

# DEVLIN'S DESCENT



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# CHAPTER 3: DANIEL

Devlin crossed the street. It was strange that such a simple task could become so difficult, but his need for Pus was increasing exponentially with each passing moment. The teaspoon or so worth of Pus he had licked out of the container three hours ago had run its course. He'd slept off most of it, the night before being somewhat exhausting. The little hooker had been a rookie at Pus consumption, but she'd been a pro at the fine art of sex.

Even if he couldn't remember much of it, his aching body told him she had rode him and put him away wet. The crust of semen still caked into his pubic hairs told him he'd fallen asleep quickly after their sexual encounter. It reminded him of when he and Caroline had first gotten together. They'd slept in each other's arms after sex what seemed a million times, and he hadn't minded the crust of love butter when he awoke then. It was easily removed with a warm shower.

Now, with each step, the tightness on his pubic hairs reminded him of the girl last night — and not in a pleasant way. It seemed to reaffirm that Caroline was long gone now, never to return. It was a feeling that he wanted rid of as quickly as possible.

There was a mission on 3rd street that let homeless people take hot showers, and that was just what Devlin needed. He'd used their services countless times. Even taken along his spare change of clothes — a ratty pair of pants, a T-shirt that looked like someone had spilled motor oil on it, and a change of socks and underwear that had more holes than a golf course — and washed them in the shower as well. He took them back to the dilapidated old building he lived in, hung them out to dry, and had clean clothes to wear.

The plastic grocery bag, neatly tucked under his right arm, contained those clothes.

Devlin tried not to bath at the mission often, though. He knew that The Little Man was looking for him, and such predictable behavior was a sure fire way of ending back up in a six-by-ten room with no windows awaiting the next experiment.

Fortunately, there were plenty of other places in the city to bath. The Texaco over on Diversity had a shower in the men's bathroom. It was one of those bathrooms on the outside of the gas station. Usually, a key was required to enter such places, but some hoodlums had busted the lock on the door. They'd trashed the bathroom and the station owner showed no sign of wanting to repair the lock or clean the graffiti and filth from the restroom. If you could stand the smell of a fresh pile of heroine addict shit in the floor, you could shower there as well.

He decided he would shower there instead.

*First things first, though,* Devlin thought. *Need to get some more Pus.*

He negotiated the street crossing and turned to the north. Any Pus junkie worth his or her salt knew that the suppliers were where the whores were, and vice versa. The two commodities seemed to go hand-in-hand.

A few blocks down, he hung a right. Almost instantly, the scenery around him changed. Office buildings gave way to run-down shops with bars over the windows. The people changed, too. Gone were the three-piece suits. In their place, people in t-shirts and jeans who looked as if the life had been zapped out of them by some unseen force walked aimlessly to and fro. That force, of course, was life. *These were the losers of the world,* Devlin thought, and he felt more at home with them than he did the winner. For, he knew he was one of the losers now. There was a part of him that tried to believe he had a hope in Hell of moving back up in the world, finding love again, but he knew it wasn't true. His chance at love had come and gone. He could not start over again.

The building came up on his right quickly. It was in similar disrepair to the building he called home, but the city had

not yet closed it down for demolition or renovation. Devlin saw a pair of burly types standing in the doorway, black as he felt in his heart and mean-looking.

He stopped at the base of the stairs and looked at them.

They looked back.

Devlin concentrated. He focused on the two men before him, projecting his thoughts toward them. As he did so, the expression on the men's faces changed. They went blank for a second. Something ghost-like surrounded them, enveloping them in a thin, white mist. It cocooned them for a moment, and they became immobilized. Devlin slid past them without being seen. He didn't know what they saw now; he just knew they didn't see him any longer.

He didn't fully understand the newfound powers his exposure to undiluted Green Pus had given him. He supposed it didn't really matter. And, if he stopped to think about it too much, his conscience might get the better of him. He might actually stop to wonder if what he was doing was right. That was something he simply didn't want to ponder anymore.

After he entered the building, the mist around the two men dissipated. They looked dumbfoundedly at one another a moment. They had a momentary feeling of *déjà vu*. It had happened to them before but, just like Devlin's lack of understanding about his powers, it was something they could not explain. After a moment, the first man shook off the strange sensation and began a conversation with the second man about the woman he'd slept with the night before, totally oblivious to Devlin's passage.

Devlin strolled through the building. Behind closed doors, he heard voices. He walked on past until the hallway opened up into an oval shape. Devlin had always found the layout of the building interesting, and wondered who would design such a place. Or why anyone would let a place with such unique architecture fall into such a state of disrepair.

Some people just don't appreciate art, he reckoned.

He walked to the door to his left and knocked.

He heard shuffling inside. "Who is it?" a man's voice

asked.

"Devlin," he replied.

The door slid open slightly, revealing a chain. A small, greasy-haired man looked out the door. "I thought I told you not to come back?"

Devlin ignored the comment. "Give me some Pus and I'll leave."

The man thought on this a moment. Then, he stepped out of sight. When he returned, he had two of the familiar little containers in his hand. "I'm not going to keep doing this, you know?"

He offered the containers through the door and Devlin took them. "You'll do it as long as I want," Devlin told him. "Or I'll make her come back."

Devlin stared at the man and, as he stared, the same thin cloud of mist that had enveloped the men at the front door encircled the dealer. The man stumbled backward, as if trying to get away from whatever was in the mist with him, but could not. He screamed, but Devlin heard nothing. He could hardly see the man in the milky thickness that surrounded him, but he knew full well what the man was seeing.

His wife. Long dead from a car accident that he had caused. Her beautiful face mangled in such a hideous way that the sheer sight of it made him scream in absolute fear.

Devlin stood there a moment, letting the fog encompass the man. Letting the horror of his life come back to haunt him. Everyone has a secret horror that's too much for them to bear, The Little Man had told him once. On that point, The Little Man had not lied.

Devlin allowed the memory cloud to leave and the man lay on the floor, panting and crying in fear.

"You'll do it as long as I want," Devlin said. "Remember that."

Devlin turned and walked away, leaving the man to his fear.

Once he was out of the building, Devlin ducked into an alleyway, opened one of the containers, and drank down its contents. The Pus slid down his throat with a familiar burning sensation. He savored the feeling, closing his eyes and moaning in pleasure as the substance almost immediately took effect. He hated what he had done to the dealer, but the dealer deserved it. He had killed his wife and he had walked free. But the horror or what he had done remained.

In a way, Devlin supposed, he was bringing a form of vengeance upon him for what he had done. He knew that he couldn't expect to receive Pus from the man much longer, though. Even a slime ball dealer would eventually figure out that he could taint a batch of Pus and kill Devlin.

Devlin told himself that this was the last time he would get Pus from that particular dealer.

But, he might visit him again just to torture him.

Devlin chuckled at the thought. *When did I become such an animal?* He asked himself. But, he knew the answer to that. He had always been an animal on the inside. The Green Pus had helped him unleash it.

He made his way toward the gas station now. The streets were busy today, so much activity. He noticed the young lovers in the crowd, holding hands, seemingly happy. He found himself wondering how many of them would be together a year from now. Hell, a month from now. How many of them would betray their lover for another? He'd become quite cynical about love since Caroline had done what she had done, and even the Green Pus couldn't make him change his feelings about it. If anything, Green Pus made him see the world more clearly. It opened his eyes to reality.

*Reality. Now there was a concept he could do without.*

The station loomed up on his right. It was as derelict as the other buildings in the area, but it was still open and serving gasoline. The windows were barred over and the attendant — a blondish-brown-haired young man who looked to be in his early twenties — looked up at Devlin through a bulletproof glass window as he passed. Disinterested in him, he

turned his attention to the car fueling at the pump.

Devlin slid around the corner of the building and tried the bathroom door. As expected, it was unlocked. The station owner hadn't bothered to fix it yet. Devlin doubted he ever would.

He stepped inside, turned on the light, and latched the door from the inside. The neon bulb glowed a pale yellow onto the white walls. Graffiti littered those walls. Devlin had read it all. Numbers to call for various sexual favors, witty comments about politics and life, and the ever-popular smiley face over the toilet. He sat the plastic bag with his clean change of clothes on the floor.

Devlin turned the shower on and undressed. He looked at himself in the dirty mirror over the sink. His eyes had big black rings under them. At that moment, he felt ancient. Ancient and used up.

The room started to fill with steam from the shower.

Devlin bent and took the second container of Pus from his pants pocket. He opened it and drank down its contents quickly and completely.

Then, he turned to the shower.

And that was when he saw the boy.

Devlin jumped at the sight of him. A little brown-haired boy, naked and skinny to the point of being malnourished, with hollow cheeks and blue eyes. He was standing in the shower, but the water was not hitting him. Instead, the water sheeted off him in waves.

Devlin regarded the boy a moment. There was something familiar about him, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The boy did not speak or move. He just stood there, letting the water roll off him.

Devlin approached him. The boy did not flinch as Devlin reached out and tried to touch him.... but he couldn't. His hand passed through the boy and touched the wet wall behind him.

Devlin drew back his hand and looked at it as if there was something wrong with it.

"Daddy," the boy said.

Devlin felt a chill run through him.

"Who are you?" he asked again.

This time, the boy looked him squarely in the eyes as he stepped forward. "It's me, Daniel," he said.

Devlin gasped. His mind flashed back to a night, long ago now, when he and Caroline had lain in bed, exhausted, spent from sex. Caroline had asked him what name he wanted their son to have, and he had told her.

*"Daniel."*

He looked at the child again and realized that the boy had his eyes. There were features that he could accredit to Caroline as well. The forehead was all hers. His hair had the texture as hers, too.

This child was their child.

He had no doubt about that.

"I don't understand?" he asked the boy.

Daniel stepped forward a bit, and Devlin stepped backward. He didn't know why he did that; it was more instinct than anything.

Daniel stopped and turned. Devlin noticed a mark on the child's neck. It was a bruise, big and black and ugly.

Devlin stepped forward. "What happened to you?"

The boy did not reply immediately. Instead, it was his turn to retreat into the mist of water coming from the shower. Devlin followed him into the shower, though, and the warm water pelted his flesh as he stepped up to the boy. "You're my son," Devlin said.

The boy nodded.

"But, you're not real."

"Yes I am," the boy said in a voice that sounded distant and pale.

"I don't understand," Devlin said.

He sank back into the corner further, his body seeming to flatten against the shower wall. "After you left," the boy said.

“She found out. She found out that she was pregnant. She thought I was his, but she was wrong. I’m yours.” The boy sank further into the shower wall. “She aborted me.”

Devlin fell back against the shower wall opposite the boy. The thick fog of steam in the room made it almost impossible for him to see the boy now, but he knew he was there. He’d always known he was there. From the moment he’d taken his first dosage of Green Pus, he’d known about Daniel. He realized it with such immediacy and certainty that it overwhelmed him.

Caroline had been pregnant with the child. Their child. She thought the boy was the other man’s. She had aborted him and locked him into a purgatory that Devlin’s newfound powers allowed him to access.

Devlin thought back to the last time he had slept with his wife. It was.... what? Five? Six? Almost seven months ago now? He remembered the sweet gyrations of her hips as they made love.

Daniel had been the result.

Or would have been, if she had allowed the pregnancy to come to term.

Devlin felt weak. He felt like her betrayal of him had moved to a new level. Not only had she slept with another man; but, now, she had aborted their child. A small part of him felt relieved by that knowledge. Another part of him felt horrified by the knowledge.

“You shouldn’t let her do it,” Daniel told him. “You should have been there for me.”

Devlin began to cry. “I’m sorry.”

“*And I’m dead!*” the boy said. He came out of the misty shadows, a sneer on his face. “You want to see what it’s like?”

The boy ran at Devlin. Devlin tried to move away, but there was no time. Daniel sank into Devlin and Devlin felt an intense cold flow through him. He could feel the boy’s mind interlocking with his own, and the bitterness the child felt. In his mind’s eyes, Devlin saw everything. He saw Daniel’s

small form swimming in a sea of amniotic fluid. He could feel the comfort and the safety that the womb held. He could sense the joy the child felt within the womb.

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Devlin felt the moment of Daniel's death.

He wanted to scream.

"You let her kill me," the boy said inside his head. "You let her kill me and I'm never going to let you forget it."

"I...I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Sorry doesn't help," Daniel said. "I'm a part of you now. You'll never get rid of me."

Devlin dropped to his knees. "I'm sorry." He said. "Please forgive me." He was pleading with his unborn son. The unborn son who now resided only in his mind.

Daniel laughed, and the laugh echoed inside his head as it faded.

Then, as quickly as he appeared, Daniel's thoughts were gone.

Devlin sank to the floor of the shower, letting the warm water flow over him as he pondered what had happened.

*Had it been real?*

*Was Daniel real? Or, was it his drugged mind playing games on him? Had his torture of the drug dealer brought this on?*

He didn't know.

He sat back and let the warm water caress his flesh.

And he cried.