

DEVLIN'S DESCENT



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Chapter Nine: “Who d’ King”

The next morning, very bright and early, a knock came at Caroline's door. She awoke from a fitful sleep filled with dreams of her abort child extracting revenge on her. In that dream, Daniel — or the aberration that Daniel was — chased her through the brightly lit corridors of the complex. He screamed at her in tones that only an animal could make as he chased her, a long, sharp machete in his hand. In the light, the machete glistened with blood. Whose blood it was, she had no idea. The dream had not given her that information. But, Daniel had not bothered to wipe the blade clean; there was no time for that. He wanted to see her dead.

And, just as Daniel had reached her and raised the machete over his head for a killing blow, the knock at the door came.

She jumped at the sound.

The room around her was already brilliantly lit. It was surprising to her that she could sleep in such a bright light, but she had laid there for hours after the womb room letting strange thoughts dance through her head.

Another knock came.

She sat up in bed, the thin white gown barely covering her body, as the door slid open.

"Did I wake you?" a voice said.

She looked in the direction of the voice and saw the small outline of a boy in the doorway. *It's Daniel*, she thought, *he's come to kill her. It wasn't a dream at all.*

Her heart raced a moment, then she noticed that there was nothing in the boy's hand. If he was going to kill her, he would have to do it with his bare hands. The thought did not comfort her much.

Daniel stepped into the room and closed the door. A soft hydraulic hiss came to her ears as the door slid shut. It was the

first time she had noticed anything about the door. It clicked shut and, she knew, she would not be able to open the door if she tried the handle.

She and Daniel were alone.

Daniel stepped toward her, and she pushed herself back into the corner. He sat at the foot of the bed.

"We've been given a second chance, you and I," Daniel told her. He did not look at her. Instead, he peered at the wall across from him. Caroline couldn't get over how much his profile looked like his father's. It was uncanny and chilling, as if Devlin himself had been reborn. "Not many people get second chances, you know?"

Caroline didn't speak for a moment. When she did, her voice was thin and wispy. "I'm sorry," she told him.

Daniel turned and looked at her. "It's all right. The Little Man made it all better. He makes everything all better." Then, he gave her a toothy grin that sent shivers down her spine.

"What has he done to you?" she asked.

"Who?"

She tried to remember the name The Little Man had given her at the bar, but could not. It seemed like she had been locked in the room forever. "The Little Man. What has he done to you?"

Daniel's smile faded. "He fixed the mess that you made. He made it all better."

Daniel stood and walked to the shower door. He stopped and felt the fabric of the towel hanging over the door, then touched the glass. "It's funny," he told her. "I'm sure you don't notice it, but the world is a strange and fascinating place. So many things to feel, touch, experience." He ran his hand along the towel again. "You stole that from me."

"I...I didn't mean to," Caroline said, her voice still shaky and thin. "I was confused."

Daniel snickered at that. "Confusion? You want to know about confusion?" he said angrily as he let go of the towel and sneered at her. "Try being in the womb and having yourself torn apart, limb by limb, when all you're trying to do is sur-

vive. Now that is confusion!"

His gaze burned a hole through her.

Caroline tried to look away, but could not. The boy was there, in the flesh, and pretending he wasn't would do her no good. She thought he might run at her, try and hurt her. She wondered if The Little Man had given him extraordinary strength in that vat he had been grown in. If so, there was no way she could fight the child.

There was a part of her that did not want to fight, though. She knew that Daniel deserved his revenge, if he wished to extract it. She had done more than hurt him; she had killed him.

And The Little Man had reversed that.

In Daniel's eyes, The Little Man was akin to God.

"We need your help?"

She looked at him. "Who needs my help?"

"I do," he replied. "And The Little Man."

"For what?" Caroline said, but she already knew what the boy was going to say. She had been drawn into this bizarre world for a reason, and that reason was Devlin. The Little Man knew that Devlin still loved her, and that gave him an advantage. She didn't know the full blunt of what had happened to Devlin while he was in The Little Man's sphere of influence, but she could guess. It was pretty much what was going to happen to her, if she stayed within the confines of the room she found herself in. She would become a experiment of The Little Man and most likely die via his hands.

She looked into Daniel's eyes and saw that he knew what she was thinking. A chill ran through her as she realized that Daniel had been given Green Pus while still in the womb tank. Deprived of sensory stimuli, his mind had been free to wander down paths very few other minds had traveled before.

He could read her mind.

Or, at least, her thoughts at the moment.

She wasn't sure how far his powers went.

"Far enough," he said with a smile as he stood and walked to the wall. He turned and leaned against the wall, looking at

her with eyes that seemed to burn a hole in her. "Far enough that you'll never, ever be rid of me again." He grinned. "Unless you do what I say, that is?"

"And you'll let me go?"

Daniel nodded.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"It's simple," Daniel told her. "I want you to find Devlin and bring him back here. After that, we'll set you free."

Caroline looked down at her hands. They were shaking.

"Let me give you something for that," Daniel told her. He reached into his pocket and produced a vial of Green Pus. Caroline looked at it and began to salivate, anticipating the bitter, but welcome, flavor of the substance. She had only been given Green Pus twice, but she was already an addict. It only took once, the newspapers said. She hadn't believed it, then. But, now, she knew that it was the gospel truth.

She reached out and took the vial. Daniel patted her hand as she closed it around the vial. "Take it," he said. "Make yourself better. I'll be back in half an hour. We'll go see Devlin then."

"You...know...where...he...is?" she asked in a jittery voice.

Daniel smiled. "I've always known where he was. But," he added, "you're gonna have to be the one to bring him back. If you can't do it, The Little Man and I will throw you out on the street. They'll find your dead body in a dumpster — like they found mine. I promise you."

Caroline hadn't heard him, however. Her thoughts had turned to the vial in his hand and the precious substance within. She opened the vial and drank down the Green Pus as Daniel, the child she had aborted, walked away, laughing.

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Twenty-six minutes later, the door re-opened. By then, the Green Pus Caroline had swallowed had turned her body into one excited, enlightened nerve. She tingled all over, like a

low-grade orgasm that wouldn't stop.

She looked up from her bed as Daniel, accompanied by The Little Man, stepped into the room.

"You're looking well rested, my dear," The Little Man said in a sarcastic tone. He motioned down to Daniel. "Give them to her," he said.

Daniel carried a small bundle and he tossed them at Caroline. She looked at what he had thrown at her and saw that it was the dress she had been wearing the night The Little Man had abducted.

"Don't worry," The Little Man said. "I've had it cleaned. Please, dress."

Caroline stood and looked at the man, then down at the clothing. "Let me get dressed in private," she said.

The Little Man grinned. "It's nothing I haven't seen before, my dear." He tapped Daniel on the shoulder. "Go wait in the hallway for us, son. We won't be long."

Daniel said nothing as he turned and exited the room.

"Now, get dressed."

Caroline paused only a moment, then she removed the robe she wore. She stood before The Little Man completely naked. They looked at one another in silence, The Little Man's sinister eyes eating her up. "You're really quite a lovely woman," The Little Man told her as he stepped toward her. "It's a shame you're such a two-timing tramp."

Caroline said nothing. Instead, she reached for her clothing and started to dress.

"You were quite delightful in bed, as well," he said as he stepped up to her and touched her breast. "Not the best I've every had, but certainly worthwhile."

Caroline flinched away from the man. "Don't touch me," she said.

The Little Man chuckled. "You weren't quite so hard-to-get the other night when we brought you in," he said as he touched her other breast. "As a matter of fact, you were quite receptive to my touch, as I recall."

Caroline slapped his hand away.

The Little Man's smile eroded. In its place, a sneer so sinister and evil that she had never seen one quite as devilish before, crossed her face. He lurched forward, grabbed her shoulders with both hands, and thrust her backwards onto the bed.

Caroline screamed.

"Scream all you want," The Little Man said as he struck her across the face. "No one will come to your rescue."

She clenched her legs together but The Little Man pried them apart with his own legs. He started to pull his pants down when he heard a voice.

"Mommy?"

They both turned and looked toward the door. Daniel stood there, the brilliant light, once again, making him look like an angel.

"Go away, son," The Little Man told him. "This is none of your concern."

Daniel did not turn and leave, though; he stepped into the room.

The Little Man stared into the boy's eyes. There was something there that he had seen before. *Defiance*. He had seen the same expression on Devlin's face more than once. It stood to reason that his son would be just as stubborn as Devlin.

"She killed you," The Little Man told Daniel. "Why would you care what happens to her?"

Daniel stood there and said nothing in reply.

The Little Man looked down at Caroline's nude body. Her skin glistened with sweat from the exertion, and the shine off her body was too much for him to look at. He turned away.

The Little Man drew a deep breath, then slowly slid out from between Caroline's legs. "Later," he told her. "This isn't over with, yet."

He walked to Daniel and looked at him sternly. "If you ever disobey me again," he said, "I'll deprive you of Green Pus for a week. We'll see how defiant you are when your suffering from withdrawals."

Daniel looked into The Little Man's eyes. He was so short

that Daniel almost stood as tall as he did, and it gave Daniel a certain amount of pride to know that he was as tall as his master.

He smiled. "I won't do it again," he said, but the tone he used implied that he would, indeed, defy The Little Man if and when the mood struck him.

The Little Man glared at Daniel a moment, then turned to Caroline. "Get dressed, we've got work to do."

He looked back at Daniel for just a moment, then walked out of the room without another word.

The hydraulic door slid shut behind him.

Daniel stood there, regarding his mother.

"Thank you," she said as she pulled the dress on, covering her nudity. "He was going to rape me."

"Yes," Daniel replied.

Daniel looked back toward the door. Caroline wondered if The Little Man was standing outside, his ear pressed to the door, listening in. But, then, she realized the absurdity of that thought. If The Little Man wanted to listen in, she had no doubt he had the room bugged. He probably knew everything that was said and done in the complex. He was a megalomaniac. Caroline knew that much about him. He was in charge and wouldn't allow anyone else even the smallest bit of power when he was around.

"We need to do what he says," Daniel told her.

"Why?" she asked.

Daniel stepped up to her and took her hand. She didn't resist him; she let he guide her hand to his head. She felt something underneath the cover of his hair. She brushed the hair back and saw a two-inch long scar.

"What did he do to you?" she asked. She looked into her son's eyes....*but he wasn't really her son, was he? He was something grown in a vat of embryonic goo. A doppelganger of the son she had aborted.*

And, he was more than the child she would have borne unto the world. The Little Man had fed his unformed mind with Green Pus. Caroline knew from her own limited ex-

periences with the substance that it changed a person. She felt differently than she had before. Better, in many ways. Green Pus had taken her mind and expanded it; it scared her to think how much Daniel's mind had been expanded by the substance.

"It's an explosive charge," Daniel told her. His stare told Caroline that the situation was serious. "The Little Man isn't one to repeat his mistakes. I defy him, he pushes a button and my head explodes."

He grasped Caroline's hand. "He'll put one in your head too if you don't do what he says."

Caroline pulled her hand back. "What's he want from us?"

"Not much," replied Daniel. "Just our obedience."

"And he'll kill us if we don't comply?"

"Yes," said Daniel.

"Why?"

"He wants Devlin," Daniel told him. "He thinks Devlin is the missing link in his experiments. He wants to put an explosive chip in Devlin's head and control him like he's controlling us."

"With Devlin, he could conceivably rule the world."

"I find that hard to believe," she said.

Daniel stepped closer to her. He whispered. "Don't," he said. "I've seen what Devlin can do."

"But....?" Her voice trailed off. She wanted to know how Daniel knew anything about his father, but she knew now that The Little Man was, indeed, listening in. If she found out any more about Devlin's, and Daniel's, abilities, it would have to be in a place where The Little Man could not see or hear them.

Someplace other than the underground complex.

She looked down into Daniel's eyes. The boy knew what she was thinking. *Could he really read her mind?*

You can, can't you? She thought.

Daniel nodded and smiled.

"My God," she said.

Then, the door opened. Daniel turned. The Little Man stood there, looking slightly perturbed. Joseph was behind him.

"I think we've had enough of a visit for the time being," The Little Man said. "I gave you some time together so that Daniel could help you to understand the levity of the situation. You will obey my orders, Mrs. Devlin. You will do what I say, when I say to do it, is that understood?"

Caroline did not answer immediately. The defiant part of her wanted to tell The Little Man that there was no way in Hell that she would follow his orders. But, even as she thought it, she knew that The Little Man had all the cards in this particular game. If she tried to escape, she would fail and The Little Man would rig her head with an explosive charge. Then, she would have to obey him or die.

Better to play along, she thought. Look for an opportunity.

She looked down at Daniel. He was looking up at her with sympathetic eyes. He was still reading her mind. He knew that she didn't have a chance.

"Yes," she said.

The Little Man nodded. "We'll see about that, I suppose. Time will tell." He looked at Daniel. "In the time being, I have a mission for you, Daniel. One uniquely suited to your powers."

"What about her?" Daniel asked.

"It appears your mother needs to learn who's boss around here," The Little Man told him. "Her time will come."

Daniel said nothing.

"Come along," The Little Man told him. "Let's leave Joseph and Caroline alone. They've got a lot to talk about."

Daniel looked at his mother, then at Joseph. It was only then that he saw the leather whip in his hand.

The Little Man reached out his hand to Daniel and he took it. The Little Man turned and walked toward the door. The Little Man stopped, turned, and spoke to Joseph. "I want to see welts," he told Joseph. "Lots of them. Do you under-

stand?"

Joseph nodded. "Yes sir."

The Little Man's gaze went to Caroline. "Next time, you'll know not to push me away."

With that, he turned and led Daniel out of the room. The hydraulic door slid shut behind them, and, by the time they were fifteen feet away, Daniel heard his mother scream as Joseph carried out his orders.