

The Tea Chest

Heidi Chiavaroli

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Heidi Chiavaroli's thrilling romance *The Tea Chest* asks questions that resonate beyond the immediate needs of its heroines.

Emma and Hayley live two hundred years apart, but they are connected through their tenacity and willingness to risk everything for love. In pre-Revolutionary Boston, Emma, whose family is loyal to the crown, is supposed to marry Samuel, a despicable, money-grubbing rogue who will stop at nothing to have her and her dowry. Emma's true love, Noah, comes from nothing and is driven by high ideals. Emma's choice between loyalty and freedom echoes through time.

Two hundred years later, Hayley vies to become the nation's first woman SEAL. At the same time, she deals with her difficult family, including her mother, who has substance abuse issues. Hayley has always chosen freedom over loyalty, but that decision is tested when she reconnects with a past love, Ethan.

The women's stories entwine when Hayley uncovers a mysterious document hidden in a tea chest that leads her and Ethan to find out what happened to Emma and Noah. The two women are not alone in their struggles: faith plays a role. Emma connects to God in her suffering, while Hayley is more hesitant, though she starts to believe that there might be a greater plan. Their paired perspectives generate deep feelings; each woman wrestles with both love and the sacrifices that love's connections bring into their lives.

Emma's story is more dramatic of the two; she lives with the daily reality of the Revolution growing inside Boston and spreading through the countryside. With masterful pacing, Hayley finds bits and pieces of Emma's story in libraries and archives, resulting in dramatic tension as each new twist becomes clear. When its full truths are finally revealed, Emma's gripping story proves to be filled with violence, torture, and death, all while she serves a higher calling to God and country.

Questions of freedom, loyalty, history, and family make the sweeping historical novel *The Tea Chest* satisfying.

JEREMIAH ROOD (March / April 2020)

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