Dexter in the Dark

Jeff Lindsay

Published by Orion

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

IN THE BEGINNING

IT remembered a sense of surprise, and then falling, but that was all. Then IT just waited.

IT waited a very long time, but IT could wait easily because there was no memory and nothing had screamed yet. And so IT did not know IT was waiting. IT did not know it was anything at that point. IT just was, with no way to mark time, with no way even to have the idea of time.

So IT waited, and IT watched. There was not a great deal to see at first; fire, rocks, water, and eventually some little crawly things, which began to change and get bigger after a while. They didn't do very much except to eat each other and reproduce. But there was nothing to compare that to, so for a while that was enough.

Time passed. IT watched as the big things and the little things killed and ate each other aimlessly. There was no real joy to watching that, since there was nothing else to do and there were plenty more of them. But IT didn't seem able to do anything but watch. And so IT began to wonder: why am I watching this?

IT could see no real point to anything that happened and there was

nothing IT could do, and yet there IT was, watching. IT thought about this a very long time, but came to no conclusions. There was still no way to think any of this through; the whole idea of purpose wasn't quite there yet. There was just IT and them.

There were lots of them, more all the time, busily killing and eating and copulating. But there was only one of IT, and IT did none of those things, and IT began to wonder why that was, too. Why was IT different? Why was IT so unlike everything else? What was IT, and if IT actually was something, was IT supposed to do something, too?

More time passed. The countless changing crawly things slowly got bigger and better at killing each other. Interesting at first, but only because of the subtle differences. They crawled, hopped and slithered to kill each other – one actually flew through the air to kill. Very interesting – but so what?

IT began to feel uncomfortable with all this. What was the point? Was IT supposed to be a part of what IT watched? If not, then why was IT here watching?

IT became determined to find the reason IT was here, whatever it was. So now when IT studied the big things and the little things, IT studied the ways IT was different from them. All the other things needed to eat and drink or they died. And even if they ate and drank, they eventually died anyway. IT didn't die. IT just went on and on. IT didn't need to eat or drink. But gradually, IT became aware that IT did need – something; but what? IT could feel that somewhere there was a need, and the need was growing, but IT could not tell what it was; there was just the sense that something was missing.

No answers came as ages of scales and egg clutches paraded by. Kill and eat, kill and eat. What is the point here? Why do I have to watch all this when I can't do anything about it? IT began to feel just a little bit sour about the whole thing.

And then suddenly one day there was a brand new thought: Where did I come from?

IT had figured out long ago that the eggs the others hatched from came

from copulation. But IT had not come from an egg. Nothing at all had copulated to bring IT into existence. There had been nothing there to copulate when IT first became aware. IT had been there first and, seemingly, forever, except for the vague and disturbing memory of falling. But everything else had been hatched or born. IT had not. And with this thought the wall between IT and them seemed to grow vastly higher, stretching up impossibly tall, separating IT from them completely and eternally. IT was alone, completely alone forever, and that hurt. IT wanted to be a part of something. There was only one of IT – shouldn't there be a way for IT to copulate and make more, too?

And that began to seem infinitely more important, that thought; MORE of IT. Everything else made more. IT wanted to make more, too.

It suffered; watching the mindless things in their roiling riotous living. Resentment grew, turned into anger; and finally the anger turned into rage with the stupid, pointless things and their endless, inane, pointless, insulting existence. And the rage grew and festered until one day IT couldn't stand it any longer. Without a pause to think what IT was doing IT rose up and rushed at one of the lizards, wanting somehow to crush it. And a wonderful thing happened.

IT was inside the lizard.

Seeing what the lizard saw, feeling what it felt.

For a long while IT forgot rage altogether.

The lizard did not appear to notice it had a passenger. It went about its business of killing and copulating, and IT rode along. It was very interesting to be on board when the lizard killed one of the littler ones. As an experiment, IT moved into one of the little ones. Being in the one that killed was far more fun, but not enough to lead to any real purposeful ideas. Being in the one that died was very interesting and did lead to some ideas, but no very happy ones.

IT enjoyed these new experiences for a while. But although IT could feel their simple emotions, they never went beyond confusion. They still didn't notice IT, didn't have any idea that – well, they simply didn't have any idea. They didn't seem capable of having an idea. They

were just so limited – and yet they were alive. They had life and didn't know it, didn't understand what to do with it. It didn't seem fair. And soon IT was bored once more, and growing angry all over again.

And finally one day the monkey things started to show up. They didn't seem like much at first. They were small and cowardly and loud. But one tiny difference finally caught ITs attention: they had hands that let them do some amazing things. IT watched as they became aware of their hands, too, and began to use them. They used them for a great variety of brand new things: masturbating, maiming each other, and taking food from the smaller of their own kind.

IT was fascinated and watched more closely. IT watched them hit each other and then run away and hide. IT watched them steal from each other, but only when no one was looking. IT watched them do horrible things to each other and then pretend that nothing had happened. And as IT watched, for the first time, something wonderful happened; IT laughed.

And as IT laughed, a thought was born, and grew into clarity wrapped in glee.

IT thought, I can work with this.

CHAPTER ONE

What kind of moon is this? Not the bright and gleaming moon of slashing happiness, no indeed. Oh, it pulls and whines and shines in a cheap and guttering imitation of what it should do, but there is no edge to it. This moon has no wind in it to sail carnivores across the happy night sky and into slash-and-slice ecstasy. This moon instead flickers shyly through a squeaky clean window, onto a woman who perches all cheerful and perky on the edge of the couch and talks about flowers, canapés, and Paris.

Paris?

Yes; with all moon-faced seriousness, Paris is what she is talking about in that far-spreading syrupy tone. She is talking about Paris. Again.

So what kind of moon can this possibly be, with its near-breathless smile and smirking lace around the edges? It batters feebly at the window but it can't quite get in past all the sickly sweet warbling. And what kind of Dark Avenger could simply sit across the room, as poor Dazed Dexter does now, pretending to listen while mooning blearily on his chair?

Why, this moon must be a honeymoon – unfurling its marital banner across the living room night, signaling for all to rally 'round, sound the charge, once more into the church, dear friends – because Dexter of the Deadly Dimples is getting married. Hitched to the wagon of bliss pulled by the lovely Rita, who has turned out to have a life-long passion to see Paris.

Married, honeymoon in Paris.... do these words really belong in the same sentence as any reference at all to our Phantom Flenser?

Can we really see a suddenly sober and simpering slasher at the altar of an actual church in Fred Astaire tie and tails, slipping the ring onto a white-wrapped finger while the congregation sniffles and beams? And then Demon Dexter in madras shorts, gawking at the Eiffel Tower and snarfing café au lait at the Arc de Triomphe? Holding hands and trundling giddily along the Seine, to stare vacantly at every gaudy trinket in the Louvre?

Of course, I suppose I could make a pilgrimage to the Rue Morgue, a sacred site for serial slashers.

But let us be just a tiny bit serious for a moment: Dexter in Paris? For starters, are Americans still allowed to go to France? And for finishers, Dexter in Paris? On a honeymoon? How can someone of Dexter's midnight persuasions possibly consider anything so ordinary? How can someone who considers sex as interesting as deficit accounting enter into marriage? In short, how by all that is unholy dark and deadly can Dexter really mean to do this?

All wonderful questions, and very reasonable. And in truth, somewhat difficult to answer, even to myself. But here I am, enduring the Chinese water torture of Rita's expectations and wondering how Dexter can possibly go through with this.

Well then. Dexter can go through with this because he must; in part to maintain and even upgrade his so-very-necessary disguise, which prevents the world at large from seeing him for what he is, which is at best not something one would really like to have sitting across the table when the lights go out – especially if there is silverware present. And quite naturally, it takes a great deal of careful work to make sure it is not generally known that Dexter is driven by his Dark Passenger, a whispery-silk voice in the shaded back seat that from time to time climbs over the seat and into the front to take the wheel and drive us on to the Theme Park of the Unthinkable. It would never do to have the sheep see that Dexter is the wolf among them.

And so work we do, the Passenger and I, work very hard at our disguise. For the past several years we have had Dating Dexter, designed to present a cheerful and above all normal face to the world. This charming production featured Rita as The Girlfriend, and it was in many ways an ideal arrangement, since she was as uninterested in sex as I am, and yet wanted the Companionship of an Understanding Gentleman. And Dexter really does understand. Not humans, romance and love and all that gabble. No: What Dexter understands is the lethally grinning bottom line, how to find the utterly deserving among Miami's oh-so-many candidates for that final dark election to Dexter's modest Hall of Fame.

This does not absolutely guarantee that Dexter is a charming companion; the charm took years of practice, and it is the pure artificial product of great laboratory skill. But alas for poor Rita – battered by a terribly unfortunate and violent first marriage – she can't seem to tell the margarine from the butter.

All well and good. For two years Dexter and Rita cut a brilliant swathe across the Miami social scene, noticed and admired everywhere. But then, through a series of events that might well leave an enlightened observer somewhat skeptical, Dexter and Rita had become accidentally engaged. And the more I pondered on how to extricate myself from this ridiculous fate, the more I realized that it was a logical next step in the evolution of my disguise. A married Dexter – a Dexter with two ready-made children! – is surely a great deal farther from seeming to be anything at all like what he really is. A quantum leap forward onto a new level of human camouflage.

And then there are the two children.

It may seem strange that someone whose only passion is for human vivisection should actually enjoy Rita's children, but he does. I do. Mind you, I don't get all weepy eyed at the thought of a diaper or a lost tooth, since that would require the ability to feel emotion, and I am quite happily without any such mutation. But on the whole, I find children a great deal more interesting than their elders, and I get

particularly irritable with those who cause them harm. In fact, I occasionally search them out. And when I track these predators down, and when I am very sure that they have actually done what they have been doing, I make sure they are quite unable to do it ever again – and with a very happy hand, unspoiled by conscience.

So the fact that Rita had two children from her disastrous first marriage was far from repellent, particularly when it became apparent that they needed Dexter's special parenting touch to keep their own fledgling Dark Passengers strapped into a safe and snug Dark Car Seat until they could learn how to drive for themselves. For presumably as a result of the emotional and even physical damage inflicted on Cody and Astor by their drug-addled biological father, they too had turned to the Dark Side, just like me. And now they were to be My Children, legally as well as spiritually. It was almost enough to make me feel that there was some guiding purpose to life after all.

And so there were actually several very good reasons for Dexter to go through with this – but Paris? I don't know where it came from, this idea that Paris is romantic. Aside from the French, has anyone but Lawrence Welk ever thought an accordion was sexy? And I would have thought that by now it would be clear that they don't like us there, and they all insist on speaking French, of all things.

Perhaps Rita had been brainwashed by an old movie, something with a perky-plucky blonde and a romantic dark-haired man; Modernist music playing as they pursue each other around the Eiffel Tower and laugh at the quaint hostility of the dirty, Gaulloise-smoking man in the beret. Or maybe she had once heard a Jacques Brel record and decided it spoke to her soul. Who can say? But somehow Rita had the notion firmly welded into her steel trap brain that Paris was the capital of sophisticated romance, and the idea would not come out without major surgery.

So on top of the endless debates about chicken versus fish and wine versus cash bar, a series of monomaniacal rambling monologues about

Paris began to emerge. Surely we could afford a whole week, that would give us time to see the Jardin des Tuileries AND the Louvre – and maybe something by Moliere at the Comedie Francaise? I had to applaud the depth of her research. For my part, my interest in Paris had faded away completely long ago when I learned that it was in France.

Luckily for us all, I was saved from the necessity of finding a politic way of telling her all this when Cody and Astor made their subtle entrance. They don't barrel into a room with guns blazing as most children of seven and nine do. As I have said, they were somewhat damaged by their Dear Old biological Dad, and one consequence is that you never see them come and go: they enter the room by osmosis. One moment they are nowhere to be seen and the next they are standing quietly beside you, waiting to be noticed.

'We want to play Kick The Can,' Astor said. She was the spokesperson for the group; Cody never put more than four words together in a single day. He was not stupid, very far from it. He simply preferred not to speak most of the time. Now he just looked at me and nodded.

'Oh,' said Rita, pausing in her reflections on the land of Rouseau, Candide and Jerry Lewis, 'well then, why don't you –'

'We want to play Kick The Can with Dexter,' Astor added, and Cody nodded very loudly.

Rita frowned. 'I guess we should have talked about this before, but don't you think Cody and Astor – I mean, shouldn't they start to call you something more, I don't know – but just Dexter? It seems kind of –'

'How about mon papere?' I asked. 'Or Monsieur le Comte?'

'How about, I don't think so?' muttered Astor.

'I just think,' said Rita.

'Dexter is fine,' I said. 'They're used to it.'

'It just doesn't seem respectful,' she said.

I looked down at Astor. 'Show your mother you can say 'Dexter' respectfully,' I told her.

She rolled her eyes. 'Puh-leeeeeze,' she said.

I smiled at Rita. 'See? She's nine years old. She can't say

anything respectfully.'

'Well, yes, but,' Rita said.

'It's okay. They're okay,' I said. 'But Paris – '

'Let's go outside,' said Cody, and I looked at him with surprise. Four entire syllables – for him it was practically an oration.

'All right,' said Rita. 'If you really think... '

'I almost never think,' I said. 'It gets in the way of the mental process.'

'That doesn't make any sense,' Astor said.

'It doesn't have to make sense. It's true,' I said.

Cody shook his head. 'Kick the Can,' he said. And rather than break in on his talking jag, I simply followed him out into the yard.