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T H E

D E V I L S ' S

W O R K S H O P

[A N O V E L]

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*This is for
Leonard F. Hill*

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Without all of you, I would still be digging dirt in Chapter Two.

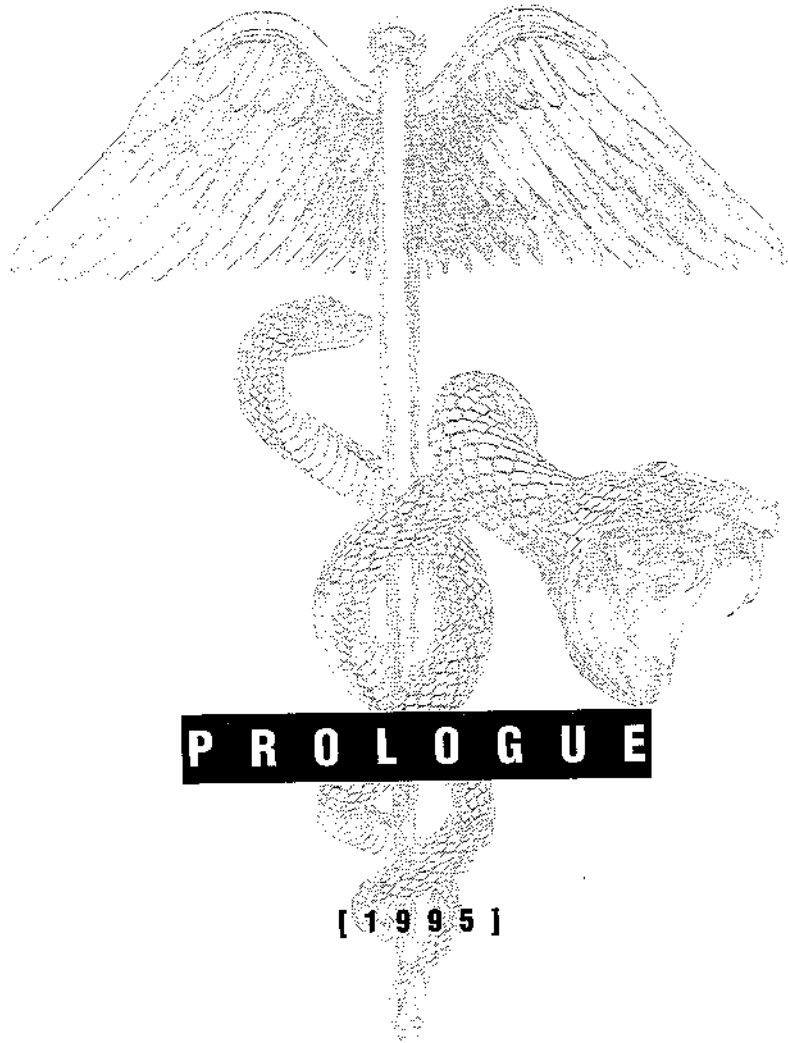
Finally, thanks to my wife, Marcia, who gives me the love and provides the safety that allows me to try this kind of work in the first place. Thirty-five years of my insanity and she's still there, on the other side of the bed each morning. . . . Go figure.

Science marches on blindly, without regard to the real welfare of the human race, or to any other standard, obedient only to the psychological needs of the scientists, and of the government officials and corporation executives who provide the funds for research.

—TED KACZYNSKI

Where God built a church, there the devil would also build a chapel. . . .

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



P R O L O G U E

[1 9 9 5]

THE END

The tall Marine Captain stood next to his beautiful wife, looking into the open grave. His dress uniform with its brass buttons twinkled in the bright Southern California sunshine. One row of colorful Desert Storm combat ribbons was arranged on his chest directly under his Jump Wings. His Silver Star was a testament to his courage, his gallantry under fire.

The Minister was talking about the inevitability of death. “. . . God has his plan for all of us,” he said.

The Marine never took his eyes off the damp hole in the ground, never looked up, never engaged the sympathetic stares of the others. Tall and handsome, he seemed every inch the hero, except for one thing . . . he couldn't stop crying. His shoulders slumped and quivered, his neck and chest heaved in powerful grief.

When the Minister was finished he motioned the young Captain to step forward to give the eulogy for his daughter, but Cris Cunningham could not move. He stood with his eyes down, sobbing uncontrollably.

“This is very hard,” the Minister finally said, sympathetically. “We certainly all understand.”

They were about to lower little Kennidi Cunningham into the ground. Her misshapen, tumorous body was at last hidden from the hateful stares of curious strangers; department store rubber-necks who would move away in horror when they saw her . . . distance shielding them from possible infection, while providing a second look at the sickness that had mangled her.

The Marine raised his tear-soaked eyes to the small, flower-draped casket, which contained his four-and-a-half-year-old daughter. The huge chrome hoist squatted ominously over the hole, a futuristic spider about to deposit its valuable mahogany cocoon.

Since Captain Cunningham could not stop crying, his father, Richard, finally stepped forward and took his place. He was tall, like his boy, and wore a look of deep concern. His eyes fluttered from his weeping son back to his granddaughter’s coffin. “Little Kennidi tried,” her grandfather said softly. “She fought with all her soul. But some things, as Father Macmillan has said, are just in God’s hands from the start. Some things can’t be changed. We will never forget her or her courage.” Then he reached forward and took a white carnation off the casket, moved over, and handed it to his son’s wife, Laura, who, like her husband, had not looked up. Her eyes, like his, were fixed on the hole that was about to receive their only child.

Both knew they would never have another.

The funeral reception was at Richard Cunningham’s Pasadena mansion. It was a Spanish-style house on three beautiful landscaped acres near the arroyo that ran south from the foothills.

The guests pulled up to the house and got out of their cars, wearing dark clothes and grim expressions. In the entry, the family had put the best picture they had of Kennidi up on an easel. She

had been only eighteen months old when it was taken, but already you could see the misshapen swelling. The later photographs were all unacceptable.

The picture of Kennidi showed that she'd had her father Cris's intense blue eyes and blond hair, but that was where the resemblance stopped. The hemangioma tumors that had started growing in her almost from birth were already redesigning her smile and bulging her forehead, eventually numbering in the hundreds. Non-cancerous growths made of tangled blood vessels, they grew in her eyelids and mouth and in clusters down her throat and spine. They distorted her speech, and in the end made it impossible for her to walk.

It was then, when she could no longer move, that Cris Cunningham, the Gulf War hero, the courageous Marine, had disappointed everyone.

He started drinking.

The doctors at Bethesda Naval Hospital had tried to explain Kennidi's horrible condition, but they could not be absolutely truthful, so they finally said that sometimes this sort of thing just happens. They said there was no explanation of why Kennidi had been born with this congenital sickness. They looked at the terror-stricken parents and mumbled meaningless platitudes. "Sometimes bad things happen to good people," they said, or "God has his own divine plan for each of us."

The doctors reduced the growths they could get at with laser surgery, shrinking some of them, but, in the end, Kennidi Cunningham could not withstand the ravages of the tumorous disease that was sweeping through her. The losing struggle went on for almost three years. The constant treatments provided only temporary relief, while Kennidi always seemed to be getting weaker and smaller. When she was four and a half, she finally died. It happened during abdominal surgery to relieve a blockage in her intestines.

Of course, the doctors at Bethesda knew it had not been God's divine plan that had killed her. They had already seen more than twenty similar cases.

Her own father had delivered the ghastly death sentence.

The guests filed past the touched-up photo of Kennidi and signed the book, leaving little messages of consolation next to their names. They wandered down to the pool, where a string quartet played softly. They stood quietly holding glasses of wine or punch, their too loud whispers pitting the sweet sad music like sand blown against a window.

By then, everybody knew the story, mostly because of the press coverage about the lawsuit the Cunningham family had filed against the U.S. Government.

None of that seemed to matter now.

Cris Cunningham stayed upstairs in his old bedroom while the mourners arrived. He knew, like the doctors at Bethesda, what had really happened to his daughter. After Kennidi's death four days ago, Cris had collapsed. His grip had finally been pulled loose by the endless tug of events.

Cris now sat on the bed, in the room where he had grown up. This place had been his first safe haven. He tried once more to find himself, sitting in the room where all of his values had once been formed, but his recollections were now skewed in the shifting dimension of Kennidi's death.

He had enjoyed victory after victory here: Scholastic All-American, UCLA quarterback, Rose Bowl MVP. He had dragged all the trophies back to this place and examined each honor carefully, searching for hidden meaning. He had been on such a frantic quest for achievement; he had never spent much time looking inward. Now he was *afraid* to look. Afraid of what was missing.

Even in high school, he'd begun to thrive on the adulation of others. He had tried to sort the meaning, looking for what his father

called "the true elevating factors." Now the photographs and trophies from his "Golden Boy" youth mocked him from the shelves of his room and made him feel even more lost and alone than before.

Self-pity was not an emotion that suited Cris, and yet after Kennidi's death it engulfed him, filled his stomach with bile and his mind with confusion.

His father knocked on the door and entered, uninvited. Richard Cunningham had been Cris's inspiration growing up; a college All-American end at Michigan and a self-made millionaire. Cris had desperately wanted to please him and follow in his footsteps, until Kennidi got sick. After that, everything changed.

"Cris, you should come down. It's rude not to at least say hello," his father said. "Laura's down there handling it all by herself. You should go be with her."

"I killed her, Dad," Cris said softly. "I killed Kennidi. Nothing's going to change that. I can't face it. I can't."

"You didn't kill her. That's crazy," Richard said, his voice betraying the sharp new edge of impatience with his son. "If anything killed her it was the pyridostigmine bromide, or the insect repellent, the P.B.-Deet. It wasn't you; the lawsuit will eventually prove it. The new doctors say that..." He stopped because he could see he had lost his son's attention.

Cris was looking out the window now, at the old oak tree. He had often lain in his bed in this room looking at the gnarled, twisted limbs and leaves of the ancient oak, turning them into fanciful designs: a dog's head, a map of Alaska. Now he saw nothing but an old tree.

Richard didn't know what to do for his son. Cris's pain was so obvious and so potentially destructive that his father was both angered and paralyzed by it, as if any false move might send Cris crashing down into a cavern of emptiness from which he would not return.

Richard kept hoping Laura would find a way to help. She and Cris had dated since high school. She knew him better than any-

one, but Richard had noticed that she seemed to look at her husband now with something close to hatred. Cris's drinking was getting steadily worse. His son, whom he had pushed to greatness, who had been a hero, first on the football field and then the battlefield, had now chosen the coward's way out. He had chosen self-doubt, self-pity, and alcohol.

"Cris, please. . . . Come downstairs."

Cris looked up at his father and finally nodded.

As it turned out, it would have been better had he stayed in his room. Cris got drunk, and while the combo played "Memories," he fell into the pool.

When they fished him out, his drenched uniform clung to him. It was easy to see he had lost quite a bit of weight.

Again upstairs in his room, Cris sat on his bed and cried. His father looked at him from the door, not sure what to do. "Son, you've got to get ahold of yourself. Kennidi's gone. She wouldn't want this. You've got to make a new start," Richard said.

When Cris looked up at him, Richard saw such hopelessness in his son's vacant stare that he was momentarily stunned by it.

"It's *all* gone. This whole thing is over, Dad," Cris said, as he waved a wet sleeve at his trophies. His voice was a monotone of despair. "I can't start over. It's in me. I'm poisoned by it. There's nothing left." The next thing he said chilled his father with its finality. "It's the end," the Golden Boy whispered.