

The Brat Next Door

By

Jodi Bella

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OTKromance writing as Jodi Bella

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Chapter 1

Trace Samuels strode along the worn dirt path that ran from his farm to the next, his blue eyes narrowed and hard, his bare arms tense, muscles bulging. The birds in the trees sang merrily in the Indian summer sunshine, as if cheered by his situation.

When he got a hold of Tessa Randall, he was going to give her the hiding of her spoiled little lifetime! This time she had well and truly gone too far.

Somewhat to his relief, his eyes fell on his clothes, sitting in a pile up ahead of him on the dirt path. Obviously, Miss. Tessa had regretted her little joke and thought maybe he'd leave her alone if she gave him back the clothes she'd stolen from him while he'd been swimming in the creek. He paused to pull on his jeans over his wet boxer briefs, then angrily shrugged into the worn flannel shirt, too. He was too intent on finding the little pest to bother buttoning the shirt or pulling on his boots, though. Despite Tessa's sensibilities, he had fully intended to hunt her down and spank her for this latest prank, even when all he'd had on were his wet boxers—now that he had clothes back, he had no qualms at all about it and was, in fact, only more resolved to get the job done good and proper.

For years, Trace had been telling his best friend, Aaron, Tessa's older brother and her legal guardian since she had been ten, that what that girl really needed more than anything was a damn good spanking. But Aaron was soft on his sister—too understanding, really—and easy to forgive. In all the years they'd been friends—all their lives, really, as they'd grown up on neighboring farms—Trace had never seen anyone stand up to Tessa. Not even her parents when they had been alive.

Well, today, that was going to change.

Today, Trace Samuels was going to finally even the score with Tess Randall for all the times she'd played tricks on him throughout the years, for all the pouts and tantrums Aaron had put up with, and for all the mischief and trouble she'd gotten into but had never had to account for. For all the times Trace's hand had literally itched to spank some of Tess's sass away, today would put it all to rights.

He rubbed his hands together in anticipation as he quickened his step.

He was sure Tess had been right pleased with her prank today. She'd probably snickered to herself the whole time she was stealthily gathering his discarded clothes from the grass while he took his first break all week with a hard earned swim in the cool creek that separated the two farms. If he hadn't surfaced from the water just in time as she'd been riding off on her little mare, he would have missed seeing her depart, the long braid of copper hair flying behind her as the shapely backside he'd so often wanted to have writhing over his knee bounced in the saddle.

Of course, even if he hadn't seen her leaving the scene of the crime, Trace would have known Tess was the culprit. She always was. If he lived to be a hundred, he would never understand why she always chose him to vent her brattiness on. Not that she was an angel with everyone else, because she wasn't—but for some reason, even now that she was a grown woman, she always chose to pick on Trace.

He had reached the Randall's property now and he grinned as he scanned the buildings. The blood in his veins heated and quickened as he anticipated the chase and capture, followed swiftly by the comeuppance Tessa so richly deserved. Aaron was in a neighboring town today bidding on some cattle at auction, which meant that Lil Miss. Jokester was Trace's for the afternoon. He could do with her as he pleased—starting with giving her the longest overdue spanking in history—and no one would be around to stop him.

Tessa Randall peeked down from her hiding spot in the hayloft and suppressed a giggle with her hand when she saw Trace below.

His ruggedly handsome face was stamped with a dark scowl as his blue gaze darted from building to building. He surprised her by lifting his well-muscled arms to cup his mouth before bellowing her name.

"TESSA!"

For a moment Tess felt like her heart had stopped. He did not sound amused by her little prank, not one bit. But then again, he never was amused by her jokes—which was exactly why she loved tormenting him with them all the time.

"If you come out right now, I'll go easy on you!"

Humph! He'd go easy on her, would he? As if he was really going to get the chance to retaliate! Ha! Tess had known Trace all her life, and though he blew a lot of smoke about what a

brat she was and all the things he'd like to do to get even with her, the truth was that Aaron always took her side and protected her.

Of course, she realized belatedly, Aaron was away for the afternoon. She'd momentarily forgotten that when she'd come across Trace at the creek just before she left after her own swim. Though she hated spying on him, she'd hidden in the shadows and watched him shuck his boots, socks, shirt and jeans, revealing a beautiful masculine body that had fairly made her mouth water. She'd found herself transfixed by the sight of the man she'd known as a boy while his powerful, sexy body tore through the water with ease. The sun had dappled through the full summer leaves to sparkle his tan chest with spots of golden adornment. His near black hair had been swept back with the water from where it usually lay in charming disarray around his face. She'd glimpsed flashes of his strong, hard legs as they scissored through the water.

She must have sat there, still as a stone on her horse's back in the shadows of the trees for a good ten minutes, just watching him! And what was worse was that it wasn't the first time she'd caught herself admiring Trace like that. It had actually been happening quite a lot lately.

This time, however, she managed to snap herself out of it. And then, just to prove to herself that these disturbing lapses of hers meant nothing, she'd eased out of the saddle without a single sound, crept over to Trace's clothes, and carried them away with her.

It had been a perfect crime, really. She'd left his clothes for him in the path back a ways—so he'd have a bit of a walk before finding them, but certainly not too far that she'd be going overboard. He should have taken the peace offering as she'd intended and headed home. Then later, when Aaron was back (and she was therefore safe), he could come over as usual to gripe and groan about her latest prank.

He was NOT supposed to come after her. Especially looking that ticked off.

Tessa ducked her head back behind the wall and willed him to go away, even as she wondered at her own stupidity in taunting him when Aaron wasn't around to protect her. Her palms were suddenly clammy, despite the fact that Trace Samuels was the one man besides her brother that Tess really trusted. She nervously wiped her sweaty hands on the still damp material of her white swimsuit.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!" Trace called in a singsong voice that was totally at odds with his deep, throaty baritone.

Tess crouched lower in her hiding spot, trying to make her body as small behind the hay as she could. What she succeeded in doing instead was brushing her nose with the hay and before she had time to react differently, a sneeze escaped her.

Oh, no...

Even though she knew better than to do it, she couldn't resist poking her head towards the service door to see if Trace had heard her.

He was, of course, staring right up into the loft when she did this incredibly stupid thing. And he grinned, this cocky, brass balls type of grin that made her want to punch him in the eye. And then he shook his finger at her and called, "Don't you move a muscle, Theresa Marie."

Tess grimaced at him. No one else, not even Aaron, ever called her that.

Of course, the moment she saw him enter the barn below her, she jumped down from the loft to the grass below. She landed with a grunt, thinking that jumping out of the hayloft had certainly been easier when she was a kid.

A quick glance over her shoulder showed that Trace had retraced his steps and was already coming towards her, hand outstretched.

Panic seized Tessa at the look of determination and resolve in his eye. Painful memories from the past clouded her reasoning and what she knew to be true about Trace's character. She turned on her heel then and made to run for her life.

Trace got to her first, however. In a few short seconds, he had stopped her flight, picked her right up off her bare feet and carried her like a sack of horse feed against his hip to the picnic table that sat against one wall of the house. It was there that he sat himself on one bench and managed—albeit with some struggle to combat her kicking and flailing about—to finally put Miss Theresa Randall bottom up over his knee.

"Trace!" Tessa screeched, bucking and thrashing around over his lap like an unbroken filly. "Let me up right now! I mean it! You better let me up!"

Trace chuckled at the ire behind her words. "Sorry, kiddo," he refused her almost gently, though he used the nickname on purpose because he knew she hated it even more than when he used her full name. He patted her upturned bottom and grinned. "I've waited too long to give up an opportunity like this. I just might never get another one like it again."

"Aaron will KILL you if you hurt me!" she threatened.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Tessa," Trace assured her. And, as if to prove it, he let his warm hand settle on her behind, smoothing the material of her swimsuit in a wide circle. Hmm... This was more interesting than he'd thought. Um...

He cleared his throat and readjusted her over his lap. "I'm just going to give you a spanking, brat."

"Oh, JUST that?" Tessa quipped, glaring at him over one shoulder.

Trace's annoyance with her returned, temporarily shoving aside those other feelings he wasn't sure what to do with. "Yeah," he said, and he raised his hand high over his head, watching her wide blue eyes grow bigger still as she watched him over her shoulder. "Just <SMACK!> EXACTLY <SMACK!> that <SMACK!>."

"Oww!"

"That was nothing, missy!" Trace scoffed and he swatted her again, watching her wince again at the impact of his hand.

"Ouch!"

He shook his head. "Get used to it, kiddo, cause I'm just getting warmed up ... or rather, I'm just getting you warmed up."

"Har, har... Oww!"

Trace chose to ignore her sarcasm. Instead he concentrated his efforts on lighting an inferno in her backside. In Trace's opinion, he had a lot of years to make up for with this spanking, and he wanted to be damn thorough.

Tessa wailed her misery as he spanked her, raising quite a din with her constant "ows" and ouches, moans and squeals. She kicked and wriggled and twisted around, trying to escape his iron clad grip in any way she could, or to at least deflect the hard blows of his hand. His aim was always infallible, however, and despite her efforts she could find no escape.

"You're going to bang your head on the table if you don't settle down," Trace finally warned her.

"Then let me up!" she cried.

"No." <SMACK!> "Take your spanking like a big girl instead of like a baby."

She pouted openly, though remained quiet for a few moments. "No one's ever spanked me before," she finally said.

"I know. Believe me, it's long overdue. I've been trying for years to get Aaron to do it."

"It hurts!" she complained. She looked so sorry for herself, and so cute, and Trace found himself considering the color of her shapely bottom. It looked quite red already through the thin material of her white tank suit, and he lessened the weight of his swats. But he didn't stop. Not yet.

"It's supposed to hurt."

"My suit's still damp, too," she whined.

"Yes, it is. I guess that makes it sting even more."

"Uh huh."

He slowed his swats even more.

"Are you almost done?" Tessa asked a few moments later, her voice all sniffly and little-girl like.

"Are you sorry yet?"

She glanced at him over her shoulder, and smiled impishly. "Sure."

<SMACK!> "You don't look very sorry, Tess!"

"I am, really! Ouch! Boy you've got a hard hand! Owww! Come on, Trace, lemme up!"

He gave her a few more hard smacks right where her bottom cheeks rounded down to the tops of her thighs, just to reinforce his point, then patted her cheeks more gently.

"Okay, brat, you're done. Up you go."

She scrambled to her feet and stepped away from him quickly, craning her neck around to look at her bottom. The skin under her white tank suit looked pink and it was red where the skin peeked out of the legs of the suit.

"Phew! It's so hot!" she exclaimed, rubbing her backside unabashedly and doing a little dance in place, all the while pouting very openly at Trace.

Trace laughed at her antics, earning him a dark frown. "Good, then I did a good job."

"You're a jerk!" Tessa proclaimed, still holding her backside, one cheek cupped tenderly in each of her small hands.

Trace shrugged, suddenly finding himself unable to look away from her. With her hands cupping her bottom, her small pert breasts were thrust forward and strained the material of her suit. Her blue eyes were electric with her temper and wet with a few unshed tears. And the way she was rubbing her abused posterior... it was definitely erotic to say the least. And it suddenly had Trace wondering when Tessa had stopped being a little girl and become a woman.

"Well," he said gruffly, trying to get a hold of himself and the strange path his thoughts were on, "you're a brat. And you deserved every single swat you got. More, in fact."

"Oh! How dare you! Just wait till Aaron gets home, buster..." As Tess launched into a full-blown tirade, Trace found himself staring at her mouth and wondering for the first time in his life what it would be like to kiss her.

Warning bells went off in his head at that thought. This was his best friend's little sister, here, not exactly territory to go jumping into feet first. And then there was all the hell Tess had been through in her past. She was a woman to use caution with, not recklessness.

Yet he still couldn't take his eyes from her mouth. And he found himself getting to his feet.

Tess noticed the strange look that had come over Trace's face. She shut her mouth then, and she even took a step or two backwards, not sure what to expect from him. He followed her, undeterred.

For a moment, Trace half expected her to run from him again. But then she raised her head a notch and met him full and square in the eye. The look of challenge she gave him was so powerful, he might not have noticed the quiver in her lip if he didn't have tasting her mouth already foremost on his mind.

A second later, Tess's back met the side wall of the house and a second after that Trace was an inch in front of her, his arms braced against the warm brick on either side of her head. He watched her look in first one direction, then the other, yet still she made no move to run away. And she still could have; he wouldn't have even tried to stop her.

But for the moment she wouldn't look at him and her lips were still quivering.

"Tessa." Her name sounded rough as he spoke it, like gravel in his throat. "Look at me, honey."

Maybe it was the endearment that won him her gaze. He'd certainly never used one with her before—instead it was usually 'brat' or 'pest.' There was insecurity in her eyes to match the vulnerability her trembling lips suggested. It was the combination of those two that was Trace's undoing.

As gently as a feather, Trace lifted his hand and cupped the side of her face with it. Neither of them seemed to notice the irony of the gentleness of his hand on this cheek compared to the iron hardness of it earlier on her bottom cheeks.

Tess's breath caught audibly and she leaned into his touch. Her eyes drifted closed and it was then that Trace dipped his head and kissed her.

It had to be the tamest, most gentle of kisses that Trace had ever given a woman. And all it did was leave him wanting more.

He drew back after a moment to look down at her. Her eyes were wide and bewildered, no longer challenging, but askance. She looked up at him as if waiting for his next move, feeling him out. And she licked her lips slowly, sensuously, as if grabbing up the last lingering taste of him there.

Trace groaned and tipped her chin up for another kiss. This one wasn't as gentle or as chaste. His tongue darted between her soft lips and his mouth slanted over hers. The sweet taste of her was nearly overwhelming and he plunged one hand into the loose hair at the base of her braid while the other reached back to cup the soft swell of her still warm behind. An image of that behind wiggling over hip lap flooded into his mind and he grew hard at the memory coupled with the kiss.

The soft mewling sounds that Tess had been making during their first kiss had now changed to muffled sounds of distress. It took Trace a few minutes to recognize the difference, and to feel the pull of her hand on his arm where he was holding her chin. He pulled abruptly away from her, and looked down into eyes filled with fear and betrayal.

For a few moments all they did was stare at one another, both trembling, though for two very different reasons. Trace finally wiped the back of his hand across his mouth as if to rub away the offensive kiss, and he swore.

"Awww, hell..."

A second later the sound of tires on gravel sputtered up behind them. Trace didn't have to look behind him to know that Aaron was home.

"Shit."

Tess ducked under his arm then and ran for the front door of the house. As she passed him Trace saw the tears on her cheeks that he had put there.

Trace made himself turn to face Aaron. His longtime friend was getting out of his battered pickup, his expression already concerned as his green eyes followed Tess inside. Trace grimaced, realized that Aaron must have seen how intimately they had been standing, not to mention the telltale redness he had to have noticed on Tess's backside when she rushed inside.

Aaron's gaze slid slowly to Trace as the screen door banged shut after his sister. "What's going on?" he asked cautiously.

Trace raked a frustrated hand through his damp hair and gathered his courage. "Well, Aaron, I finally spanked your little sister today." Trace straightened his shoulders and made himself meet the dark clouds gathering in Aaron's face. "And then I really screwed up and kissed the little brat."