

HEARTS HAVEN

LEXI'S HEART

DELIA LATHAM

A SPECIAL  
MOTHER'S DAY  
ROMANCE

HER HEART. HIS FAITH. LOVE REBORN

# Lexi's Heart

Delia Latham

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**

**COPYRIGHT 2013 by Delia Latham**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or Pelican Ventures, LLC except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

eBook editions are licensed for your personal enjoyment only. eBooks may not be re-sold, copied or given to other people. If you would like to share an eBook edition, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with.

Contact Information: [titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com](mailto:titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com)

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated are taken from the King James translation, public domain.

Cover Art by Nicola Martinez

White Rose Publishing, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC  
[www.pelicanbookgroup.com](http://www.pelicanbookgroup.com) PO Box 1738 \*Aztec, NM \* 87410

White Rose Publishing Circle and Rosebud logo is a trademark of Pelican Ventures, LLC

Publishing History

First White Rose Edition, 2013

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-275-2

**Published in the United States of America**

## Dedication

To the three amazing authors who have traveled with me throughout the entire Heart's Haven journey: Tanya Stowe, Mary Manners, and Marianne Evans. It has been a joy and a pleasure getting to know each of you. My life has been enriched by the contact. I am truly honored to call each of you "friend," and have been immensely blessed by the entire Heart's Haven experience!



## Praise for *Jewels for the Kingdom*

Author Delia Latham creates an outstanding piece of work as she gives the reader moments of love, pain, excitement, ministry, soul searching examination and so much more. ~ Darin Godby for Readers Favorite

Delia Latham has a gift for creating engaging, magnetic characters and a charming setting where heavenly encounters unfold. Endearing relationships and a journey to forgiveness are strong elements in this God-inspired short story written with refreshing creativity. ~ Nancee Marchinowski, Perspectives by Nancee

Ms. Latham has beautifully woven together a story of love, romance and God's great forgiveness. ~ Gay N. Lewis, Author of *Sarah: Mission of Love*



## Other Titles by Delia Latham

### Novels

*Destiny's Dream (Solomon's Gate, Book 1)*

*Kylie's Kiss (Solomon's Gate, Book 2)*

*Gypsy's Game (Solomon's Gate, Book 3)*

### Novellas

*Yesterday's Promise*

*Treehouse*

*Jewels for the Kingdom (Heart's Haven)*





# 1

*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!

## 2

Just over an hour later, she fought a wave of pure panic as Mitch set a small bowl of coconut-pineapple sherbet on the tiny table and handed her a plastic spoon. He lowered his bulk into the chair across from her, and amusement overrode the moment of terror. Not a small man to begin with, his cowboy hat and boots provided an illusion of even greater height. As for girth...well, those broad shoulders said it all.

The man looked completely out of place in a dainty ice cream parlor chair.

How had he talked her into coming here with him? Lexi couldn't even remember the tactic he'd used, and yet here she sat, trying to keep from laughing out loud.

"What?" He lifted a heaping spoonful of pistachio ice cream to his lips—nothing dainty about the size of that bite!—and paused. Gray eyes narrowed, and he tilted his head, studying her closely enough to send her heartbeat into overdrive. "What's so funny?"

Lexi couldn't quite swallow a giggle. Part nerves, part humor, and completely embarrassing. What would he think of her, a forty-three-year-old woman with too many lines on her face to lie about it, giggling like a teenager? "It's just...you in that pretty little chair."

He pulled off a very convincing glower and, to her utter horror, another burst of giggles burst from her

lips.

“So what are you saying?” Sliding the humongous dollop of ice cream into his mouth, Mitch took time to swallow it while maintaining that vicious glare. “That I look like a bull in a china shop?”

A little taste of her sherbet gave Lexi an opportunity to consider her answer. “Something like that.”

A hearty burst of laughter erased the fake scowl. “Well, honesty begs honesty, lady. I think you probably hit the nail right square on the head.” He wiped his fingers with a napkin, tucked it into his empty ice cream cup, and landed the whole thing in a nearby trash can with a neat little basketball toss. “So tell me about your mother.”

Ripped from the humor of the moment and thrust back into harsh reality, Lexi managed a shaky smile. “You first. How often do you read at Rosewood?”

“Whenever I can. I try for once a week, usually on Mondays.”

“That’s why I haven’t seen you there before.” Lexi pushed her sherbet cup aside, too fidgety to stomach the sweet treat. “I always visit Mama on Fridays.”

“No kidding?” Mitch grinned. “You know, it just so happens that my schedule’s changing. I’ll be reading on Fridays as of...” He made a show of glancing at his cell phone calendar. “Why, this week.”

She couldn’t help smiling, despite the warning bells her good sense tried to ring. “Now isn’t that the strangest coincidence?”

“Very strange.” Mitch leaned forward and held her gaze with his own. “To answer your question, I do it because they took such wonderful care of my dad at Rosewood. He had Alzheimer’s too. I, uh—” He

cleared his throat and looked away. "I lost him just over a year ago."

"I'm truly sorry."

"Me, too. I miss him." He hauled in a massive breath, then shot her a smile. "Your turn."

She hesitated, but she'd needed a sympathetic ear for so long...Lexi spoke haltingly at first, but then the words came faster and longer than she could remember ever having spoken at one time. The man across the table listened without interruption, but his eyes expressed genuine interest. In fact, that heart-stopping gray gaze held a degree of caring Lexi couldn't quite believe. How could this stranger care so much about the details of her life when Todd hadn't managed to do so in over two decades of marriage?

*Be very careful, Alexa. Your heart's not ready for the likes of Mitch Gaynor.*

Or any other man. She'd already tried the marriage thing. Tried it to the tune of twenty-three wasted years and a heart that felt used, abused, and tossed aside like a worthless piece of trash.

Not that any of that mattered. Mitch wasn't interested in Lexi's heart. He was just a nice man who wanted to help her through a situation not unlike what he'd recently endured.

He wanted to be a friend.

Alzheimer's had sucked Lexi's dearest friend into a hopeless place where she couldn't follow. She desperately needed someone to fill the void left by Mama's mental absence. If Mitch wanted to be that someone, what could it hurt?

But gratitude was all she had to give, and she couldn't afford to forget it—not for a single moment.