

An excerpt from . . .

Rebel Dove

by
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Halfway up the stairs she stopped and held her breath as Joshua left his room, locking the door behind him and placing the key in his right trouser pocket. Her heart took on a life of its own, jumping frantically as she watched him fold sheets of paper and tuck them into the sash of his uniform.

Well damn it all to hell, men use women all the time to get what they want and find pleasure in it. Why can't women do the same? I wonder how you would like to surrender to my will for a change, Major Joshua Carmidy. Two can play your game! I'll make you want me, just as you have made me want you. And when you do, I'll take great pleasure in casting you aside like yesterday's news.

Coming down the stairs, Joshua tried to walk past Elise where she stood, trance-like, on the staircase. With one step to the right, Elise blocked his path and coyly looked up at him, her heart pounding so rapidly she was sure he must be able to hear it. *Try to ignore me now, Major Carmidy, she mused. And just what did you hide in that sash of yours?*

Stopping abruptly, Joshua smiled at Elise before taking her gently by the shoulders and moving around her to place himself on the step below so their eyes were level. "Elise, taken any more midnight jaunts lately?"

It was obvious to Elise that he enjoyed this sort of merriment, judging by the twinkle in his eyes, so she smiled enticingly at him. She wanted his attention focused on her and only her, as an appealing woman. "Major, you do me an injustice. Why, I've been cooped up in this old house for days, it seems. You know I only went out to the encampment to take pity on those poor boys. And then, of course, there was the other night, when I went out with someone I thought to be a gentleman. That is, until he accused me of stealing important papers."

She leaned closer to him and felt her bosom strain against the cut of her bodice. He must have noticed, as she felt his grip tighten on her shoulders, and she moved her hands to his waist, sliding them sensually inside his jacket. His body stiffened. *Yes, this is quite to my liking, and I see you're enjoying it too,* Elise thought, batting her eyes at him delicately and wetting her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Always the best way to disarm a suspect," Joshua goaded, his eyes showing a glimmer of humor, which gave her heart a lift.

"Absolutely. Take them by surprise, right?" she whispered to him seductively. "So tell me Major, do you disarm *all* your suspects with threats of searching them? I've heard Mr. George Hornsby is quite a suspect. I trust you haven't been inclined to search him, too?"

The glimmer of humor became a full flame as Joshua's face lit with laughter. "You are too quick for your own good, Miss Elise Hamilton. But take heed, I'm on to you, so watch your step!"

“On to me, Joshua? Whatever *do* you mean? Surely you must have realized by now that I’m just a sweet little southern girl...” Elise leaned nearer to him, bringing her mouth close to his. Her pulse quickened as she felt his breath on her lips. Gazing longingly into his eyes, she finished her sentence, whispering seductively, “...just keeping to myself!”

Needing no more coaxing, Joshua lifted his hand to the back of her head, drawing her closer still, then—stopping in mid-air—he looked down at the woman in his arms. Elise almost swooned, but she kept her head as she slid her fingers gently beneath his sash, securing the papers she had been after. With short gasps of air that pushed her bosom up against his stiff body, she slowly began to inch the papers clear of the sash. When Joshua drove her lips apart with his tongue in a deep, moving kiss, Elise nearly dropped the papers, but somehow managed to grasp them tightly in her hand as she slowly moved it to her side. All the while, Joshua tantalized her with the tip of his tongue, sweeping it across her lips, sending a tingling shiver through to the very depth of her soul. The sensation of their kiss and the adrenaline rush of her thievery made it a doubly bewitching experience that Elise never wanted to end. The intensity eased, only to be replaced with shorter kisses as if he were nibbling away at her lips, making her gasp with longing.

As they pulled slowly apart, she eased the papers she had stolen from him behind her, sliding it under her jacket and into the belt at her waist. His lids lowered and his smile was utterly sensual. *Hmm—that was quite enjoyable, definitely more to my liking and I got what I came for—the papers, and him!*

“Do you *have* to go on duty, Joshua?” she asked reluctantly, her voice a sensual coo. “We could take a walk down by the creek, if you like.” His hand slid around her back, pulling her close again for one brief kiss on her upturned lips.

“As tempting as the offer is, Elise, I regretfully have to decline. Duty calls, you know, darling.”

As heartwarming as it was, hearing him refer to her with such endearment, she skillfully pouted to show her disappointment, cleverly disguising how keen she was to escape to her room to read the stolen document.

“Yes, of course. Will I see you later, then?”

“Much sooner than you’d expect, so no frettin’ now, y’hear?” Joshua was clearly mocking the southern phrases he had picked up around town.

Ignoring his snide remark, Elise smoothed her fingers on his chin and leaned forward to place one last kiss on his wide, sensuous mouth. “I’ll be waitin’ in anticipation for that splendid moment.”

With that, she pretended to adjust herself, making certain that she secured the papers in her hand and swiftly turned, being careful not to let him see what she held. Smiling proudly at pulling off the ultimate piece of espionage, Elise started to climb the stairs. As she reached the second stair she found herself unable to continue, as Joshua’s hand was holding firmly onto her belt.

“Whoa there, sugar!” Joshua commanded.

Elise knew she had been caught, and thinking quickly, she turned herself around, waving the papers in front of her, smiling coyly down at him. “Missing me already, Joshua, or something else perhaps, like these papers?”

“I told you Elise, I’m on to you!”

“If that were the case, surely you knew that I had to prove to you just how wrong you’ve been about me. If I couldn’t even distract you long enough with my feminine charms, to swipe some silly old papers from you without your knowing, just how could you possibly think me capable of other dastardly deeds? This is proof that I’m not capable of the treachery you’ve accused me of in the past. So you see, I’m innocent.”

“Innocent is not an adjective I would use to describe you, Elise. Anything *but*, is more like it.”