

A wooden chair with a ladder back, set against a red background. The chair is the central focus of the image, with its backrest and seat clearly visible. The text is overlaid on the image.

an Anderson Dexter novel

# Act of Will

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an Andersson Dexter novel  
by M. Darusha Wehm

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ISBN 978-0-9737467-6-1

## *Sneak Preview*

On February 14, 2011, get the audio podcast or buy the complete book in print, audiobook or ebook at <http://darusha.ca/actofwill>

In the meantime, read the first Andersson Dexter novel, ***Self Made***.

<http://darusha.ca/selfmade>

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## Also by M. Darusha Wehm

***Beautiful Red***

***Self Made*** (an Andersson Dexter novel)

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## Chapter One

Luis Harker was not a particularly emotional man, but he was crying now. Big, racking sobs convulsed his body, straining his bound hands against the back of the chair he was tied to, the cuffs digging into his wrists. When the man had first put the restraints on him, Luis found himself, lucid through the fear for a brief moment, wondering if they were the new electromagnetic cuffs that all the Security guys were talking about at work. It had been a long time since he had been able to think about anything like that.

He barely even noticed the room he was in, on the face of it a tiny anonymous box, like every other apartment he had seen. But a closer look showed the room for what it was missing — there was no storage area, no zapper for heating food. Just a stained mattress, a door that Luis might have guessed led to the lav had he been able to think about it. And the chair. All of Luis' attention was riveted to the chair in the middle of the room.

It was a typical metal chair, the kind you would find in the waiting room of an upgrade salon or a cheap food booth. There was nothing remarkable about it, other than the fact that Luis had been tied to it for what felt like an eternity, bound by thick polymer rope that seemed to get tighter the more he struggled. He had stopped struggling a long time ago; now the uncontrollable movement of his body as he sobbed was the only tension against his restraints.

When the man had first grabbed him, Luis had put up a fight. He had been leaving work, the sky already dark but the lights of the city bright enough that he felt he should have seen the man crouching in the small alleyway. But while Luis was walking to the train stop, he was going online after a long day at work, checking his messages and scanning the news boards. He had made that walk 260 days a year for three years and he barely even watched where he was going any more. With his display overlaid on his vision, he could see just enough to avoid the other commuters while he surfed the boards and answered mail, but that had always been enough before.

Luis was in the middle of reading an article about a new brand of food bars which promised increased mental acuity and focus as well as the usual nutritional supplements, when he felt the wind go out of him. He was dazed, but he could still see through the words and images on his display, and he saw a figure duck in front of him and take what looked like a small metal box from a pocket. Luis had no idea what was happening, but instinct told him it was not a good thing, so he tried to knock the box from the other

person's hand.

Even though he worked in the physical upgrade industry, and wore the body of a fashionable young man about town, Luis had never been all that interested in physical things. Like many people, he lived his recreational life online, in the virtual world Marionette City which he accessed through his neural implants. So, he was completely unprepared for the pain and loss of balance that came when his hand made contact with the metal box, and in the moment of his confusion, the other person found an opening. The box swung up and Luis felt rather than saw an arc of electricity shoot from the box toward his face. Everything slowly faded to gray and Luis felt himself fall to the ground. He felt hands holding his wrists together and binding them with the lightweight restraints that his addled mind incongruously focussed on. Then he was out.

When he opened his eyes, he was in the room, tied to the chair with his wrists behind his back. He was alone. Of course, he screamed for help, tried to go online and call for help, but his screams went unanswered and he found his connection to everywhere net scrambled. The small, still lucid part of his brain guessed that whatever hit him from the metal box had screwed with his implants, but he kept trying to connect, over and over again until the full implication of his situation caught up with him, and he began to cry uncontrollably. He was going to die, after that crazy fucker did god only knows what to him first. Luis threw up all over himself.

He waited, alone and afraid, smelling the stink of his vomit and sweat. With every minute that passed, he became more afraid, less able to think clearly. By the time the apartment door opened, Luis couldn't even speak. He simply thrashed at his bounds as the man entered, grunting incoherently as the man slowly walked toward him, Luis' eyes wild with pure animal terror. Even though he was looking right at the man, there was no way Luis would ever have been able to identify him, even if he lived. He never even noticed the knife.

It gleamed as if it were a brand new laser edged cutter, but it was old. The short handle was made of fossilized bone, worn smooth and shiny by the sweat of untold numbers of hands. The blade, Damascus steel, was inlaid with an intricate pattern — wavy like water — as it had been folded and forged by hand. The steel was honed to a razor edge, its tip a dagger's pinpoint. It was beautiful.

The hand which held the knife, loose and comfortable, belonged to a man who was as ordinary as the weapon was remarkable. He had a body sculpted by the nutrients and

chemicals in budget food bars — young, thin, muscular, healthy and utterly nondescript. His face was dotted with the small metal studs most everyone wore, implants which upgraded the neural interface with everywhere.net. He could have been anyone; Luis could easily have been his brother. Even his voice was unremarkable, but Luis jumped when the man spoke.

“I’m sorry about this,” the man said softly, tracing the polymer bounds with the tip of the knife. “I don’t usually keep people like this for so long, but I was unavoidably detained. I’m sorry; it must be very uncomfortable.”

Luis struggled to make sense of the man’s words, tried to formulate something to say, something to get him out of this. “Please,” he croaked, his voice hoarse from shouting, “please. Let me go.”

The man laughed, the sound surprisingly light. There was no trace of cruelty in his voice when he said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t do that.” He drew the knife absently across Luis’ arm, a thin line of blood welling up in its wake. “Make no mistake,” he said, “I am going to kill you. But there's no reason why we can't both enjoy it.” He pulled the small metal box from a pocket and Luis felt the spark of lightning again. One of the nodes in his face burned for a fraction of a second, then he felt the sensation change to one of intense pleasure.

The man began the work with the knife, and Luis felt physical ecstasy like he never had imagined. He spent twenty glorious minutes before he finally died.