

# DEVLIN'S DESCENT



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**Chapter Sixteen:  
“Man in the Corner”**

Devlin's head hurt. The blow he had taken had probably caused a concussion; his vision was blurred and his equilibrium wasn't quite right. Still, he had managed to escape The Little Man in what could only be called a remarkable stroke of luck.

*It wasn't luck, the voice in his head told him. I was watching out for you.*

"Thanks," Devlin said.

Daniel did not reply.

Devlin had run away from the abandoned building, never to return to it. He supposed The Little Man would know that, and that he wouldn't place his people around the site in hopes that Devlin would return. But, if there was one thing that Devlin understood about The Little Man, it was that he was a paranoid little shit of a human being. He would put his people there if he thought there was a million-to-one chance Devlin would return.

He wouldn't.

Devlin had traveled several miles across the city (moving *toward* The Little Man, he realized) to an old, abandoned motel. The place hadn't had a tenant in years, nor had it been maintained. If there was one certainty of the city, it was that there were a lot of broken dreams here. The motel had been someone's dream once, just as a happy life with Caroline had been Devlin's dream.

He broke into room #6 by prying a board off a window at the rear of the building. He crawled inside quick, hearing the sound of scurrying rats as they fled. It was a sound that no longer scared him; there were far scarier things out there than rats, he knew.

He was in luck. A bed remained in the room, albeit with a rat-infested mattress on top of it. Devlin staggered to the bed

and flopped on the mattress. He heard several disapproving squeals as the bravest of the rats ran off into the darkness.

And then, the darkness took him.

##

Devlin dreamed.

It was a dream based in reality, as so many dreams are. He was back in The Little Man's underground lair. It was after his first experience with undiluted Green Pus. He could still feel Emily on top of him, gyrating her hips into his. It had been a sweet sensation made all the better by his experience with Pus. He still had her love juices caked into his pubic hair.

They had taken him back to his room and he had seen the ghosts that haunted the underground lair as he passed them. They were dressed in clothing that looked to be from the 1940's, with hairstyles that matched. In his Pus high, he found their appearance humorous. He giggled, and the orderlies escorting him looked at him quizzically.

"Hi!" he said to one of the ghostly passersby, a woman who looked to be in her mid-30's. She nodded at him as she walked on.

"Who you talking to?" one of the orderlies asked.

"The woman," Devlin told him.

"What woman?"

"The one who just walked by us."

The orderly turned and looked behind him but saw nothing but bright light. Devlin, on the other hand, turned and saw her walking away. "See ya later," he said, giggling stupidly.

"Fucker's nutty as squirrel crap," the orderly said to his partner. Then, he turned and escorted Devlin to his room.

At the door to Devlin's room, a ghostly man stood. He was tall and thin, with peppered gray hair that had receded a ridiculous distance. It was a perfect semicircle from one ear to the other.

The man stood there as the orderlies opened the door and pushed Devlin in. Before they could close the door, however, the man stepped nonchalantly into the room.

The door closed.

Devlin stared at the man a long moment, then asked: "Who the hell are you?"

The apparition said nothing and moved toward him.

Normally, Devlin would have been afraid. But, the Green Pus was still running rampant within his system, and he thought the man was nothing more than a figment of his imagination. Still, as the man drew near, (the brilliant light flowing through him so well that Devlin could only make out bits and pieces of him as he walked), Devlin felt uneasy.

The man stopped in front of Devlin.

"Stand up," he said.

For reasons that evaded him, Devlin stood.

The ghost scrutinized Devlin for a moment. "You're the one," he said finally.

Devlin was puzzled by the comment. "The one? The one what?"

"The one who will set us all free," the man said.

Devlin shook his head. "I don't understand."

"You will," the man said. "In time." The man reached forward and touched Devlin on the scalp. "Remember," he said.

Then, he was gone.

That was the way the original incident had occurred, but Devlin's dream rewrote the ending. This time, instead of telling him to remember, the man reached inside his skull with his ectoplasmic hand. When he his hand out, he had a large chunk of Devlin's brain in his hand. "It's a terrible thing to waste," the ghost told Devlin. "A terrible, terrible thing to waste." Then, he opened his mouth and bit into Devlin's brain.

Devlin awoke, a scream at the back of his throat. The room was dead silent; he could hear the sound of his own breathing, labored and furious, in the darkness. He was afraid. The place was strange and, at first, he couldn't remember how he'd gotten there. After a moment, however, he realized where he was and what had happened, and his breathing slowed. His head felt better, but it still hurt. He could focus on the rats that were scurrying along the baseboards of the room, upset that there was a new tenant with them. He drew in a deep breath and caught the scent of the room for the first time. It smelled like shit and piss. Devlin had no doubt that the rats had urinated and shit on the bed, and that he was laying in it.

He didn't care.

He'd been in worse spots.

"That's right," a voice in the darkness told him. He turned and saw Daniel standing there, a soft red glow around him.

"My head hurts," Devlin told the boy.

"It should. You took one hell of a wallop from that guy back in the alley."

He looked about the room and noticed that it was light out. "How long have I been asleep?" he asked.

"Two days," Daniel replied.

"*Two days!*"

Daniel nodded. "Yes."

He moved out of the shadows of the room and stood at the end of the rat-piss soaked mattress. "It wasn't just a dream," Daniel told him.

"A dream?"

"The man," Daniel told him. "The one you saw in your room after that first time your took undiluted Green Pus."

"How do you know about that?" Devlin asked as he tried to get out of bed. Spots danced before his eyes but, eventually, he managed to sit up on the edge of the bed.

"I've been inside your head," Daniel told him. "Remember?"

Devlin clamped his hand to his aching head. "How can I

forget?"

"You can't." Daniel moved to his father's side. He sat down on the bed, his ectoplasmic form made no indentation in the mattress, nor did it squish the rat droppings beneath him.

"He never told you who he was, did he?" Daniel asked.

"No."

"Well," Daniel said. "His name was Benjamin Carlsrud. He was the man in charge when everything went to hell in that underground bunker The Little Man calls home now."

Devlin stared at his son. He found it odd to think of the boy as his son; he was merely an apparition, a ghost. The physical boy that had died two days ago was closer to being his flesh and blood, he reasoned, but the ghost was the one he considered his son. It didn't make a whole lot of sense but, then again, not much in Devlin's life made sense to him any longer. He was existing, not really living. And, he knew that he would never be able to live again until The Little Man was dead.

"How do you know that?" Devlin asked.

"I'm dead, remember?" Daniel replied. "I can talk to the spirit world — and Mr. Carlsrud very much wants to talk to me."

"Why?"

"Because he knows I'm talking to you, and he wants you to stop The Little Man just as badly as you want to stop him."

"What was Carlsrud doing down there?"

"All kinds of Biological weapons," Daniel replied. "It was during World War II. The government had secret biological labs all over the country. Carlsrud and his workers created a weapon. Unfortunately, they screwed up and let it loose in the lab. Over a hundred people died in that underground facility. The government torched the place. You remember seeing gas lines running through the building, don't you?"

Devlin had, indeed, seen the gas lines. He hadn't thought much of them at the time but, now, now that Daniel was pointing out the obvious, it made sense. The gas lines that ran

throughout the building had been a failsafe measure. When the contaminate had broken out, someone half the nation away had probably given the order and incinerated everyone in the underground bunker.

*Must have smelled like Memphis in May*, he thought, remembering the time he and Caroline had gone to the nationally renowned barbeque festival in Memphis. It had smelled wonderful, and they had eaten some of the best barbeque either of them had ever tasted down there.

*Funny what you remember at times*, he thought. They had rented an expensive hotel room and Caroline had made love to him in the room's hot tub. He could still hear the sound of water splashing as she straddled him.

*I love you Caroline*, he thought—and he hated himself for the thought.

"Tell me more," Devlin said, shaking the thought of his wife from his mind. He would see her soon enough, he knew. Then, he would have to face the reality she had created for him. Not now, though.

"Like The Little Man," Daniel continued, "Carlsrud was working on expanding the human mind, amongst other things. The virus that escaped and eventually led to their incineration was only one of the things they were working on down there." Daniel paused, then added: "There were a lot of other things, too. One of them, you're very familiar with."

Devlin didn't need to ask what it was. He knew. His body was aching for some of it now. Green Pus. Carlsrud and his staff had been the creators of Green Pus. Or, at least, they had created the first version of Green Pus. He knew enough of the history of Green Pus to know that many other hands in many other places had been involved in its refinement. Devlin was sure that The Little Man had made major improvements on the substance.

"So, Carlsrud created Green Pus?"

"Yes," replied Daniel. "They experimented on soldiers back then; soldiers who volunteered for the experiments. The Little Man experiments on the desperate and downtrodden."

Like you.”

“Like me,” Devlin repeated. And, he *had* been downtrodden. He had suffered more than he had thought he could ever suffer, and he had survived — thanks to Green Pus.

“So,” Devlin asked, “why does this Carlsrud want to stop The Little Man?”

Daniel paused a moment before answering. “Because,” he said finally, “The Little Man is Carlsrud’s grandson.”

##

“Grandson?” Devlin said when he found the power to speak again.

“Yes. Carlsrud died twenty years before The Little Man was born. His son is The Little Man’s father.”

Devlin found that all the pieces were starting to fall into place. The Little Man had come from a multi-generational military family or, more likely, a family that had strong ties to politics and the military. A family of privilege. In a lot of ways, that explained the little bastard’s arrogance—it was inbred. He had been given a silver spoon to suck on instead of a pacifier, and he still had it in his mouth.

Devlin hated The Little Man even more for that. He had always had to struggle and suffer for what he wanted in life; The Little Man had been handed it all. It made him sick to his stomach to think that The Little Man had taken away any semblance of a real life for Devlin. Of course, Devlin realized, he had allowed The Little Man to do it. He had been weak and The Little Man had exploited Devlin’s weakness to his advantage. He supposed that exploitation of weaknesses in others was the primary reason some people succeeded in life. And, as much as Devlin hated to admit it, The Little Man was far more successful than he was. But, his success had been handed to him in many, many ways. Devlin had struggled for whatever success he achieved.

Devlin felt the dryness at the back of his throat. His head was throbbing, and not just from the blow he had taken. He

needed Pus. He needed it very, very badly. The location he had chosen to sleep off his injuries was dead center, ground zero, so to speak, of Pushead City. It wouldn't be hard to find and acquire Pus.

"You're in need," Daniel said when Devlin looked back at his son. The strange aura that surrounded the boy had changed. It was not as bright as before.

"What's happening to you?" Devlin said.

Daniel smiled. "There's no need to worry," he told Devlin. "I feed off of your energy—your mental energy. You're getting weaker, so I'm getting weaker. But, I'm sure, you'll find some Pus and make us both all better soon."

"I will," Devlin promised. "I will."

He stood, staggering on his feet a moment, then found composure. He turned and looked back at Daniel. The boy had not risen off the rat shit infested mattress yet. "What's the matter?" Devlin asked.

Daniel stared at his father a moment. "Carlsrud," he said. "I was just talking with him."

"What'd he say?" Devlin asked.

"He said there's a way into the underground facility. A way that The Little Man won't be monitoring. A way that's been closed off for over fifty years. You can go there and kill him." Daniel stared coldly at his father. "That's what he said."

"I still don't understand," Devlin replied. "If Carlsrud is The Little Man's grandfather, why does he want me to kill him?"

"Because," Daniel replied. "The bright white light.... it's not keeping them out...*it's keeping them in.*"