

VIRAL EXECUTION

BOOK THREE IN THE CANTRAL CHRONICLES

VIRAL EXECUTION

Book One - Precisely Terminated

Book Two - Noble Imposter

Book Three - Viral Execution

AMANDA L. DAVIS

Viral Execution

Volume 3 in the Cantral Chronicles

Copyright © 2011 by Amanda L. Davis

Published by Scrub Jay Journeys

P. O. Box 512

Middleton, TN 38052

www.scrubjayjourneys.com

email: info@scrubjayjourneys.com

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in printed reviews, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (printed, written, photocopied, visual electronic, audio, or otherwise) without the prior permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, either living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Print Edition: ISBN: 978-1-946253-10-1

Mobi Edition: ISBN: 978-1-946253-11-8

Second Edition - First Printing November 2020

Printed in the USA

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020920700

Facebook facebook.com/AmandaLDavis

CHAPTER ONE

“**F**elicia Sharon, you’re accused of one thousand counts of enslavement and mistreatment of fellow persons as well as ...” Simon stood at the front of the crowded courtroom, looking at a stack of papers in one hand. “... ten million counts of mismanagement of authority.” He wrinkled his bushy white eyebrows. “Ten million? Can that be correct?”

Monica crouched on the marble tiles just outside the room, peering through the crack in the barely open double doors that allowed her a glimpse of what once housed the Council of Eight’s meetings.

Someone inside the court answered Simon’s question too softly to hear over the buzzing of the wall slaves and Seen who watched from rows of cushioned benches lined up in the room.

“Ten million it is, then.” Simon shook a bony finger at Felicia. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

She stood behind one of eight mahogany desks, wearing the simple black dress of a Seen, her hands resting on the desk’s top. “I did what I could, Simon. You must know that. I helped Monica in the end.” She raised her hands, jingling a metal chain that bound her wrists together. “Without me, she would have failed.”

Monica nodded, though no one in the courtroom could see her. Felicia shouldn’t have to stand trial. Fox would have won if she hadn’t helped stop him.

Viral Execution

“You had my brother transferred!” someone in the crowd shouted.

More cries of protest rang out.

“My daughter lived in the southwest wing and got transported to the fields!”

“Your husband terminated my child!”

The shouts blurred together in a chaotic cacophony.

Simon banged an old boot against a desktop. “Order! Order! This is not how trials are supposed to go. We’ve been over this. Must I remind you with every Noble who comes to trial?”

Some of the shouts diminished, but one man called out, “How can we know what she says about the computers is true? She just wants us to release her!”

Monica clenched a fist. If only Simon would let her speak. She could tell them the truth.

“Aaron Markus, my brother”—Felicia choked on the words—“tried to kill me for what I did. Why would I risk death, then turn around and lie about my deeds?”

“That’s probably a lie, too!” the same man yelled. The crowd erupted into more shouts.

Shaking her head, Monica let out a long sigh. At this rate it would take weeks to put all eight Council members on trial.

Simon banged on the desk again, and everyone slowly quieted.

A hand touched Monica’s shoulder. She whirled around and jumped to her feet.

A dark-haired woman in black Seen dress stood beside her, a frown marring her pale features. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

“Tresa!” Monica pulled the courtroom door closed, muffling the buzzing voices. “You startled me. I thought you were watching the trial.”

“I was, but I slipped out during a break.” Tresa’s frown deepened. “You’d better disappear. The fewer Nobles who know your identity, the better.”

Amanda L. Davis

Monica shrugged. She had avoided Nobles her entire life, so it wouldn't be difficult to continue doing so. She needed to be in that courtroom standing in support of Felicia, the woman who had saved her.

Heavy footfalls sounded down a nearby corridor. Trig, a large Seen man, led Aaron Markus toward them.

Suppressing a shudder, Monica edged away from the double doors. Aaron—the man who once ruled the world and had tried to kill her. He shot her an angry glare, but with his hands bound in chains and Trig standing by, Aaron wouldn't do anything violent.

Tresa rested a hand on Monica's shoulder. "Trig, Felicia's trial isn't over. Why are you here?"

"I was told to come. You can see here." Trig dug in the pocket of his Seen uniform and pulled out a scrap of paper. "A boy brought me this. He said it was from Simon."

"Alfred?" Monica took the note. Tresa's son often ran errands for Simon now.

"No, some other boy. I don't know his name."

She turned the note over, revealing the words *Bring Aaron to the courtroom. His time has come.* written in a neat script that didn't look like Simon's normal scrawl. Maybe he was trying to write more neatly now that he held an official office.

"That doesn't look like Simon's writing, Trig," Tresa whispered. She looked over her shoulder toward the closed doors. "They'll be breaking any moment. They've been stalled for half an hour now."

"You brought me up here for nothing, then?" Aaron scowled and shook his chains. "These trials are a farce. You won't accomplish anything with them. Wall slaves aren't intelligent enough to understand a court system."

"Dismissed!" Simon's shout echoed from behind the closed double doors. "Get out of here, all of you, and don't come back until you can behave!"

Viral Execution

Tresa grabbed Monica by the shoulders. “Come on. If Simon sees you here ...”

The doors burst open. Men and women marched out, all chattering loudly. Most wore scowls or frowns, but others seemed excited, like this was a game.

Trig steered Aaron to the edge of the crowd and stood beside Monica and Tresa near a paneled wall.

Aaron shrugged off Trig’s grip. “I can take care of myself, Seen. I don’t need a bodyguard.”

As the crowd filtered into side halls, a few people glanced at Aaron. The grumbling conversations took on an angry tone.

Monica backed against the wall and watched the crowd closely. No one would dare hurt Aaron out in the open, would they?

Simon’s gray head appeared in the midst of the people, and he elbowed his way to Trig’s side. “Trig, confound you, what are you doing here? It’s not safe for Aaron to be out of his cell!”

A shattering noise sounded nearby. A woman screamed. Tresa’s grip on Monica’s shoulders tightened, sending pain down her arms. She tugged away from Tresa. “Is Felicia safe?”

“Garth is with her.” Simon squinted at the crowd flowing by. “He’ll make sure she stays out of harm’s way.”

“Put that down!” A man’s voice echoed up the hall. “Stop!”

The crowd parted in a rippling motion as people scooted to the sides. A man in Seen uniform charged Trig.

“He has a knife!” a woman screamed.

Tresa gasped and pushed Monica behind her.

Aaron dodged to the side. Simon threw himself in front of Aaron as a burly Seen man, even bigger than Trig, ran toward them with a shard of glass clutched in one hand. Blood dripped down his wrist, but he didn’t slow.

“Fisher, don’t!” a woman called. “They’ll kill you!”

Trig darted forward, but Fisher slashed at him with his makeshift knife, slicing Trig’s arm. Trig punched Fisher in the face, but Fisher shoved Trig to the side and dove at Aaron.

Amanda L. Davis

Aaron raised his chained hands in a defensive position. Fisher hit the side of Simon's head with a clenched fist.

"No!" The sharp scream escaped Monica's throat. "Simon!" Trig grabbed at Fisher again, but he lurched out of the way.

Fisher raised the glass dagger and plunged it into Aaron's neck. "Aaron!" Monica and Tresa cried his name in unison.

Blood splattered across the floor and dripped down Aaron's chest. Gasping, he pushed feebly at Fisher with bound hands. "Why?"

Fisher released the dagger, still embedded in Aaron's neck, and stepped away. "You had my daughter terminated."

Trig grabbed Fisher from behind. Fisher relaxed his shoulders. "I won't fight you, Trig. I've had my revenge."

Aaron gasped again and fell against Simon, knocking him down and pinning him to the floor.

The crowd pressed in around Trig and Fisher. "Got what he deserved," someone muttered.

Simon crawled out from under the Noble's body. "That was unexpected." He clambered to his feet. Blood covered his shirt and hands, and he shook a finger at Fisher. "What were you thinking, man? If he dies ..."

Trig unfastened Aaron's chains and bound them around Fisher's wrists. Fisher stared silently straight ahead.

Aaron's eyelids fluttered, and he reached for the glass shard. Monica knelt beside him. "No, don't touch it." She looked up at Tresa who stood there gaping. "You have to help him. I know he's a Noble, but—"

Aaron yanked the glass from his throat. Blood gushed from the wound, pulsing with every beat of his heart.

"Aaron!" Monica clamped her hands to his neck, but the blood oozed between her fingers and onto the floor.

"Keep up the pressure." Tresa knelt beside her and laid her hands over Monica's. "Simon, get Aric!"

"Let 'im die," someone growled.

Viral Execution

Simon edged toward an opening in the group of people, but two men shifted to block his way, their arms crossed and expressions sour.

One man spoke, “Don’t do it, Simon. We’d have sentenced him to death anyway. He knew that.”

A small boy pushed his way to the front. “Simon?”

Monica locked gazes with the boy. “Alfred! Get Aric, quick!” Warm blood still pulsed against her fingers.

Alfred nodded and darted away. A man grabbed at him, but he slipped by with ease and disappeared in an instant.

The man stepped forward. “Get away from Aaron, you two.” He pushed past Trig who held Fisher against the wall.

Monica gulped. There was nothing she and Tresa could do to stop the man if he decided to finish killing Aaron. She pressed harder on Aaron’s neck, but the blood wouldn’t stop flowing.

Trig glanced between Fisher and the man. “Trey, leave them alone.”

Trey stared at Trig for a moment, as if sizing him up. After a few seconds, Trey stepped back into the crowd, muttering, “He’ll die anyway. They can’t fix a neck wound like that.”

The crowd started to disperse, talking among themselves as if nothing had happened.

Aaron’s gasps grew ragged. As he gulped, his Adam’s apple moved beneath Monica’s hands.

“Hold on, Aaron,” Monica whispered. His skin now cold, his gaze darted from Tresa back to Monica.

“We’re coming!” Alfred’s shrill cry carried over the noise of the milling people.

“Get out of my way!” Aric’s shout sounded close by, but the Seen grew louder. They blocked the hallways.

Monica fought the urge to rise to her feet. She had to keep the pressure on Aaron’s wound, but the Seen! How could they do this? They had to let Aric through!

Amanda L. Davis

“Let them by, you miscreants!” Simon charged forward waving his blood-covered arms. He pushed two men to the side and pulled Alfred through the crowd. Aric followed close behind, a black bag clutched in one hand. He ran toward them, but Simon stayed behind and whispered something to Alfred.

With a quick nod, Alfred ran back into the crowd and disappeared once more.

Trey grabbed Aric’s arm, but Aric shook him off with a snarl. “Don’t touch me, Seen!” Aric opened his bag and dropped to his knees at Monica’s side. “Hold on, Uncle.”

“We should just kill them all,” Trey muttered. “Save us the trouble of these stupid trials.”

Aric fumbled with some gauze. “Got to stop the bleeding.” Aaron’s eyes closed.

Her heart thumping, Monica watched Trey inch closer. If he decided to cause more trouble, could Trig stop him? Trig hadn’t been able to stop Fisher, and Trey looked bigger than Fisher.

Aric slipped a thick wad of gauze beneath Monica’s fingers and over the wound. “You’re doing a good job. Hold that in place.”

She nodded. “Should someone tell Melody?” Aaron’s wife would want to know.

“No, there’s enough chaos here.” Aric pulled a curved needle and black thread from his bag. “There isn’t time to take him to the infirmary.” He poured a clear, potent-smelling liquid over the needle and thread. “And we have no supplies left there anyway, thanks to Simon’s dispersal of the medications.” Shaking his head, he moved the needle and thread closer to Aaron’s neck. “This probably isn’t going to work. He’s lost too much blood, and I don’t have the right tools, but I’ll do what I can.”

“Is there anything else I can do?” Monica bit her lip. Aaron had tried to kill her, but no one deserved to die like this.

“Not really.” Aric gave Tresa a clean cloth, then eased Monica’s hands from the wound. “You did a great job.” He opened the wound farther with his fingers, drawing forth more blood.

Viral Execution

Gulping, Monica looked away.

"I have to close the artery before I can stitch up the skin," Aric murmured. "Tresa, please wipe blood away from the site and monitor his vital signs."

"Yes sir."

"What's going on?" Felicia stalked out of the Council room. Garth followed close at her heels, his large shoulders hunched.

"Madam," Garth said, "you must stay in the Council room. Simon ordered it."

"Felicia," Monica called. If Felicia saw her brother like this ... "Please, it's safer for you in the Council room."

Simon jogged over and stood between Felicia and her brother. "Felicia, I must insist you return to the courtroom at once."

"Not until you tell me what's happening!" Felicia shook off Garth's attempts to guide her away. "I've been completely cooperative with all of your demands thus far, and enough is enough. I heard people calling Aaron's name."

Trig whispered something to Simon, then walked through the crowd and down a hall with Fisher at his side.

A few people clapped Fisher on the back as he passed, and murmurs of "We'll vote in your favor" and "Good job" floated through the corridor.

"Simon, stop stalling." Felicia set her hands on her hips and craned her neck. "Whose blood is that on your shirt? Is Aaron all right?"

"*All right* is not the phrase I'd use." Simon looked down at his clothing. "I'd best get cleaned up. We need to leave soon."

"Aric, his heart rate is dropping too quickly!" Tresa's words sounded strained.

"I know! I know!"

Monica finally risked a look. Blood pooled around Aric's knees and covered his and Tresa's arms up to their elbows. She gulped. How could Aaron survive so much blood loss?

Amanda L. Davis

Aric pressed a needle into Aaron's neck and pulled a suture tight. "There's nothing I can do; our blood supply is drained. We're out of everything but antiseptic!"

Felicia pushed past Simon. "Aaron!" The name escaped in a short shriek. "Who did this?"

"Don't worry, Felicia, the perpetrator is in custody." Simon started to pat her on the shoulder but stopped and drew his blood-covered hand back to his side.

"Don't worry? My brother is dying!"

"It's what he deserved!" someone shouted.

Felicia whirled and faced the crowd. "You Seen and wall slaves think you're better than us? You murder as soon as you're given the chance. People are burning the city just because they can—because they want to do something to express their anger, but they're destroying themselves." She shook a fist. "Killing us won't help, but I'm sure that won't make any difference to you. I would be willing to do any work a fair court assigns me, but how can I listen to murderers and their hypocritical accomplices?"

The crowd stirred and murmured amongst themselves. Some took a few steps forward and then back again, as if trying to decide what to do.

Monica edged away. Felicia was just going to make them angrier.

"Madam, calm down." Garth stood beside her, his hands behind his back.

Simon nodded. "There aren't many here who will side with you, no matter what you say. They've been beaten down for too many years. The brutal termination of friends and family has a way of deafening the ability to listen to reason."

"Aric." Tresa's whisper barely sounded above the mutterings.

"I know." Aric heaved a deep sigh.

Monica crouched beside them. Aric poured some clear liquid over his hands and scrubbed them clean, allowing the disinfectant

Viral Execution

to spill to the floor and mix with Aaron's blood. A needle still protruded from Aaron's neck, and the thread lay slack in places.

Tresa wiped her hands on a towel.

"You're not finished, are you?" Monica shook her head. If they were, it must mean ...

"He's dead." Tresa finished wiping her hands, then laid the towel over Aaron's face. "We'll have to inform Melody."

"Dead?" Felicia covered her face with her hands.

A loud cheer echoed around the hall. Someone even threw a hat in the air.

"No, no, no!" Simon waved his arms. "This is not how civilized people should behave! A man has died. You should not react this way!"

The cheer grew louder, drowning out Simon's protests.

Tresa spoke to Aric, but her words were overpowered as well. After a moment, she turned and ran down a side hall, sidling through the crowd with little trouble.

Monica edged close to Aric and spoke into his ear. "Where is she going?"

He shook his head. "Can't hear you!"

"Death to the Nobles!" Trey punched the air with a fist. The crowd took up the cry. "Death to the Nobles!"