

DEVLIN'S DESCENT



ROGER
DALE
TREXLER

© 2009 Roger Dale Trexler.
All rights reserved.

Chapter Twelve: “Harvest Moon”

The Little Man held Daniel's hand as they crossed the street. By appearance, they looked like nothing more than a father and son out on a leisurely afternoon stroll, albeit a father who looked like a clown and a child with very apparently abnormalities. Since the murder of Mayor Donnelson twenty-four hours earlier, Daniel had become quiet and retrospect. The Little Man had taken him back to the underground lab and allowed him nourishment — he had, after all, done what he had been told and taken the troublesome mayor out of the mix, even if he had tried to exceed his bounds afterwards. The Little Man didn't blame him; he would have done the same thing if their rolls were reversed. He understood and could appreciate disobedience.

After dinner, The Little Man had taken Daniel to his mother's room.

Daniel had spent the night there.

In the morning, they found Daniel sleeping at the foot of his mother's bed. His mother, still black and blue from the excellent beating Joseph had given her, was cowering in the corner when The Little Man entered the room. Even in the brilliant light that flood the area, he could make out huge black and blue welts on her body. He had grinned, then said: "I hope you've learned your lesson."

He looked down at Daniel. The boy had awoke at the sound of the door opening, and he was staring glassy-eyed at The Little Man.

"Come with me, boy," The Little Man said.

Daniel was obedient and followed.

The Little Man guided him through a maze of hallways. Finally, they reached a door and The Little Man turned to him. "I expect you to behave yourself in here," he told him. "If you

don't..."

The Little Man's voice trailed off. Daniel understood what "if you don't" meant. He had seen the welts and bruises on his mother as well.

The Little Man keyed in a code and the door slid open. Daniel held his hand to his face. Inside, the light was normal.

And, The Little Man did not have on his dampening head-gear.

"Go in," The Little Man said. He placed his hand on the boy's back and shoved him forward.

He did not follow Daniel inside.

Daniel turned and looked at The Little Man. In the brilliant light flooding in through the door, he looked like something otherworldly. The Little Man smiled and said: "I'll be back in four hours. Then, we've got a job to do."

The door slid shut.

Daniel stared at the door a moment, then turned and looked about the room. It was different than any room he'd been in before. There was a sofa and a television set mounted to the wall. The room was practically barren beside those two intrusions, and Daniel wondered just exactly what he was supposed to do there.

Slowly, he walked to the sofa and sat.

The television automatically popped on. On the screen he saw a familiar site. It was the parking garage he had been in less than twenty-four hours earlier. The news ticker at the bottom of the screen read: MAYOR DONNELSON FOUND DEAD. In the middle of the scene, surrounded by police officers, a covered body lay.

He was alive when I left him, Daniel thought. What happened?

But, he knew what had happened. The Little Man. He had changed his mind about letting the mayor live out his life as a vegetable. *That, or I went too far.* But, even as he thought that, he knew The Little Man would have punished him if that had been the case. It was more likely that The Little Man

had covered his ass and seen to it that the mayor would not make a miraculous recovery.

Death was permanent.

At least, for most people.

A screen within a screen popped up on the television, and a woman who appeared to be in her mid-50's looked at him. "Hello, Daniel," the woman said. "My name is Dr. Ruth Colletti. Can we be friends?"

"What do you want from me?" he asked.

Doctor Colletti smiled. "Not much, really," she assured him. "I've just been assigned to you to find out how it felt."

"How's what felt?" Daniel asked.

"Why, murder, of course!"

##

Over the course of four hours, Doctor Colletti showed Daniel the news. This eventually gave way to far more gruesome video shot on battlefields. There was a strong emphasis on the evils of mankind. Daniel watched obediently as Doctor Colletti narrated. When Daniel ventured to ask a question, she told him to wait until the video was finished. Then, and only then, his questions would be answered.

Daniel did as he was told.

Finally, after the last video of a naked man who'd been tortured to death in some Middle-eastern prison faded to black, she said: "Ask your questions now."

Daniel looked around the room. In the corner, he saw a camera, its power light glowing red, looking down on him.

"Why?" Daniel asked.

There was a pause as the question was considered. "The world is in chaos, Daniel," Doctor Colletti's voice said in a soft, unthreatening monotone. "It's in chaos and we need to alter the future if mankind is to survive."

"But, why me? Why was I born?"

Once again, a thoughtful pause followed his query.

"You were born to alter the future of mankind, of course,"

Doctor Colletti told him. Her tone sounded as if she considered the question irrelevant. "You are the first enhanced human being to be produced. You could say you're the prototype and the blueprint of those who will follow you."

"So, there will be more?" he asked.

Undoubtedly."

"Why?"

Irritation crept into her voice. "I told you already...because mankind needs our help."

"Like I helped Mayor Donnellson?"

Another long pause.

"Yes," she said.

"What if I don't want to help? What if I don't want to kill people to alter the future of mankind?"

The television flicked to life. On the screen, an X-ray of a human skull appeared. Daniel didn't need her to tell him whose skull it was. There was a small, oblong blur in the X-ray.

The explosive chip in his skull.

"Your obedience is required for your continued survival," Doctor Colletti told him.

Daniel stared at the chip on the screen. "What if I don't want to survive?" he asked.

Doctor Colletti did not reply. He turned and looked at the camera as the power light went dark.

##

Five minutes later, the door opened and The Little Man entered. This time, he had a hat on. Underneath, Daniel knew the man now wore one of those headsets that would prevent his mental intrusions. Still, Daniel tried. He reached out with his mind and could not touch The Little Man's mind.

The Little Man smiled and walked up to Daniel. He threw a freshly washed pair of jeans and a shirt at him. He held a jacket for the boy in his hands. "Put these on," he told the boy.

For a second, Daniel did not respond. The Little Man turned back to the doorway and Daniel's eyes followed his. Outside, in the brilliant light, two massive men stood. "You wouldn't want me to have them put on their headsets and come in here, would you?" The Little Man asked smugly.

Daniel started to get dressed.

##

They cut to an avenue on the right. Thirty feet behind them, the two burly thugs who'd stood outside the television room walked, their headsets carefully hidden beneath hoods. The chill air coming in off the lake made their camouflage appropriate and inconspicuous.

"Where are we going?" Daniel asked.

"Oh," The Little Man told him. "We're just going to pay a visit to an old friend, is all. A dear, dear old friend."

The section of town they walked in was dilapidated. And, oddly enough, Daniel knew exactly where they were headed.

##

Devlin awoke. The twilight that crept through the window had become so familiar to him that he considered the place home. It was as if he had always been there, and always would be.

But, as he lay there, a wave of unease flowed over him.

"My brother's coming for you," a voice in the darkness said. He stared into the void and, as his eyes adjusted, he saw Daniel sitting on the dirty floor. The dirt beneath him was unstirred.

"Your brother?"

"The other one," he said. "The physical me....and he's not alone."

"Who's he....?" Devlin started, but did not finish. He realized full well who the physical Daniel was with. The Little

Man. The little bastard who'd turned him into something more than a Green Pus junkie. He was a freak. An aberration. Something that should not exist, but did. The very fact that he could communicate with his aborted son, whose physical form had been regrown in some way that Devlin did not understand, was only the tip of the iceberg when it came to Devlin's oddness. He was no longer a man; he was something more.

"Where are they?" Devlin asked.

"Just down the street," Daniel said, pointing at the boarded over window. "You should be able to see them through there."

Devlin stood and walked across the room. He had knocked one of the boards on the window out some time ago to let some fresh air into the room, and he peered through the opening.

Just as Daniel said, Devlin saw The Little Man and the physical being that had taken part of Daniel's consciousness standing on the street corner.

The physical Daniel peered up at Devlin.

They locked eyes, and Daniel pointed.

"Daddy!" he yelled.

Devlin felt a chill run down his spine as he stood there. The Little Man looked up at him then, and an evil smile crossed his face.

Somewhere below them, Devlin heard a crash.

The thugs The Little Man had brought along were now in the building.

Devlin felt something cold touch his hand. He looked down into Daniel's eyes. "We have to go," Daniel told him.

Devlin glanced out the window again. The Little Man and Daniel were still standing there.

Another crash, closer this time, brought Devlin out of his daze.

"Come on, let's go," Daniel said. There was a nervous tension in his voice, and Devlin found himself wondering why a dead child would be nervous. *Was there some way that The*

Little Man could reunite the spiritual and the physical Daniels? And, if so, what would be the consequences of such a unity, rejoining bastard child with bastard child?

It was something Devlin knew he did not wish to find out.

He turned and looked at Daniel. The boy's ghostly arm was pulling at him, sliding through his rise, then into thin air again. Daniel didn't seem to understand that he was not a solid boy like his counterpart down on the street below.

Another sound, this time very close indeed, spurred Devlin to action.

He had chosen the third floor of the abandon building for several reason. From his experiences with transients, he knew that most of them were lazy creatures at heart. If they entered the building, they would look for a place on the first floor to sleep, eat, do drugs or whatever it was that brought them into the building in the first place. They wouldn't venture up the stairs unless they had a reason.

The third floor also offered Devlin the opportunity to hear his pursuers before they were upon him. There was a great deal of broken glass and debris — transients liked to shit in their mess kit, Devlin realized — and anyone coming down the halls, unless they knew the path that Devlin had cleared, would make noise.

And, the final reason Devlin had chose the third floor was that they had erected one of those waste chutes into a dumpster below in the room on the fourth floor that was easily accessible via just outside the room he currently resided in. No one had worked in the building in months, but the waste chute was still there.

He had an escape route.

Devlin glanced out the window again. Daniel still stood next to The Little Man. Both of them were looking up toward Devlin.

Devlin stood there a moment, feeling somewhat paralyzed and perplexed.

Another sound came.

He turned and ran.

##

Daniel reached out and touched The Little Man's hand. "You're gonna get my daddy back for me?" he asked.

The Little Man nodded. "Yes."

There was no reason to embellish his response; Daniel knew many, many things. He knew that The Little Man wanted Devlin for the same reason that he wanted Daniel alive. He knew that The Little Man would implant a chip in his father's skull that would guarantee obedience. He knew that, and far, far more.

They stared up at the window and, for a second, Daniel caught a glimpse of his brother. The boy seemed to sink into Devlin, then pass through him. Then, Devlin turned and ran.

"Do you know where he's going?" The Little Man asked.

Daniel did not respond for a moment. Then, he said: "no."

The Little Man looked into his eyes. "You're a horrible liar," he said. "Take me to him. Now."

"I don't want to," Daniel said.

The Little Man let go of Daniel's hand. A second later, he slapped the boy so hard stars danced before his eyes. Daniel reeled from the blow, almost falling down, but The Little Man caught his arm. He dug his fingers into his flesh as he said: "Take me to him. *Now!*"

Daniel stared at The Little Man. If looks could kill, The Little Man would have been dead. And, if he hadn't been wearing the little helmet that kept Daniel from entering his mind, that was exactly what would have happened.

Instead, Daniel had to obey The Little Man. He hated the man with a passion beyond a his few days of life, but that was The Little Man's doing as well. He had force fed him information and sensory stimulation that had given him the ability to love and hate. It seemed odd that he could do that,

considering the fact that he had been in a vat less than a week ago, but it was true.

Daniel could hate.

And he hated The Little Man.

"Get up, boy," The Little Man said.

Daniel stood.

Reluctantly, he started to walk toward the building.

##

Devlin headed for the stairs and Daniel followed. The sound of running feet was close now. Very close. In the darkness of the building, he could see very little. But, he knew his way about the place. He had made it a prerequisite that he knew the path from his little squatter room to the chute. He had walked the path many times in the past, even used it once or twice to exit the building. The dumpster at the bottom of the chute had been taken away months earlier, and Devlin had had to slow his fall through the chute with his hands and legs pressed against the fabric. It had worked fairly well, and he knew that he had chosen a good spot to hide.

Not good enough, he thought as he hit the door that led upstairs.

Off down the hall, a light shone toward them.

"There they are," he heard a man's voice shout.

Devlin didn't wait around to see the face of the man. He slid through the door and used the handrail to guide himself as he bolted up the steps. He looked at the top of stairs and saw the ethereal glow of Daniel.

"We can't go that way," Daniel said.

"Why not?" Devlin asked.

Below them, the stairwell door opened.

"He's down there," Daniel said.

Devlin turned and a flashlight shone in his face. He heard something whiz past his ear. It was so close that he felt the disturbance in the air as it past and struck the wall behind him.

“We’ve got no choice,” Devlin said. Without another word, Daniel ran into his father. Devlin felt the icy chill as the boy entered his mind. The effect lasted only a fraction of a second, though, and Devlin knew that they could travel more effectively together.

The men started up the stairs.

Devlin ran through the door at the top of the stairs.

For a second, he thought the chute had been removed. It was so dark that he could not see it, and he hadn’t bothered to look to see if it was there earlier. Still, the sound of feet running up the stairs forced him to take a leap of faith.

He lunged toward the chute.

To his surprise, it was still there. He hit the fabric so hard that he thought he might break through it and fall to the ground, but it held. He slid quickly down the chute and put his hands out in front of him, grabbing one of the thick metal coils that held the fabric’s shape for it. His body contorted within the tube, and he let it. With a little effort of his own, he managed to turn himself over, throwing his feet forward into a breach birth position.

It all took place in less than a second, and Devlin’s head swam with the drunkenness of a Pus high and such a drastic equilibrium shift. Still, he threw his feet out and they caught on another of the metal coils. His feet bounced off them, then caught the ones before as well.

It slowed him down.

He hit the bottom of the chute and grabbed the final coil. His speed kept him from a complete grasp of the coil, and his hand tore free. He dropped to the ground with a thud.

A full second passed before he could regain his senses. But, when he did, he realized someone was standing over him.

Daniel.

And, The Little Man.

“Hello, Devlin,” The Little Man said. “Long time no see.”

The Little Man turned to Daniel. “Show your father what

you can do," he said. "Now."

Daniel looked down at Devlin.

"I'm sorry," he said as he began to concentrate.

Then, Devlin felt his mind begin to burn.