

OLIVIA BRYNN



Tempting Tessa

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Tempting Tessa is a prequel to Olivia's erotic contemporary western novel
Tessa's Pride

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the age of majority by law.**

Tessa sat straighter in the saddle when the horse's movements jostled her already tender joints. She still wore bruises from being thrown from Firecracker during morning exercises yesterday. Maybe spending a rare day off on horseback probably wasn't the best idea, but she'd been looking forward to a solitary afternoon in the meadow on the far south edge of the Bradley Equine Ranch property for weeks. Finally the finicky Montana spring weather and her schedule agreed.

It was still crisp, but warm enough to go without a jacket. Wildflowers were beginning to bloom, and the sage released its perfume beneath her mare Jessup's hooves. Tessa closed her eyes and smiled. It was going to be a perfect day.

She had a brand new romance novel, a packed lunch, and twelve hours with nothing to do. Most ranch hands spent their time off around the bunk house, eventually pitching in to help before it was all said and done. Cowboys were rarely idle people. Tessa, on the other hand, was one of the few females on the BER payroll, and maintained the firm belief that time away from daily responsibility was good for the soul. At first the others gave her a hard time about leaving each week, but after Tessa pulled eight strands of chest hair out of Jeffrey Binks' collar, they seemed to learn their manners pretty quickly.

No one ever bothered her when she was in her little corner, and she began to wonder if any of the other hands even knew about the place. If they did, they obviously didn't see it the way she did. Plenty of trees to offer shade, and the little freshwater stream ran off the mountain and right through the little copse. Since she was able to see for miles around, she could take off her jeans and maybe wade through the cold water would help numb her aching muscles.

Tessa lifted her face to the clear blue sky, and reveled in the gentle sway of her horse.

The cadence of Jessup clopping along the hard clay dirt was a comforting beat. When another set of hooves joined in, she whipped her head around, almost losing her Stetson with the movement.

"Mr. Bradley!"

Joshua Bradley had somehow silently edged his horse close enough to reach out and touch. Although she would give anything to have the freedom to do so, Tessa had to grip the leather reins in suddenly slippery hands to keep from indulging. There was no way she'd compromise her position at BER by making a pass at the owner.

"Mornin', Tessa." He tipped his hat, and Tessa wasn't sure if he was being polite, or mocking her with such an old-fashioned gesture. She only hoped that the heat rising to her face wasn't obvious beneath the shade of her hat. "Where ya goin'?"

"It's my day off," she rushed to explain. The last thing she wanted to do was make him think that she was shirking her duties.

The corners of his eyes crinkled, and his mouth—she'd dreamed about it just last night—tilted up in the easy smile she'd come to associate with him. "I know." His horse moved a bit closer to hers, and Tessa was tempted to guide her mare toward his, just on the chance of brushing Josh Bradley's thigh.

Get a hold of yourself Tessa McCade.

"So...where ya goin'?" he asked again.

The image of an afternoon skinny dipping with Joshua Bradley flitted through her mind, but she answered his question before it turned into a full-blown daydream. "Just the south forty. There's a nice place for a picnic."

Josh grunted, a strange thoughtful sound. Tessa didn't know what it meant, so she kept quiet, until the silence became uncomfortable. Should she ask him to join her? Maybe ask him

what brought him out today? Was that assuming that it was her business? He broke it when he reached up to release a button on his shirt. "Just so happens, it's my day off too."

Tessa swallowed hard, her eyes trained on the wedge of brown skin of his throat until his words registered. She brought her gaze to his, and wasn't surprised that he'd caught her staring. "You...you took a day off?"

Tessa tried to remember the last time Joshua Bradley took a day off. Of course he was raised on BER land, and although Tessa herself lived in the huge house too, her career choice was his lifestyle. Her barracks were his home.

"Yep. You always come back from yours practically glowing. Thought I'd see what the big deal is." He winked.

Tessa looked away. Of course they'd spoken before, but never when they were alone, and almost always regarding Bradley Equine Ranch business. She couldn't remember a casual conversation that didn't include a fair amount of her fellow cowboys posturing.

"Well?" He reached out and touched her elbow, causing her heart to skip a beat.

She dried her palms on her jeans. "I...uh, hope you enjoy it Mr. Bradley. You might..."

"Josh."

She snapped her gaze back to his. "Excuse me?"

"Call me Josh. You're the only one at BER who calls me Mr. Bradley."

"Oh." She knew that. The other hands gave her shit every time she referred to him as Mr. Bradley, but she couldn't come up with a reason to stop. Now that he'd specifically asked her to use his given name, she didn't have a choice. Tessa was grateful that she had to guide Jessup through a grove of trees right then, saving her from further comment. If she didn't know any better, she might think that he was using this conversation to begin a friendship. Friendship? Get

over yourself, Tess.

God, it's hot.

When they reached her sanctuary, she dismounted. She half hoped he'd just continue riding away, with a smile and a wave. She chanted his name, hoping she'd have the nerve to say it aloud when she bade him goodbye.

"It's not like we don't know each other," he continued, as if no time had passed since his request. "We've been living in the same house for three years."

Tessa stifled a groan. *Don't remind me.* Her bedroom was right below his, and it seemed that as soon as the sun went down, her libido and imagination came out to play. "Yeah," she answered. She busied herself with lifting down her saddle bags, and pulling out her shade-umbrella and blanket.

"What I don't know about you, I can look up in the employee files."

Tessa dropped the umbrella, and held the blanket against her chest. She stared at him in shock, racking her brain as to the information those files might contain. To her consternation, he threw his head back and laughed. Out loud. The rich sound echoed off the limestone boulders. "I'm kidding!" Tessa returned his smile, until he continued. "I already looked in there. Nothing juicy." He dismounted, and removed his horse's bit, then went to work on the saddle.

She watched him for a few minutes. Apparently he meant to spend the day with her. Tessa McCade, lowly ranch hand...alone with Josh Bradley. That should have sent her scurrying back to the safety of her quarters, but the surreal aspect of this whole meeting kept her rooted. She spread out the blanket beneath the sprawling cottonwood tree. She'd wake up in a minute. This was just another fantasy gone awry. Just in case, she'd have to watch her mouth if she wanted to keep her silly crush on her employer a secret.

So much for skinny dipping. She returned to Jessup to remove the bit and bridle.

"I know enough about you Tessa," he continued, tossing his saddle over a low limb. "I've been watching you. I know you can rope a calf for branding in nine seconds."

Seven, she corrected silently. She took pride in the fact that she could beat every other cowboy at BER by at least full two seconds. She kept her eyes averted. If she saw any measure of pride behind his eyes, she might collapse into a puddle in the gravel, or start giggling like a little girl.

So he'd been watching her. If he'd ever noticed her staring at him, he never let on. Instead, she'd sneak glances in between bouts of studiously ignoring him. She didn't want to get caught ogling her boss. She didn't want to be like those other girls whose summer jobs at the ranch turned into full blown affairs with Josh Bradley. Tessa watched each romance unfold, and eventually fold up. She tried to deny the little happy dance when each woman eventually packed her things and found new employment.

No, she didn't want that stress.

Did she? Maybe it was worth it. Maybe she was smarter than those others. Maybe she would be able to separate her heart from her body, and just enjoy a fling for the sake of mutual pleasure.

Tessa hid the new flush of color that rose to her cheeks behind Jessup's mane, and unbuckling the bridle. She had to refocus and calm her racing heart, even though she could still feel his eyes on her.

"Tessa?" He stood on the other side of her mare, and worked on the saddle straps. God, he was close. She kept her nose close to her horse's hide to keep from smelling his clean scent.

"Yeah?"

"I'd like to know you better."

Tessa bit her tongue. After years of working for this man, watching him date a handful of women, superimposing herself in their shoes, and having irrational dreams about his sexual prowess, she couldn't help but feel a little flattered. Behind that warm fuzzy feeling, a bright warning light blinked in the back of her mind. Josh Bradley was her boss. Even if he were serious, she couldn't succumb, no matter how tempting. It would only spell trouble for her career.

"You're my boss."

"So?" He walked around the horse, until he was right behind her. Tessa held onto the leather against Jessup's jaw until she felt it bite into her palm.

"So you already know everything you need to know about me." Her voice was shaky, and she cursed her weakness.

"Not quite." Tessa could have sworn she felt a finger trail from her earlobe to her collar. She pinched her eyes shut to concentrate on the feather light touch, willing it to be real. "I don't know if you like cream in your coffee."

God, he was so close, she could feel his breath on her nape.

"I don't know what your favorite subject was in high school."

It was definitely a finger on her pulse. He added another, until four work-roughened fingers curled around her collar bone.

He leaned in close to her ear and his voice rumbled through her chest. "You haven't told me if you like country music. Or whether you like to dance."

Tessa's heart pounded against her ribs so hard she was sure he could hear it. She stood still, using her steady mare to keep from stumbling like a fool. The only reason she kept her eyes closed was because she knew that once she opened them, he'd disappear back into the deep

recesses of her fertile imagination. It was so damn real though...

"I'd like to know how many freckles you've got on your nose."

Tessa swallowed, shock rendering her mute, and his proximity sending her muscles into a state of rigor.

Josh didn't seem to notice her inner struggles, as he went on, moving close enough for her to feel the heat of his body against her back. "I want to know how you taste."

She whimpered, finally breaking her silence. "Mr. Bradley..."

"Say my name, Tessa." He turned her around, and she blinked him into focus.

Sucking a breath in didn't help, but she was able to whisper, "Josh."

He smiled, a pleased, predatory grin. This was real. She wasn't dreaming. She could smell the musky pine scent of his soap. She could see his pulse through the wedge of skin revealed through his undone buttons. Even the texture of his cotton shirt beneath her hands... When did she reach up to his chest?

"I know you want me, Tessa. I've seen the lust behind your eyes."

Tessa dropped her chin, heat flooding her cheeks. "I..."

"Don't. Don't deny it. Each time I caught that look, you'd turn away." He tilted her chin back up until she was forced to look into his gorgeous eyes. "If you had kept looking, you would have seen the same lust in mine."

Her reflection shone in them now. Her shock showed plainly in her wide eyes and dropped jaw. "You... what are you saying?"

"I want you, Tessa. I've wanted you for a long time. You just never gave me any sign that you were ready."

"I..." She shut her mouth. God, she was so ready she was pulsing with need.

"Tell me you're ready. I've waited a long time."

"But...you're my employer."

"I could fire you right now," he teased, then laughed at the mortified look she gave him.

"I'll re-hire you in a few hours, I promise."

Tessa felt drunk. Her mind swam with the possibilities that this man offered her. "And tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow," he ran his hands down her arms, then clasped her hands, "is up to you. We can pretend it never happened, or..." He moved one boot in between hers, until his erection fit against her hip.

Tessa sucked air into her deprived lungs, instinctively moving against his arousal.

"Or," he continued, pressing her against her horse's flank. "I could fire you again tomorrow."

Rationality be damned. This was what Tessa dreamt about. Joshua Bradley. Hard. For her. "Yes."

He released her hands to bury his in her hair, knocking her hat into the dirt. "Hell yeah." Tilting her head to one side, he lowered his mouth on hers, sealing it with a delicious amount of suction and heat. Tessa slid her arms around his neck, pulling him even closer.

With a groan, Josh's tongue invaded her mouth. Plunging, exploring, and enticing hers to join. He adjusted his stance, wedging that thigh higher between her legs, and pressing her up against her horse. Tessa rode his thigh, rubbing the thick denim of their jeans against her damp folds. The friction was delicious, but not enough.

"Jesus," he pulled his mouth from hers, gasping. "I can feel your heat." His lips left a trail along her jaw until he paused to take her earlobe between his teeth. "I want that heat, Tess. I

want to be deep inside you."

"Please. Josh." She panted.

Josh scooped her up and within seconds she was sprawled on top of the blanket she'd brought. He worked on her belt buckle for a minute, before sitting back on his heels to tear open the snaps on his shirt and drop it behind him. His chest was broad and bronzed. She'd seen it many times while they labored together, but somehow it looked even sexier now. "Take off your pants."

Tessa didn't stop to think. It was too late for that. She had them unfastened and shoved to her knees before he pulled them the rest of the way to her boots. She sat up to tug off her boots, as he hopped from one foot to another to remove his. By the time she threw her shirt aside, she looked up to see Josh in all his naked glory, kneeling between her knees, and staring down at her as if she were a long awaited birthday present.

"You're beautiful," he whispered, bringing one hand to her breast, cupping it in his callused fingers, and groaning when her nipple beaded as he watched.

"So are you." Tessa had begun her own explorations, starting with his dusky rose nipples, and working down his tight stomach. When she reached his engorged cock, Josh hissed in pleasure, his hands stilled on her body.

"I love your hands. God...Tess..."

His loss of control infused her with power. She wrapped a hand around his length, and gave a long drag down to his base. She pumped, using the steady drops of pre-cum to lubricate each stroke.

He'd dropped to all fours, and hung his head to watch her hands on him. She added a corkscrew movement when she reached the ridge below the swollen head of his cock, then

tightened her fist on the way down.

"Stop Tess...I'm close."

"Come for me."

"Please..." He hadn't moved, so Tessa didn't take his plea seriously. In fact she increased speed. "Tess..."

He threw his head back on his shoulders and arched his back. Tessa didn't let up. She brought her other hand up to cup his balls, rolling them, pulling them gently as she worked his flesh.

He was long and hard, one vein snaked on the underside of his cock, disappearing beneath her fist as she jacked him off. Her boss. Josh Bradley.

The reminder of who she was with filled her with lust, and her rhythm increased. She could feel his orgasm beginning with the tightening of his stomach, then his balls, and he reared up on his knees, running both his hands through his hair. Tessa followed him up, sitting before him, entranced by his sex. The scent, the texture, and as she leaned in for a taste, Josh gave a low rumbling growl at the first touch of her tongue, and dropped his hands from his scalp to hers.

He was beautiful. A word she rarely used to describe a man, or his cock, but she truly found pleasure in just looking at him at her mercy. She wrapped her lips around the mushroom head of his erection, and sucked him slowly into her mouth.

"Fuck," he swore. Clenching and releasing handfuls of her hair, as if he wasn't sure if he wanted to force her to continue, or to pull away from the pleasure she gave. She hummed her enjoyment to help him decide. The sound seemed to spur him to move his hips, cautiously though, so she wasn't afraid she'd choke. A few more twists of her hand, and strong suction, and he pulled away with another swear word just as he came, ejaculate spitting up and falling onto

her hand and onto the blanket between their legs.

Moisture rushed to coat her pussy at the sight of his pleasure. She continued milking him, drawing every drop from him that she could, while squirming on the wool blanket, desperate for her own release.

"Enough," he rasped, taking both of her wrists in his hands. Tessa looked up into his eyes, and saw them dilated until only a thin circle of brown showed. "Jesus Christ, that's not what I planned."

"Oh really?" She smiled, and licked her lips. "What exactly did you plan?"

He pushed her back onto the blanket, and settled between her thighs. She felt the warm puffs of air on her moist opening when he answered. "Ladies should always go first."

He lowered his face in between her legs. At the first touch of his tongue, Tessa shuddered, unable to keep the reaction from taking over her entire body. He murmured his approval, then curled his hands beneath her hips, and settled in to feast.

"Oh, God...Josh..."

His tongue was nimble, his lips moving against her weeping sex, teasing her sensitized flesh. Around and around he swirled inside, then all across her opening. His mouth was warm, his breath hot, and his enjoyment of her sent tendrils of electric need curling through her womb. He latched on to her clit just as he brought one hand back around to shove two long fingers inside.

"Yes..." The pressure built, pulsing beneath her skin. Her skin flared, as if she was combusting. Even the soles of her feet felt like they were on fire. Josh licked and sucked, twisting his fingers inside her, and humming pleasure into her core.

Tessa reached down, digging all ten fingers into his scalp, luxuriating in each subtle

movement of his head as he licked her over the edge. "Josh!"

Heat poured out of her center, flooding her extremities, and a pulsing orgasm raced down, releasing in a surge of ecstatic pleasure.

"Mmm," Josh didn't stop his mission, but he did ease up to help her ride the next wave, and then the next, until she lay panting on the blanket, exhausted and elated.

When the last of the contractions left her, Josh kissed his way back up her stomach, covering her with his weight.

"Give me a minute," he breathed. "I want inside you so bad."

"I want you there."

He kissed her, sharing her taste, and renewing her passion. His hands were hot on her skin. As he learned her body through touch, she did the same. Tessa swore she felt his heart thumping so hard that it shook the ground, until Josh's head jerked back, and his wide eyed look told her just what that rhythm was.

"Shit!" He was on his feet in an instant, and gathered their clothes into his arms. "Someone's coming. Run, Tess. Into the trees."

Tessa's heart dropped to her toes, but she did as she was told, and ran naked from the soft grasses into the prickly pine needle covered ground under the trees. From behind a thick juniper bush deep in the copse, she and Josh struggled to redress as quickly as possible. When she looked up at him in fear, he grinned. A mischievous smile, that sent heat back into her chilled body.

"You're a naughty, naughty cowgirl," he whispered, kissing her while fastening the last of his shirt snaps.

She laughed, tucking in her shirt just as the horse and rider appeared in their makeshift

picnic site.

"Joshua? Where are ya?"

Thomas Bradley. Josh's father. Her *other* boss. The only father figure in her life. Tessa wanted to disappear. She finger-combed her hair, hoping old Tom would attribute her messy locks to the horseback ride.

"It's okay," Josh whispered. He pulled her into a quick hug, and spoke against her ear. "He'll never know. For all he knows, we went for a walk."

Tessa nodded, then returned his devilish grin.

"In here!" Josh called back, taking Tessa by the hand and leading her back into the clearing.

Thomas watched them emerge into the sunshine. She saw the disapproval in his scowl for only a moment. Tessa pulled on her hand, but Josh held tight.

"What's going on?" Thomas Bradley wasn't the type of man to beat around the bush.

Josh shrugged and smiled down at Tessa. "Thought this would be a good place to picnic, but Tessa had to tinkle."

She scowled back, and tried again to pull her hand free of his. To no avail. Her embarrassment only made both men chuckle, so she let it slide.

"Well, sorry to cut it short, but Rodriguez needs you. You aren't answering your cell."

Josh released her hand to bend down and retrieve his hat where it lie brim up on the tangled blanket.

Heat rose to Tessa's cheeks as she saw her own hat, right next to the umbrella, discarded on the ground where Jessup once stood. The horse had walked off to chew on some grass, leaving her Stetson lying like a bull's eye on the empty grass. No self-respecting cowboy or

cowgirl treated a Stetson like that. She might as well spray paint a big sign announcing what she and Josh had been doing only moments before.

"I must have left my cell at home." Josh explained.

Thomas grunted, his eyes bouncing from Tessa to his son. "You'd best get back in there. Leave Tessa to her day off." His face softened, and he winked down at her. "I'm sure she doesn't need her boss hanging out when she's trying to enjoy a nice quiet picnic."

Josh opened his mouth, but apparently reconsidered his words. He shot an apologetic glance her way, then whistled for his horse.

She helped him saddle the gelding, working like the devil to keep her grin hidden from Thomas Bradley. The older man was more like a father to her than any other man alive. Most of her embarrassment stemmed from the fear that she'd disappoint him by getting involved with Josh. Especially if it didn't work out between them, which would only cause tension at the ranch.

"I'll see you later," Josh whispered while leaning a little closer to the gelding than was necessary to tighten the bit. "We have unfinished business."

She stopped him from mounting his horse, after a glance Thomas' way. His gaze was still locked on his son, making Tessa wonder what he would think about Josh starting a relationship with the hired help. Thomas looked away and lit a cigar.

Josh gripped her hand. "We didn't do anything wrong. I've dated employees before."

Tessa pinched her lips together. She knew all about that. Those two employees quit soon after the relationship with Josh dissolved. She'd get her head on straight before that happened. She shook her head and asked, "Do I have my job back?"

Josh smiled, a big wide grin that filled Tessa with excitement. "You're hired."

Once both men were in the saddle, Thomas turned to her with a smile. "Sorry we

interrupted your day young lady.

Tessa bit her tongue, and replaced her hat to hide the guilt. "Is everything okay at the ranch? I can..."

"Everything's fine," Thomas waved her off. "You enjoy your day off now. Get lots of relaxing in. I've got plenty of work lined up for you in the morning."

She watched the pair ride away, and tried to shove down the one word that kept emerging in her mind.

Family.

She took a deep breath. *Careful, Tess.* Josh Bradley was fire, and she'd be a fool to play anywhere near that flame.



It took twice as long as it should have to finish the book, since her mind kept wandering to Josh Bradley. Although she wanted to saddle up and ride right after the Bradley men, she managed to stay off site the entire day as Thomas suggested. She used the time to relax and refocus. It would be a big mistake to get too carried away by what happened in the meadow. Although Tessa's heart ached for more, her brain was cautious. Any kind of affair with him would affect not only her heart, but her entire career. She was even able to ride home around dusk at a sedate pace, but the closer she got to the house she shared with Josh, her resolve to take things slow faltered, and images of her sneaking into his upstairs bedroom that night fluttered through her mind.

She rounded the huge stable to the sight of Josh tossing a duffle bag into the cab of his pickup. From the load already strapped down in the bed, it looked as if he was planning a long trip. Tessa's heart seized when he climbed behind the wheel, and she spurred Jessup into a run, but his truck kicked up so much dust as he tore out of the property, she doubted he even saw her

approach.

She sat rigid in the saddle and watched him leave the property, and didn't take her eyes off the black vehicle for long moments, until it disappeared over the rise.

Tessa slid from the saddle, held on tight to Jessup's neck, and pulled her hat low over her eyes. She wouldn't cry, she refused to. Instead, she would just build a wall of armor around her heart. At least he left her with something.

Her pride.

Tessa and Josh's story continues in the book *Tessa's Pride*.

Visit <http://olviabrynn.com> for details.