

# PRECISELY TERMINATED

Book One in the Cantral Chronicles



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Book One - Precisely Terminated

Book Two - Noble Imposter

Book Three - Viral Execution

**AMANDA L. DAVIS**

## Endorsements

*Precisely Terminated* by Amanda L. Davis has everything I hope for in a book—an exciting journey, intriguing characters, danger at every turn, anguish, joy, and, most of all, great writing. The story begins with gloom, which is perfect for the dystopian setting, but unlike many dystopian novels, this story doesn't leave the reader in despair. I wholeheartedly endorse and recommend *Precisely Terminated*. This is a book that can be enjoyed by anyone and a story no one will soon forget.

**Bryan Davis**, author of the **Dragons in our Midst** series

Few debut authors can create a story world and characters that are original and unique, but Amanda L. Davis has succeeded. A page-turning blend of futuristic and old-world, *Precisely Terminated* pits a young heroine against a mindless computer with the power to take millions of lives. I read this book cover-to-cover and enjoyed it immensely. If you want something out of the ordinary, read *Precisely Terminated*.

**Scott Appleton**, author of **The Sword of the Dragon** series

Amanda L. Davis is an exciting new voice in Christian fiction I'm thrilled to discover. The imaginative adventure of *Precisely Terminated* kept me eager to turn pages, and Davis's vivid prose places you right in the midst of the action. A perfect read for fans of *The Hunger Games* series and other dystopian novels. You'll be rooting for these characters and clamoring for more in the Cantral Chronicles. Keep 'em coming, Miss Davis!

**C.J. Darlington**, author of *Thicker than Blood* and *Bound by Guilt*

# Acknowledgments

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Mangy and Nia, thanks go to you two as well. Without Clean Place and your encouragement (especially Mangy's), I'm not sure I ever would have started writing for fun, and that's where it all began.

And thank you to the One who gave me the idea. I hope that the theme of light always being available, even in the darkest places, shines through for every reader, especially for those who are wandering in darkness themselves, hoping to find the Light of the World.

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# CHAPTER ONE

**H***ow nice it must be to sleep so peacefully when doom awaited at dawn.* Letting out a sigh, Faye pulled a threadbare blanket from a top bunk and surveyed the many beds and sleeping bodies lined up in the cramped room. How little they all knew, these poor, ignorant laborers. Perhaps they would die unaware of the tragedy about to befall them.

As she folded the blanket and laid it back on the bed, tears welled in her eyes. Why did it have to happen this way? She was only a nursemaid, one slave in the midst of thousands. Why should she die because of one man's actions? It simply wasn't fair. No, it was cruel, inhumane, tragic ... evil.

She slowly clenched a fist. Fair or unfair, the time had come. The plan had to proceed.

A child cried out from across the room. Faye turned to locate the sound, knocking her elbow against a bunk beside her own. She squinted into the darkness across the rows of similar bunks along the walls of the narrow chamber. Thin sheets hanging around each bunk offered the only privacy to be had by the overworked slaves.

Faye pressed a hand on her forehead and blinked away her drowsiness. If only she could have slept for more than a couple of hours. Would she be able to complete her part of the plan? Was there really any choice?

The child yelled again, and the noise rose above the snores of others. Faye weaved through the maze of people lying about the

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room's floor, trying not to imagine the horror they were soon to face. Each and every soul here would die, including herself. It was too late to save anyone except the chosen refugee. Master Joel's well-laid plans had to be scrapped in exchange for a desperate rescue. He had moved too quickly. Now they had to salvage one life in the midst of the storm.

Faye tripped over someone lying in the aisle. She muttered an apology, but the sleeper paid no mind. Like the others, he was accustomed to poor treatment. The Nobles didn't even provide enough beds for their chattel. Could anyone really be surprised that the heartless Nobles thought so little of killing every inhabitant of this vast city? There were plenty of other cities to rule, mobs of replacement slaves to put into service. Although Cillinese was a major trading hub, the Nobles would scarcely feel the loss.

A petite, blonde woman sat on the floor, cradling a squirming child, her back against the wall. Faye knelt beside her and placed a hand on the small boy's head. "Any news, Kat? Have they found out for sure?" Faye's hands trembled. She never should have allowed herself those precious few moments of sleep, but exhaustion had held sway. Now everything could be lost if she didn't act quickly.

"The uprising has failed." Kat closed her eyes and rested her head against the wall. "They will raise the dome shortly." She rocked the toddler in her arms. "The night-shift dorms are buzzing with the news."

Faye shook her fellow worker's shoulder. "Kat, we mustn't give up now. We can still save a life." The image of a rising wall burned in Faye's mind. One small child could escape if Master Joel's plan worked. It had to succeed.

Kat pushed herself to her feet. She pointed to the back of the boy's neck where a red welt the size of a fingernail pulsed. "There's no chance even for the youngest of us," she said. "They're implanting tracking chips so early now. The doctors must have known about the rebellion." She blinked back tears and laid the



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boy on an empty bottom bunk. As he squirmed, Kat leaned over, kissed him on the forehead, and pulled the curtains closed around the bed, breathing a forlorn sigh. “Sweet dreams, love. I hope the sacred hymns are really true. They are our only hope.”

Faye pulled her friend into a warm hug. “I wish we could save your son, Kat.” As their embrace tightened, Faye looked over Kat’s shoulder at the curtained bunk. Would Kat be willing to go with her? Certainly she wouldn’t want to leave her son to die alone.

Pulling back, Faye nodded at the door a few feet away. “We can try to save Master Joel and Madam Brenna’s daughter, Kat. I know she’s a Noble, but if we help, maybe she’ll be able to make a difference.”

After wiping her eyes with her apron, Kat touched the red spot on the back of her own neck. “What good would that do? The Nobles have chips same as us. If we run from the gas, we’ll only get electrocuted, and I, for one, think that sounds much more painful.”

A vision of an escaping slave flashed through Faye’s mind, a recent episode she had witnessed herself. The man had been intent on running, despite the warnings. When he struck the invisible barrier, his frame jerked violently as sparks of electricity danced around his eye sockets. He died within seconds, leaving a scorched, smoking body lying on the other side of the palace gate. Faye shivered. Noble or not, Master Joel wasn’t cruel like the others. It wasn’t his choice to kill runaway slaves. His objections never seemed to matter to the Council of Eight. Still, one hope remained.

Faye took Kat’s hand in hers and whispered, “I recently learned that the Nobles’ children don’t receive chips until they are five years old.”

“I have heard that rumor,” Kat said. “If it’s true, what difference does it make?”

Faye tugged on Kat’s arm and led her to the door, still whispering. “Please help me. Master Joel’s daughter is just four. She can evade security.”

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“What?” Kat set her feet, halting at the door. “Are you talking about kidnapping her? Right out from under Master Joel’s nose?”

“It’s not a kidnapping.” Cold sweat broke out across Faye’s skin. The insanity of this plan had never been clearer. But what did it matter? If they failed, they would die anyway. They had nothing to lose.

As thoughts of the child she had taken care of for four short years came to mind, a new surge of compassion nearly overwhelmed her. Of course they should try. It would be cruel *not* to try. Monica could live in the Cantral palace. Because of his passion for the opposition, Iain had agreed to take her in as his own. And with news that Cillineese was about to be gassed buzzing through the other city-states by now, he would be waiting at the city’s edge in the messenger tunnels when Monica arrived.

“It’s Master Joel’s plan. No one else knows, but Monica’s been so sick so often, hardly anyone realizes he has a child.”

“Monica?” Kat’s brow furrowed. “I thought her name—”

“We decided to teach her a new name once we took her into hiding.” Faye opened the dormitory door, revealing a long, dark, narrow staircase. “Are you coming with me, or not?”

“I can’t leave my son. This will never work.” Kat wrung her hands. “Won’t she be with her family? How could you get her away without others noticing?”

“I told you; Master Joel knows. He set this up as a last-ditch effort. He should be waiting for me.” Faye’s wristband beeped loudly, and she checked its digital screen. The signal had come. She stepped down into the staircase and placed her palm on the wall. Low lights sputtered to life at the top of each stair, illuminating dozens of additional steps. “I have to go, with or without you.”

“But if I’m not here—”

“Kat ...” Faye rubbed her hand up and down Kat’s arm. “Your son will die whether you’re here with him or not. He’ll go peacefully in his sleep. If you want to do something for life in the midst of death, come with me. I need your help. I don’t think I can

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get Monica all the way to the wall by myself; the shocks might be brutal.”

Kat clenched a handful of her skirt fabric, her knuckles turning white. She stepped onto the first stair, shoulder to shoulder with Faye. “I’ll come. As much as I hate to leave him, I don’t want to see him die.” Glancing back at the curtains enclosing her son’s bed, she whispered, “I love you.”

Faye reached around Kat and closed the door. Since the stairwell was too narrow for them to descend abreast, Faye walked in front, her hand pressed on the wall, her fingers feeling every groove in the thick stone. She shivered despite the shawl draping her shoulders. Cool air was forever getting trapped in the slave corridors.

“Her room is one floor down from here and through another passage to the right.” Faye’s words echoed in the narrow space.

Since they stood in an outer wall of the Nobles’ palace, they could access any floor from their staircase and not have to descend ladders to lower levels. Sensing that time was running out, Faye picked up her pace, racing down the stairs and turning into the side passage. She stopped halfway down the hall. A small lightbulb flickered beside a low crack in the wall to her right.

Kat crept up to her side, murmuring, “I’m out-of-bounds even now, you know. This isn’t my side of the house.” She put a hand on the back of her neck and shivered. “I’ve already received two warnings.” She touched her wristband. “What if someone sees me? The Nobles can knock me out where I stand.”

“Everyone will be with their families.” Faye knelt by the light and passed her palm over the bulb. The light changed to green for a split second, and a chest-high panel in the wall popped open. She looked at her wristband. Now to tell the computers that Monica needed her. She pushed a button on the band’s screen. The girl had been so sickly during her infant and toddler years that the computers were accustomed to the odd hours.

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“Everyone’s with their families.” Kat put a hand on Faye’s shoulder. “Just as I should be.”

“Go back if you must. I have to save a life.” Faye crawled through the opening in the wall, hoping Kat would continue to follow. They were at least a quarter of a mile from the city wall, and she had to get Monica and the paper.

Thickly piled pink carpet enveloped Faye’s fingers as she entered the room. Still on hands and knees, she scooted away from the opening to allow Kat space to enter. A large four-poster bed dominated one corner of the suite, dwarfing the small form lying in the center.

Faye rose to her feet and padded to the bed. When she stopped beside the sleeping girl, Kat bumped into her.

“Sorry.” Kat shuddered. “The computers don’t like me being in here, and I’m not used to this. No Nobles go to the laundry room. Here, someone could come in at any moment.”

“And do what? We’re all going to die anyway.” Faye pursed her lips and shook the little girl snuggled under the blankets. “Monica, wake up, honey.”

Monica tugged her blanket over her head. “No.”

Faye pulled the top comforter off the bed, leaving just the sheet covering the girl. She tickled Monica and forced herself to laugh. “Come on, you, I need to take you somewhere. You get to meet a friend of mine. Wouldn’t you like that?”

“Ah, there you are, Faye.” A man’s voice rumbled through the room.

Kat jumped, a squeak of surprise escaping her lips. Faye whirled around to face the speaker.

A tall man garbed in dark clothing stood by a door at the other side of the room. He crossed the floor to their side in a few steps. “There’s not much time.”

Kat grabbed Faye’s arm.

Shaking her off, Faye nodded. “I know, Master Joel. I’ve arranged for someone to meet us at the wall. She’ll be taken to

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Cantral.” She looked around Joel’s shoulder. “Where is Madam Brenna?”

As a shadow fell across his face, he shook his head. “It is best you don’t know.”

Monica sat up in bed and reached out to her father. “Daddy.”

He scooped her into his arms. “I’m sorry it has to be this way.” Joel slipped a tanned muscular hand into his pocket, extracted a folded page, and handed it to Faye, keeping a tight grip on his daughter. “This contains the plans I had hoped to follow if we hadn’t been found out. Monica needs to take it out of the city with her. I can only hope your friend will know what to do with it.” He swallowed hard. “My brother will be getting his wish. But we may be able to foil him, even after death.”

Faye accepted the paper. “Yes sir.” She glanced at Kat, who now stood beside her, rigid as a board, her face completely white. “We should go now.” She reached for Monica, but the little girl wailed and clung tightly to her father’s neck, as if she knew she’d never see him again.

Joel kissed his daughter on the forehead and pried her arms away from his neck.

She kicked and wriggled. “No! No! No!”

“Come on, Monica,” Faye whispered. When she plucked Monica away from her father, she squirmed all the more. “We’re going to explore the slave tunnels, just like you always wanted to.”

Monica relaxed in her maid’s arms. “Really?” she said. “You never let me before.”

“This is a special, one-time deal.” Faye grabbed a blanket from the bed and tucked the paper in its folds. “You have to promise you’ll be quiet.”

Monica’s eyes widened. She nodded fervently, her tousled brown curls falling into her face.

Rumbling shook the room. Faye staggered. Joel caught her elbow and pushed her to the slaves’ passage door. “They’re closing the dome! The doors will be sealed in moments. You have

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to go immediately.” He shoved Faye through the opening, almost sending her tumbling down the corridor. She caught herself on the wall. Monica’s fingernails dug into her neck.

“Faye!” she wailed.

Kat shot through the door. “Come on!” She grabbed Faye’s arm and dragged her along.

Dozens of stairs flew by under their feet. Monica whimpered as they jostled down passage after passage, but she didn’t say another word.

As they descended into the underground halls, distant screams sounded above their heads. If only they could save more than just this one child.

Faye’s lungs burned. Monica kept slipping in her arms. Kat helped adjust the girl’s position every few yards. The tunnel floor shook, and bits of dirt fell from the walls and ceiling.

“We must be getting close,” Faye said, panting.

They rounded a bend in the passage. A triangular sign protruded from the wall, marking the city limits. Only a little farther—they might just make it! More dirt clods landed and crumbled. A thick metal door protruded from the ceiling, directly behind the warning sign. It descended slowly, the metal already blocking half of the doorway.

Where was Iain? Sweat dripped into Faye’s eyes, blurring her vision. He had to be there. If he decided not to show, then not even Monica could be saved. A buzzing pain rattled her skull. Her chip didn’t like her being this far out of her normal area. A beep sounded from her wristband. Her foot caught on a clump of dirt. She landed on her side, the force of impact throwing Monica from her arms. Monica unrolled from her blanket and lay crying on the floor.

“Are you all right?” Kat was at Faye’s side in an instant.

Pain lanced Faye’s chest. “Just get her,” she gasped. “Go!”

Kat scooped up the wailing child and took a hard step toward the door. A short, thin man darted out from the other side, ducking

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under the descending metal plate. He shuddered as he crossed the threshold. Sparks flickered on his shoulders. The small shocks had to be painful, but he pressed on.

“Iain!” Faye yelled. More stabbing pains shot through her chest. She struggled to her knees, still panting.

Iain grabbed Monica from Kat’s arms. Inch by inch the door separating them from freedom fell closer to the ground. With a guttural shout, Iain tossed Monica through the foot-tall gap. He dove after her, barely fitting underneath.

Shuffling on her knees, Faye snatched the paper. The door clanged shut, sealing them off from the rest of the world. She stared at the metal plate. The buzzing in the back of her head stopped. The computers no longer cared if they were out-of-bounds. They would soon be dead from the gas.

Kat sank to the floor. More dirt drizzled from the ceiling. “We’re stuck. They’ll gas us any second.” She pulled her knees up to her chest. “I don’t want to die, Faye. I haven’t done anything wrong.”

“I know. It’s not your fault.”

“They can’t do this.” Shaking her head, Kat began rocking back and forth. “Why’d you convince me to come? Now my son will die alone, and we didn’t even succeed.”

Faye smoothed the white page out on the ground. “Monica is safe. We did not fail.” She clasped her hands to keep them from shaking. Yes, Monica was safe, but they did fail to get Iain the all-important plans.

Taking off her shawl, Faye whispered, “We can still get the plans to Iain.” She wrapped the shawl around the paper. As another shudder rolled through the tunnel, she snatched the boundary sign from the wall and shoved it into the ground, gouging a sizeable hole. She placed the bundle inside and scooped loose dirt over it. “Iain will know the paper is missing. I’m sure he’ll come back to look for it once they start to repopulate the city.”

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“Long after they’ve incinerated our corpses,” Kat spat out. She rested her head on her knees. “What are they waiting for? They must have sealed the city by now!”

Faye patted the dirt covering the shawl until the site appeared the same as the rest of the floor. Standing, she used the sign’s edge to draw a tiny *X* in the wall at shoulder level to the left of the buried packet. “I pray he finds this. I don’t dare leave a bigger mark.”

Hissing sounds shot through the walls. More dirt fell from the tunnel’s sides, exposing metal pipes embedded close to the ceiling. Kat leaped to her feet. She grabbed Faye’s shoulder and wailed,

“It’s happening! It’s happening! I don’t want to die!”

White steam spewed from minuscule openings in the pipe.

Faye grabbed Monica’s discarded blanket and yanked Kat farther down the tunnel, away from the *X* and the buried bundle. Once they reached a turn, she pulled her friend to the floor and hugged her tightly. “Just think, Kat. We rescued Monica. Perhaps she will be able to help free all the slaves, and no more cities will perish.”

The vapor drifted lazily along the tunnel, filling the space above their heads. Faye fought the panic rising in her chest. She had to be brave for Kat during these last moments of their lives.

“But it’s too late for us, for our families.” Kat shook violently.

Gas clouded Faye’s vision. Holding her breath, she blinked back her own tears. Maybe it would be better to stop fighting, to just sink into death’s embrace.

“Faye,” Kat moaned. “I can’t see.”

Faye inhaled deeply. Darkness crept into the corners of her eyes. “Neither can I.” Fear finally overwhelmed her, and she wept. “Oh, God of our songs, save us now!”

Blindness took over. She struggled for a last breath, but it never came.