



A HEART

Adrift

LAURA
FRANTZ

a novel

“The perfect blend of history, faith, and love in all its forms, this tale of second chances and brave choices swept me away. Laura Frantz brings colonial coastal Virginia to life so well, I could almost taste the salty sea breeze. Expertly crafted and elegantly penned, *A Heart Adrift* proves once again why this author ranks among my all-time favorites. Highly recommended for fans of historical fiction.”

Jocelyn Green, Christy Award–winning
author of *Shadows of the White City*

“Laura Frantz has a way with story, lacing her books with hope and starlight. *A Heart Adrift* contains a considerable amount of both. It’s a sweetly satisfying novel that is as addictive as the chocolates Esmée Shaw creates and Henri Lennox craves. A slow-burn romance aches with longing and the possibility of second chances, but it’s the relationship between vastly different sisters that stole my heart: gentle Esmée, who finds all she’s ever wanted against the backdrop of crashing waves and an isolated island, and vivacious Eliza, a woman who discovers everything she was always meant to be in the loss of all she thought she was.

“*A Heart Adrift* firmly anchors readers during the stirrings of the hardy remembered French and Indian War. And in the middle of that storm, it shines a light on providential grace and the beauty of redemptive love.”

Kimberly Duffy, author of *A Tapestry of Light* and *Every Word Unsaid*

“*A Heart Adrift* is a lush treatise on love lost and found at the intersection of ambition and desire. While Esmée was endearing to me as a woman with agency and intellect, persevering against the rigid constructs of her time period, Henri’s passion to forge a life with the woman he loves while danger looms awakened every last one of my romantic sensibilities. Laura Frantz’s rich tapestry of history and heroism is destined to dazzle readers of Susanna Kearsley and Diana Gabaldon—all while luring new fans with its intricate plot, delicious pacing, and welcome intrigue. This long-established queen of epic historical fiction is at the height of her game. And I know I speak for many when I happily say I cannot wait to see where she sweeps us away to next!”

Rachel McMillan, author of *The London Restoration* and *The Mozart Code*

Laura Frantz, *A Heart Adrift*

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Books by Laura Frantz

The Frontiersman's Daughter

Courting Morrow Little

The Colonel's Lady

The Mistress of Tall Acre

A Moonbow Night

The Lacemaker

A Bound Heart

An Uncommon Woman

Tidewater Bride

A Heart Adrift

THE BALLANTYNE LEGACY

Love's Reckoning

Love's Awakening

Love's Fortune

A HEART

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To my heart sister,
Ginger Graham,
who reached home ahead of me.
I hope heaven has a beautiful library.



PROLOGUE

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more, men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea, and one on shore, to one thing constant never.

Shakespeare

VIRGINIA COAST APRIL 1745

With his back to the coastal wind, Henri Lennox settled his arms around Esmée Shaw, guiding her soft, pale hands with his tanned, callused fingers as they let the long silken line out. The pear-shaped kite caught on a gust, tugging at the string till it threatened to snap.

“Let it fly away from you bit by bit,” he told her.

She did so, her laugh a surprised trill as the kite climbed higher. “Shall I let out more line?”

“Slowly, aye. With the right technique, you can even make it dance.”

“What?”

“Just give a tug to the string now and again. Like this.” He showed her as they gazed upward, the kite zigzagging against the azure sky, its tail a scarlet streak as it soared and dipped.

Wonder laced her tone. “Where did you get such a winsome creation?”

“The East Indies. They’ve been kite-flying for centuries. We colonials are just coming awake. Our kite lacks but one thing.”

“Oh?” She tugged on the line and sent the kite dancing again.

He relaxed his hold on her hands, resting his jaw against her hatless head. She fit neatly beneath his chin, her back warm against his linen-clad chest, the wind ruffling her carefully pinned hair like he longed to do with his fingers. He breathed in the telltale rose scent that seemed to imbue every ebony strand. “The kite lacks decoration. Our entwined initials should suit.”

“Henri . . . how romantic.” Her voice held a touch of teasing. “’Tis something I might fancy, not you.”

“You’ve no idea what keeps me awake long nights at sea.”

The afternoon sun sank behind them when it had been in their eyes minutes before. Had it not just been noon? At their feet was an empty basket, the remains of a *piquenique*. The cold meats, cheeses, and fruit had been devoured, even the little comfits molded in the shape of anchors from Shaw’s Chocolate shop. Esmée’s hat was atop the sand near her discarded shoes. Henri saw Admiral and Mrs. Shaw at a distance, slowly walking the beach with Esmée’s younger sister.

He kissed his beloved’s soft brow, his hands falling to her tightly cinched waist. “With you, time seems to melt away when I want it to stand still.”

“If I could stop the clock, I would.” She let out more line, head tipped back as the kite soared higher. “I want to run with it.”

“In those petticoats?” Even as he asked it, she darted away from him. Lithe and laughing, she ran full tilt along the shore, a ruffled white wave breaking over her bare feet.

He started after her, stepping over her hat and slippers. The sand slowed him, his boots heavy, but he finally caught up with her. He untangled the kite string from her fingers and led her behind a dune that hid them from any onlookers.

“Henri, will you spoil my merriment?”

“My mind is more on kissing than kites, Esmée.”

She caught her breath as he brought the kite string behind his back, out of her reach, while his free arm encircled her. She laid her head upon his chest, her long-lashed eyes closing. Emotion knotted his throat. Did she realize she held his heart? Not just a piece of it. The entire whole of it.

She raised her head, her green eyes soft yet wary. “*Don’t*, Henri.”

He brushed back a dark tendril of her hair. “Don’t kiss you?”

“Don’t tell me you’re leaving again.”

“All right, *ma belle*. I’ll just kiss you then.” The tender moment was theirs, the future be hanged. He kissed her soundly. Rather, she kissed him, her arms tightening around his neck as if anchoring him to the spot and preventing their parting. Sensations she alone was capable of rousing swam through him, widening eddies of desire shadowed by regret.

“Captain Lennox? Esmée?”

At the sound of the admiral’s voice they drew apart, and inexplicably Henri let go of the line. The colorful kite kept soaring, borne on a west wind over the water, seeming to touch the clouds before vanishing from sight.

CHAPTER

ONE



YORK, VIRGINIA **SEPTEMBER 1755**

Chocolate had been Captain Henri Lennox's one weakness. Was it still?

Pondering it, Esmée wiped cocoa-dusted hands on her apron and stood in the open doorway of the chocolate shop facing York's sail-studded harbor. The noon sun still held a touch of summer, drenching her in buttery yellow light.

A pint of honey-sweetened milk. Two dried Mexican chilies. One cinnamon stick. A crushed vanilla pod. All whisked into a steamy froth with a wooden molinillo.

That was how the captain preferred his chocolate. Though it had been ten years since she'd last seen him, Henri Lennox's memory still chafed like a saltwater rash. Would it always?

Overhead the shop's wooden sign swung noisily on its iron bracket in a contrary coastal wind. *Shaw's Chocolate*. Newly painted and adorned with a silver chocolate pot, it beckoned countless cocoa-craving customers.

At six o'clock, Esmée moved to close the door, trading the briny tang of the sea for the warm, rich scent of cocoa instead.

"Daughter, have you finished Lady Lightfoot's almonds?"

Esmée rounded the worktable as her father emerged from the adjoining coffeehouse that served as his office, his pleasure plain. Upon the long wooden countertop before them was tray after tray of confections. Esmée's favorites were the chocolate almonds, but she'd made several batches of sugared almonds too.

"Fit for the most fastidious matron in all the Tidewater," her father announced after close perusal. "And her annual ball."

Esmée smiled. "I've used cochineal and saffron to color them red and yellow—and spinach and berries for green and blue."

"Vibrant." He tossed a red confection into his mouth. "Delicious."

"I've more to do tomorrow if the weather continues cool, though I'm running short of orange flower water."

He crossed to the large bow-fronted window, taking in the moored vessels like the admiral of old. "We're overdue for a merchant fleet. We've too much illicit Dutch tea and silk handkerchiefs of late."

Was there a beat of regret in his voice? Did he miss his seafaring days? Alarm unfurled like a pirate's black flag inside her. Barnabas Shaw held himself erect, defying the stoop of age, his silver hair hidden beneath a white periwig, his garments tailored to his distinguished frame. He seemed preoccupied of late. A bit on edge. He claimed it was on account of all the bloodshed, but that seemed naught but a bad dream, the conflict on the distant frontier betwixt faraway England, France, and the Indians.

Or was he pondering her mother? Though Eleanor Shaw had been gone three years, it seemed far longer.

Turning, he faced Esmée. "Where is our summons to the ball? I've not had a look at it."

She unearthed a stack of papers beneath the counter, the gilt-edged invitation at the very bottom.

"Read it to me, if you would, as I've misplaced my spectacles."

She held the card aloft in the fading light. "Pleasure Ball. While we live, let us live. Admiral Barnabas Shaw and Miss Esmée Shaw are

requested to attend the ball at Lightfoot Hall on Tuesday, seventh of October current, at seven o'clock p.m.”

“Your sister is coming from Williamsburg, and we shall go together as a foursome.”

“Eliza never misses a frolic.” Esmée placed the invitation on a shelf. “She and Quinn are a popular pair. They dance divinely.”

“As do you.” At last he moved away from the window. “I shall be your proud escort. No doubt you’ll not lack dance partners, even at eight and twenty. ’Tis not too late, you know . . .”

Not too late for love, for marriage.

The ongoing lament was now a familiar song. “I’ve no wish to wed and leave you, Father. An occasional frolic is enough for me. Besides, who would manage the shop? Your other business ventures take all your time. You don’t even like chocolate.”

He chuckled. “’Twas your mother’s preoccupation. But she came by it honestly, being a chocolatier’s daughter.”

“A preoccupation I am happy to continue.” Esmée eyed the almonds for any imperfections. “At least for now. I’ve none of Eliza’s ambitions. I want to live simply. Be of benefit to somebody somewhere.”

She reached for the commonplace book stuffed with recipes penned in Mama’s faded, scrolling hand. The secrets of the chocolatier’s trade. She’d not exchange the old book for a chest of buried treasure . . . or a husband.

Smoothing her soiled apron, Esmée set the chatelaine at her waist clanking. Crafted of sterling silver, it had been her mother’s, a practical yet whimsical piece of jewelry she was rarely without.

“Be that as it may”—her father cleared his throat—“you were in love once.”

His low words rolled across the empty shop like a rogue wave, swamping and nearly upending her. Schooling her astonishment, she stared at him. “A foolish infatuation I’ve since recovered from.”

“Have you?” He kept his gaze on Water Street. “Or is it more you met a man who’s made every would-be suitor of yours unworthy ever since?”

How pithy he could be. How wise. But how wrong he was about this antiquated matter.

“A man who set me aside for the sea.” Esmée untied her apron and hung it from a wall peg. “A man who is deemed a respectable privateer in some circles but a pirate prince in others.”

He looked at her then, no apology in his weather-beaten features. “I don’t mean to nettle you, Daughter. I only mention it because there’s been talk that Captain Lennox has returned to the colonies.”

Her hands fisted in the folds of her skirt. Though she’d been about to retreat into the kitchen, all such practicalities flew out of her benumbed head.

“The scuttlebutt is he intends to finish the lighthouse on Indigo Island. And I must say I heartily approve. Virginia—Chesapeake Bay—has ne’er needed it so much as now. Guard ships are not enough. We must have a light.”

The light that was my idea and he abandoned upon our heated parting.

Her father talked on, unaware of the maelstrom in her head and heart. “No doubt that and his usual business bring him back, owner and part owner of several vessels as he is.”

Captain Lennox—Henri—hadn’t been home for years, at least not on the streets of York. Last she knew he’d been sailing the trade routes of the Spanish Main, his many exploits printed in the *Virginia Gazette*. Of late he held the record for the fastest sailing time, some 240 miles in less than a day. Exploits she’d dismissed as more fancy than fact. Betimes he seemed more ghost, haunting the coast.

Haunting her.

She’d grown used to thinking him afar off, not hazarding a meeting on some side street in York or even Williamsburg. The very possibility of stumbling across him had her all aflutter, her claimed recovery in question.

“Time for supper.” With a jangling of keys, her father locked the front door. “I’ll walk up the hill and home with you after I dismiss the indentures.”

She hardly heard him, lost as she was in the tattered memories of the past. His footsteps retreated, but his hard words outlasted him.

“You were in love once.”

Absently she fiddled with her chatelaine, toying with the ornamental chain with its many pins and clasps. It bore several significant trinkets. A key. Scissors. A watch. A pincushion ball. A needle case. A heart-shaped vinaigrette and another for sweetmeats.

Even a tiny silver lighthouse.