

Maxwell's Daughter

Part Five

Church. The building Stephen had spent his entire life avoiding, any place of worship for that matter but against all odds, he found himself kneeling before God. He hadn't seen Maria for over three weeks now and he began to tell himself that if he said his prayers and lived a good life, the blackness that he had pushed out of mind would stay just there. But of course he was wrong.

Stephen knelt in front of the alter of the abandoned chapel. The church was dark but a light had been left on at the front, the light from which Stephen used to scan over a verse from Hebrews with his tired eyes; *'Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.'* Candles burned peacefully on the alter which was draped with a large white cloth that portrayed the image of a dove holding an olive branch.

Stephen felt his lungs wheeze and he coughed a chesty, painful cough that forced his eyes to close and his hand to snap to his pocket to take out his handkerchief. When his lungs eventually gave relief, Stephen drew his handkerchief away to see that it was covered in a heavy blackness as if it had been sprayed with a black spray paint. As his pupils widened in disbelief, there was a second surge from his lungs and Stephen spat black blood onto the open pages of the Bible. The blood dripped down the pages until the black ink of the scripture was indistinguishable from the dark blood.

Stephen slammed the book and took it in his arms before hurrying from the church. As his quick footsteps echoed around the high-ceilinged church, the many candles set out on the alter quickly flickered and died.

Although it was past ten in the evening, Stephen did not much feel like returning home. He knew Andrea would have left some food out for him maybe with a glass of wine. It was two more days until Sunday, until he could cleanse the darkness in his soul for a few days but he knew it would

return sooner or later. His life had become an endless battle.

Stephen Maxwell reached up and flicked on the car light. He took the heavy, leather-bound Bible from the passenger's seat and opened it at random. *'And no one could bind her anymore, not even with a chain, for she had often been bound with shackles and chains, but she wrenched the chains apart, and she broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue her.'* Stephen pondered for a second before dropping the book onto the seat and starting the engine. The car disappeared into the darkness.

Stephen paused, his foot hovering over the accelerator. Fuck it, he thought and slammed his foot down. The car picked up speed and after a second, smashed through the large iron gates. Stephen quickly hit the brakes and the car slowed to a stop. No alarms? Stephen supposed the fence was more to keep something in rather than out. He jumped out of the car, his lungs again heaving and spitting out a large gloop of blood onto the drive. Stephen took up the Bible from the passenger's seat and followed the floodlights to the house.

Stephen tried the door but of course it was locked. He rang the bell three times with no reply, before rearing back and kicking out at the door. His first two attempts resulted only in a searing pain spreading through his leg but his third try, kicked the door, which swung back, having broken the lock. Stephen's brief military training seemed to have worn off a little and he limped inside, trying the lights. They flicked on to reveal the familiar, too-homely atmosphere.

'Maria?' Stephen yelled. The lights flickered and a low muttering could be heard from somewhere in the house. Stephen coughed up some more blood and in his disorientation, he could not make out where the noise was coming from. His feet led him to the door to the basement, which lay open, a cool draft circulating from below. Stephen took up the flashlight and stepped carefully down the steps, the Bible still clutched in his sweaty grip. As he reached the bottom, the same stench hit him like a cloud of stink propelled by the force of a freight train.

As Stephen held the flashlight up, trying to squint to focus on the opposite wall, where the twisted girl was chained up, his foot caught on something large and heavy and as Stephen felt forward, moving his other

leg to recover from the trip, the flashlight swung forward in his grip and Stephen caught a glimpse of the readily decomposing corpse of Maria Castillo, a stain of brown down her front where she had cut her own throat with a knife that lay by her right hand, or what was left of the tissue, and bones.

Stephen's stomach wrenched and this time it was vomit that spewed from his open mouth and onto the corpse. He stumbled forward, the sound of clinking and rattling growing with intensity. When he at last cast light upon the demon girl, she thrived and forced against her binds. Her eyes fell upon Maxwell and there was something in her eyes, pleading? They exchanged a look and Stephen felt something warming inside of him, was it pity or even love? He took a large box of meat and tore it open with his fingers. He threw several what looked like pork chops at the girl, who devoured them instantly.

Stephen's pity of the girl grew in a matter of seconds; the poor girl, her legs must be aching continuously, and although she most-likely enjoyed the absence of light, she must be so lonely.

Maria was dead, soon people would find out and the cops would be round soon, the house would be re-possessed. Ha, possessed. Stephen chuckled for a fraction of a second before shuddering with self-disgust. His mind began to grow weighed down by the infinite problems and responsibilities, which he had been forced to respond to. His mind was like a body, bound by ropes and tied to bricks, residing at the bottom of dark lake. He could think of nothing else and sat in an armchair with a bottle of cheap Whiskey at hand (he had drunken through the expensive dated spirits) in his living room, with nothing but a candle lit in the whole room. He no longer feared the darkness. What he feared now was himself.

His mind could conjure only one plausible solution; he must taken his wife and child... children rather, far away from here. Somewhere where a scream could not be heard even by dead, rotting trees. He must hide his deepest secret in the same literal way as to never let Andrea find out. Whatever it took, he would do it. He had only to think up an elaborate, fake back-story, why it was that they must move far away from any civilisation. He had killed someone? No, don't be stupid. He fancied a

change? That wouldn't cut it. A sick part of him knew that Andrea would do anything if he told her, even without reasoning. That would have to be it. He would move them away and the girl too, hide her someone close but where nobody would ever find her. He would hope that she would die soon or else God send an angel to take her to hell where she belonged. Only time will tell, Stephen Maxwell thought as he downed a long mouthful of Whiskey and at last passed out, a relief from life, the nature of which was even darker his nightmares would haunt his waking moments as much as his waking moments haunted his sleep.