

DEVLIN'S DESCENT



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Chapter 26:
“In the Sweet Bye and Bye”
or
“In the End”

Devlin felt the sun on his face. It felt good. It reminded him of his childhood. He'd always been a shy boy, an introvert, but nature had always appealed to him. He loved to run through the fields of tall grass of the meadows near his childhood home. He played there for hours, and those were some of the happiest memories of his life.

Life had been simpler then. His worries were few and far between; his parents had carried the burden of existence for him. Of course, he had been a child and not appreciated that particular gift they bestowed upon him; but time had taught him many lessons, most of them unwanted and heartbreaking.

He lay in the sun and relished the moment. It was something he hadn't done in a long, long time. There had been such a burning need within him. For revenge. For understanding. That, above all else, was what he needed. To understand. To make some sense out of what his life had become.

So many things had come and passed, yet Devlin still did not understand. Perhaps it was so simple that he over-analyzed it. Perhaps *that*, amongst other things, had driven Caroline into another man's arms. They had walked the same path, Caroline and he. At least for a while. But, sometimes, the road branched off in strange directions and people chose to go that way instead of stay on the path of least resistance.

Devlin basked in the sun and tried to forget that for now. All he wanted at this moment was to enjoy life.

Or, was this life?

He wasn't certain.

But it felt good.

He heard the sound of birds in the sky as they called out to one another. That was what life was about, he realized. People calling out to each other. Sometimes, that was the only thing that made life worth living. The need to be with someone.

“Devlin?” a familiar voice said. For a second, he did not open his eyes. He wanted to drink in the solace of the moment, the warmth of the sun on his face. He wanted to bade the voice farewell; *go away, I don't want to talk right now*. He wanted the solitude to last forever.

He trusted this moment in time. He hadn't trusted much over the past year.

“Devlin?” the voice said again. This time, he opened his eyes and saw Caroline. She was standing over him, looking down at him.

“What?” he asked.

“It's time for you to go home,” she told him. “Time to go back.”

At first, the words had no meaning to him. *Go back where?* But, as he glanced around him, he found himself in an unfamiliar place. It was a hill, a mountain, actually, that towered out of a fog-laden land below. He could see what looked like some sort of Egyptian or Mayan or some other long-lost culture's temple jutting up out of the fog. He looked around him and saw people, thirty or forty, at least, walking down into the fog. And, he saw the Egyptian tomb god standing beside the trail they walked, waving them on.

He turned to Caroline. “Where am I?”

She smiled that smile he had always loved. There were so many things he had loved about her. Her smile, her laugh, the way she had laid in his arms. All of those things had comforted him at one time or another. “It's hard to explain,” she told him. “I'm not sure if I understand it fully myself. But, this is where you go when you die.” She turned and pointed into the mist below. “Down there, hidden from everyone, are our fondest memories, the moment in time where we felt most

whole in life.”

Devlin stared down into the abyss. “Is this Heaven?” he asked.

Caroline laughed. “Heaven is what we make it,” she told him. She bent down and took Devlin’s hand. “I wish I had known that...before. We don’t know what we have until it’s taken away from us. Then, it’s too late. I’m sorry, Patrick. Please believe me.”

Devlin looked into her eyes. There was such sincerity there, such lament. He did believe her, because he believed those things himself. He believed that losing something you love was one of the greatest tragedies in a person’s life. He thought he had lost everything; but he was wrong.

He turned and saw Daniel standing next to the Egyptian tomb god. The beast and the boy were looking at him. Daniel said something to the tomb god and it nodded its head. Daniel came walking toward them.

“It’s time to go, Mommy,” Daniel said to Caroline. Caroline stood as the boy offered his hand. She took it.

Caroline?”

“Yes, Devlin.”

He stood and walked to her. “I have a question?”

“I thought you might. Ask it,” she said.

He looked down into the fog as the souls who’d once occupied The Little Man’s lair vanished into it one by one.

“Will I be a part of you fondest memory? The moment in time where you were the happiest?”

“Come with us and find out?” Caroline asked him.

The Egyptian tomb god stood beside her now. He moved twenty feet in the blink of an eye. He bent and offered Devlin a hand. Devlin took the hand and the beast lifted him as if he weighed no more than a feather. “You can stay with her, if you wish?” the creature told him. “You did me a kindness by freeing the souls of the dead.... and by bringing me The Little Man.”

Devlin looked around. “Where is he?” he asked.

The beast grinned toothily. “There is a special place for his

type,” he told Devlin. “But...do not worry, his suffering will be legendary.”

Devlin said nothing in reply. The Little Man had caused so many people pain in life; it was only fitting that he should be brought to justice by Death. He hoped that the man suffered as he, and so many others, had suffered. Better yet, he hoped Death was correct that The Little Man would suffer in ways that mortals could only imagine. It served him right.

Devlin looked at Daniel. “What about him?” he asked Death.

“We had an agreement,” the Egyptian tomb god replied. “He was to stay at your side until The Little Man was defeated. It has come to pass. The boy is mine now.... and he did not suffer in his passing.”

“Thank you,” Devlin said.

Death nodded.

Devlin looked into Daniel’s eyes. “It’s all right, Daddy,” Daniel said. “I’ll be here, with Mommy.”

“You may stay if you wish?” Death said again. “You deserve peace.”

“Is that possible?” Devlin asked.

“Anything is possible,” the beast said. “I am Death incarnate. You are almost dead, Devlin. Only your spirit is keeping you alive. If you let go, you are welcome to join those that you love. It is a far better world here than what awaits you out there.”

Devlin looked at Caroline, then at Daniel. Part of him wanted to stay. He had suffered so intently over the past year that a respite from the pain would be more than welcome. It would be a panacea. But, as he looked at Caroline and Daniel, he realized that he had so much more to do. He had helped to rid the world of The Little Man, but there were more like out there, and he knew that he could not stay.

“I want to go back,” Devlin said.

The Egyptian tomb god nodded. “I would expect no less from you,” it said. It regarded Devlin a moment, then turned

to Caroline and Daniel. "I will give you a moment to say your goodbyes," it told them. Then, like a flash, it was gone.

A shadow from above darkened their path. Devlin looked up and saw half a dozen pterodactyls flying by in formation, like a flock of geese. "Amazing," he said.

"You could change your mind?" Caroline asked. "Stay with us?"

Devlin shook his head. "Part of me wants to," Devlin told her. "But I can't."

Devlin walked up to Daniel. He reached out and touched the boy and was not surprised to find that, here, in the Netherworld, the boy had substance to him. He bent and gave Daniel a hug. "I love you, son," he told him. "I wish things could have been different." He did not look at Caroline; there was no accusation in his tone. What was, was. There was no way that things could be turned around. This was the present and both Caroline and Daniel were dead. Devlin was close to death. He knew that. But, he could go back.

And, that was what he wanted.

Behind them, the Egyptian tomb god appeared. "It is time," it said.

Devlin nodded.

"I love you both," Devlin told them. "Always remember that."

Then, it was like something had grabbed him and jerked him away with intense speed. He looked up to see that one of the pterodactyls had grabbed him and he was being swept away from the mountaintop. He tried to look back, but the mist obscured everything.

He hoped they were trying to look for him, too.

The pterodactyl carried him high into the sky. They were heading toward the bright orb that he had originally thought was the sun. It wasn't. As they grew nearer, Devlin realized it was rolling in upon itself, like a man-made waterfall that fed itself through some hidden pump system. But, this thing was not man-made. God had created it.

The pterodactyl carried him higher and Devlin saw so

many things. In the distance, strange structures jutted out of the mist periodically, many of them alien to him. There was something that looked like the Space Needle in Seattle; another protrusion resembled the Washington Monument. And, farther away, Devlin saw something that he recognized clearly. The two towers shone brilliantly in the light coming from the sun vortex and Devlin hoped that the people who'd died within them were all in their special moment in time.

The pterodactyl carried him high above the swirling vortex and Devlin wondered if another Heaven lay above the one below.

Then, the pterodactyl released its grip on Devlin and he fell into the vortex. As he entered it, he saw a tunnel that led to the other side.

He looked above him and saw the pterodactyl watching him.

Then, the light swallowed him.

Devlin gasped. The air entered his lungs with a rush, and his oxygen-hungry heart screamed for it. He shot upright, knocking Rosetta backwards as he did so. For a moment, his mind was still in the Netherworld, still staring at the pterodactyl as it glided over the sun vortex.

He drew another breath and his lungs burned. Dots danced before his eyes as the world around him came back into focus.

"Oh, thank God!" Rosetta said as she scurried to him. She wrapped her arms around him and held him close. "I thought you were dead!"

"I was," Devlin said.

Devlin looked around. He was still in the arena and death was everywhere. The beasts that The Little Man had so prided himself on were dead; the creatures had attacked one another and killed themselves. Or, at least, that was how it appeared. He had no doubt that the Egyptian tomb god, aka Death, had played a hand in that. Nearby, The Little Man's

mutilated body lay. Death had allowed the genetic mutations to tear him apart. Devlin was sure it had been a long, painful process.

Devlin felt no remorse for the man. He deserved his fate, and Devlin wondered what tortures Death had in store for him in the afterlife. He hoped that the little bastard suffered immeasurably for what he had done.

He pushed up on his elbows and felt ripples of pain dance through him. Around his shoulder, where The Little Man had shot him, dried blood cracked the fabric as he moved. He reached out and pulled the shirt aside. No wound remained. Whatever damage had been done had been repaired. Devlin didn't know if it was the double dosage or undiluted Green Pus flowing through his system, or a gift bestowed upon him by the Egyptian tomb god for services rendered.

He supposed it didn't really matter. He was alive and, for the first time in a long time, thankful to be so.

Rosetta helped him to his feet and he once again surveyed the arena. Dead mutations littered the floor of the place and he could almost tell which mutant had turned on which. The air smelled coppery with blood.

Devlin stood there and drank in the intoxicating aroma. He wondered if Death had done the same.

Rosetta stood silently by his side, helping to hold him up. He swayed. The Green Pus was still in him, and he knew what he had to do.

"Come on," Devlin said. "Let's get out of here."

Together, they walked to the edge of the arena. Once again, Devlin turned and looked back at the carnage that had occurred there. *So many people died in this arena*, he thought. *I need to destroy it.*

He knew just how to do that.

They walked through the now-silent halls of the complex. The emergency lights were still on, giving the place an eerie aura. The lack of ghosts running through the hall seemed strange to Devlin, but it was a good sort of strange. He knew that all those souls had been released and were now in a bet-

ter place.

Still, the complex where The Little Man had caused so many people pain remained, and that was something that Devlin could not tolerate. Some other sawed-off, power-mad bastard might succeed The Little Man in his tyranny. It was something Devlin had glimpsed in his Pus-filled dreams. But, that bastard would have to find a new place to do his experiments and tortures.

They came to the elevator and Devlin looked at Rosetta. "I think it's still operational," he told her. "You should go up."

"What about you?" she asked.

He smiled. "Don't worry, I'll be there shortly."

She stared at him a moment and he thought, maybe, she wasn't going to do as he asked. But, finally, she reached out and touched the elevator button. There was a ding and, in the silence of the complex, they heard the sound of the elevator's mechanism begin to operate.

A moment later, Rosetta stepped into the elevator. Devlin looked into her eyes as the doors closed behind her. Then, he moved on.

He had seen something in the generator room he had entered the complex through. It was the gas main that could fill the complex with fire. There were volatile chemicals that The Little Man used for nefarious purposes stored in a room just down the hall from the generator room. Devlin knew that, if he torched the facility, the chemicals would explode. Hopefully, the explosion would destroy the facility. He thought it probably would.

He entered the generator room a moment later. The valve that opened the gas main was on the far side of the room. He made his way there quickly, broke the lock with the crowbar and turned the valve. He heard the sound of gas hissing through the pipes.

He ran back to the elevator as fast as he could. Behind him, flames began to jump out of the lines at regular intervals. He reached the elevator and punched the button. The door opened. Rosetta had sent the elevator back down for him. He

stepped inside, punched the “up” button, and the door closed just as the flames reached him.

The elevator rose quickly. When it reached the top, the door opened. Rosetta stood there, tears in her eyes. The guards were gone. Devlin wondered if they had been the men who now lay dead in the subterranean arena.

The ground shook as Devlin stepped out of the elevator. “Run!” Devlin yelled.

They ran.

The stored chemicals had exploded. There was a deep rumbling sound coming from underneath them. As they ran, Devlin could feel the earth move under his feet. The massive complex was imploding, creating a sinkhole. The earth cracked open in several places and flames shot up into the early morning darkness.

When they were safely away, Devlin turned and looked at the damage he had done. The building had been swallowed up. Devlin thought of The Little Man’s body; he hoped the incinerator had roasted the little bastard well before the explosion occurred. He deserved far worse than that, but it would have to be enough. His tyranny was over. Death had him now...and he would suffer an eternity of pain. It served him right.

Devlin watched for a long time before he realized Rosetta was holding his hand.

In the distance, they heard the sound of sirens.

“We should go,” Rosetta said.

“In a moment,” Devlin said. He watched the flames shoot out of the ground and thought about all the things he had lost: Caroline, Daniel, his very existence. He had been lost, but he knew that he would be all right, now. He had descended into darkness and survived. He had started out a loser and ended up a winner. In the end, he supposed that was the secret to life: to keep fighting even when you felt you could fight no longer. To prevail.

The sun began to peek over the horizon. *It’s a new day*, Devlin thought. *The first day of the rest of our lives.* He looked

at Rosetta. He would cherish her as long as he lived. If he were lucky, she would do the same. Regardless, he knew now that he would survive.

“Let’s go,” he said. He took one final glance at what he had done, then turned and walked away.

His felt whole again; his ascent was complete.

THE END