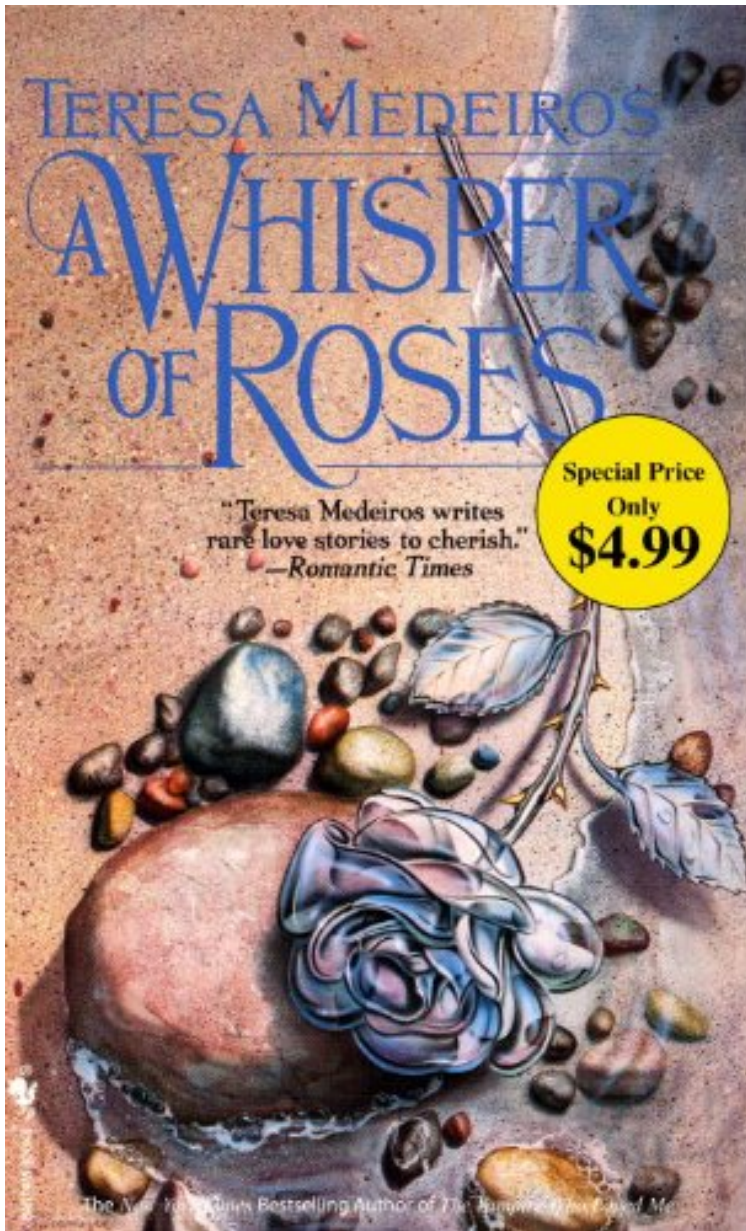


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# Whisper of Roses



Par Teresa Medeiros  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAs she peered over the edge of the gallery, Sabrina Cameron trembled at the sight of the sun-bronzed giant striding into view. But she never recognized the stranger...not until the moment she found herself surrounded by arms of warm steeland drowning in smoldering green eyes that had once held cool disdain but now shimmered with passion. Morgan MacDonnell, the boy, had been her tormentor. Now it looked as if Morgan, the man, would prove infinitely more dangerous...Though hatred divided their clans, Morgan MacDonnell had come to Cameron Glen hoping for a truce...only to find that by evening's end the

only way to avert bloodshed between the two families was for him to marry his enemy's daughter. But even as Morgan spirited Sabrina away to his rugged fortress, his battle would not be won. For this delicate rose of a girl would put up a bold fight...and the spoils of victory would be nothing less than a heathen MacDonell's heart.

From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One SCOTLAND, THE HIGHLANDS 1730 "The MacDonnells are a-comin'! The MacDonnells are a-comin'!" The cry shot like cannonfire through the sleepy village of Cameron Glen. The villagers raced madly through the cobbled streets, not knowing whether to hide their livestock or their children. One cynical crofter tipped back his chair, took a long, slow draw off his pipe, and announced dourly that sheep or daughter would do just as well to a MacDonnell in an amorous bent of mind. The few who could afford the luxury of curtains jerked them shut. Hammers tapped in frantic rhythm as boards flew up over window and doors. The Camerons and the MacDonnells had been feuding for so long that no one could remember the cause. To the villagers their laird's foes were still more myth than men. For decades they had done their thieving and ravishing in stealth. If a village lass returned from a mountain walk rumped and dazed, knowing whispers would greet the subsequent swelling of her belly and the birth of her tawny-haired babe. Kneeling in the road, a withered old man gathered a group of awestruck children around him. "I was but a wee lad meself, but I'll ne'er forget the last time the MacDonnells marched through Cameron Glen. Giants they were, o'er eight feet tall wi' thighs as wide 'round as tree trunks." A freckled little girl hid her trembling face against his leg. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "And 'round each o' their waists hung their terrible trophiesthe severed heads o' the Camerons." The children squealed in delicious horror. Caught up in his own lurid tale, the old man cast the manor house on the hill an ominous look. The stone tower of ancient Cameron Keep sprouted from its timberframed wings like an embattled mushroom. He knew the MacDonnells had been invited to Cameron not to battle, but to banquet. But why would Dougal Cameron invite his enemies to his home when he knew they were more inclined to eat the family than the feast? His palsied hand absently smoothed a boy's cowlick. "Daft," he muttered. "Our own laird's gone as daft as a rabid hare." At that precise moment, the occupants of Cameron Manor might have agreed with him. The drawing room had been thrown into chaos by an army of servants and helpful Camerons. Caught up in the pervasive atmosphere of terror and glee, Sabrina rushed back from the old buttery, where she had hidden her mother's silver tea service. She tripped over the small, grizzled dog curled up in front of the hearth. He bared his one remaining tooth and snapped at her. "Sorry, Pugsley," she murmured, pausing to straighten his jeweled collar. "I won't have those ham-footed Highlanders stomping my rugs to death," Elizabeth Cameron announced. Heedless of her silk skirts, she dropped to her knees on the bare stones and began to roll up a plush Persian carpet. "No worry, Mama." Brian lounged on an overturned Louis XIV gilded armchair, ignoring Alex's obvious grunts for help beneath the weight of an ornately carved Elizabethan chest. "The MacDonnells will never make it this far. We've been at peace for almost a month. Without our throats to cut, they'll be cutting their own by now. I predict extinction in "he drew a gold pendant watch from a ruffled pocket" three hours and seventeen minutes." "I'm surprised they haven't extincted themselves already with all that inbreeding," Alex gasped, letting the chest drop dangerously near the polished toes of Brian's shoes. "I've heard they share women like other men share"" Alex!" Elizabeth cleared her throat, jerking her head toward Sabrina's avid face. Her elder son lapsed into silence. He might tower over his mother by half a foot, but he knew when to curb his tongue. Beneath her willowy slenderness lay a spine of fine English steel. The coils of gray in her fiery hair had yet to soften the temper that accompanied it. Sabrina affected a sophisticated shrug. "Don't scold on my account, Mama. Why, only this morning I learned a new song from one of the kitchen maids." She locked her hands at the small of her back as she'd been taught to do when serenading guests and primly sang: Ride hard the MacDonnells wi' their wild golden locks, Fierce their long claymores, but nary as fierce as their "Sabrina!" Her mother gasped a warning. "tempers?" she hastily warbled. Alex choked back laughter and applauded. "Carry down your clarsach, Mum! My baby sister can entertain our guests after we sup tonight." "If I've my way, she'll be bolted safely in her chamber until those lascivious rogues are gone," her mother said grimly. Sabrina knew that if her mother had her way, she'd be bolted safely in her chamber until her journey to London in the spring. It was her mother's fondest wish that Sabrina's jovial uncle Willie introduce her to some eligible country parson who couldn't find the Scottish Highlands on a well-marked map. "It seems our MacDonnells are known for more than just their fighting prowess," Brian said dryly. "As are you, dear brother," Sabrina whispered in his ear, "if the gossip about that little milkmaid in the village is true." He reached to yank one of her curls, but she danced out of his reach. "Did old Angus MacDonnell truly pay court to you, Mama?" A smile softened her mother's lips. "Indeed he did. The gallant fellow offered me a side of beef from a stolen

cow, Cameron I suspect, and his own black heart. I've always felt a bit guilty. When I chose your father over him, it broke a peace of almost"she counted on her fingers"six hours."Sabrina's cousin Enid, who was visiting from London, trotted from the room, clutching two Ming dynasty fluted vases that had braved stormy seas and rutted roads to travel from Peking to Cameron. A thump and the sound of shattering glass was followed by a muffled "Oh, dearie me." Sabrina winced.Sighing wearily, her mother sank back on her heels and surveyed the drawing room. Stripped of its exotic treasures, the hall was a barren shell that hearkened back to another era, when the tower had been the heart of a primitive fortress instead of the drawing room of an elegant manor house.They all knew that even now Dougal Cameron was in the courtyard instructing their clansmen on the finer points of courtesy that would allow them all to survive this night. One overturned wine goblet or upset pepperbox could result in a massacre that would destroy the illusion of civilization Elizabeth Cameron had devoted a lifetime to preserving. Her fierce passion had coaxed both her genteel children and her precious English roses from the harsh Highland soil. Her dejection wounded them all.Hoping to cheer her, Sabrina stood on her tiptoes and plucked a crystal rose from its vase on the mantel. "The Belmont Rose, Mama. Shall I hide it in the buttery with the rest of your things?"Her mother rewarded her with a smile. "No, princess. 'Twas a gift from King James to my father for saving his crown at the battle of Sedgemoor. Carry it up to the solar, where no one will be tempted to crush it." Spirits restored, she wiped her hands on her skirt and began firing off commands. "Bestir your lazy self, Brian, and help Alex with that chest before I take the starch out of your ruffles. Enid, stop sniveling behind that fire screen, or I shall write William and tell him what a silly goose he's raised for a daughter."Heartened by her mother's recovery, Sabrina climbed the curving stairs to the gallery, twirling the rose's smooth stem between her fingers. She'd always found the Belmont Rose an object of fascination.Fragile and exquisite, the handblown glass glowed beneath the sunlight streaming through the oriel windows. Her fingertip traced a petal more delicate than all the teardrops she'd never shed for one MacDonnell. As she entered the serene gloom of the solar, a knot tightened low in her belly, a knot she'd thought to be long unraveled.For five summers Morgan MacDonnell's shadow had fallen across her life. Five summers of waiting for the next hairy spider to drop down her back. Five summers of stumbling over the grubby foot that shot into her path. His final blow had landed the summer she was eight, when he had finally befriended her brothers and enlisted them in his pranks. Her wistful affection for the tall, proud boy had been slowly buried like a stone in her heart.His father had summoned him home in his sixteenth summer after some fool MacDonnell got himself gutted stealing a Cameron sheep. Swinging on the garden gate, Sabrina had watched him go, mystified by the tears that choked her throat. Her fondest wish had come true. Morgan MacDonnell wouldn't be coming back to Cameron Manor. Not next summer. Not ever.Until tonight.With painstaking care Sabrina laid the rose on the crushed-velvet runner atop her mother's harpsichord. The wretch was probably dead by now, she thought unkindly, stabbed by one of his own treacherous kin or shot dead in the bed of some jealous crofter. When he was only fifteen, the maidservants had already begun to admire the broad flare of his shoulders and the bold invitation in his sleepy green eyes that had never looked at her with anything but cool disdain.Sabrina wandered to the window. Her restless gaze followed the jagged crest of the mountains. Snowy white clouds raked their peaks. The MacDonnells might even now be lumbering out of their lair and down the rugged trails toward Cameron. Did the only son of Angus MacDonnell ride among them?She shook off a sudden chill, hoping neither she nor her father would find the price of peace too high.As Morgan MacDonnell rode out o...Prsentation de l'diteurAs she peered over the edge of the gallery, Sabrina Cameron trembled at the sight of the sun-bronzed giant striding into view. 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