



TULSA
TEMPEST

#1 IN THE TULSA SERIES

NORMA
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All of the characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Note from The Author Regarding the Tulsa Series

The 4-title Tulsa series has had a long and interesting journey. In the late 1990s, I had just completed the last of four contemporary romance novels for Barbour Publishing's *Heartsong* line. At that time, I was approached by my editor at Barbour to submit ideas to him for historical fiction.

Because I've lived in the Tulsa area for most of my adult life, I knew a little bit about the infamous Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. But honestly, at that time, no one talked much about it. (That later changed as survivors began to speak up.) I knew that that event would serve as the backdrop for my historical, Christian, Tulsa series.

The very same day that my editor asked me for historical fiction ideas, I sat down and wrote out thumbnail sketches for all four titles. He liked the ideas and offered a 4-book contract.

All four, then, were originally published through Barbour's *Heartsong* line where they enjoyed immense popularity. (I still have file folders full of fan letters.)

Later, when the idea of eBooks was in its infancy, an independent group offered to publish my series digitally. As often happens in the publishing industry, the whole thing fell apart due to 1) being ahead of the curve regarding digitally-produced books, and 2) poor business management.

And, yes, yet another group purporting to be an independent publisher, also had their hands in the pie. That too fell apart.

Discouraging to say the least.

The Tulsa Series languished until I recently resurrected them and placed them on Amazon's Kindle. Even with that, little was done to promote the titles.

But this is a new day!

Presently, the four titles are decked out in delightful new covers, plus all will now be available in both print *and* digitally.

I trust as a reader, you will enjoy these stories as much as I enjoyed researching and writing them.

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Chapter 1

Tessa was upset at Papa for ruining Christmas. Christmas should be a time for joy, not despair. Tessa's scuffed tan valise sat by the door waiting, her black cloth coat slung carelessly across it. The new red and blue muffler Mama had knitted for her for Christmas added a small bit of cheer.

"When are you coming back again, Tessie?" Vega wanted to know. Tessa felt her four-year-old sister tugging at her skirt as she tried to move about the cramped kitchen of their small house. Vega clutched the cloth doll Tessa had sewn for her as a Christmas gift. Christmas was two days ago, and Vega had not let loose of the doll since the moment she opened the package.

"She will be back when she can, Vega," Mama told her. "Just like always. As long as the roads stay open and Pastor Stedman can get through. Now scoot."

Tessa watched as little Vega stepped away long enough to have obeyed, then came back underfoot.

"Come over and color with me," eight-year-old Siegrid called out from the other side of the room. She was lying near the wood-burning stove to stay warm. She held up one of the bright crayons that Tessa brought from Independence School where she taught. Neither girl cared that they were broken.

Vega shook her head making the halo of blonde curls shake. Her clear blue eyes were wide. "I don't want to color. I want Tessie."

Tessa was trying to help Mama as much as she could before the rumble of

Pastor Stedman's Model A sounded the warning that she must go. She folded the soft bread dough over and over again, while Mama chopped the vegetables for the stew. Papa had shot a rabbit, and cleaned and dressed it. That would be their supper after Tessa left.

She traveled home from the Glenn Pool every weekend, but this time, since it was Christmas holiday, she was home longer. Perhaps that was why Vega now clung to her.

Looking down at Vega, she suddenly realized her little sister was troubled. Little ones could sense so much. Perhaps Vega had heard Tessa arguing with Papa last evening. Even if she didn't hear from the loft, Tessa believed her little spirit sensed something wasn't right.

Tessa lifted the fat mound of dough into the oiled crockery bowl, wiped her hands on the tea towel and sat down on one of the spindle chairs beside the kitchen table. Immediately Vega was on her lap. Tessa buried her nose in the little girl's silky curls. "When will you stay with us forever and ever, Tessie?"

Tessa looked over at Mama just in time to see her mother's gentle face cloud over with concern.

"You know I can't stay forever, Vega. I have to teach the children at the school at the Glenn Pool."

"But I want you to stay forever."

At that Siegrid dropped her crayon and came over to the chair and quietly stood behind Tessa. "At least until New Year's Eve," she added to Vega's plea.

Siegrid ran her finger around the crown of braids on top of Tessa's head. The braids loosened as Siegrid tugged at a hairpin. Siegrid gave a little giggle.

Tessa's hand flew up to the braid. "No, no, Siegrid. We can't play now. I've got to be ready."

She firmed the hairpin back in place.

"Last year you stayed until New Year's Eve," Siegrid persisted.

"Much warmer it was last holiday," Mama said. With her Swedish accent, Mama's w's all sounded like v's; but Tessa had been training herself and her sisters to pronounce their w's correctly.

"Hear that wind out there?" Tessa yanked one of Siegrid's long golden braids. "A storm may be coming. If it sleets or snows Pastor can't get through."

"Goody," Vega mimicked. "Pastor can't get through."

Tessa laughed and gave Vega a squeeze. Then she reached up and pulled Siegrid around where she could give her a hug. "Now girls, I need your help when I bring in another load of wood. Stand by the door and watch, and open quickly when I shout."

"Ve vill," Vega said as she hopped down.

"Wa, wa, will," Tessa corrected. She reached up to pull Mama's heavy woolen cloak down from the hook at the front door.

"Tessa," Mama chided with a shake of her head. "There's no need. I can do it."

"And you will do it—plenty times before winter is out."

"Wa, wa, will," Vega chanted as she danced about with her dolly as a partner.

"If Berg were still with us..." Siegrid said.

"No if's, little sister. Berg is warm and happy in heaven, and he doesn't have

to cut or carry any wood." She fastened the hood of the cloak securely under her chin. "Now mind you, open as soon as I shout."

She heard the girls giggling as they slammed the door behind her. Cold wind hit her face like a thousand tiny needles. She hurried down the stoop and across the barren yard to the woodpile. She, too, missed Berg. It was because of him she made the decision to teach. When pneumonia took his life winter before last, she was determined she must earn money to help Mama and the girls. Even at fourteen, Berg was straight and strong as a towering oak. No one would have thought such a healthy boy would be felled by an illness.

Kneeling down, she carefully selected the biggest logs she could possibly carry. She balanced them on one arm and piled them up. Using her other arm to cradle them, she slowly pushed up to her feet again. The weight pulled at her back. She tottered a moment, but caught her balance.

At least she needn't worry about stumbling over Old Blue, Papa's hound. He was probably sitting proudly in the buckboard wherever Papa was—whatever he was doing. She kicked the cloak out of the way before stepping up on the stoop so as not to trip.

"Open," she shouted. The door flew open without a moment's hesitation. She staggered to the heating stove where the girls dutifully unloaded her arms. Together they made a neat stack that would last through the night.

As she hung Mama's heavy cloak back in its place, she heard the unmistakable sound of the Model T. She saw both girls freeze.

Mama hurriedly pulled the warm bricks from the oven. Wrapped in old rags, the bricks would keep Tessa's feet warm at least half the way to the Pastor's house.

Tessa wound the warm woolen muffler around her head and neck before pulling on her coat. By the time she had pulled on her knitted mittens, she heard Pastor's strong knock on the door.

"Ho, ho," he called out with laughter ringing in his voice. Pastor Stedman was always laughing. "Guess who?"

As she opened it, the noise of the rattling old car filled the house. A hearty gust of north wind ushered the Pastor in. His huge frame made the house seem even smaller. The aroma of gasoline permeated his coat and hat. He pulled the door shut behind him. He politely removed the hat to reveal a shock of snow white hair.

"Welcome Pastor Stedman," Mama said as she stepped from the kitchen to the doorway to shake his hand. "I have *pepparkakors* for you to take back for you and Edith to enjoy."

Pastor patted his front and his smile beamed beneath the white fluffy mustache. "Still trying to fatten me up, eh Gerda Jurgen? Vell, it's vorking," he said mocking her Swedish pronunciations.

Mama gave him a kind smile and the girls giggled.

"And vat are you two giggling about?" Pastor's hand dug deep into his coat pocket. "I say, Siegrid, have you grown two inches since I was here last?"

Siegrid shook her head and blushed.

"She's almost as tall as Tessa," Vega offered.

"That's not saying much," Pastor said, his grin now aimed right at Tessa. "To be as big as a peanut."

The girls giggled again, but Tessa didn't mind. She never minded Pastor's

teasing. It was always in love. Unlike Papa's teasing.

Pastor continued to fish about in his pocket as the girls watched closely. "Would you look here," he said acting surprised. "How do you suppose these came to be in the pocket of this coat?" His wide fist was thrust out. The girls ventured closer.

He opened his hand to offer them each a piece of peppermint stick. Vega jumped forward to take the candy; Siegrid moved more cautiously.

"What do you tell Pastor?" Mama encouraged. She was still scurrying about getting everything ready for Tessa to take.

"Tank you, Pastor Stedman," Siegrid said softly, and an echo came from Vega. They looked at Mama for permission to eat them now. Mama nodded.

"Wish I could stay and visit, Gerda, but those clouds look mighty threatening. And Tin Lizzie is leaping to get back home."

"Go," Mama said. "I help carry." She pulled her cloak down from the hook and spread it around her. "Siegrid, help with the door again. Close it tightly until I come back in."

Pastor grabbed the valise, and the basket of food Mama had prepared. Mama took the warmed bricks. Tessa kissed her sisters and then grabbed up the box of her belongings, which was tied with twine. Last night Mama had urged her to take a few more of her possessions back to the parsonage. Especially the books.

"Our house is so little," Mama told her. "You may as well help us out by taking these with you."

Strange, Tessa thought. Everything was so strange this time. The wind coming across the fields was almost too cold to allow words of good-by to Mama.

The wind sucked the very air from her lungs.

Tessa settled into the front seat as Mama positioned the warm bricks beneath her feet. Pastor Stedman brought out the heavy lap robe and the two of them tucked her in as though she were a child getting ready for bed.

Before closing the door Mama took Tessa's cheeks in her hands and whispered. "It is sorry Papa is not here."

Tessa nodded but found no words to answer. It was all right with her that he was not there. But she knew what Mama meant. Mama was really saying she wished Papa were more of a papa, not just that moment, but all the time.

Tessa felt suspended between two worlds. The pull forward to the kindness and gentleness of the Stedman home near the Glenn Pool. The pull back to the love of her mother and sisters, and her need to help them. Each time, the pulling ripped at her insides until she wasn't sure where she truly belonged. "I love you Mama," she said.

"You are my Tiny Delight, Tessa. God bless you." She released Tessa and closed the door and scurried back into the house.

As the pastor settled in and the old car moved away, Tessa wiped steam off the window and saw Siegrid and Vega with their faces pressed against the window watching her go. Tessa knew they were crying. She felt a pang of remorse because she didn't share that same deep sadness with them.

The car moved slowly through the rolling hills, which were covered by stands of scrub oak and blackjack with a few taller cottonwoods among them, now all barren in the winter chill. Nothing was as colorless as Oklahoma in the winter. Mama always said that at least in Sweden there was pretty snow all winter. Tessa

watched as the endless miles of brown countryside moved by her window. An occasional farmhouse, or a line of trees along a creek bank, broke the monotony. The heavy gray clouds caused the horizon to fade into a colorless nothing.

The aroma of Mama's sweet *lussikatter*, and *pepparkakors* mixed in with the harsh smell of gasoline and made Tessa's stomach do strange things. The special buns and cookies were part of Mama's tradition to celebrate St. Lucia's Day, and she had carefully saved back enough to share with Pastor and Edith.

When Tessa was small, the story of the young St. Lucia kept her in awe. But now that she was older, now that Pastor Stedman and Edith had made Jesus so real to her, Mama's traditions from the Old Country had lost their effect on her.

Pastor Stedman hummed hymns deep in his throat as he wrestled with the steering wheel of the old car. Tessa knew before they traveled very far, he would begin singing. This was just the warm-up time.

Tessa wished her family had a car, even if it were an old Model T like this one. Mama could learn to drive and do more things for herself. A telephone would be nice, too.

By the time the bricks cooled, Tessa's body heat beneath the weight of the lap robe had warmed her some. Even though the car broke the wind better than when they all piled into Papa's wagon, it was still a biting cold. Periodically she rubbed her hands together or rubbed her cold nose with the warm mitten.

Soon Pastor Stedman was singing, beginning with mild renditions of "Yield Not to Temptation," and "The Lily of the Valley." By the time they reached the parsonage, he would be into gusty songs like "Awakening Chorus." But midway into "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart" he stopped.

He glanced over at her—even though he could scarcely afford to take his eyes from the deep frozen ruts in the road. "Say Little One, why so quiet? My singing sounds so much better when your singing comes along side to soften it."

She smiled. "Don't stop," she told him. "It makes me feel better inside."

"You need to feel better?" The question hung in the cold air. Tessa didn't quite know how to answer, so she remained quiet.

Pastor was kind and changed the subject. "The school board met the other day," he told her, "and voted to renew your contract for the nineteen twenty-one, twenty-two school year." He gave a hearty laugh. "When they first laid eyes on you almost a year and half ago, they had a few misgivings. Tiny thing that you are, and so young. But now they're proud as banty roosters—even old Hargis—acting like it was all their idea."

Mr. Hargis owned the mercantile store near the Glenn Pool where the main cluster of oilfield workers lived. He had been the most vocal. Mr. Hargis said that at age sixteen, Tessa would never be able to handle the rowdy children of the oil field roughnecks and roustabouts. The children had such unsettled lives moving about from one oilfield to the next—wherever there was work. But she proved she could do the work. Now they wanted her to stay. And now she could no longer stay.

"I figured you'd be spouting 'I told you so's' when you heard. A third year they want you, Little One."

She didn't know what to say. Finally, when she could stand the silence no more, she said softly, "I can't come back next fall, Pastor. I'm sorry."

But Pastor's hearing wasn't all that good, and the noise of the infernal engine was horrid. He cupped his ear and leaned in her direction. "What's that, Little One?"

So she had to say it again. Louder. And it hurt worse to say it the second time. "I can't come back."

"Can't come back? Now why on earth can't you?"

She chose her words carefully. "Papa has other plans for me. Come May, I'm to marry Hod Latham."

At that, Tessa feared the pastor was headed clean off the road. "Hod Latham? You can't mean it. Lord forgive me, but that man has the worst reputation in the county. Everybody knows he's one of the most rambunctious bootleggers around, and mean as a hornet."

"And so is Papa."

[Read the rest of Tessa's story RIGHT HERE!](#)