



Resurrected Love

K.M. DAUGHTERS

GOSPA JOURNEYS, VOL.3



Resurrected

Love

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K.M. Daughters

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Resurrected Love, Gospa Journeys, Vol. 3

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Dedication

For Mary and her Son

Praise for K.M. Daughters

JEWEL OF THE ADRIATIC:

"K.M. Daughters has written a lovely story of faith lost and regained, of love created and blessed by this faith." Long and Short Reviews

Selected as Book Of The Month, Catholic Mom's Book Club," The story is light, fun and quick paced...I read the book in two sittings and was left wanting more...Thank you for a lovely reading experience!"
Lisa M. Hendley, Webmaster, Catholic Mom.com

"Jewel Of The Adriatic is beautifully written."
Readers Favorite, Hawkesville, KY

ROSE OF THE ADRIATIC:

4 1/2 STARS, "Fantastic, A Keeper" from Romantic Times Books Reviews: "Miracles really do happen in this character-driven story by the writing team behind Daughters. The strength of faith and love prevail in this well-crafted book. Matt and Anna will capture your heart."

5 Hearts, The Romance Studio, 2009 CAPA Nominee: "This tale is deeply spiritual while still being an excellent romance and well told story."

"KM Daughters creates riveting and wonderful character driven stories that prevent you from putting the book down. This is one author who NEVER disappoints and is on the top of my reading list." New York Times Bestselling Author Brenda Novak

Prologue

Sister Teresa awoke early to carve a little “me time” into her day. She relished a few quiet moments each morning before her tornado-like daily life spun out of control. This morning the sun was but a glowing line on the horizon as she sat shivering in a thin shawl on a boulder in the middle of a pasture in the sleeping village. A breeze lifted her veil and tickled a wisp of hair against her neck. Her breviary lay open to the day’s Morning Prayer, yet ignored in her lap. Her rosary hung slack in her hand as her mind raced, despite her hopes that peaceful devotion might forestall circular thinking about mounting troubles. The orphanage needed money. The furnace was on its last legs and the nights cooled increasingly.

If her incessant prayers were answered, heat might rise into ancient radiators.

She cast her eyes heavenward and offered a prayer of thanksgiving for Father Mark and his, *please Lord*, generous pilgrims. His group would arrive in Valselo this weekend. The sister prayed they would pack their checkbooks. Father Mark had promised he would raise the funds for the new furnace, somehow.

Dusting the back of her skirt as she rose from her seat, Sister Teresa strode through the fields towards home, praying the rosary in her mind like a

lovely secret. She considered Our Lady of the Angels Orphanage her only home, in common with the forty children who lived there with her and Sister Madelena. Left on the doorstep of a convent, a newborn infant, Teresa had spent fifty years searching for her true home. She had finally found it five years ago in this tiny secluded village where she was needed, valued, and blessed by Our Mother's nearness.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Sister Teresa stooped to pick an armful of scarlet poppies from the multitude of bushes edging the path that zigzagged across the pastureland. Heaping the flowers in a basket hung over her arm, she smiled, envisioning the flowers in vases adding cheer to her dining room table. Reaching the paved sidewalk, she hurried down the busiest street in town, waving to villagers on their way to sunrise Mass. A small sign, SIROTISTE, pointed the way to the orphanage, down the familiar lane.

The Lord is with thee...

The sprawling, single story stucco building nestled between two billowing, weeping willow trees. A fence bordered a slapdash athletic field. Slides, swings, and a rickety, wooden merry-go-round equipped another fenced-in, side yard. After breakfast, she always gave the children the freedom to romp in this playground until the school bus arrived.

Blessed art thou amongst women...

Teresa smiled when she noticed the pile of clothes on the add-on front porch. The villagers remembered her children with care packages that magically appeared on an almost daily basis. Anonymous donations included a loaf or two of home-baked bread, eggs plucked fresh from the coop, or

vegetables from home gardens, which still glistened with morning dew. Today's bounty looked like hand-me-downs. The kids loved to sort through the donated clothes—especially her girls.

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus...

Grinning she approached the porch along the narrow brick path and then stopped short when the bundle of clothes seemed to move. She balled her hands and rubbed them over her eyes, but she thought she detected subtle movement again. Drifting closer as she vowed to find a few pennies to buy those eyeglasses she obviously needed, the bundle of clothes morphed into the figure of a young girl huddling at the doorstep in a fetal position.

Hurrying, Teresa stumbled up the three slab stairs. She dropped to her knees in front of the frail girl, set the basket of flowers on the wood slatted deck, and rested her hand on the youth's thin shoulder. "Child, are you all right?"

"Yes, Sister Teresa," came a muffled, lyrical voice. She raised her head, a radiant smile lighting a heart shaped face. "I have been waiting for you."

On an exhaled breath, Teresa exclaimed, "Oh my!"

Sitting back on her haunches, she hung captivated by this youngster's crystal clear, turquoise eyes and dimpled, alabaster cheeks. In the many years Teresa had worked with children, she had never encountered a more beautiful child. Silky, straight, platinum blonde hair hung down her back. Skin like exquisite porcelain glowed in the dawn's light.

With difficulty, the sister found her voice. "Why are you waiting for me? How do you know my name? Where are you from, dear?"

"They told me to wait for you here."

"Who? The villagers?"

The child cocked her head, but remained silent as she stretched out bony legs. Lifting stick-thin arms over her head she yawned, and then giggled. In bell-like tones she said, "I have been waiting forever, and I am starving."

"Where is your home?" *Certainly, not in the village. I know every village family.* "What is your name?"

"My name is Marta and my home is here now. With you." She stood and extended her hand toward Teresa.

Clasping the offered hand, joy flooded Teresa's senses, an ecstatic avalanche that swelled her heart to near bursting.

"Do you have eggs, Sister? I really love eggs." Marta's laughter tinkled.

"Yes, I think so," she stammered, as she rose to her feet. Still linked to Marta's hand, she had never experienced such happiness. "I can find some eggs for your breakfast."

"Oh thank you, Sister!" Marta opened the orphanage's front door with her free hand, tugged on Teresa's arm, and towed her down the corridors, directly to the kitchen, as if she had navigated the journey through the hodgepodge floor plan before. *Absolutely impossible. I know I've never seen this little girl here, or anywhere else, before.*

Sister Madelena stooped to open the oven door as Marta and Sister Teresa passed through the arched kitchen doorway.

"Sister Madelena. You made your cinnamon buns. Oh yummy!" Marta exclaimed. "May I please have one?"

Teresa shrugged at Madelena's vacant expression.

"They have to cool, first. Please wash your hands and join the other children at the table," Madelena directed.

Marta let loose of Teresa's hand, breezed over to the sink and dutifully obeyed Madelena. When she finished drying her hands, she poked her head into the dining room adjacent to the kitchen.

"Thank you, Maria, for saving me a place next to you," Marta declared as she moved towards the table. She scooted along the long wooden bench to the place next to raven-haired Maria.

Teresa and Madelena stood in silence observing Marta's interaction with the other children.

"Where did she come from?" Madelena whispered, eyes glued to the golden-haired child.

"I don't know. I found her curled up on the front porch. She said she was waiting for me."

"Did you tell her I was making cinnamon buns?"

"I didn't say a word. This is the strangest situation. She knew her way to the kitchen, and she calls us by our names as if she has been here before. It seems she knows us, yet I have never seen her before. Have you?"

"No," Madelena said.

Mystified, the religious sisters wagged their heads and gazed pointedly at Marta.

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The intercom chirred on his phone console and Jack depressed the button absently. He scooped the handset to his ear without lifting his gaze from the ledger sheet displayed on the gargantuan monitor on his glass-topped desk. "Yes, Anita."

"Mark Mackenzie to see you, Mister Dunne."

Disturbed, his eyes refused to focus on the screen. *Father Mark, after all these years?* Jack fixated on the vacant place on his desk where he had formerly displayed the silver framed photograph of Beth and Johnny. His chest constricted, as if God's persistent wrath wrung out his heart with both mighty hands.

"Is he wearing a clerical collar?" Jack voiced into the mouthpiece.

"Uh, no," came Anita's reply. "But...since you mention it..."

Jack huffed a breath. "I know. The man can't hide it. Send him in."

Father Mark glows with the light of God.

Shoving his chair back, Jack rose to his feet while trepidation shook him to the core. *I don't want to see you, Father. I don't want to remember.*

The priest burst through his office door, handsome, energetic, glowing with that maddening confidence that God was on his side. *Not mine.* One thing Jack knew with certainty: God couldn't care less about what Jack wanted.

"Hello, Jack." The tone in his voice rang with relish as if his former spiritual counselor was ecstatic at the sight of him. Father Mark beamed.

The barrage of memories threatened to crush Jack. *May the perpetual light shine upon him...Beth's hysteria. Her eyes clouded with tears and blazing with accusation. The tiny, white coffin amid a sea of aromatic flowers.* Jack couldn't stand the smell of flowers anymore.

"Father Mark," Jack uttered, skirting the desk on stiff legs, his right arm extended.

The positive energy that flowed from the handclasp filled Jack with penetrating warmth, like life giving water drenching arid soil. On an exhalation he said, "It's good to see you," meaning it.

Jack had valued Father Mark's friendship since high school. The coolest teacher at St. Mary's High, he had fostered Jack's fascination with technology; had inspired his quiet, abiding faith and had gently discouraged him from pursuing the vocation of the priesthood when his infatuation with Beth Ann O'Donnell had blossomed into true love.

All the good things in Jack's adult life dated back to beginnings with Father Mark—his schooling that enabled riches beyond his imagining, his marriage ceremony, and Johnny's christening.

He also associated Father Mark with the all-encompassing bad thing in his life—including the loss of his five-month old son to SIDS. Jack had easily avoided Father Mark since the funeral, having no intention of ever entering a church for the rest of his life.

"It's *great* to see you," Father Mark asserted. Claspings his hands and scrubbing the palms together

with “oh boy” exuberance, he stood in front of Jack’s computer monitor. “What are you working on?”

Jack grinned. “A consulting project for Steve.”

Mark’s eyes widened, boyish. “As in *Jobs*?”

Chuckling, Jack nodded assent.

“Wow!” The priest grinned ear to ear. “I’m so proud of you, Jack.”

Jack’s gaze dipped as he wagged his head in denial. The last thing Jack felt was pride. “Yeah, well...”

“No, *seriously*,” Father Mark persisted. “You’re the only billionaire I know.”

“Well, there’s a feather in your cap.” Jack smiled, despite his sarcastic tone. “I had a billion dollars for maybe a week, tops.”

“Another reason I’m so proud of you. You’ve done amazing things with your philanthropy.” Father’s Mark’s blue eyes narrowed, piercing.

Jack recognized that expression on the priest’s face. He braced, anticipating some sort of expectation—some sort of *high* expectation.

“That’s why I’m here,” Father Mark said. “I’m hoping your generosity will extend to a worthy cause of mine.”

Surprised when money was all he asked of him, Jack responded spontaneously. “Sure. How much do you need?”

“Don’t you want to know what it’s for?” Father Mark’s eager expression gave Jack pause.

There’s a high expectation hidden in there somewhere. “It’s not necessary, Father. I know you’ll put it to good use.”

Jack rounded his desk, opened the drawer and took out his checkbook and a pen. He met Father

Mark's eyes. The priest's intense gaze had Jack on high alert.

Ready to write a blank check to escape this cornered sensation, Jack poised the pen over the check register.

"Mind if we sit for a minute?" Father Mark asked casually, as he turned his head towards the seating arrangement in the forefront of the office. In a flash, the priest occupied one of the two Barcelona chairs.

Jack joined him reluctantly, the checkbook dangling from his hand.

"I'd like you to go on a trip with me," Father Mark said. "For now, I'll just need one thousand, five hundred, ninety-nine dollars. That covers everything, including air fare."

"What?" Askance, Jack peered at him. "Father...my schedule...what's the destination?"

"Croatia near the Adriatic. There's an orphanage there in a village called Valselo, which translates roughly as sea valley. It's a very special place, run by sisters who lovingly raise children to adulthood, rather than seeking adoptive parents for them. The area is too poor to offer a pool of prospective parents for these orphans, so foreign adoption is the only option. The Valselo visionaries founded the orphanage. They insist that these children should be raised in their culture, believing that foreign adoption would rob the country of its future. The orphanage needs a furnace...and that's only the beginning."

Relief eased tense muscles and Jack relaxed against the soft leather. "I don't have a single qualm about giving you any amount that would satisfy you, Father. I'd be glad to help right now. I don't need to

evaluate this place personally."

"Thank you, Jack. And I'll gladly accept any donation you see fit. But I still want you to write that check *and* come with me. We leave Friday."

Jack knit his brows. "I'm sorry. But that's impossible."

"Do you know that Beth works at St. Mary's? She runs the business office for me."

A myriad of emotions coursed through him, shame foremost. "No...I..." How could he explain the wall of silence between them that had grown ever higher, and more impenetrable?

"This is Beth's favorite charity, Jack. She pours all the money you send her into it and others like it. She'll be among the members of the group I'm taking there."

My Beth. My love. The chasm in his heart widened. Guilt and grief winged inside him like swarms of angry insects. "Father, don't make me talk about this."

A warm hand covered his. "I won't. But trust me, Jack? Come on this pilgrimage."

"I haven't spoken to Beth since the funeral. We've been separated for three years. She doesn't want anything to do with me. We can't get past this, Father." Tears stung the corners of his eyelids at the admission.

His gaze soft, Father Mark squeezed Jack's hand. "Do you love your wife?"

Jack heaved his chest. "I adore her. But I can't face her."

"Have I ever asked the impossible of you, Jack?"

"Not really." He grinned, despite the distress talking about Beth engendered. "But at the time, it felt

like it.”

“You can face her. And you should.” Father Mark slipped his hand away and rose from his seat. “Plus, I want you to bring that checkbook, son.”

Now, hope winged inside Jack, an emotion so absent since his son had died that it registered as pain. Shaken, Jack forced a natural tone into his voice, “Can you give me the itinerary? I’ll think about it. *If I go, I’d rather make my way there alone.*”

Father Mark whipped a crumpled brochure out of the pocket of his slacks. “Here you go.”

Beth Dunne grimaced at her bulging inbox and stewed with frustration at the precious work-time she had lost leading the Finance Committee meeting in Father Mark’s unexplained absence. *I will corral that man, or die trying.*

Collections were *way* down, tuitions were the lowest in school history, and pledges for the church’s restoration had fallen off. The list of students in need of charitable grants to attend St. Mary’s Elementary and High schools was at an all-time high. The economy continued to pose a threat to God’s church, and Beth needed Father Mark’s sunny optimism to help her shoulder the burden of fiscal reality.

A blur of movement outside her office door caught her eye. “Oh, no you don’t!” she shouted as she left her desk and rushed out into the hallway.

The priest still retreated towards the door leading to the rectory. “Father Mark. I see you,” Beth sang out.

Stopping in his tracks, he spun around. His

hands at his sides in seeming supplication. "Did you need me for something?"

His false innocence had her grinning. "That's an understatement. Come in here a minute?"

"I always have time for you," he agreed, as if his truancy this morning didn't prove otherwise.

Collecting her notes from the meeting, she stood at her desk ready to impress him with her efficiency and capability. Her work here was deeply satisfying despite Father Mark's distaste for the bureaucratic aspects of running the parish. The beloved priest more than compensated for that failing with his unflinching love for his parishioners and his unfailing ability to nourish their spirits. Without Father Mark and the gift of this job, Beth's soul would have died with her baby.

"Are you interested in the finance committee meeting's minutes?" Beth posed with a wry twist of her lips.

Father Mark bit back a smile. "Oh, yes. Very."

She handed him the notes. "Sure, you are, Father-catch-me-if-you-can." Beth burst into laughter as he accepted the sheet of paper without deigning to glance at it.

"You're not even going to look at that, are you?" she asked, hands on her hips.

"God will provide."

"You tell that to those bills in my inbox." Rounding her desk, she plopped down into her chair. "Where were you this morning? The hospital?"

"No, thank God, I wasn't needed at the hospital. I was...recruiting," he replied.

"Really? A candidate for priesthood?"

Father Mark sat in the ladder-back chair in

front of her desk. "I hope I added another pilgrim to our upcoming Gospa Journey."

"I'm so excited about visiting there," Beth proclaimed. "And thankful that many of my prayers are answered with this peace in my heart. I want to sponsor one of the children, I think. I'm thrilled that I might be present when Our Lady speaks to a visionary. It's all so awe inspiring."

"You won't be disappointed. The Queen of Peace's presence is tangible in Valselo, Beth. Every time I leave, I hunger to return again. She continues to call me, and humbles me with what she imparts to her visionaries. Our Lady asks all to pray for priests and says, 'They have a special place in my heart. They represent my Son.' Her words sustain me in my vocation."

He waved the sheet of paper in the air, grinning. "Even in light of finance committees."

"Don't worry, Father. I'll deal with all this paperwork somehow before Friday. I want a clear mind to experience this pilgrimage fully. I..." *Am I putting too much store in this? Do I really believe my heart might beat without aching? Maybe I'll be granted that miracle.*

"Beth, I went to see Jack this morning."

Her tentative hopes dissipated as her heart raced, each beat a piercing throb. "I don't know what to say..."

"I asked him to consider joining our pilgrimage. I think he will."

Cyclonic emotions stole her breath. Father Mark, her spiritual advisor, alone knew how much she loved Jack, and how intensely she suffered in her separation from her husband. He also knew about the