

From Doomed to Redeemed

Kappa Tau Book Chapter

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Tessa Martin was your average teenage girl, until her brother was hit and killed by a drunk driver. From there her life took a turn for the worse. Boys, drugs, and alcohol consumed her. Then she found God with the help of Jackie, her brother's old girlfriend. Tessa is now a Pastor's wife, someone she never thought she would be. It's funny how God changes your life sometimes. Join Tessa while she lives out this crazy thing called life and learn more about her past, her present, and where she's headed.

“Two grande salted caramel hot chocolates.” I told the barista. As I waited for my order, I kept an eye out for Jackie. She normally arrived early, so I made sure to get here extra early to buy her drink. When my order was fulfilled, I paid and dropped the extra change in the tip jar. As I turned around Jackie walked through the door.

“Hey Tessa!” Jackie greeted. She looked different from the last time we were together. Her brown hair fell in soft ringlets and her green eyes popped from the line of black eye liner rimming her eyes.

I handed her one of the cups. “For you.”

“You spoil me, you know that?” She chuckled. The smile she gave me made her whole face light up.

I spotted a secluded table in the corner and walked toward it. “Thanks for meeting me.” I told Jackie. My eyes caught a glimpse of my reflection in the window. Compared to Jackie, I looked like a mess. My hair was thrown up in a bun, and I wore ragged jeans paired with a hoodie that swallowed me whole.

“Hey, no problem. That's what I'm here for.” She sat down across from me. “What's going on?”

I looked down, a little ashamed of myself. “I just, I'm not doing well. I haven't been the same since Mark died. You know that.”

She looked at me with sad eyes. “I know. It's going to take some time to get over losing your brother, it's not an over night process.”

“Yeah, that's what the therapist said.” I told her glumly. “I want to go back to normal. Mark would want me to go back to normal, but I don't want to lose him in the process.”

“You are never going to lose the memories you have of him. You will never forget him.

Mark was a huge part of your life. There will always be a place in your heart for him.” She paused. “Didn't the therapist tell you that too?”

“I stopped going.” I told her with my head hung low.

“Tessa.” Jackie scolded. “You didn't really even give it a chance. We just talked you into going last month.”

“I know, but I felt like I wasn't getting anywhere with it.” I crossed my arms over my chest. “She wanted me to talk about my feelings all the time and blah, blah, blah. It wasn't helping.”

“Even if you didn't notice, it was helping. You used to call me almost every night because you were upset or because you dreamt of the night Mark died.” Jackie reasoned. “Today is the first time you've called me in over two weeks. I would say that's progress.”

“I guess you are right, but I'm not going back.” I said sternly. “Just because I haven't called you doesn't mean that it has gotten better. I've just learned to control it better.”

“Tess, it's not good to hold it in.” She took hold of my hand. “If you need to talk, call me. I'm serious.”

“I know, but I look at you and see how well you are doing and then there's me, a ticking time bomb of emotions. I can see one simple thing that reminds me of Mark and I break down in tears.” I told Jackie ashamed.

“That is normal. He wasn't even my brother and it took me a long time to get to a place where I didn't tear up when I was reminded of Mark.” Jackie told me, trying to console me.

“You and Mark were dating. It seems to me that you have everything together and then here I am: the sister that can't even look in his room without breaking down in tears.” I grumbled.

Jackie sighed and thought for a moment. I noticed she still wore the heart shaped necklace that Mark gave her last year. “Okay, you see that booth in the corner over there?” She said pointing. “That was *our* table. For months I couldn't even come close to this place. If I did, I would end up in hysterics. When I finally decided I could come back, I never stayed; I always got my drink to go. One day, I came in and I sat down in that booth letting all of our memories rush over me.” She sighed again. “I was a hot mess. The owner even brought me a box of tissues. That was the day that everything started changing.”

Her comment piqued my interest. “So I should just go somewhere that was special for us and let the memories wash over me?”

“That's not what I said. I said that's when everything started changing.” Jackie took a sip of her drink.

“You aren't making any sense.” I said confused.

“You aren't going to want to hear this, but hear me out, okay?” I nodded acknowledging her. “Sitting in the booth that day made me realize what my life was missing. I had distanced myself from God because I was upset. I let my relationship with God deteriorate all because Mark was gone and I was upset that God didn't save him.”

Jackie was being completely honest with me, but I didn't want to hear it. “Jac, I know you mean well, but somehow I don't think going to church will help me.”

She sighed. “Tessa, do you know when your brother was happiest?”

I felt as though she was asking me a trick question. “When he was with you?”

“No.” She said pointedly. “It was on those rare occasions that you would join us at church. He wanted you to experience what he felt when he was in the presence of God, but he didn't know how to explain it. I didn't know how to explain it and I grew up in church. “

I shook my head no. "There's no way I could step foot in a church again. Not after what I've done." I thought of the countless guys that I had slept with, all the types of drugs I had tried, and the countless nights I spent passed out on the bathroom floor from drinking too much in order to make the pain go away temporarily.

She smiled. "Once you give your life to God, your past doesn't matter to Him anymore. He erases all of the wrongs you have done. He loves you, no matter what. He just wants you to commit your life to Him and He will take care of the rest."

What she was saying was starting to sink in. I could start over. "So, you're telling me that I can have a new start just by going to church?"

"Well, it's not just about going to church. It's also about having a relationship with God."

I wasn't sure how that would work or even if it would work, but at this point I was willing to give anything a try. "Where do I start?"

*~ Fifteen Years Later ~*

"Michael! Reagan! Come on, you know how Pastor gets when we are late for Sunday school." I yelled up the stairs.

"Mom, seriously? Dad needs to chill. So what if we are a few minutes late." Michael replied coming down the stairs. He was a spitting image of his father, right down to his dark brown eyes, slender build, and spiky chestnut brown hair.

I grabbed his chin and forced him to look at me. "Excuse me? You do not talk about your father like that."

He sighed as I let go. "Sorry mom."

“Don't let it happen again.” I told him sternly. “It matters if we are late, we have to set a good example.” I looked up the stairs again. “Reagan! We are leaving and if you aren't in the car in two minutes, you can walk to church.”

“Sorry mom!” Reagan said as she got in the car. “My hair just wasn't cooperating today.”

“Maybe the princess should get up earlier to allow for possible hair malfunctions.”

Michael said snidely.

Reagan scoffed and punched Michael's arm. I love my kids, but sometimes they are a handful. “Guys, seriously? Behave or I will make you hold hands for the rest of the day.” In the rearview mirror I could see Reagan huff and Michael smile triumphantly.

We got to church just in time. The bell for Sunday school rang as I walked in the door.

“Aunt Tessa, you guys were almost late again. Uncle Jared was getting agitated.” Colin taunted.

“Colin Michael, you get yourself to class right now and stop harassing your aunt.” Jackie scolded coming to my rescue. She rolled her eyes. “Sorry.”

“It's fine. Is Jared really upset?” I asked tentatively.

“Oh, you know my brother. He lets the smallest things upset him.” She replied. “Take it with a grain of salt.”

“I know. Well, I'll catch up with you later. I better go find him before I'm in more trouble.” I headed toward my husband's office.

Jared looked up and smiled when I walked into his office. “I was just getting ready to call you.”

“Here I am. Before you say anything, it wasn't my fault we were almost late. It's *your* daughter's fault.” I sat down in one of the chairs in front of his desk.

He shook his head. “What was *our* daughter’s excuse this time? If you tell me she couldn’t find anything to wear, I will give all of her clothes away.”

“Her hair wasn’t cooperating.” I rolled my eyes. “She is going to have to start getting up earlier.”

“I agree, we’ll talk to her tonight.” He walked around his desk, sat in front of me, and took my hand. “I have a favor to ask.”

The way he said it concerned me. “Whatever you need.” I replied immediately.

He took a breath and let it out. “I want to use your testimony in my sermon today.”

My mouth dropped open in shock. I stared at the wall behind Jared debating my answer. On one hand, I wanted to say yes because my testimony could help someone else who is struggling, but on the other hand, I did not want to revisit the place that I was in before I found God. Some of my darkest and most shameful days were during that time, especially right after my brother died. Few people other than Jared and Jackie knew my whole story.

“I’ll keep it PG and change names. No one will ever know I’m talking about you unless you share that information.” He said with sincerity.

I looked back at him. I could see that he knew how hard this would be for me, but was trying to make it as easy for me as possible. “Okay.” I finally told him. “Okay.”