

Chapter 1: Expelled

The school bell rang at the end of the day, so Mark picked up his math book and headed out of class. He walked through the crowded halls to the English room where he always met his younger sister, Jessica. She was 16, beautiful, and in need of his protection, so he seldom let her out of his sight.

He made his way through the herd of noisy students. When he finally reached the English room, she wasn't there. A familiar panic hit, and he knew what he had to do. He immediately pushed his way through the crowded hallway, ran out of the building, and started looking around the grounds.

A few people said good-bye to him as he passed, but he didn't acknowledge them. He just continued on his quest, looking anxiously for her. He saw many students sitting around talking, unaware of the problem at hand. Many were getting in their cars to leave. A few were throwing a football on the grass.

Then he saw a group of students gawking at something and knew instantly that was what he was looking for. His heart rate jumped as he ran over and broke through the crowd to see that they were watching two students in the bushes in a passionate make-out session. He recognized the couple immediately. The boy was Kendall, the captain of the football team. The beautiful girl with the long brown curls and deep eyes was Jessica.

He ran to Jessica and pulled her away. She fought him, but he grabbed around her from behind with a strong enough grip

that she couldn't break free. She could kick, but she wasn't going anywhere.

"Let me loose. I've got to have him!" she screamed.

"No Jessica. You don't. Calm down," Mark replied in an incredibly controlled tone for one in his situation. He started to carry her away, but Kendall got up and stood in his way.

"Hey, what are you doing?" he protested, puffing out his chest to look tough.

In as calm and controlled a voice as he could, Mark answered, "I'm sure you were just caught up in the heat of passion and not intentionally trying to be disrespectful to my sister, so leave now before I get angry."

Kendall didn't leave. He had an audience and wanted word to spread of his conquest, not word to spread of him running from her big brother. Besides, Kendall was the captain of the football team and really didn't feel very afraid of Mark or anyone else. He was the one others should be afraid of.

He glanced at Mark to size him up. He didn't look too tough. His brown hair and eyes had a boy next door look – not that intimidating. He did seem to have some muscle, but no more than Kendall. He had nothing to fear.

"Let her go!" Kendall taunted. "She wants me. You can see that. She's a big girl and can make her own decisions without big brother getting in the way."

Mark stood in front of her. "You'd do something you both would regret if I let her go," he responded. "I'm warning you – leave now!"

Again, Kendall foolishly ignored the warning and didn't leave. He stepped forward to intimidate Mark. "Let her go? We were just getting started," he boasted. "If it bothers you, we'll get a room." He laughed and perused the crowd to make sure they were all impressed with his display of manhood. The crowd whispered excitedly, encouraging him to continue.

Mark had heard all he could. His face turned red. His heart raced, and his temper exploded! He threw his sister to the ground and attacked the boy. He started with a kick to the gut and pushed Kendall back.

The crowd started chanting, "Fight, fight, fight..." as if this was some game where no one would really get hurt. Only one student took it seriously and thought to run off for help.

In fact, Kendall didn't take it seriously enough at first, despite the hard kick he'd taken to the gut. Sure, he knew it was a real fight, but he faced it cockily, unaware of how truly ugly fights really are. Instead of thinking of the injury he and Mark could cause, he thought only of himself, his reputation, and winning. He intended to cream Mark and let rumors spread of his conquest with the girl and his victory in the fight.

He raised his fist, but he didn't even get a punch in. Mark came in like an experienced fighter with a punch to the stomach and an uppercut to the jaw.

Pain shot through Kendall, and his head spun. He then realized that Mark was out for blood. He no longer worried about impressing the crowd and focused intently on survival. He threw a few punches, most of which Mark blocked, but he hit enough that it had to hurt Mark, and blood ran down his face.

But that was nothing compared to the beating Kendall was taking. He found Mark's punches harder to block. Mark hit quickly and unpredictably. Kendall had a hard time seeing them come. The hazy, disoriented feeling from being hit didn't help either.

Jessica tried to stop Mark, insisting that she loved Kendall, but Mark pushed her to the ground again.

That gave Kendall a chance to strike. He hit Mark in the face with two quick punches followed by hard right that should have knocked him out, had he not been so strengthened by his anger.

The crowd roared in approval, but it only made Mark angrier. At Kendall's next punch, Mark grabbed his arm and twisted it to force Kendall's side to turn to him. Then he kicked him in the side of the knee, crushing his knee.

Kendall screamed and fell helpless to the ground. Mark jumped on top of him and pulled his fist back to punch the boy's nose into his brains. The crowd no longer cheered, but watched on in horror as they anticipated the fatal blow.

But the killing strike didn't come. Mark shook his head as if he was coming out of a fog and lowered his fist. "I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!" he cried. He tried to lift Kendall's knee to see how badly he had wounded it and what he could do to help, but Kendall screamed in agony at the first touch.

"Someone get a teacher!" Mark yelled, but help was already on the way.

Several teachers came running up with a few football players, who intended to break up the fight. The teachers ran immediately to Kendall's aid.

Mark stared at the scene for a moment. If only he could undo the damage he'd just done, but of course he couldn't. He was helpless. He got up and let the teachers take over. He could do nothing for Kendall, but there was something he could do for Jessica.

As Jessica ran to help Kendall, Mark grabbed her and pulled her away.

"Don't leave!" Mrs. Clark called to him after only a few steps. Mark ignored her and continued on his way.

The teachers were too busy with Kendall to follow him, but the football players weren't. Six of them followed him as he dragged his sister, kicking and screaming, toward the school. Were they trying to detain him as the teacher requested or beat him for hurting their teammate? He'd find out soon enough. Either way he hurried into the school, pulling Jessica with him. Students stared at him and everyone whispered, unsure if it was safe to say anything out loud.

Mark ignored their comments. He dragged Jessica to the water fountain, turned it on, and stuck her head in it. At first she screamed and fought, still insisting that she had to get back to Kendall, but after only a few moments, she lost her resolve. As soon as she stopped fighting him, he released her.

"Thanks," she said when he pulled her head out of the fountain. She hugged her brother and cried. "What would I do if I didn't have a brother like you? I'm really sorry!"

He hugged her back to comfort her, and then looked around at the gawking students.

“We’d better go,” he suggested. “I’d rather not be around when they write up the suspension notice.” They turned to head to the door, but the football players stopped them.

“You’re dead meat!” the largest football player yelled, and they all attacked Mark. He very patiently blocked as many punches as he could, but he still ended up taking a harsh beating. Even though he had experience fighting and may have been able to make a good showing, even against six strong opponents, he didn’t throw a single punch. He merely blocked what he could and let the boys get away with the rest.

Jessica saw the blood on his cheek and the hopeless expression on Mark’s face and tried to break up the fight. She ran into the middle of them. “Stop!” she called. “Stop! You’re hurting him!” One of the football players grabbed her so she couldn’t get in the way.

Two other boys grabbed Mark’s arms and held him. Mark still didn’t fight back.

The largest football player came up and hit Mark in the stomach, hard! Mark doubled over. The boy then turned to Jessica and announced, “It’s stopped!”

“No. It’s my turn,” a thinner, muscular teammate added as he punched Mark in the face.

“Stop!” Jessica yelled. She broke the grip of the boy holding her and ran full force toward the next boy who wanted to take a turn. With a flying kick, she knocked him away.

The boy stood up and glared at Jessica as if he might hit her instead.

Mark raised his head weakly. “Don’t touch her!” he warned. “You can hit me, but please don’t touch her. I deserve it. She doesn’t.”

“You deserve this!” the boy said as he kicked Mark in the chest. Mark gasped for breath. The boy almost said something that would have infuriated Mark, but fortunately for him the teachers came in. He discretely elbowed Mark in the gut as his teammate spoke.

“We were just holding him here so you could talk to him,” the boy lied. “He was trying to run away and putting up a fight, but we restrained him with as little force as possible.”

“I’m sure you did,” Mrs. Clark replied. “You may go. We’ll take it from here.” She motioned to the door.

The boys pushed Mark to the ground as they left. He sat on the floor and saw the posse of teachers standing over him.

Mrs. Clark pointed to a door. “To the vice principal’s office – now!” she ordered.

The other teachers stared threateningly. They were expecting a fight and intended to escort him into the office, but Mark got up and went cooperatively. Jessica followed.

“You may go,” Mrs. Clark informed Jessica. “You have no business with the vice-principal. Unfortunately, we can’t kick you out of school for your behavior. It was after hours and outside the building. If we suspended every girl who behaved like a slut, we unfortunately would have few left in the school to teach. Go home!”

“She’s staying with me!” Mark insisted.

“There is no reason for her to be here,” Mrs. Clark argued. “We have witnesses. We know what happened. There will be no excuses.”

“There will be no excuses,” he assured her with as much strength as he could muster in his weakened state. “I was wrong and will do anything I can to pay for my actions, but Jessica must stay with me now, for her own protection.”

Mrs. Clark saw the pleading in his eyes and the blood running down his face, and for the first time realized the beating he had taken. She somehow felt sorry for him, despite what he had just done.

“Very well,” she consented. “Jessica can stay.” She glared at Jessica. “But you, young lady, will not say a word.”

They entered the office and all the teachers except Mrs. Clark left. She escorted Mark and Jessica to Mr. Lewis’s office. They had to wait there for some time while Mr. Lewis finished with the ambulance that was outside.

When he came in, he was fighting angry. “Do you realize what you just did?” he yelled.

“Yes, Mr. Lewis,” Mark replied quietly. “I’m really sorry.”

Mr. Lewis pounded his fist on his desk. “Really sorry! Really sorry! Is that all you can say? Kendall won’t be able to play for the rest of the season. You smashed his knee. He’ll be on crutches for months.”

“I’m really sorry,” Mark said again. What else could he say? Mr. Lewis would never believe the truth. He glanced over at

Jessica, who was sitting in the corner of the room, and then looked down.

Jessica opened her mouth to defend her brother, but shut it, realizing that she promised not to make a sound. She pulled her knees up and hugged them as a little child who is feeling insecure. She wanted so much to go hug her brother, for she knew how much this hurt him. He was truly sorry. Couldn't Mr. Lewis see how badly he felt about what he'd done?

Mr. Lewis didn't. He blew up. He hit both hands on his desk. "And you were sorry with the last fight and the one before that!"

"Truly," Mark replied. He pulled out his handkerchief to stop the bleeding from the cuts on his cheeks. "I deserve to be suspended again. Go ahead."

"You're not getting off that easily this time," Mr. Lewis raved. "Three strikes and you're out!" He leaned in Mark's face and seethed, "This time, you're expelled!"

Mark looked surprised, but maintained extreme composure. "Fine," he agreed. "Do what you must. I deserve it."

"You're not even upset about it," Mr. Lewis ranted. "You've got a problem boy. A real problem."

"Yes," Marked agreed calmly. "I know. I will leave, but if I leave the school, Jessica needs to go with me. She's not safe here."

"So I suppose you think you're all noble and justified in fighting because you were protecting this slut," he mocked, pointing to Jessica.

Jessica had to speak up despite her promise. Comments about her always riled her brother up and generally ended up with the person who insulted her going to the hospital. “Stay calm,” she told Mark. “He doesn’t understand. He doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

That was true. Mark knew it. Somehow he had to keep control. He breathed deeply and repeated, “He doesn’t understand.”

“Can we please go home now?” he asked when he was sure he was under control. “I’m really not feeling well and need some time alone.”

Mr. Lewis wrote up the expulsion notice and handed a copy to Mark. “You can go, but I warn you this isn’t over. Social services has already been notified and said they would send someone to your house immediately.”

That was bad news. In fact, it was horrible news. He grabbed his sister’s hand and pulled her out of the office and down the hallway where they were met with barbed comments being thrown at them along the way. They didn’t say a word to their mockers and went straight to the car.

Mark pulled out his keys, but Jessica insisted on driving because he was upset and could be too dangerous. He assured her that he was safe and sat behind the wheel. She took the passengers seat and they headed home.

They went home without a word being said. The only noise was the hum of the engine and the sound of Jessica crying. When they neared their house, Mark mentioned, “You may want to gain composure before we go in.”

She kept crying. “But it’s all my fault. If I could just control my thoughts better these things would never happen. I embarrassed myself, got you hurt and expelled, and I’m responsible for Kendall being in the hospital.”

“I did that, not you,” he countered. “Don’t blame yourself for any of it. You can’t help having the curse any more than I can.” He looked away from her. “At least you don’t maim people.”

She still cried as she put her hand on his arm. “Why can’t we just be normal?”

He wasn’t sure how to respond, so he said nothing and turned down their street.

They saw an unfamiliar car as they pulled into the driveway.

“That must be the social worker,” Mark stated.

“I don’t like it,” Jessica cried.

He tried to be strong for her. He had to be strong for her. “I suggest that when we go in, you put on your best face and try to impress the social worker, or something bad could happen. I’ll go back to my room.”

“There shouldn’t be anything to get angry about with the social worker here, should there?” she asked innocently. “They just want to help, don’t they?”

“Let’s hope. Just go and be very nice,” he warned. “You need to make a good impression. I am too stressed and could lose control too easily.”

He stepped out of the car, walked around, and opened the door for his sister.

They both walked in the house and greeted their mother, who was with a lady who they assumed must be the social worker.

“This is Mrs. Peterson, from Social Services,” their mother introduced.

“I suppose these are your children,” Mrs. Peterson replied in a nasal tone. She noticed the cuts on Mark’s face. “I heard you have been fighting.”

“I’m terribly sorry, ma’am. It was an unfortunate incident.” He extended his hand to Mrs. Peterson who reluctantly shook it. “If you’ll please excuse me, I’m going to my room,” he added. “I’m very sorry about what happened today.” He walked out of the room with as much dignity as he could muster. Hopefully he’d made a good enough impression.

“We’ll talk later,” Mark’s mother whispered to him as he left the room. Jessica sat down quietly on the couch.

Mark walked into his room and picked up a pair of handcuffs. He prepared himself for what was to come, for he knew he couldn’t force himself not to listen to what was going on in the room beside him.

In the living room, things were not going well. Social workers had been to the house before because of Mark’s behavior. Generally they were very kind, helpful people, as most social workers are, but this one was sure that Mark’s misbehavior was because of bad parenting.

“How long have you been raising your children alone?” Mrs. Peterson asked.

“Their father died three years ago,” Mark’s mom explained.

“And how did he die?”

“He was murdered,” she answered. “There’s a police report on it.”

Mrs. Peterson tapped her pencil on the notebook in her hand. “There’s also information in Mark’s file about it. He was there when it happened wasn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“His file says that he fought the murderer off. Are you sure that’s accurate?”

“Of course,” his mother answered innocently. “What are you trying to say?”

Mrs. Peterson put her pencil down and leaned forward. “To put it bluntly, Mrs. Stanton, I think it looks awfully suspicious that you have a son that is out of control and was coincidentally there when his father was killed.”

Mark’s mother’s eyes went wide. “Are you accusing Mark of killing his father? Mark loved his father very much.”

Mrs. Peterson ignored her and continued, “Since then, Mark has repeatedly fought at school. Most school fights are fairly harmless, but Mark – Well, I have two other accounts of fights where he injured someone and that’s only in the year social services has been watching him. That’s not to mention today’s. Kendall will have to have surgery on his knee, and it will take months to recover. It may never be right again.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Peterson, I will talk to Mark about it.”

“Mark doesn’t need a talking to!” Mrs. Peterson fumed. “He needs some real intervention. He needs to be locked up or put through a wilderness rehab program or something drastic!”

“I’ve got him in martial arts training,” his mother explained. “That should help him learn control.”

Mrs. Peterson was not impressed. She glared at Mark’s mother through the spectacles that hung on the end of her nose. “What kind of mother teaches a psychopathic child to fight? You are a disgrace and blind to the problems your son has.”

“No I’m not. I understand them all, but he really is a good boy,” she argued.

“He is not!” Mrs. Peterson yelled. “He is a juvenile delinquent who has been indulged by a negligent or incompetent parent who has no control over him. I am going to see that he is removed from this house at once!”

“No!” their mother screamed, and Jessica let out a gasp. A loud crash came from Mark’s room.

Mrs. Peterson went immediately to see what was happening in the other room and found Mark handcuffed around a pole set into the windowsill. The dresser had been kicked over, and Mark was trying to break himself free.

“Go away!” he yelled. “I don’t want to hurt you. Just go away.” He kicked at the wall and put a hole in it. Then he tried again to break himself loose.

Mrs. Peterson couldn’t believe the sight. In all her years at social services, she’d never seen anything like it. She ran out of the room and slammed the door behind her.

“He must be taken away!” she demanded. She ran into the living room and called for help.

Mark’s mom followed her trying to explain. “Please listen! You must listen,” she called out hysterically.

“I will listen while someone comes to take him!” Mrs. Peterson argued. “Then we will determine whether he is to go to an asylum or prison.”

Mark’s mother went hysterical. “You can’t lock him up! He’s a really good boy. He can’t help the outburst. It’s all part of the Stanton curse. It started a long time ago when the Stantons opposed an evil Sorcerer, and his staff was broken and his power was drained, but all those who battled against him were cursed with negative emotions that control them. The curse has been passed down to Mark, but he is really very patient unless he’s protecting his sister, because her behavior is a curse too, and Mark has to fight with the evil sorcerer who is constantly after him so he can kill the cursed people in a ritual and get his power back!”

She breathed heavily when she stopped and stared at Mrs. Peterson to see her reaction.

Mrs. Peterson opened her cell phone and dialed. “I need more back-up,” she ordered. “I want the police and the asylum out here – now! The boy is dangerous and the mother is crazy.”

A loud crash came from Mark’s room. He could hear what was going on. He broke a lamp and kicked another hole in the wall.

“I’m not crazy,” Mark’s mother argued.

“Sure you’re not,” Mrs. Peterson said patronizingly. “Everyone thinks their children are cursed and can’t control their actions because some sorcerer who would have to be hundreds of years old by now is after them. You just stay calm and try not to hurt anyone.”

Mark’s mother didn’t stay calm. She went even more hysterical, so did Mark.

That’s how the police found everything – chaotic! They grabbed Mrs. Stanton and pulled her to the asylum van in the midst of hysterical screaming for her children. Then they had to tackle the task of subduing Mark. He was in such an angry rage that even with his hands cuffed the police couldn’t get near him. After he kicked several police across the room, they finally ended up shooting him with a tranquilizer gun and carrying him out.

As they were taking him out, one of the police noticed the girl with the long, dark hair and big eyes in the corner of the room sitting quietly and quite in shock.

“What do we do with her?” the policeman asked. “Who is she?”

“That’s Jessica,” Mrs. Peterson responded. “She is very intelligent and the star of the academic team. Unfortunately, her social life doesn’t measure up to her academics. It’s a shame. She’s probably been affected by living with these people for so long.”

“What should we do with her?” the policeman asked.

“I’ll take her to foster care,” Mrs. Peterson said. “We have houses to use in emergency situations.”

Jessica finally spoke. “Please, may I go with my brother?”

Mrs. Peterson didn’t want to let her, but, in the end, they ended up taking all of them to the mental institution. The police thought a full mental evaluation needed to be done on Mark, and social services thought Jessica could use therapy.