

DEVLIN'S DESCENT



ROGER
DALE
TREXLER

© 2009 Roger Dale Trexler.
All rights reserved.

Chapter Ten: “The Real Me”

Daniel stood in two places at once. Part of him was with Devlin in a run-down, abandoned apartment building. He could feel that part of himself; or, rather, that part of him could feel the other part. It depended on your point of view, really. He wasn't certain which part was the real him. It was confusing to him that there was another part out there; a part that felt as detached and lonely as he did. For all The Little Man's technology and power, he could not make Daniel feel like a part of humanity.

Perhaps, he thought as he stood there on the curb across from the courthouse, if I can get the two of us back together, I will feel whole.

But, even as he thought that, he knew that he would not.

The Little Man would never allow that, anyway. The explosive chip nestled in to his brain was proof positive of that.

He looked around him. It was a cool day. Hints of Autumn's impending assault were in the air, and the wind coming in off the lake had a bite to it. It wouldn't be long before people couldn't stand outside in light jackets. They'd have to dig out their winter coats.

He heard the sound of horns honking and, a moment later, a stretch limo with its lights on came around the corner. Someone had decorated the vehicle up and, as it passed, Daniel saw that the JUST MARRIED that was written in white on the back window had been altered. Someone had scratched out the "I" so that it now read JUST MARR ED. Several passersby chuckled at the witty soul who'd altered the statement of marital bliss into something a little more sinister.

Daniel watched as the limo drove around the corner and out of sight.

He glanced at the watch The Little Man had given him. It

was 4:20 p.m. The courthouse had closed at 4:00 p.m. and he had seen a slow, steady flow of people exiting. He watched the exodus with a certain detachment. His mind, quite literally, was in two different places. He had not told The Little Man of this, even when the man had used drugs to get the truth out of him. The Little Man was hopelessly paranoid, as well as power mad. He had created Daniel in a vat, but he did not trust him. Daniel's exposure to Green Pus had made him somewhat impervious to such interrogations. But, The Little Man didn't know that. Daniel supposed there were many things in life The Little Man did not know. He did, however, understand megalomania, and that was enough, Daniel supposed. The Little Man could fake the rest.

He ran his hand along the small scar on his head. *Could I pull that out? He wondered. Take a razor blade and cut it free from my body?*

No, he told himself. *The Little Man wouldn't be that careless. He had imbedded the explosive chip deep enough inside his cranium that there was no way, short of brain surgery, it would ever get free. That's be hard to explain, he thought, and he had to smile at the thought. Walk into the emergency room and say, "hey, could someone cut this explosive chip out of my brain. Please?"*

Definitely something that would never happen.

The door to the courthouse opened, and a man stepped out. He was middle-aged, pudgy, but not the man The Little Man had sent him after. He watched as the man walked down the steps of the courthouse, turned right, and walked out of sight.

You out there? Daniel asked. Brother?

For a moment, there was no answer. Then, Daniel felt the presence of his doppelganger. It was a weird sensation, not dissimilar to sinus congestion. A thickness located directly between the eyes. It rolled in and seemed to thump his cranium as it found a home. Daniel's vision blurred a moment, and the outside world became distant and unimportant.

What are you doing? The other Daniel asked.

You know what I'm doing.

Why? Why are you helping The Little Man?

"Look around in my brain," Daniel said, his voice thin and mumbling. "The bastard put a chip in my head."

He felt a stirring within his skull. A moment later, the thickness returned to his sinuses.

I'm sorry, the voice in his head said. I wish I could help.

"You could stop The Little Man," Daniel said.

I can't. He's got something that stops me from getting at him. The light in the complex is too bright.

"He's not always there," Daniel said.

There's something else that stops me then. I'm not sure what it is.

Daniel drew in a deep breath and sighed. It was interesting to him that he could get so accustomed to such a simple act as sighing within days of being born. And, in truth, that was what had happened to him. The Little Man was as much a father to him as Devlin was. He had taken the remnants of his former self — *not all the remnants*, the voice in his head told him — and sirred himself a son.

Yeah, a son with an explosive chip in his head, Daniel thought.

He could sense the other part of him considering the thought, but his doppelganger said nothing. He supposed there was really nothing else that the spirit Daniel could say to the flesh and blood Daniel but that he was sorry for the circumstances they found themselves in. Each of them had had no control over it. They were helpless. Other people had the power, but not them. The doppelganger Daniel had sought out Devlin and he, at least, had a comrade. Flesh and blood Daniel had his mother. In a way, it was like a divorce with two children, with one child going to each parent to be nurtured and loved.

Except, of course, both parents were addicted to Green Pus. For that matter, Daniel was, as well.

It was a bizarre dysfunctional family with The Little Man as the Family Counselor from Hell.

Daniel snickered at the thought.

Just then, the courthouse door opened and a man walked out. Daniel quickly forgot his other self within his head and looked at the man. It was Mayor Donnelson, the man whom The Little Man had instructed him to kill.

Daniel felt an adrenaline rush course through him as he watched the man walk down the steps and turn left.

Daniel followed from across the street.

What are you doing? His doppelganger asked.

"You know exactly what I'm doing," he replied.

This man could stop The Little Man!

"Get real...no one's going to stop The Little Man. He's too powerful."

Devlin could.

"Devlin's not going to do anything but take Green Pus and you know it."

Silence.

Daniel crossed the street at a stoplight. Mayor Donnelson ambled along, completely oblivious to the fact that he was being followed.

They crossed the street again. Mayor Donnelson turned into a parking garage. Daniel would have wondered why the mayor didn't have a parking spot closer to the courthouse if he'd known to think that way, but there were so many things that his mind still did not comprehend. Sure, The Little Man had instilled his mind with an amazing amount of information in the nine months he'd been grown in a womb tank, but there were many things that still evaded him. Like the rest of the bodies growing in womb tanks, the probes in their brains fed them a constant stream of information and images. Daniel had been educated like that, but the introduction of his aborted stem cells had changed him from an unformed body to who he was. And, the Green Pus had helped to expand his intellect as well.

He wondered how many of the other children in womb tanks were being pumped full of Green Pus on a regular basis, and what that might mean when they, too, were born.

How many have explosive chips in their heads, too? He wondered.

The thought sent a chill through him.

He followed Mayor Donnelson into the parking garage.

Donnelson reached his car, a late model blue Cadillac. He dug in his pockets for his keys, punched the lock button, and the car announced to the quiet garage that the door was unlocked. He put his keys back in his pocket, then paused, stopped and turned. Something told him Daniel was there.

"Are you following me, son?" he asked.

Daniel said, "yes."

A puzzled look crossed the mayor's face. "Do I know you?" he asked.

Daniel shook his head. "No, but you know the man who sent me."

The puzzled look increased. "I don't understand?"

Daniel grinned. "You're not supposed to." He took a few steps forward. In the shadowy gloom of the parking garage, Mayor Donnelson stepped backwards as well. It defied explanation as to why he could find fear when confronted by a ten-year-old, but he did. There was something lurking behind Daniel's eyes that he did not like.

"The Little Man wants you to know — it's nothing personal, it's just business."

With that, he took a step back and spread his arms wide. His head dropped. His chin touched his chest a moment, then he looked back up at the mayor. Daniel's eyes had rolled back in his head; only the whites shown at him as Daniel's body began to shake.

At first, nothing happened. Mayor Donnelson stood there, thinking that he was being confronted by one seriously disturbed little boy. For a second, he felt nothing but sorrow and the need to protect the child.

Then, he felt the burning.

It started in his left arm. A tingling sensation. He thought to himself: *The kid's giving me a heart attack! Wasn't a tingling sensation in your leg arm a sign of a heart attack? How can a ten-*

year-old kid give me a heart attack?

But, the burning traveled.

He looked at Daniel. "What are you doing to me?" he asked. There was more than a tinge of fear in his voice. He wanted to run, but his nervous system would not respond. He was frozen in place and could not move. All he could do was watch as Daniel's face strained harder and harder.

And, as the boy strained, Donnelson's entire body lit on fire. Every nerve ending, every synapse, every cell seemed to be alit with energy. A conscientious observer, had there been one, would have seen Daniel's body glow red. It would have been pink at first, then brightening into a rich crimson glow.

The observer would have seen Donnelson body begin to glow as well as Daniel channeled his power to the man. Pink at first, then a brilliant red that shone like a red dwarf star preparing to supernova. All the while, Donnelson's mind baked under the heat and pressure that Daniel applied.

Donnelson fell to the garage floor and spasmed. His tongue rolled back into his mouth and he started gasping for air. There was a thick, whistling sound as the man's involuntary body reactions tried to draw in enough breath for him to continue living.

Daniel, now oblivious to everything surrounding him, concentrated on the man. He could feel the chip inside his cranium. He knew the exact spot where it lay. He could tell that it was beginning to heat up from his exertion. *Would it blow up?* He wondered. *Should I let it?* He asked himself.

Both answers seemed to be: *yes*.

"Stop!" a familiar voice told him.

At first, he did not listen. He kept right on boiling the Mayor's brain with his mind. It was only when a stern hand grabbed him and jerked him around that he realized the voice he had heard was that of The Little Man. He had come to watch his offspring on his fledgling mission.

Daniel's mind instantly stopped its assault on Mayor Donnelson. Donnelson's body ceased shaking and he let out a gasp that sounded like a punctured tire deflating rapidly.

He lay still.

There was a long, awkward moment in which The Little Man held Daniel. Daniel turned his attention to The Little Man, wanting nothing more than to turn brain into a mush of nothingness like he had Mayor Donnelson's. Daniel stared into The Little Man's eyes as he concentrated....but nothing happened.

"I won't make it that easy," The Little Man said as he released Daniel. The Little Man took off the hat he wore and reveal to Daniel why his attempt to vegetate his mind would not succeed.

Underneath the hat, The Little Man wore something that looked like a nylon hair net....except it wasn't nylon. The material shone with a metallic sheen. It glowed a light blue as well, and Daniel could see a thin power cord that ran from the right side of The Little Man's head, into the suit jacket the man wore, and, undoubtedly, into a power supply in his left breast pocket.

Daniel looked into The Little Man's face, dumbfounded.

The Little Man was smiling. "I learn from my mistakes," he said. Then, he slapped Daniel so hard that stars danced before his eyes. Daniel fell backward onto the garage floor. Stunned, it took him several moments to turn and look at Mayor Donnelson. The man lay less than five feet from him. His eyes were still open, and he stared at Daniel with an accusing expression.

Daniel looked at The Little Man. How long he had been observing, Daniel did not know. All he knew was that The Little Man had sent him out on a mission. A mission that his mother had been intended to be a part of. *Perhaps, Daniel reckoned, Caroline was supposed to seduce Mayor Donnelson when he came to his car?* Maybe The Little Man would have had a photographer handy to snap some publicity shots that the very publicly married mayor would have wanted suppressed.

Caroline's defiance had changed all that.

The Little Man had sent Daniel out on his own. Perhaps,

he had sent him to find out just how far he could trust him. It seemed likely, at the moment, that The Little Man had been testing Daniel's powers. Daniel had allowed himself to become too involved in what he was doing, and he had shown The Little Man that his powers far exceeded what The Little Man knew he was capable of.

He had exposed himself.

The Little Man had exploited a weakness in Daniel to get a job done, and also to find out just how far Daniel's powers went.

He looked down at Daniel. "You've been holding out on me?"

"No, sir."

The Little Man grinned a toothy smile. "No need to be afraid," he told Daniel. "If I'd been in your shoes, I'd have done the exact same thing. I'm proud of you, actually."

"Really?" Daniel replied.

The Little Man shook his head. "No."

It was then that the two thugs The Little Man had brought along with him grabbed Daniel. He turned, looked at them, tried to stop them, but the metal wire mesh covering their head would not allow him to probe their minds in the same way he had Mayor Donnelson's. He had seen everything inside the man's mind. From the tryst with the Mayor's stock clerk years ago that had gotten him his first bit of political power, to the power lunch he had shared with the city's most important people, everything had downloaded into Daniel's head. But, try as he might, there was nothing he could do to get into the minds of the thugs that held him.

Or the mind of The Little Man.

Daniel watched as The Little Man bent over Mayor Donnelson. He leaned there in silence a moment, then ran his hand through the mayor's grey, thinning hairline. "You should have taken that bribe I sent you," The Little Man said.

Donnelson only drooled in response.

The Little Man turned to Daniel. "Finish him," he said.

Daniel looked down at the man laying on the pavement,

then at The Little Man. "He's a vegetable," Daniel said. "He won't cause you any more problems. Let him go."

The Little Man glared at Daniel. In that second, Daniel understood all there was to understand about The Little Man. It wasn't enough that he had defeated his foe; he had to completely humiliated the man. "I want him shitting his pants for the rest of his days," The Little Man told Daniel, "Or I'll kill your mother...do you understand?"

Daniel looked into The Little Man's eyes, and he knew the statement was true. The Little Man would kill his mother. Part of him didn't really care. The woman had killed him, after all. But, there was something inside him that wanted the drama to continue. Something that needed his mother to be a part of that. Without her, Daniel would never get to meet his father.

Devlin.

And he so wished to meet him.

He so *needed* to meet him.

"Okay," Daniel said. He stood slowly, careful not to upset the balance, and walked over to Donnelson. He looked down at the wreckage of the man who'd been the city's most important person and thought: *You win some, you lose some.*

Then, he turned to The Little Man and said: "What do you want me to do?"

The Little Man grinned his toothy, Cheshire cat smile and said: "I want him to finish out his existence as a basket case. I want him to be able to remember me, but not remember me to the authorities...is that possible?"

Daniel looked at Donnelson. The man looked half-dead.

Daniel understood.

"Anything is possible," he said. "Just tell me how far to go."

"Take it to the limit," The Little Man said.

Daniel turned to Mayor Donnelson's still form. "Forgive me," he whispered. Then, like an obedient slave, he did what he was told..