

Excerpt from Dream Eater (Fractured Memories Series) by A. Dalcourt
Published 2013

"Dezmond..."

"Dezmond!" A young boy was pushing on him, urging him to wake.

Dezmond groaned, "Leave me alone."

He felt the boy climb up on him and began to pry his eyelids open. "I know you're awake, Dez. You promised you'd help me with my project! Now wake up! Waaaaaaake up."

Dezmond attempted to frown at Alistair, but it was far too difficult a feat to accomplish when both top eyelids were pulled from their respective eyes. "Get off, my eyeballs are shrivelling!" He pushed his sibling to the floor. "I thought you meant you wanted help tomorrow. It's got be..." Dezmond reached for his digital clock and stared down at the oppressive numbers dutifully shining up at him. It took a moment for him to understand what he was reading, the numbers didn't quite make sense. His brain assured him that the numbers were 'far too early in the morning to be checking the time'. He agreed with his brain and put the clock down.

The child smiled fondly at the older man. Alistair was nine years old and at this time, and he was Dezmond's elder brother and favourite playmate.

They were in his childhood home in the bedroom where he and Alistair would build forts out of their beds, using their blankets and pillows. One tall window allowed the moonlight to shine down on the boys. Dezmond remembered this night. It was August, and Alistair was eager to grow his own special berries this year. The concept of growing produce still eluded the children, but try they did like they did every year by planting everything from buttons to sticks and watching and waiting for signs of growth.

Reasonably, Dezmond wasn't so keen on sneaking off to the shed to check on the progress of whatever Alistair had planted this year. He stared down at his older brother. Alistair would be found in the morning...

Dezmond rubbed his aching chest. The boy leapt to his feet and pulled on his brother's sleeve. "Come on we don't have much time."

The older man got up out of bed. His bones ached and it hurt to breathe. He struggled to focus. Memories of a forgotten life nagged at him, begging for attention. Yet he couldn't grab hold of the threads of that reality. A part of him so desperately wanted to be here with his brother, to return to that time in his life when all was well and the demon hoards were just superstitious nonsense.

He followed Alistair out of their shared bedroom.

Giggling caught his attention. "You can't find me," came the familiar taunt of his young wife.

Dezmond's heart skipped a beat. He dashed deeper into the darkness of the sleeping abode, leaving Alistair calling after him.

He was outside. The sunlight was sparkling through the whispering leaves. It was late summer and his love for Desdaria was in full flux. He caught sight of her summer dress caught on a breeze, betraying her presence behind an ancient oak. He played along.

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"One more hint," he called, smiling broadly as he snuck up on the tree.

"I've given you enough hints!" Desdaria called. He rushed up behind her, grabbing her up in his arms and spinning her around. She screamed with excitement. It felt good to hold her again, he never wanted to let her go again.

Desdaria was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

She had long auburn hair and warm brown eyes and a smile that could light up a room, especially when she smiled at him. She was of a thin build and shorter than average by a few noticeable inches. She had narrow hips, an aspect that the Military Regime considered a fault as she did not have the acceptable build of a breeder. Her breasts were small but she had wide shoulders and strong arms, shaped by her long hours tending to the family farm.

She kissed him deeply, her love igniting a part of him that he had thought dormant. He pulled her closer, promising to never let her go again.

She pulled away and asked, "Is it true that you're buying daddy's land?"

"I am," Dezmond conceded. He didn't want to treat her as her father had treated her mother, he saw her as an equal, even though the Regime did not. They sat down on the hill overlooking her father's land. She leaned against him, listening to the sound of his voice.

"Your father is being pressured in all manner of ways. I fear for your safety and that of your family if we don't do something soon. This morning I asked him to include the property as part of your dowry."

He felt her body tense and he was quick to add, "It's a formality. You see your father can't outright sell the property unless the buyer has the approval of the Regime. Which I do not. I am not nearly as glorious or honoured as they feel that I should be. But-" he raised a finger and smiled cleverly at her, "he can include it as a wedding gift. You know along with the three cows and seven sheep that he gave me to take you off of his hands," he joked.

She slapped his arm playfully as rebuttal. He pulled her in close again. "Not only do I have a stronger standing in the community than your father, but as your landlord, a portion of the food produced here will be mine to claim," he explained. "I've survived off of food cube for a very long time, my dear. I haven't any problem returning the food to feed your family."

"You're doing this for us?" She was genuinely confused by this action. Two of her older sisters married well and went on to ignore the family. She vowed to be different and made sure that Dezmond understood that she intended to care for her family. But some part of her doubted that he would allow it.

"Given your father's condition and everything that's been going on, it'll be a long time before someone with his affliction will be treated with any degree of respect," he told her candidly. "This is the only way that I could think of to avoid having him bullied off of his own property, or have his family starved out."

She sighed, taking it all in. "He had to have his arm replaced," she told him, "What was he supposed to do?"

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"We'll be married in September," he told her. "If you're not comfortable with...umm...the arrangements. I'll be happy to wait until you're ready."

She blushed. He was much older than she was by almost fifteen years, and her sisters had shared every gory detail of what exactly transpired on the much anticipated wedding night, shocking her into fear. While not an uncommon arrangement as her sisters both married men in their late fifties, she had always thought it unnatural and perverted for an old man to marry a child.

"You could have married me when I was sixteen," she told him, as she was just leaving her teen years.

"I'm glad I didn't," Dezmond replied. "We wouldn't have had this opportunity otherwise."

The shape of a child could be seen at the house, looking for something, or perhaps someone. Dezmond watched him idly for some time. "I have to go," he told his young fiancée, "I promised to help with something back at the house."

He kissed her and promised to come back soon.

As he moved down the steep hill toward the farm house, the day shifted into night and his surroundings faded and shifted as his memory tried to work out the details. It was a warm night, befitting the season. Crickets sang and the twilight twinkled in a variety of brilliant hues, like some masterpiece that he had seen somewhere before. He was in the backyard of his childhood home back in the suburbs in a sleepy little community where everybody knew everybody's name. It was a time when humans were numerous and the biggest concern was freedom of speech. Government conspiracies were reserved for the excessively paranoid.

As a child, the backyard seemed massive and, because that was the way he remembered it, that's the way it appeared to him now. In the back of the property was an old workshop where his father used to fix machines of all kinds for the townsfolk while his mother had a little area of her own for gardening tools.

Alistair had given up on waiting for Dezmond, just as he had all those years ago. Guilt ate at the old man. Had he been there, maybe he could have saved his brother. He followed the boy into the workshop.

Moonlight shone through the large, crooked window resembling something out of a child's drawing. Rough concrete floors ran throughout the small workshop, evidence of the inexperienced and cheap labour that went into the construction of the old building.

Needing only a small space to slip through and mindful of how loud the garage door could sing in the quiet of the night, Dezmond slip through quietly and allowed the door to gently swing shut behind him, as though it was returning to its preferred sleeping position.

Working by the window, Alistair was carefully logging his result. He had set up a terracotta pot with his mother's help and had, like every year prior, planted something to grow. Unlike their usual routine of checking in on it every day for about a week, usually after their mother's reminder, and then forgetting about it, the young boy had become obsessed with this year's project.

The sound of metal crashing to the ground as something spooked and skittered drew his attention. "Dez, you came!"

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"Yes," the old man replied guiltily, "I did promise to help." He approached the boy and his creation. The pot remained empty, save for the rich dark dirt that filled it.

The boy glanced over at their father's restoration project, currently elevated on concrete blocks. He frowned. "It's here again," he told Dezmond. "It's been trying to eat my plant."

Once again the old man regarded the empty pot before trying to see what it was that Alistair was seeing. The shadows cast by the moonlight made seeing shapes very easy. If it were a living thing, its eyes would reflect the light, giving away its presence. Yet he saw nothing. He heard nothing.

"I thought with you here it would leave me alone," Alistair stated and shrugged before returning to his journal. "I guess I was wrong."

Dezmond regarded the empty space beneath the car before going into inspect it. He struggled with the details. His elder brother had been found dead...

- See more at: <http://www.awakeninganthology.com/Fractured-Memories/Volume-i/Dream-Eater#sthash.jBHwrkRQ.dpuf>