

# DEVLIN'S DESCENT



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# **Chapter 13: “Shattered”**

The burning was, at first, no worse than a headache. A tingly, burning sensation began to grow behind his eyes. Devlin stared into the face of the aberration that was his son and grimaced as the pain built within his skull.

Daniel said nothing as he concentrated. His face turned a bright red as Devlin reached into his own mind and retaliated. He tried to block the boy's assault, but he was not completely successful. He had only used his powers on dullards and simpletons before, and never, really, on someone with powers that almost equaled his own. And, Daniel's powers were formidable. He had not heard the news about Mayor Donnellson, but he would not have been surprised that the boy had been able to turn the man into a mental vegetable. He knew that he, too, had the power to do so, but he had only explored it far enough to keep himself on a Pus high.

Daniel was more skilled at it, he realized.

Still, as Devlin concentrated harder, he could feel the boy backing away. He could also feel *his* Daniel, the spiritual son, helping him.

In a moment, Devlin had Daniel out of his mind altogether. He thought about stopping there, letting the child go, but he knew that The Little Man would use him for what he was worth.

As Devlin stared into the boy's eyes, he could see that Daniel did not want to serve The Little Man. As he reached deeper into his mind, he felt the boy's pain at what The Little Man had made him do to Mayor Donnellson. He saw the horrors the boy had been forced to perform, along with the guilt that The Little Man had not been able to fully remove from the boy's soul. He also saw Caroline, her bruised, battered

and naked body lying on a bed he knew was in the subterranean hellhole The Little Man called home.

Devlin shot The Little Man a quick glance, a look of bitterness and hate on his face. Daniel might be an aberration of nature, but he was also part of Devlin's flesh. The Little Man had made the boy do things that he did not wish to do, and he would make him do far worse in the days to come.... unless

Devlin stopped him.

Devlin turned back to Daniel and concentrated.

The boy began to shake.

*That's right, the voice inside his head said. Free him.*

*But, he's my son.*

*No, I'm your son. He was grown in a vat to serve The Little Man. Free him. He wants to be free.*

A tear rolled down Devlin's cheek as he concentrated harder. He was so impervious to his surroundings that he did not hear the thugs The Little Man had brought along as they came out of the waste chute behind him.

The men stood there a moment, watching what was happening, until The Little Man yelled: "Stop him!"

The man in front swung his hand in a wide arch and struck Devlin with the blunt of his fist.

Devlin fell over, unconscious.

The Little Man walked up to Devlin and kicked him squarely in the stomach. Devlin's unconscious body let out a grunt and lay still.

He turned to look at Daniel, and it was then that he saw the other Daniel standing beside him. His eyes widened as he came to understand that what he was seeing was something that should not exist, but did.

*A ghost.*

The two Daniel's regarded one another for a long moment. "You know what you have to do," the physical Daniel said.

Daniel nodded.... and slid inside the boy.

The physical Daniel turned and smiled at The Little Man. Inside Daniel's head, the other Daniel slid around the explosive charge. He concentrated on it, sending his energy into it

and the device began to warm.

Outside his head, Daniel clamped his hands to his skull as the heat intensified.

The Little Man, realizing what was happening, reached into his coat pocket, looking for the remote control to the device in Daniel's skull. He found it, flicked the switch, and turned it off.

But, there was nothing he could do. Daniel continued to grasp his head as his skull began to glow red in the darkness. The thugs backed away, scared and dumbfounded by what was going on.

The Little Man, however, stood his ground.

Daniel arched his head toward the sky and screamed.

Then, his head exploded.

##

Caroline awoke with a start. She shot up in bed, staring into the brilliant light that seemed to be everywhere. She thought she had heard a scream but, as she sat there, breathing heavily, she realized the scream had been in her mind.

"Daniel?" she whispered. The scream had come from Daniel.

And Daniel was dead.

*Except, he wasn't really dead. Was he?*

She wasn't sure if he'd ever actually been alive. The Little Man had created him with aborted stem cells, but did that give him a soul? Yes, she thought. She had glimpsed a soul in the boy.

She sat there for a long time, staring at white walls that were practically indiscernible in the bright light. She had thought often about the bright light that filled most of the complex — but not all of it — and come to understand that the light was keeping something away. Just what it was keeping away, she wasn't sure.... but she now had a notion of what it was.

*Ghosts.*

*Spirits.*

*Otherworldly entities.*

She supposed that The Little Man had done many nefarious and horrifying things in the complex, and the bright light, somehow, kept the spirits in the complex at bay. Perhaps, she reckoned, the light confused the dead. She, like everyone else on the planet, had heard all about near-death experiences and the corridor of light that, supposedly, led you to Heaven. But, what if the light did not lead you to Heaven? What if, instead, it was something that trapped your spirit and kept it confused and disoriented for all time? What if there was no such thing as Heaven or Hell, just some sort of other dimensional holding cell for souls?

What if?

She stared into space and knew.... knew.... that Daniel was dead. Or, at least the physical creature that The Little Man had created from aborted stem cells was dead. But, she also knew that there was a spirit that had escaped the boy at the time of his death, and that part of him had screamed out from the netherworld for her.

That was the part that was trying to get to her.

And, a piece of it had.... for a moment.

She stared at the walls wishing that he had broken through.

And, as she stared, she started to cry.

##

Devlin awoke the second the wetness splattered his face. His eyes opened just in time to see Daniel's body fall to the ground. Disoriented at first, he thought there was something strange about the boy. After a second, he realized what it was. The top of Daniel's head was missing. The explosive charge had sent blood, brains and bone flying into the air, ripping Daniel's skull away in a haphazard circle that ended just above the ears. In front of him, Daniel lay on his right side, his left eyeball dangling, almost touching the pavement.

*Get up,* the voice inside his head told him.

Devlin grunted, still stunned by the blow he'd taken from one of The Little Man's henchmen.

*Get up, dammit!*

It was those three words that brought Devlin out of his reverie. He glanced around him quickly. The two men who'd come down the chute were covered in the remnants of Daniel's skull. Just behind Daniel, The Little Man himself lay on the ground, having been knocked flat by his proximity to the blast.

*Get up! Daniel screamed. Run!*

Devlin stood. He felt a little shaky on his feet. The henchmen, both of them more interested in their boss than Devlin, had their back to him. They were helping The Little Man to his feet and were totally oblivious to Devlin as he staggered to his feet. It was only when they heard the sound of Devlin's shuffling feet that they turned and looked at him.

Devlin exchanged glances with both of the men. In the heat of the moment, one of them had removed his headset to wipe away the remnants of Daniel. He held the headset in his hand, and Devlin concentrated on him.

A familiar cloud formed around the man. Devlin did not stop. He reached out with his mind and wrapped himself around the man, reaching into his mind and finding the weakness he could use against the man.

He found it in a long, lost memory. The man had locked it away in the back of his mind, but it was still there. In his mind's eye, Devlin could see it.... and he exploited it.

He saw the man — an uncle, perhaps—as he slid in next to the boy. Nate, he thought. Nate was the little boy's name. No, it was the man's name, too. But, Nate was the boy who had locked away the memory, and Nate the man who'd become mean and ruthless because of the memory was the one whom Devlin would make suffer.

He reached inside his mind further and drew the memory out.

It was a bedroom, dark and quiet. Nate had been sleeping when the man had entered the room, but the creaking of

the door awoke him. The man stood in the light coming in through the doorway, a tall, dark, foreboding shape. He held a beer can in his hand.

As Nate watched, the man took the beer to his lips and swigged it down.

He tossed the can aside. It clanged on the floor.

“You awake, boy?” the man asked.

Nate lay still and said nothing. Devlin could feel the boy’s fear. He knew what was coming.

The man stepped into the room, unbuckling his pants as he did so.

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Devlin projected the image of Nate’s rapist on the other thug, and that was all he needed to do.

Nate lurched forward and grabbed the throat of his comrade, thinking him his long-lost attacker from childhood.

Devlin watched as the two men tore into each other, both of them fighting for dear life.

And, when the second attacker’s headset fell off during battle, Devlin reached into his mind and found a horrifying incident from that man’s past, too. But, there was no real need for that. The two men were virtually equal in strength and agility, making the fight between them incredibly vicious.

The other man, fighting off a headlock from Nate, sank his teeth into Nate’s arm. Nate screamed. He beat the man across the forehead with his free arm and blood sprayed ev-

erywhere as his nose shattered.

The man fell limp onto the ground, but Nate kicked him repeatedly. He kicked him so hard that the man's body lifted into the air on several occasions.

The Little Man had stirred during the battle and he now tried to stand on his feet. Devlin noticed this, and he turned his, and Nate's, thoughts toward The Little Man.

Devlin still had Daniel's spirit at his side. "Kill him, Dad," the boy told him. "Kill him while you can!"

Devlin didn't need further goading. The Little Man was the worse human being he knew. He had seen the man do unspeakable things with a sinister smile on his face. The Little Man cared no more for another human being than he would an ant on an anthill. He was a monster of a man, and he deserved whatever he received.... especially from Devlin.

Devlin turned to Nate and, once again, he reached into the man's mind and controlled him.

Nate lurched toward The Little Man.

But, The Little Man had come prepared for such a contingency. He reached into his jacket and produced a pistol.

As Nate jumped toward him, The Little Man raised the weapon and fired.

For a second, it seemed like nothing had happened. Nate continued running toward The Little Man, his armed outstretched like a pseudo-Frankenstein monster. Then, Nate staggered like a drunkard a step or two. He stopped walking altogether after that and stood there, swaying back and forth. He turned and looked back at Devlin, disorientation and confusion in his eyes. Devlin saw the bullet hole in the center of the man's skull. A thin dribble of blood oozed out the hole and down the slant of his nose. Devlin thought it looked like black paint in the poorly lit alley.

Nate tried to mouth some words as he staggered back and forth, but only primal and unintelligible sounds came out. He stared at Devlin as the color left his face and he fell backward onto the pavement and lay there, dead.

No one said a word for a long moment.

"Your turn," The Little Man said. He aimed the gun at Devlin. "Come with me, or I'll kill you."

"You're gonna have to kill me, then," Devlin said.

"As you wish," The Little Man said.

He fired.

What happened next, Devlin did not know he was capable of. He reached out with his mind and saw the bullet as it traveled through the barrel of the gun. And, with his mind, he clamped the barrel together.

The pistol exploded in The Little Man's hand.

The compression of the explosion sent The Little Man staggering backwards. He held his right hand before him and saw that the explosion had torn his trigger finger off. Only a thin remnant of skin held the finger to his hand, and blood gushed from the damaged appendage.

The Little Man did not scream out in pain. He stared at Devlin in disbelief. "You've become powerful," he said.

"I could kill you where you stand," Devlin replied.

The Little Man did not argue the fact; he knew that it was true. Devlin was his greatest student, his greatest accomplishment. He had known the man's powers were beyond his comprehension, but he hadn't realized how far until that very moment. His hand tingled.

"Then why don't you kill me?" The Little Man asked.

"If you give her back to me," Devlin told him, "I'll let you live."

The Little Man laughed. "No," he said.

In the distance, the sound of police sirens came to their ears.

"Why don't we just stay here and wait on the authorities?" The Little Man said.

For a second, Devlin considered it. But, he knew that The Little Man had connections that went very, very high up the ladder. He had gotten away with murder many times, amongst other atrocities. He had killed Mayor Donnellson, after all, and someone with the ability to get away with such a murder was not someone to trifle with. The military was

funding his little underground science project, also, and that meant that The Little Man had the protection of the government. If Devlin waited on the authorities, the only thing he would achieve was getting himself arrested. And, if that happened, he would have to hurt innocent people.

He looked at The Little Man. If he killed the little bastard where he stood, it would bring him great joy.

Devlin heard the screech of car tires as the police arrived.

Devlin stared coldly at The Little Man. "I'm coming to get her," he told him.

The Little Man grinned. "I'm looking forward to you trying," he said.

"I'll be coming shortly," Devlin said.

The shuffling of running feet came to his ears, and Devlin saw the first police officer round the corner of the alley.

"Soon," he said.

"I'll be waiting," The Little Man said.

Devlin turned and ran away.

Only after he was gone did The Little Man allow himself to feel pain.