford the mortgage on

both places. A cottage had become available at Heart's Haven the day her cavernous house sold.

Decision made.

Nice to know something could still go right for her....

Go see Mama.

The thought sliced through her mind out of nowhere, just as she turned the wheel toward Angel Falls and touched her foot to the accelerator. She frowned, gave her head a slight shake, and ignored it. She visited Mama on Monday, not Friday.

Again, decision made. Lexi rarely wasted time on mental hashing and rehashing. She floored the gas pedal and sent her car flying into town.

Owner and operator of Angel Hair—the sweetest little beauty salon in East Texas, in Lexi's biased opinion—she spent each Monday cleaning the shop. Every barber-type facility in the mid-sized town closed its doors on the first day of the work week, making it the ideal time to give the place a decent once-over. Lexi still tried to keep Sundays free of extensive labor, even though she hadn't attended a church service in too long to remember. She recognized the contrasting behaviors but couldn't seem to change the pattern. Old habits did, indeed, die hard.

Decision made.

On Friday afternoons, she always drove into Lufkin to visit her mother at Rosewood Senior Care. The facility was the only place within driving distance that boasted the excellent reputation and caring staff Lexi required for the most important person in her life. The thirty-minute drive wasn't convenient, but it could have been worse. She might have had to drive all the way to Dallas.

She shuddered at the thought. Although she wasn't a church goer, she did thank God for Rosewood! Having Mama half an hour away was difficult enough. Two hours would be unthinkable.

What gift would she take with her this week? She'd have to fit in some shopping time before Friday. On every visit, Lexi presented her mother with some small item...something meaningful, that she hoped would trigger a spark in Mama's sadly short-circuited memory. She

loved the hunt for the perfect gift, loved her recollections of fun shopping excursions the two of them had enjoyed in better times.

But Mother's Day was coming up in a few weeks, and Lexi wished she could find a way to just skip to the week afterward—why on earth hadn't scientists found a way to do that by now? Getting through this first year on her own would be hard. Beyond hard. As far back as she could remember, Mother's Day had been a treasured time of togetherness—church first, then a special lunch, just her and Mama, usually at some fancy little tea room they'd scouted out earlier.

Go see her.

The words thundered through her mind with the force of a bellowing megaphone. Lexi's foot slammed down on the brake, and she sucked in a sharp breath that hung in her frozen throat. She eased onto the shoulder and forced herself to breathe. A glance at her dash verified the radio's continuing state of non-operation. It hadn't worked in over a year.

She had heard something. But now she decided it hadn't been an actual voice—not an audible one that required ears to hear. Yet the directive rang too clearly to be denied.

Go! Now!

Without further hesitation, she checked for traffic, made a sharp U-turn, and headed for Lufkin. The salon would have to get by on last week's efforts.

Decision made.

By the time she walked through the doors at Rosewood just over half an hour later, Lexi's heart pounded in her chest hard enough to hurt. That pressing need to see her mother had not lifted throughout the entire drive from Angel Falls, during which her imagination ran wild.

What would she find in room seven? Maybe Mama would be lucid, for the first time in many months. Lexi longed for that improbable occurrence. She wanted one last opportunity to tell her mother how much she loved and appreciated her.

Mother. Best friend. Same sweet woman.

Mama had been Lexi's source of strength through the good and bad of a life that weighed heavily toward the latter. Her support during the years Lexi had tried to salvage a farcical marriage was all that kept her from falling apart...or running away...or simply giving in to depression and melancholy.

Surely Mama had known, before Alzheimer's stole her ability to hold a memory inside her deteriorating mind, that Lexi adored her. Hadn't she?

But if Lexi had ever said the words out loud, she couldn't recall the moment. And she wanted to say them, wanted her mother to know she loved her.

Because a mother like Claudette Martin deserved to know she was adored by her only child.

On the other hand, Mama's condition might have worsened. What if the staff had been forced to physically restrain her? *Oh, God, please...not that!* She couldn't stand the thought of seeing her gentle mother bound to her bed, struggling against restraints, begging to be released...

She approached the familiar room with a dry mouth, pounding heart, and trembling hands. Just outside the open door, she stopped, startled to hear the steady cadence of a deep, pleasant male voice from inside. Lexi required only a few seconds to understand that someone was reading aloud to her mother. Curious, she slipped into the room.

Facing away from the door and toward his audience, a large man kicked back in a chair too small for his frame. Long legs were stretched out in front of him and crossed at the ankle. Clad in blue jeans, black cowboy boots, and a matching Stetson, the stranger sat near a small elderly woman whose empty eyes were focused on something only she could see.

Though Lexi said nothing, the rumbling voice stopped within seconds of her entrance. Relaxed shoulders stiffened, and the stranger closed a paperback novel and stood to his feet. Only then did he turn to face her.

"Hi!" A curious, silver-gray gaze met hers. "Can I help you?"

She stared, too bewildered to say anything. She knew this man! Well, she knew of him. But why would Angel Falls' famous resident novelist be reading to her mother...in Lufkin?

And it hadn't sounded as though he was reading one of his own much-lauded Christian Westerns.

She opened her mouth, but couldn't force a single word past her lips.

The woman standing just inside the door seemed poised to fly away at the slightest provocation. Mitch Gaynor recognized Alexa Carlisle. He'd been trying to keep his eyes off this woman every time he got his hair cut in Angel Falls for several years.

"Help me?" When she finally responded to his question, her voice wasn't quite icy, but it sure as shootin' wasn't warm.

"Yes. You can tell me who gave you permission to be in my mother's room."

Her mother? *Oh, boy.* Mitch heaved a hefty mental sigh. *Not getting off to a good start, are you, cowboy?*

Lexi wasn't his stylist. He'd always gone to her partner, Malinda Carroll—not because Malinda was better at her job, but because he'd known her since they were children. Over the course of time, he'd learned far more about Lexi than he ought to know, and only partly because Malinda talked too much.

He knew that God had given her a mega-dose of beauty she wasn't even aware she possessed, but any fool with decent eyesight could see that. He knew her husband deserved to be lassoed to the meanest bull in Texas and dragged clear across the state. Mitch had no use for a man who would mistreat a woman—especially one like Lexi. Even Malinda had only good things to say about her, and for Malinda, that was a big thing.

He also knew that Lexi's no-good excuse of a husband had divorced her three years ago, in favor of some young thing he'd no doubt treat exactly as he'd treated Lexi.

And with Todd Carlisle out of the picture and already married to someone else, Mitch was acutely aware that he was free to act on his

attraction for the lovely woman who now stood in Mrs. Martin's doorway, staring at him as if he'd grown another head right before her big green eyes.

In fact, he couldn't think of one good reason he hadn't done that already. Except...well, doggone it, the woman all but radiated a "no trespassing" policy.

A panoply of expressions chased one another across Lexi's face. Curiosity battled with concern...and something else. Mitch considered himself a more-than-passable reader of people, and unless he'd lost his touch, he was looking at a whole heckuva lot of distrust.

Lexi didn't quite like him, and certainly didn't trust him.

He's way too handsome.

Lexi raked the man's chiseled features with a sharp gaze. Men are either nice or handsome. Rarely both. And it's easy to see which category Mitch Gaynor falls into.

Her acid tone seemed to have no effect on him. He stood at ease, one finger marking his place in the novel. His eyes tracked her like a hunter might watch a particularly skittish prey—not quite ready to put a bullet in the poor animal, but determined not to let it escape.

Well, she was nobody's prey. Not anymore.

"I asked what you're doing here with my mother, Mr. Gaynor."

His lips twitched annoyingly, and she realized her slip of the tongue. Now he knew that she knew who he was. Oh, well. She hiked both brows in what she hoped was a suitably challenging expression.

He held up the book. "I'm reading to her, Ms. Carlisle."

So he recognized her, as well. From Angel Hair, of course, since—unlike him—she wasn't famous for anything at all.

"I was actually able to figure that out on my own. *Why* are you reading to her?"

To her irritation, a teasing grin appeared on that movie-cowboy face.

"Well...why not?"

Oh, yes, this guy was far too handsome, with a body to match—not that Lexi noticed—and downright cocky to boot!

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