

DEVLIN'S DESCENT



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**CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO:
“Having My Baby”**

The Little Man ran down the brightly lit halls. His heart raced, more out of fear than the exertion, as he ran. Devlin had killed Joseph and, now, he was headed toward him. The Little Man feared Devlin: he could no longer deny that truth. He had always thought that he was superior to all men, but Devlin had powers that he could not oppose. He had, inadvertently, given Devlin those powers and, for that, he hated himself.

I can still win, The Little Man thought as he turned a corner and ran. *I can still be the leader of men that I know I am.*

The Little Man's delusions of megalomania were legendary amongst his employees. They laughed at him behind his back when they could, but would not dare do it to his face. They knew that The Little Man was a small, vicious little killer, and that he would not hesitate to retaliate.

They cowered to him because they had to.

Devlin was the rare exception to the rule. The Little Man knew that, if he had managed to place an explosive chip in Devlin's head, he would have been as much a puppet as the rest of his minions. But, even as he thought that, he knew that a mere explosive chip would not have stopped Devlin. He would have rather had his head explode than let The Little Man become his master.

Just like the physical Daniel, Devlin was defiant.

I'll show him defiance, The Little Man thought as he turned another corridor. He had been asleep in his underground chamber when Joseph called. When he heard Devlin's voice, however, any thought of sleep escaped him. He knew that tonight, like it or not, his game of cat-and-mouse with Devlin would end.

Devlin was on his way; he could feel it. He had heard Joseph ask Devlin for his help, then the explosion. And, while he had told Devlin that Joseph was of no significance to his operation, he had lied. He wasn't as important as the scientists and researchers that worked in the Pus room or the clone nursery, but Joseph's usefulness as a gopher and a pawn was substantial. The Little Man knew that he would have a hard time finding someone as gullible as Joseph.

He rounded another corner and the floor slanted upward slightly. It leveled out a dozen feet or so farther, putting him on a different level of the complex than he'd been on.

Sleeping quarters.

This was where the spirits lived.

The Little Man slowed his pace as he saw the spirits flow by him, dozens of them floating aimless through the bright light. The confusion they felt was palpable in this area, and it was one of the reasons The Little Man tried not to venture into this section often. His trips into the Netherworld had made him acutely attuned to the spirits, and they all wanted the same thing.

Release.

Only the bright light held them to this mortal coil.

He slowed his pace even further as he approached his destination. As he stopped, he could feel his heart pounding within his chest and it reminded him of how Daniel had almost bested him.

I'm getting soft in my old age, The Little Man thought. To let some little shit of a ghost almost kill me!

He stopped in front of the door and caught his breath. A spirit floated by in front of him. A woman. She turned and looked at him and he felt a chill as he realized she saw him. She peered into his eyes a moment before the ebb of the ethereal tide carried her along. For, there was a flow to the dead. The Little Man realized that, too, once he had ventured into the Netherworld. In death, just as it was in life, the dead went about their routines...and the tide was just as real in life as it was in death, too. Most people didn't realize it — they thought

they had control of their own destinies; but they were wrong. Something more powerful than them was in charge. Some called that power by a name, but The Little Man thought of it as a puppet master controlling mindless puppets.

He had yet to see the puppet master, but he knew of his existence as well.

With luck, one day he would break through the veil that kept the puppet master from him. Then, The Little Man would become a god.

First things first, he told himself.

He punched a code into the electronic lock on the door and it hissed open.

Caroline lay asleep on her bed.

"Wake up!" The Little Man said as he stepped into the room.

Caroline rolled over and peered at The Little Man. She had been lying on her side, the most comfortable position she could find. As she rolled, The Little Man realized the bulge in her stomach had doubled, almost tripled, in size. She had been a woman pregnant the equivalent of two months mere hours ago; now, she was nine months and ready to pop.

"What do you want?" Caroline asked.

"The baby," The Little Man said. "I need the baby.... now!"

He stepped up to her as he said the words, and Caroline cringed away from him. Unfortunately, there was nowhere to go.

Don't let him hurt me! The child screamed in her mind. *He's come to hurt me!*

Caroline reached out and pushed The Little Man away with her feet. "Leave it alone," she told him.

The Little Man fell back against the wall and chuckled. "It," he said. "You called the child an it." He stepped forward. "Why would you want to protect an it?"

With that, he lunged at her.

Caroline did the only things she could. She brought her foot forward quickly and hit The Little Man squarely in the

crotch.

Even in the bright lights, she saw his eyes grow wide as he went staggering backwards toward the wall again.

Caroline wasted no time. The second he hit the wall, she was out of her bed. She kicked out and caught him in the crotch again and The Little Man screamed in pain as he slid down the wall.

She didn't wait around. The door was still open and she bolted out it. There was no one in the hallways and she ran to her left. She knew the other direction led deeper into the labyrinth that was The Little Man's realm. Maybe, if she were lucky, the way she was headed would lead her to an exit.

"Come back here, you bitch!" she heard The Little Man shout some distance behind her. She held her stomach as she ran, feeling the child jostling in her womb, the electrode causing it pain.

"I'm sorry," she said aloud, knowing full well that the child had heard her thought a moment earlier.

The child did not reply back.

Around her, a claxon sounded and swirling red lights seemed to be everywhere. And, in the sweep of the red light, she saw people. Or, rather, she thought she saw people. They were there, but they didn't seem to have a great deal of substance to them.

They're spirits, the child in her womb told her. Spirits trapped here by The Little Man.

They moved down the hallway, apparently oblivious to her passage.

Why? She thought.

He's power mad, her daughter told her. Absolutely insane with power. These people are his captives for no other reason than he can have control over them. Just like you and me.

Caroline rounded a corner and inadvertently passed through one of the spirits that walked the hall. In the fraction of a second it took for the spirit to pass through her, Caroline knew all there was to know about that woman. Her name had been Kathy Bonita, and she had been a rehabilitation nurse dur-

ing World War II in the underground lab. The experiments they had conducted on soldiers had been brutal, and Kathy's job was to help the soldiers recuperate in whatever way she could. Caroline saw that Kathy had been a good woman, oblivious in many ways to what actually occurred in the underground labs.

She also saw the day that Kathy died. She saw the flames as they jumped out of the overhead pipes, making the underground facility a giant crematorium.

Then, Caroline was through the woman. She turned and saw that the spirit had paused and turned as well. Even in the brilliant light, she could see the sorrow in Kathy's eyes. After a second, she turned back to the path she traveled and walked away.

The dead have no attention span, the child in her womb said. They live in the moment, if you can call it living.

Caroline turned back to the path ahead of her and saw two men, both of them dressed in white, coming toward her. She spun around and saw two more men coming from the other direction. As she watched, she saw Kathy pass through them and continue her never-ending trek through the hallways of her underground tomb.

The men closed in on Caroline.

The Little Man stood by the gurney. The orderlies had brought Caroline in screaming and kicking and strapped her down. One of them even punched her to silence her. She still had the remnants of the blow on her face, a brilliant red patch that encompassed the entire region of her right cheek. It would turn colors soon and become a bluish-black bruise.

If she lived long enough, that was.

The Little Man had entered the room alongside two doctors. Neither of them were the blue-eyed doctor, Caroline noted. At that second, she knew beyond a doubt that they would find his body somewhere in a field or in one of the rivers that flowed through the city. He was as dead as she was

going to be.

All three of the men wore some kind of headset Caroline had never seen before. It looked like something out of a bad science fiction movie, she thought.

The Little Man stood by the gurney and watched as the doctors opened her robe and exposed her stomach. The baby was kicking within its cramped confines; it could sense the nervousness that Caroline felt. It knew what was about to happen.

The Little Man spoke. "I'm afraid it's time for you to give me back what is rightfully mine," he said.

"How are your nuts, asshole?" Caroline asked defiantly. "Bet you won't be screwing anyone else for a while."

"My testicles are fine, thank you," The Little Man said in his usual calm voice. "But they are the least of your worries at the moment, I would think?"

He nodded at the doctor nearest him. The doctor reached out and grabbed the probe that had been implanted in the child's skull and jerked.

Caroline could hardly hear the child's scream over her own.

The doctor held up the probe. Blood and a bit of gray matter hung from the end of the probe. Little fingers had emerged from the probe when it was inserted and it had torn free a piece of the child's brain with it. The doctor wiped the piece of brain from the probe, then stuck both towel and probe in a little tray that lay upon the surgical table he'd rolled up alongside the gurney.

"Do you want me to give her anesthesia?" the doctor asked The Little Man.

"No," The Little Man replied with a coy smile. He turned to Caroline. "She's a tough one; I think she can take it."

The doctor did not question The Little Man's orders. Instead, he reached out and took a scalpel from the surgical table.

Caroline screamed. "Please! No! I'll do anything!"

"I'm sure you would, my dear," The Little Man said, "but

the time for compliance has come and gone. Now, we'll do things my way."

The doctor took a cotton swab and covered Caroline's stomach with iodine. The Little Man did not protest the sanitary procedure. He watched as the other doctor walked around the gurney and stood at the other side, his tray of surgical necessities at the ready.

"I want the child," The Little Man told them. "The woman is expendable."

"Understood," the doctor said. Then, he placed the scalpel on her stomach and began to cut.

Caroline screamed, but the other doctor quickly placed a muzzle over her mouth. She fought and fidgeted as the doctor cut a parallel incision across her stomach.

In the womb, her daughter fought as well. She was free from the constraints of the probe and could turn, but she had gotten so large that turning was troublesome at best. Still, she reached out with her mind and tried to touch the doctors. She had no success, however; the headsets were blocking her ability to manipulate them.

Mommy, help! The child screamed.

Caroline could not respond. The pain she felt at that moment was excruciating. The doctor cut another, deeper incision into her stomach. That done, his partner reached out and spread open the incision.

"I see...." The first doctor said, then stopped. He looked up at his comrade and Caroline could see the fear in the man's eyes. The second doctor looked down into the incision.

"My God!" he said.

"Get it out of her...now!" The Little Man shouted. He leered into the opening the doctors had cut and a sinister smile was etched on his face.

The first doctor paused only a moment longer then used the scalpel to cut through the placenta.

A small, disfigured hand reached out of Caroline's stomach.

Caroline screamed through her muzzle as she saw the doc-

tor touch the hand. He used his other hand to reach into her stomach. A second later, the doctor screamed and withdrew his hand and stepped away. He looked down dumbfounded at his hand. The child had bitten through his rubber gloves and taken his index finger at the joint just above the fingernail.

“Get it out!” The Little Man shouted.

The doctor shook his head, turned, and ran toward the door. He didn’t make it, though. The Little Man took out a pistol and shot him in the back. He lurched forward, fell into some medical equipment, then fell to the floor, dead.

The Little Man turned to the other doctor and leveled the gun at him. “Get it out, now!”

The doctor, visibly shaking, did as he was instructed. He reached into the slit cut in Caroline’s abdomen, wrestled with the child a moment, then lifted her free. Caroline screamed again as he pulled the child out of her. Not because of the pain; she screamed because, for the first time, she saw what The Little Man had had Joseph impregnate her with.

The child had three arms. One of the arms was positioned squarely in the middle of its back. The other two were normal, with the exception of the forearm being abnormally long. It had fingers, but they were shaped more like claws. And, the child’s torso was contorted in strange ways.

But, the most horrifying thing about the child was its face. It had a full head of hair already. Caroline thought it might be strawberry-blonde, She couldn’t quite tell with all the after-birth matting it down. It turned and looked at Caroline. Its red eyes glowed at her and its teeth, small but sharp, gleamed as the child smiled.

Mommy, she felt it say.

Then, the child turned to the doctor and sank its fangs into his arm. The man screamed as he tried to fling it free from him, but she had a bite like a snapping turtle.

Caroline saw movement to her right. The Little Man lunged forward with a needle and sank it into the child’s back. He depressed the plunger and, almost instantly, the child’s re-

sistance began to fade.

Help me, Mommy, Caroline heard the child say.

Then, she was unconscious.

The Little man reached out and took the child into his arms. "Get the implant ready," he told the doctor.

The doctor stood there, dazed, his arm bleeding profusely onto the tiled floor.

"Get the implant ready!" The Little Man shouted as he cradled the unconscious child to him. Caroline saw that the child had a short, reptilian-like tail.

The doctor snapped out of it and grabbed a small metallic device from the table nearby. He wasted no time inserting it into the opening left by the brain probe. He used his pinky finger and sank it as deeply into the child's skull as he could. Then, he produced a tube of something that looked like rubber cement, opened it and put some of it over the hole and, almost instantly, the hole sealed shut.

The moment he finished, the child started to stir.

Caroline watched from the gurney; her own pain was lost to her. She felt only what the child felt. And, as she awoke, Caroline could feel the aching in the child's head. The explosive implant had expanded and dug itself deeply into her mind. Caroline could feel the bolts of agonizing pain race through the child, making her body twitch.

The Little Man held her up in front of her. "Do you know what I've put in your head?" he asked.

The baby looked up. Caroline could see the fire of hatred in her eyes. She nodded slowly.

"Then you know I can kill you any second I want?"

Once again, the child nodded.

"If you do not obey my commands," he told her, "I'll flick a switch and end your existence."

The child turned and looked at Caroline. Her lips started to move and, at first, only a gurgling sound came from her mouth. But, after a few seconds, she heard the child say, "Mom...my."

"Your mother will stay here," The Little Man told her. "If

you obey me, you might get to see her again.”

Caroline heard the child think, I obey. The Little Man held her a moment longer, then the doctor went to the corner of the room and produced a small animal cage made of metal. He rolled it over to The Little Man and he placed the child inside the cage and closed the door. The child lay there as the doctor rolled her away.

The Little Man turned to Caroline once they were out the door. “They can’t hear us now,” he told her. “But Devlin is on his way. I’m going to leave you here. I hope you don’t bleed to death before he gets to see you.” He cracked a smile as he took something out of his pocket and gave it to her. Caroline held up what he had given her. It was two vials of Green Pus.

“It’s undiluted,” he told her. “One is for you, the other is for Devlin. When the pain gets too much, take yours.... but make sure Devlin gets his. I want to see if he’s as powerful as he thinks he is, and if our child is more powerful than that. Do you understand?”

Caroline nodded as a wave of pain washed through her. She groaned.

“The Pus will lighten the pain,” he said. “But it’ll also make you hallucinate. Take it when you know he’s arrived.”

“How...will..I..know...that?” she asked through clinched teeth.

“Simple,” The Little Man said. “The lights will go out.”

He turned and walked away, leaving Caroline alone with her pain as he laid the groundwork for the endgame.