

# Devin Strikes Again

by Pat Ryan

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Father felt his anger lessening as he looked at the pictures laid before him. He could hear the chuckles and laughter of the others in the room and found it hard to keep a stern face in light of what he was confronted with.

There, smiling back at him was the face of his youngest son, hanging by his legs from a tree, playfully pawing at a hysterically laughing Catherine as she stood just below him. The expression on that feline face caused Father's heart to swell up with emotion. He read the subtitle, written in his other son's distinctive script, **CAT UP A TREE!**, which only served to break through his scolding veneer and cause him to burst out in laughter.

Mouse leaned heavily over his shoulder to see what caused Father's reaction then exclaimed "Vincent up a tree!", surprise all over his face. The reaction from the others in the room only served to warm Father's heart even more.

Father remembered the worry he felt just four days ago when Catherine showed up anxious, eyes full of worry, from the note she received for Vincent marked "**URGENT!**" Devin knew that if he wrote her and asked her to bring it to him, she would stop everything and do so immediately. That she did. Father handed the picture over to the others and glanced at the next. His mind wandered back to that afternoon and to how such a serious situation turned into this very happy one.

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"Now, Vincent, I think that that section of pipe needs to be inspected and, if necessary, repaired immediately. We don't have time to waste. I know supplies are low but..." Winslow's words held much conviction, due to the fact that he knew that section to be an area the children often liked to play in, and that after the cave-in last month, he was not willing to take any more chances. Vincent placed a gentle hand on the big man's shoulder to ease his anger.

"I agree, that section is getting old. I have been down to inspect it, but our supplies are limited and if this section," Vincent pointed to a separate area on the map which was laid out before the three men. "... if these pipes are not repaired now, we might have to repair the damage that the resulting flooding would do."

Father added in "Vincent is right, Winslow. Much as I want both jobs completed as soon as possible, we must think of the more immediate danger to our people and fix the lower level first. I will ask the children to keep an eye out for more supplies and maybe Mouse can go above and scavage the other materials we will need."

Vincent looked at Father questioningly, which caused the elderly patriarch to rephrase his last statement. "Maybe Vincent can go above and find the things we will require."

The three men smiled at Father's realization. It wasn't until a familiar voice from the doorway surprised them, did the men change their focus.

"Thank you, Eric," came Catherine's voice, as she entered the chamber from atop the library stairs. She

looked quickly over the railing, spotted Vincent and descended the stairs in relative haste.

"Catherine!" Vincent came forward to address her in private, a little concerned by the waves of worry that were emanating from her. Father too, was surprised at her presence. This being a Thursday, he knew she was supposed to be at work. He too drew closer.

"Vincent!" she started, a little out of breath. "I received this letter for you at the office. It's from Devin... He wrote that it was urgent I give it to you! I came straight from my office as soon as I could." Catherine handed the letter to Vincent, then looked eagerly into his eyes.

Vincent wasted no time, opening the letter with one slash of a sharpened claw. He read the few words written on the page then turned his face upward in a blank stare. Father and Winslow grew restless, both chiming in within seconds of each other.

"Well!...What does he say, Vincent?"

Vincent began to pace as he folded the letter up and handed it to Father. Father read the note aloud for the benefit of the others present.

*Vincent:*

*Need your help desperately! Don't  
delay! Come immediately! Urgent!*

*Devin*

"Cryptic note!" Catherine added. "What do you suppose it means? Could Devin be in danger?" She looked up at Vincent who was now concentrating very hard, trying to touch his brother's mind. His efforts grew fruitless as his pacing increased.

Father's voice became mixed, both with the concern for his oldest son and with the anger at that son's request. "Devin knows you can't go to him. What was he thinking of when he wrote this note?"

Vincent stopped just short of his father. "He must be in real danger! Don't you see, Father or else he wouldn't ask this of me. I must go to him!" Vincent started out of the room, only to be stopped by a delicate hand on his arm.

Catherine turned him to look at her. "Vincent, you can't make this journey by yourself. It is too dangerous! Let me go and see what he is talking about. I can..."

"No, Catherine!" Vincent stopped her. "If anything were to happen, I would be too far away to protect you!"

"Then if you must go, let me at least get you there safely. We could leave tonight. I could rent a van, we could drive by night. It would be much safer and it would assure that you get there to help Devin!"

After more attempts by Father to talk his youngest son out of going, the group finally decided that Catherine's was the safest suggestion available and she quickly returned to her office. Telling Joe that there was an emergency in the family, Catherine quickly arranged to have the next day off and went to make plans for their trip.

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"Here, Father... Look at this one." Father was brought back by Catherine, handing him another picture. There before him was a photo of Vincent and Catherine standing in the doorway of the cabin, looking a little angry.

Catherine narrated this picture, which was subtitled ***MAD AS HELL!*** "That was taken as we walked through

the door and found out that there was no real emergency." She smiled as she remembered the emotions of the moment.

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"It's not much further, Vincent, mostly back roads. I think it's safe enough," Catherine said as she turned off the main drag onto a series of twisty dirt trails.

Vincent eased out from the box Catherine had brought. She felt that if they were stopped by the police, that he would be safer in some kind of cover. Due to his size, the only thing that seemed suitable was a large refrigerator box, she saw in the back alley of a Whirlpool factory in East Queens, near where she rented the van. It was a more comfortable fit and gave Vincent a little more confidence than trying to make the trip without cover.

The windows of the van were tinted to provide even more security as they traveled out of the city. Within twenty minutes of turning off the main roads, Catherine and Vincent found themselves pulling up to a small cabin. The lights were on inside and a very familiar van was parked in the driveway.

"We're here... Let me go in first to make sure all is clear. Okay?" Catherine looked to Vincent for his understanding. Very wearily, he gave her the go ahead and remained poised to strike at the first sign of her being threatened. Catherine walked up to the door and knocked. Soon the door opened...

Charles stood in the doorway and waved for Vincent to come in, while Catherine entered to confront a very sly Devin. When the beast-man reached the cabin, he was assaulted by Catherine's strong words at, of all people, his brother.

**"YOU DID WHAT?!"** she raved. **"DEVIN! OF ALL THE CHILDISH...IMMATURE...UNTHINKABLE THINGS..."**

Vincent appeared beside his beloved. The concern evident on his face. "What is the problem?... Devin, why is Catherine so angry?"

"I'll tell you why I'm angry! Your loving brother Devin had brought us up here on a wild goose chase! He risked your life just so you could get away from the city for a few days." Catherine turned to face the accused, as did Vincent, in shock. Suddenly a flash startled them both, as Devin pulled out a polaroid from behind his back and snapped their picture.

"This will make a great beginning." he said smiling as he watched the photo develop before his eyes.

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Catherine smiled to herself as she remembered all the emotion behind that particular picture.

Mouse yanked on Vincent's sleeve. "You explain picture, Mouse?" the blonde-haired boy handed a picture to Vincent and listened eagerly for the explanation.

The picture was of Vincent surrounded by feathers, which flew about his hand in a whirling pattern. He held a pillow that was, itself, losing most of the stuffing and the expression on his face was that of playful exuberance. The picture was subtitled **FUZZ VERSES FEATHERS!**

Vincent remembered the circumstances surrounding that photo and of the other that accompanied it. That one showed he and Devin, in their nightshirts, engaged in a pillow fight, while a very bemused Charles stood in the background smiling widely. It was subtitled **LET THE GAMES BEGIN!**

Mouse tugged on his arm, eager for him to tell the story. Vincent began...

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"Hey Fuzz... I'm glad you decided to stay." Devin laid on the floor next to the fireplace in one of the two sleeping bags he had purchased for the occasion. Vincent laid beside him in the other.

"It was too late to have Catherine drive all the way back. She was extremely tired after our discussion about this little trick." Vincent's voice held a bit of harshness.

"You've got that right! I didn't know that a classy lady like that knew some of those words. She really shocked me, I tell ya!" Devin sat up within the confines of his sleeping bag.

"As you shocked both of us with your dishonesty." Vincent added, as he laid and looked into the fire's intensity.

"Look Fuzz...I said I was sorry for the lie, but there was no other way to get you two up here. I knew that if I just asked both of you to come, you wouldn't and the old man would have never agreed to it."

"Father is right in his concern. This is much too dangerous for me to take lightly. And why involve Catherine? Had we been stopped, she would have easily been in real trouble for her part in this. Did you think about that?"

Vincent still refused to look at his brother, which bothered Devin no end.

"I sent the note to Catherine because I wanted her to get involved. She wanted so badly to get you up into the country that one time and Father prevented it, just as he would have prevented it this time. If I hadn't put my two cents in. What? Are you saying that you didn't want to go with her that last time?"

Vincent's eyes looked deep into that memory of yesterday and he replied. "I wanted nothing more than to grant even one of her desires. It is what I desire most!" Vincent's gaze grew more distant as his brother watched from beside him.

A smile grew on Devin's face as he picked up his pillow and bonked the kitten-man that still lay wrapped in the sleeping bag. Vincent looked up at his brother in surprise.

Devin responded to his gaze. "Lighten up, Fuzz! You're all together too serious for being on vacation." This he followed with another swipe of the pillow, and another, then another. Vincent got out his hand to stop the onslaught, only managing to rip into the item with his sharply clawed fingers.

Struggling under fire, Vincent knocked over the end table, as he moved to free his legs from the confining covers. It fell crashing to the floor and woke both Charles and Catherine, who were sleeping in the two other rooms. Both rose to see what the ruckus was all about.

Meanwhile, Vincent, now freed from the quilting, grabbed his pillow and began matching blows with his opponent. Feathers were flying all through the room and were the first thing that confronted Catherine and Charles as they entered the main living quarters.

Amazed to see the two men acting so childish, Catherine quickly grabbed the camera and began snapping off picture after picture, while Charles moved to the other side of the room for a better vantage point at the action.

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"It wasn't until both pillows were completely empty and we were too tired from laughing to continue, that we stopped." Vincent finished with a broad mischievous grin.

"Hence came this next picture," Catherine said holding up a photo of the two men ganging up to surprise Charles with one last swipe of the damaged cushions. It's subtitled ***SWEET REVENGE!***

Father laughed as he looked over to see more clearly the picture she held. Father settled back in his chair once more holding the *CAT UP A TREE* photo. He rubbed his chin, a bit puzzled by the pile of pictures before him.

"I don't understand... If Devin wished this to be an outing for Vincent, then why all of this?" Father

motioned over the clutter upon his desk.

"Ah... but that is the beauty of it, Father." Catherine began. "Devin knew how much this was a desire of yours too... He wanted you to be able to share in the laughter. Since you could not come yourself, he thought that these pictures were the next best thing... Devin calls them the perfect birthday present... and I have to agree. They are wonderful," she ended with a smile.

Catherine leaned heavily into Vincent who now stood at her side. She was just beginning to feel the fatigue, the journey back had brought with it. Vincent could sense her fatigue and increased his hold about her waist to give her added support.

Father and the others continued to pour through the literally hundreds of photos, which lasted long into the evening. Their smiles and laughter warmed both Catherine and Vincent's hearts, as they watched their friends sharing in the gift Devin had given them.

When most had retired for the evening, Vincent suggested Catherine stay below, her fatigue was clearly making the trip above intolerable. He escorted her to their adjacent guest chamber after she had bid Father and the others good night. Upon returning, Vincent peered into the study one last time.

There sat his father, still smiling as he reviewed his son's wonderful gift. The little bit of resistance he showed in the beginning had long since faded and was replaced with love and laughter. One by one, he viewed privately every moment of his youngest son's trip as if trying to imagine that he was there experiencing it with him.

Pictures of Vincent and Devin racing across a pond, chasing each other about the cabin grounds like children, all part of a wonderful gift. A particularly precious shot was of Catherine and Vincent walking arm in arm through a meadow of tall grass. By the expression on their faces, they were unaware of being photographed. Yet another showed them in a loving embrace, still under the golden sunshine. The caption: **TRUE LOVE!**

Father smiled lovingly at the evidence of his son's happiness. All through Vincent's childhood, Father worried about the limitations that would most probably cause him to live a lifetime of loneliness. Now there was Catherine, and the love she gave his son so freely. It was truly a miracle.

"Coming to bed, Father?" came the velvety voice from the doorway, as Vincent watched his father return him a smile.

"In a few minutes, Vincent... Goodnight." he returned.

"Goodnight then, Father... Sweet dreams..." Vincent smiled softly and left his father to retire for the evening.

Holding up once more the picture of Devin and Vincent locked in a brotherly embrace, Father whispered "Goodnight children... I love you both," then touched it softly to his lips.

Father extinguished the candles about the room, then made his way slowly down the hallway toward his chamber. Along the way he looked in on Catherine and Vincent who were not each sleeping soundly in their separate chambers. As he eased himself under the covers, Father laid a group shot of Catherine, Vincent and Devin up against the candle holder on his bedside table. Tomorrow he would ask Cullen to make a frame for it. As he finally relaxed, Father saw the humor of his son's antics. *Truly Devin had struck again*, he thought as he drifted off into a wonderfully peaceful slumber.

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