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ROSE'S REDEMPTION

THE RED PETTICOAT SALOON

DINAH
MCLEOD

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Rose's Redemption

The Red Petticoat Saloon

By

Dinah McLeod

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Chapter One

“Four dollars.” She said it bluntly, watching his eyes widen as he processed the enormous sum she was asking. He was young, for a miner. That was probably all the money he had in his pocket, if he had it at all. But if she knew men—and by now, she certainly did—he would hand it over, and gladly for one romp with her. She waited patiently, already assured of the outcome. She’d played this scene out too many times not to be.

“All right,” he said at last, trying too hard to keep his eyes focused on her face when they clearly wanted to stray to her creamy, ample bosom. “Do I...”

Inexperienced. She liked that. It meant that she wouldn’t have to do much to ensure he left satisfied. “I’ll get it when we’re through,” she told him, batting her long, dark eyelashes. “I can trust you, can’t I?” Without waiting for an answer, she took him by the hand—too soft for a miner, she thought—and led him to the bathing room.

When she got him inside and closed the door behind them, she gave him a good, long look. His clothes were dirty, though he’d clearly made an effort to clean up before he’d come. He was a virgin—she’d bet her last penny on it. Only a man who’d never had a woman, even a whore, would give a damn about what he looked like. And this fresh-faced calf, with his wide, awed eyes and his stupefied grin had taken time to shave—assuming, of course, he even had facial hair—and wash the grime off his face and hands after a hard day’s work.

Normally, Rose wasn’t given to pretending to be happy to do her business, as so many of the gems were, and she wasn’t tenderhearted, but she had a special spot for virgins. It was strange, because she couldn’t tolerate bumbling fingers from a man twice her age, but from a boy trying to become a man, she made an exception.

Given her exceptional beauty and level of experience, four dollars would buy the act itself, and nothing more, on normal circumstances. But she liked the look of this doe-eyed boy who kept glancing away every time he thought he’d been caught ogling her assets. She hid a smile as she took the lead.

“Won’t you join me?”

“Uh... yes, ma’am.”

She squelched another smile. Only virgins ever called her “ma’am.” The ones who didn’t know that such manners didn’t have to be wasted on women like her. “Come on, then.”

He ambled over, still looking uncertain as he came up beside her. This was another reason she didn’t make the first-timers pay upfront. She might be jaded—and she’d been called worse—but if he spooked and took off, he wouldn’t think to ask for his money back, and she wasn’t willing to keep money she didn’t earn.

“What’s your name, sweetheart?”

The endearment had him blushing. As the color suffused his face, she decided that she liked this one. It was rare, which was why she wasn’t in a hurry to send him on his way. “Jonas, ma’am.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Jonas.” She extended her hand and after a moment, he took it, shaking gently. “My name is Rose.”

“My mom likes roses,” he blurted, then his cheeks turned crimson.

She laughed softly, not troubling to hide it this time. She didn’t have to guess his thoughts—undoubtedly, he was thinking that he shouldn’t have mentioned his mother in a place like this, one that would surely shame her to her morally staunch pinky toe if she ever came to know that he’d been inside.

“I’m sorry, I—”

“Don’t be sorry,” she interrupted, laying her hand on top of his so as to give him something else to think about. “You’re nervous.”

“I... does it show?”

Plain as day, in the furtive looks aimed at the door and the way he was trying so hard not to squirm. His lean frame was taut as a coil of wire and she knew if she made the wrong move, he would be out like a shot. But she also knew the way his breathing quickened at the slightest touch from her fingers, the way he kept trying to avoid looking at her prominently displayed bosom, that he wanted to be here. He wanted *her*, no matter how many times he told himself he shouldn’t.

“What if I tell you a secret? Would you like that?”

He didn’t have to answer—the way he lifted his eyes to her face told her that he’d like it very much.

“I’m a little nervous myself.” It was a lie, but told nicely, sweetened with honey for his benefit and one she wouldn’t have bothered with if he didn’t look like he was about to jump out of his skin. “We can take this slow—as slow as you need to.”

“Is there anything I can do... for you, I mean?”

She bit down on her bottom lip, hard, to keep from sighing. This man-child was so innocent, so sweet in his desire to please her. Most of them were like this, in the beginning. What happened to turn them so cynical and cruel? Of course, she should be the last person asking that question. She was the most jaded of the lot.

“I think I’d rather enjoy a bath. I might need some help with my clothes.” She batted her lashes at him once more, her tone and expression so innocuous that he merely nodded and followed her when she began to move toward the tub.

He didn’t question why there was already water in it—perhaps he didn’t care. He leaned down and dipped a hand in the water. “It’s still warm. I can’t believe you can just take a bath whenever you want,” he marveled. She didn’t know if he was more awe-struck by the prospect of a bath, or her. “My ma would give anything for...”

My, when he blushed he went red all the way up to his ears. She watched, marveling. She couldn’t remember what it felt like to be embarrassed by anything. She doubted she’d ever blushed once, in all her years.

“Let’s see if I can’t do something to keep your mind off your ma,” Rose said, closing the space between them. She was 5’5” and this man-child, Jonas, wasn’t but a head taller. “Have you ever loosened a corset before?” She knew the answer, of course, but she enjoyed the way he drew his breath in, a sharp hiss of longing.

She forced herself to stand still as his fumbling, inexperienced fingers untied the strings and loosened them, one by one. The truth was, as sweet as she’d planned to make this for him, she was getting bored. Not that it was something she wasn’t used to—boredom was her constant companion, it seemed.

Once he’d finally accomplished the task, her breasts sprang free. Jonas backed away and nearly stumbled, he was so surprised.

“They’re not snakes,” she scolded, careful to keep the chiding out of her voice. “They won’t hurt you, I promise. Why don’t you come have a look?”

Looking at her like he didn't quite believe her, he ventured closer, a step at a time, until he stopped a few inches in front of her. Rose's arm lashed out, taking hold of his hand. She drew him closer and put his hand on her creamy, soft skin.

The look on his face was one of awestruck wonder. His mouth dropped open as his fingers explored her breast and it occurred to her that he might have come with his pants still on.

"I'm going to undress now," she told him, taking the lead. "And I'm going to get in the tub. You're going to get in behind me and we'll take turns bathing each other. How does that sound?" She didn't wait for an answer before she began to shed her clothes. When she finished, she turned to him expectantly, unsurprised that he hadn't moved a muscle and his eyes were fastened to her naked body.

It was impressive, she supposed. She had an ample chest, narrow shoulders, a slim waist and gently curving hips. Not that Jonas would know the difference. He could look at a doe and call it a buck, for all he knew about sex.

"Shall I bathe alone?" she queried, which was exactly what he needed to hear to get him scurrying into motion, apparently. Boots were unlaced and kicked off—pants were shucked; his shirt was thrown to the floor.

He wasn't hard to look at, either, though his pale nakedness served as a reminder of how much growing up he had to do. He would do plenty of that, in the coming months. This gold-rush madness was sucking up boys, breaking their bones as well as their spirits and spitting them back out again. She'd seen it again and again, and unless Jonas could grow a pair and become the kind of man who didn't shirk from anything—much less a pair of pretty, full breasts—then it would do the same to him.

Perhaps that was another reason she was so patient, so kind. It wasn't in her nature, not after the life she'd led. But every now and again, it surfaced. Even rarer were the moments she chose to indulge the urge.

She'd only just climbed inside, sighing at the warm water, when she felt Jonas beside her. She smiled to herself—perhaps he could learn, after all. She let him sit behind her, his body spooning hers as he bathed her, gently running the bar of soap across her skin. While he concentrated on washing her, she let her hand stray behind her and capture his manhood. It had been stiffening, but under her careful ministrations it quickly became engorged. Jonas dropped the soap while she rapidly massaged his member. It was a quick end to the game they'd begun

the moment he stepped over the threshold into the saloon. With only a few strokes of her hand, he came with a loud, body-shaking groan.

Then he ducked his head, avoiding her eyes as though he had something to be ashamed of. She was sure he'd never visit her again, but there would be other whores, once he'd assured himself that it was the women who should feel the shame. She could almost see it, as she stared at him. She could almost see the transformation he would make, when he'd become a bigot, judging women who committed no greater sin than he. It would be such a shame, for him to lose his sweetness, but she knew it would happen just as surely as she knew there was nothing she could do about it. There had been a time when she would have cautioned him, or tried to lesson him on keeping that kindness that made him special, but that had been years ago. She'd since learned not to bother. Still, there was a bitter-sweetness to it that made her sigh.

“Should I... should I get out?”

“Why don't you lie by the fire?” she suggested. “I'll join you in a moment.”

“I, ah... do you need any help? Getting out, I mean?”

Ever the gentleman, wasn't he? She watched as he grabbed a nearby cloth and quickly dried himself. Then, offering her a hand, he held her steady as she stepped out and offered her the cloth. She was much faster at drying off than he, and she was soon pulling him toward the hearth. The sound of the crackling fire and the warmth of the heat as they drew nearer made her smile.

Jonas glanced down and flushed brightly. “I... I'm sorry...”

Rose smiled, letting him see what she thought about his apologizing over a flaccid cock. “Don't worry yourself. You just lie back and let me do what I do best, hmm?”

Needing no further encouragement, he did just that. He was hard again in no time, and ready for her.

“This is your first time, so I'll let you choose.”

His lips parted in surprise, making her laugh.

“Oh, honey. Please, don't trouble yourself to deny it. I won't tell anyone, I promise. Now, would you like to be on top, or do you have a preference?”

“Uh... whatever you think is best, I reckon.”

Without a word, she used her hand to encourage his legs to spread. Then she straddled him and lowered herself onto his awaiting cock. His eyes were widening at an alarming rate, but when his cock filled her, he threw his head back with a grunt that she felt vibrating through him.

“You can touch me,” she whispered as she began to move up and down his cock. When he didn’t move, she took his hand and put it on her breast. He began to knead it as she rode him.

Just like in the tub, it was over quickly. She rolled off, allowing him time to recuperate before she began to get dressed.

“Ah... I’m much obliged,” he said, at a clear loss for what to do next.

She smiled at him over her shoulder. “You can leave the money over there by the basin.”

He blinked at her, uncomprehending, then slowly, recognition dawned in his expression. “Yes, ma’am.”

She turned away and busied herself with tying her corset so that he didn’t feel watched as he left the money and took his leave. Only when she heard the door close, and the absence of eyes on her skin, did she go to the basin. She noted the stack of coins and the quarter he’d added to the pile, as a tip. It was no small thing for a man like him to leave that sum of money. She made quick work of collecting it before she slipped out herself and retreated to her room. She’d just made it inside and stuffed the coins inside her basin when she heard a loud rapping at her door. Her brow furrowing, she momentarily debated pretending not to hear. Sometimes, she really disliked her job, even though it was all that she’d ever known. Rose allowed herself a long sigh before she went to answer the door.

As she reached it, there was a second pounding that had the doorframe shaking, then loud voices. She took hold of the knob and turned it, pulling the door open. What she saw outside gave her pause. Firstly, there was a big, beefy man she was sure she recognized. Right behind him were Gabe and Madame Jewel.

“You’re not allowed up here unless you’re escorted,” Gabe was telling the man.

“I’ve been waitin’ my turn; your gal is takin’ too long,” he grouched with a scowl.

“That’s not how it works,” Gabe told him, his voice turning stern. “Every woman has the right to pick who, or if she’ll—”

“I’m certain that if you wait downstairs, Rose will be down shortly. Or, failing that, that another of my lovely gems will see to your needs. Perhaps you’d like a drink, on the house?” Madame Jewel inserted.

“I don’t want a damn drink!” he bellowed. “I want to see Rose, and I will damn well—”
“Here I am.”

All three pairs of eyes turned to her. Gabe’s were flashing with annoyance, Madame Jewel looked worried and the man, whose name escaped her, was still scowling even as his eyes greedily drank her in.

“I’s gettin’ tired of waitin’.”

“Did we have an appointment?”

His frown deepened, which perhaps would have been a warning, to any other woman. Rose, however, didn’t spook easily.

“Rose, I can escort this *gentleman* downstairs, if you’d—”

“No,” she cut Gabe off with a smile. “It’s fine.” She opened the door wider. “Please, come in.”

Even as he pushed inside the doorway, Gabe didn’t move, and she could tell by his expression that he didn’t like it. Madame Jewel was wringing her hands, and seemed anxious to talk her out of it. With a reassuring nod, she closed the door on them both. She knew that Madame Jewel only worried about her safety, but that didn’t change the fact that she couldn’t keep every foul-mouthed, rough-handed vagrant out of her establishment. As an old hand, Rose often was the one to deal with that sort. They didn’t frighten her, and the sooner they knew it, the better. It usually led to them softening, somewhat, or failing that, they went about their business quickly and left.

“Do you remember me?” he demanded once they were alone.

“Would you care for a drink? I’m quite parched. I do have a little wine I’ve been saving. Perhaps you’d care for a glass, John?” Out of the corner of her eye, she could see him visibly relax. She didn’t remember him by name, exactly—she’d bedded many a tall, thick, blustering man, and the majority of them had Christian names. She’d merely chosen one and, it seemed, gotten lucky.

“I wouldn’t say no to a drink.”

Without a word, she went to retrieve the glasses and her flask. There wasn’t much, but she divided the liquid between the tin cups. She’d called it wine, but it was closer to strong ale. She offered him a cup, watching over the brim of her own as she sipped. He downed the contents

and slapped the cup on her bedside table. He waited with ill-concealed impatience for her to do the same.

Having gotten the measure of the man in front of her, she set her cup down and cleared her throat. “Seven dollars.”

His brow scrunched in annoyance—whether it was the cost or her bluntness he balked at, she couldn’t be sure. Either way, she stared back impassively as he thrust his hand in his pocket and came up with a fistful of coins, which he shoved at her.

The money fell into her lap and she glanced down to count it. Rose snatched the coins up and dropped them in her empty cup. She would deal with them later, after he’d gone. Even looking at him, with his fleshly, sour face made her tired. She would be taking the rest of the night off, once she’d finished with him. “Tell me what you like, John.”

“You know what I like,” he spat.

Oh, she just bet she did. He was as unoriginal and unimaginative as a hundred others she’d had before him, and the ones in-between. He liked dirty fucking; he would have paid an untold amount for her to debase herself and beg for his tiny prick, of that she had no doubt. She’d met many of his kind who felt that way—that she should come to them crawling, begging for the honor of feeling their soiled dicks inside her. She knew at a glance that even though she didn’t remember him, he felt the same way. And just as surely, she knew she’d never give him the satisfaction.

“Still the proper princess, aren’t you?” he snarled. “Still tryin’ to pretend you’re more than a filthy whore.”

Rose kept her expression calm and didn’t so much as flinch. She’d heard much, much worse than the best this man could dish out.

“If you’re a princess, I guess that makes me a king. That’s what you’ll call me, when I’m between your proper thighs and fuckin’ you.”

For just a moment, she wished she’d let Gabe escort him out. But for what? He would only be there the next day, and the next until he got what he wanted. And as much as Madame Jewel might try to pretend otherwise, this sort of man must be appeased to allow for the rest of the quiet, mundane days of whoring.

Think of something else, she told herself as she began to undress. *Anything else.*

No sooner than her drawers fell to the ground, John shoved her onto the bed. He hadn't troubled to remove his clothes, only to unbutton the flap that kept his cock inside his pants. It sprang out, just as small as she'd thought it would be. Small, yet hard enough to be ready for what he intended.

“What do you call me, *princess*?” he demanded as he roughly plowed into her.

She ignored him, refusing to answer when he yelled and swore at her, trying to encourage obedience by grabbing at her breasts and his hard, punishing thrusts. He would not be the man who got the best of her.

Think of something else. And then, she heard a soft, sweet voice that, even in a whisper overrode John's barked commands. Whispering, *once upon a time...*