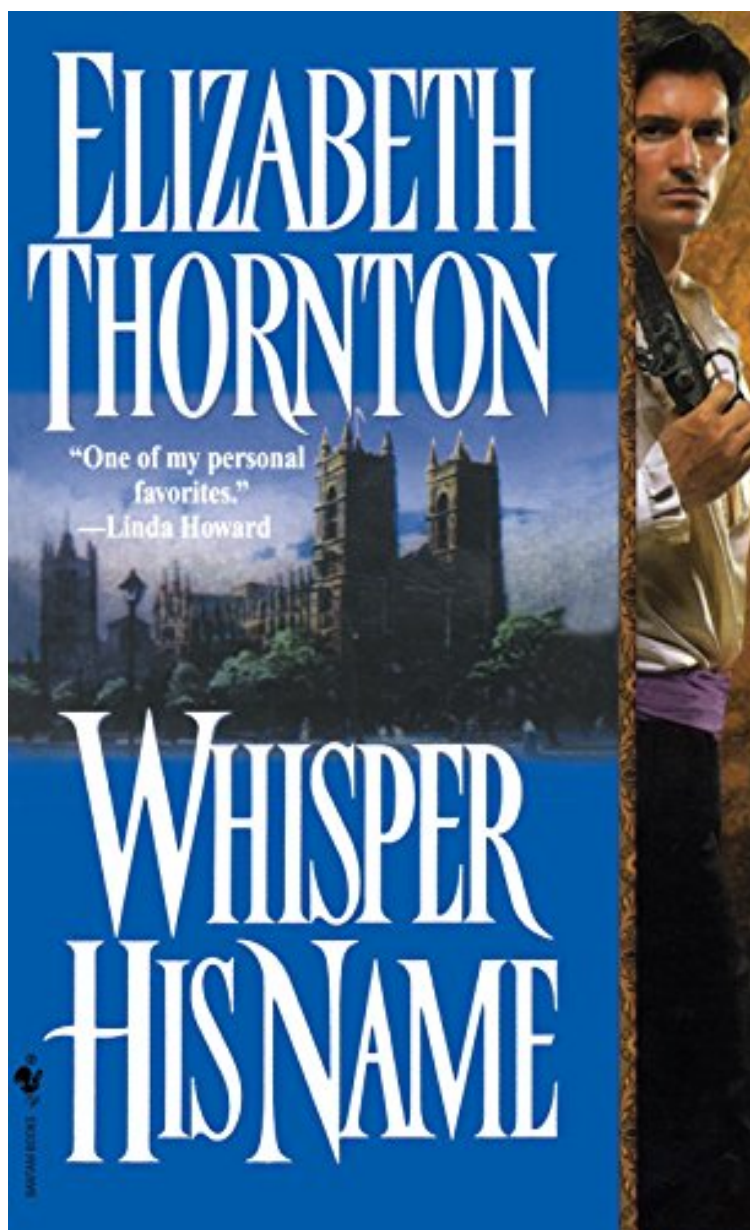


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Whisper His Name



Par Elizabeth Thornton
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBreaking the code to her heart...Independent and stubbornly unmarried, Abbie Vayle has always been a little too smart for her own good.But she may have gone too far when she starts her own rare-book business--and accidentally acquires an antique book in Paris with a mysterious code scribbled in the margins....Someone wants the book back--and is willing to kill to get it.The only trouble is, Abbie no longer has the book.It's locked away in the customs house in Dover.Now it's a race against time as Abbie stays one step ahead of her pursuers.The last person she wants to confide in is her best friend, Hugh

Templar, whom she knows only as a formidable scholar who shares her passion for Roman antiquities. But as Hugh keeps turning up where she least expects him, a few things begin to dawn on her.... Not only is Hugh surprisingly--in fact incredibly--handsome without his glasses on, but he's strangely "professional" in how he handles her mysterious enemies. Hugh is clearly not what he seems. And soon Abbie realizes that neither is she... as she discovers what it means to love with all her heart and soul. From the Paperback edition.

Extrait
Be natural, she told herself. Be natural. "Hugh," she said with unnatural brightness, "you're back." He turned his head slowly, and his tawny eyes gazed at her over the rim of his spectacles. "As you see," he said. It seemed to Abbie that there was a moment of awkwardness, and she tried to cover it by looking around for somewhere to sit. Every chair and settee was occupied. Hugh solved her dilemma. He rose and held up the paper he'd been reading. "I shall put this with the rest of the accounts," he said, looking at Major Danvers, then turning to Abbie, "Come along, Abbie. After I've taken care of this, I'll take you to the tearoom for refreshments." A look passed between Abbie and Olivia. I told you so, Olivia was saying. She had tried to convince Abbie that Hugh was too much of an intellectual to understand Abbie's mother's hints. "What were you and Olivia talking about?" asked Abbie as they left the ballroom. "The Trojan War." There was something dry about his tone, and she looked at him quickly. His expression gave nothing away. Deciding she must have been mistaken, she tried again. "What did Major Danvers give you?" "A bill for candles," he replied. "If we continue to use up candles at this rate, we may have to raise subscriptions." Hugh was treasurer of the committee that had oversight of the Assembly Rooms, and he took his responsibilities very seriously. Abbie was in the habit of teasing him about it, but on this occasion she felt shy and said nothing. The office was just off the main entrance. Hugh took a candelabra from one of the hall tables, unlocked the door, and ushered Abbie inside. While he went to the desk and rifled through some papers, she wandered around the room, looking at the pictures on the wall, but she wasn't as casual as she pretended to be. She still sensed an awkwardness between them and wasn't sure whether it originated with herself or with Hugh. "Hugh," she said, turning suddenly, "I--" "Who was the young man you were dancing with?" "What?" He looked up from the folder of papers he'd been reading. "The young man you were dancing with. I don't think I know him." "Oh, he's George's friend. Harry Morton or Horton. I can't remember which." "George?" "My brother." "Your brother's friend." The set of Hugh's mouth softened a little. "And you don't know his name?" "George has many friends, and you know how hopeless I am with names." "But you never forget a face." It was a private joke. Hugh was referring to the time Abbie had made a social blunder when she was introduced to one of Bath's leading citizens and claimed she remembered him and his daughter from somewhere. The "somewhere" turned out to be a hotel on the outskirts of Reading when the gentleman had told his wife that he was with his mother in Falmouth. There was no daughter. "Hugh," she said, "why aren't you wearing your spectacles?" "I only wear them when the print is small. Why do you ask?" "No reason. It's just that you look different without them." Now she knew where the awkwardness between them originated. It was with her. Her damnable family had put ideas in her head. She wasn't seeing Hugh as her best friend but as the romantic figure Harriet had described. She had to rein in her imagination before she spoiled everything. "What is it, Abbie? Why do you stare at me like that?" "You haven't told me what you think of my new gown," she said, then she stifled a groan. This wasn't how she'd planned to put their friendship back on the right footing. The question was too personal. She should have asked him about his books or the state of the assembly's finances. Dear Lord, what must he be thinking? Hugh was thinking that he'd deliberately engineered this private tte--tte to question Abbie about Paris, to determine what she'd done to arouse the suspicions of a member of His Majesty's intelligence service. But when he saw the swift rise and fall of her breasts and heard the slight hiatus in her breathing, his thoughts changed direction. Easy, he told himself, slowly. This was Abbie. She wasn't used to thinking of him as a lover. He wanted to tempt her, not terrify her. As casually as he could manage, he dropped the paper he was holding and slowly crossed to her. "Your new gown?" he said. "I think your gown is ...," his eyes moved over her slowly, "charming. Quite rustic, in fact. Is this the rage in Paris, this shepherdess's getup? It suits you, Abbie." "Shepherdess!" Her confusion was swamped by a tide of indignation. She glanced down at her gown. "It's no such thing! I don't know why I asked for your opinion. You've never shown the slightest interest in ladies' fashions." "Oh, I don't know." He smiled into her eyes. "I occasionally think of other things besides Roman ruins and the price of candles. I'm not as dull as you think, Abbie." There flashed into her mind a picture of Barbara Munro, the beautiful actress whom Harriet insisted was once Hugh's mistress. She blinked to dispel the image. Once she would have said that Hugh had never entertained a carnal thought in his life. He was too wrapped up in his intellectual pursuits. Now she didn't know what to think. His eyes had

narrowed on her face, not the clear, guileless eyes she knew so well, but cat's eyes, sharp and watchful, seeing everything. When he tried to take her hands, she took a quick step back and rushed into speech. "I don't think you're dull. Why, you know more about Roman antiquities than anyone." "Praise indeed," he said dryly. "Shame the devil, Abbie, and tell the truth. Don't you find me too tame for you?" "I don't think of you as 'tame.' You're ...well ...solid, and dependable." "I see," he said, and with a whimsical smile, returned to the desk. "Oh, Hugh!" Abbie went after him, cut to the quick to think that she'd hurt his feelings. "You don't understand." "What don't I understand?" He propped himself against the desk, folded his arms across his chest, and regarded her steadily. "Your friendship means a great deal to me. Hugh, you know how much I admire you and enjoy your company. I wouldn't want anything to spoil what we have." "What could spoil it?" She answered with feeling, "My family for a start." When he made no response to this, she foundered a little before going on. "They came to see me last week, and ...and ...they've got the wrong idea about us." She laughed lightly to convey just the right degree of amusement. "Oh, I should have foreseen how their minds would work. I should have known better than to ask you to carry letters for me." She touched a hand to his sleeve and quickly withdrew it. "Was it very bad, Hugh? Did they ...well ...did they ask you a lot of personal questions?" "Well, they did, but I found your family quite ...interesting." He paused. "Oh, I see what it is. They feared I was going to ask you to marry me, and they posted down to Bath to warn you off. Is that it?" "Feared? It was no such thing! They hoped you were going to ask me to marry you, and they came to try and persuade me to bring you up to scratch. They won't accept that I'm not the marrying kind of woman." "No?" "No. They think every woman wants to be married. And they don't care who I marry, just as long as--" She covered her mouth with her hand and peeked up at him. "That didn't come out the way ...that is ...that's not what I meant." "Oh, don't apologize. You've always been frank with me, Abbie. That's one of the things I like about you. But this is interesting. Tell me what else you said to your family." "I told them the truth." "That I have ice in my veins, and that no warm-blooded female would ever be interested in a dull stick like me?" When she began to protest, he waved her to silence. "Not all women are like you, Abbie. As a rule, they're not interested in the breadth of my knowledge, the scope of my interests, or my prodigious ...ah ...intelligence. They want a man who knows how to charm a woman." She shot him a quick look, but there was no hint of humor in his eyes. That shouldn't have surprised her. Hugh didn't have much of a sense of humor. She said, "All you lack is practice, Hugh, and that is easily come by." "Is it? Now there's a thought. Would you mind, Abbie, if I practiced with you? I mean, we are friends, and I know you won't get the wrong idea if I make a fool of myself." She'd never seen him look so uncertain. Not only did that look stir her softer feelings, but it also made her realize what a fool she'd been. This was Hugh. He hadn't changed. She'd allowed her family to put ideas in her head, and her lurid imagination had done the rest. Poor Hugh. He really was a sweet man. "Of course I don't mind," she said. "What else are friends for?" "You won't take offense?" "How could I take offense when you would only be following my advice?" "That settles it then." With that, he tipped up her chin and kissed her. She froze. This wasn't what she had in mind, but it was no more than a slight pressure of his lips on hers, then it was over. "How did I do?" he asked. She dimpled up at him. "Hugh," she said, "I'm not your grandmother. If you're going to steal a kiss from a lady, do try to put a little feeling into it." "Why don't you show me?" "What?" "Show me." Boldness could only take her so far, and this was going too far. She searched his face again, looking for signs of humor but his eyes were clear. It's only a kiss, she told herself fiercely. It didn't mean anything. But what if ...what if ...He took the initiative away from her. He put his hands on her waist and exerted a little pressure to bring her closer. She looked up at him with a question in her eyes. "You feel good in my arms, Abbie," he said. "Do I feel good to you?" Now that he'd made her think about it, she couldn't deny that she liked being in his arms. In fact, she liked everything about Hugh--the broad shoulders, the manly features, the thick black hair that looked as though a woman's fingers had just played with it. But she especially liked his mouth. It was full lipped, firmly molded, and made for kissing. A shiver of feminine awareness rippled through her. Dear Lord, where had that thought come from? This was Hugh, her best friend. She was doing it again, letting her imagination run away with her. His lips settled on hers, and whatever she'd been about to say was swept away in a flood of sensation. He angled her head back, and the pressure of his mouth increased, opening her lips to him. She felt his hands kneading her waist, the flare of her hips, her back, then his arms wrapped around her, bringing her hard against the full length of his body. He left her mouth to kiss her brows, her cheeks, her throat. She sucked in a breath when he nipped her ear with his sharp teeth, then she moaned when he bent her back and kissed the swell of her breasts. He kissed her again and again, each kiss more desperate than the last. Abbie had never known such passion. Her skin was hot, her blood was on fire, her whole body shivered in anticipation. She

wanted more, more, more. The kissing ended as suddenly as it had begun. One moment she was in his arms and the next he had set her away from him. Dazed, she stared up at him. "How was I this time, Abbie?" he asked. "What?" She steadied herself with one hand on the desk. "Did I put enough feeling into it? You did say to put a little more feeling into it, didn't you?" She looked around that small candlelit room as though she'd never seen it before. It was like awakening from a dream. As she gradually came to herself, she touched her fingers to her burning lips, then looked up at Hugh. If he was affected by that shattering kiss, he gave no sign of it. She stilled the tumult of questions that rushed into her mind. She'd made a fool of herself with Giles. She wasn't going to make a fool of herself this time around. She cleared the huskiness from her voice, but she could do nothing about her burning cheeks. "Hugh, what can I say?" His eyes anxiously searched hers. "Was I so bad?" She blinked slowly. "No. You were ...very good." "Revue de presse" A writer of uncommon brilliance. "--Romantic Times" One of my personal favorites. "--New York Times bestselling author Linda Howard" I consider Elizabeth Thornton a major find. "--Bestselling author Mary Balogh