

# **THE SLEEPWALKER LEGACY**

**Christopher Hepworth**

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## CHAPTER 1

### *Beijing, China.*

The Chinese government's chief negotiator was drenched in sweat, despite the chill of the air conditioning. He knew he was beaten and the resulting loss of face would follow him around like a black shadow for the rest of his life. He waited for the Englishman's inevitable counterproposal that would signal the end of his lucrative government career.

'I think we can agree that three hundred dollars a kilogram for dysprosium is a most generous price, particularly for a ten-year contract.'

Sam Jardine looked at his Chinese government hosts to gauge the impact of his proposal. The Trade Minister projected a hostile glance towards his perspiring negotiator that morphed from thunderous anger into outright derision. The rest of the Chinese team averted their eyes, shuffled their notes nervously and inched their chairs as far away from their chief negotiator as they could.

It had taken three years of meticulous planning to get to this point; Sam knew he was treading a very fine line between success and failure. No Western negotiator had ever managed to achieve a price reduction of this magnitude from the Chinese government. They treated their stockpile of rare earth metals like a national treasure. Dysprosium oxide was a crucial material in the manufacture of disk drives and until recently, the government of China had enjoyed a near monopoly on supply.

Silence descended over the room as the Chinese considered Sam's offer. Sam looked to his left at his suave boss, Sir Mackenzie Reigate, chief executive officer of the British multinational company, Sovereign Computers. 'Sir Mac', as he was generally known, regularly rubbed shoulders with the elite of British business and society. He was aghast at the magnitude of the cost reduction Sam had requested from the Chinese – even though his company desperately needed to reduce its costs. The going rate was almost double what Sam was offering, but the recent discovery of a major new rare earth deposit in Tanzania had changed the rules and could trigger a decline in world prices.

Sam picked up his delicate blue porcelain teacup and took a sip of green tea. It tasted metallic and bitter, but Sam forced himself to smile and nod in mock appreciation to his

hosts as they watched him drink. The representative from the committee for economic affairs, Xiao Zhijun smiled back at Sam. They had developed a relationship of deep mutual respect during the last three years of tortuous negotiations. Sam sensed that his offer had hit the mark. It was low-ball, but reasonable under the circumstances.

‘We would like a ten-minute recess to consider your offer,’ said the senior member of the Chinese delegation in perfect English. Wang Jing was the rising young star of the Politburo and was tipped as a future leader of the Communist Party. He was dressed in a dark grey tailored suit and wore a solid gold Rolex on his wrist. He was a handsome man but wore an expression of permanent disapproval on his face that unnerved those around him. His credibility with the Politburo was at stake if the negotiations did not go well for the Chinese government.

‘Of course,’ said Sir Mac. ‘We are happy to take a stroll in the ornamental gardens outside.’

Sam took another sip of his green tea and recoiled again at the taste. He left most of it in the cup. The general manager of Sovereign Computers China Ltd, Benny Lim stood up and bowed to the Chinese government delegates who nodded in return. Benny was acting as business adviser to the two Englishmen during their trip to Beijing and he was nervous of the high-ranking officials. Sam followed Sir Mac and Benny out of the beautiful red and gold decorated ground floor boardroom. The Trade Ministry building was located in the heart of the Forbidden City. Outside, the perfume from the camellias and azaleas in the garden masked the smell of Beijing’s pollution. Sir Mac rounded on Sam as soon as they were out of earshot.

‘What the hell do you think you’re playing at?’ he said. ‘Do you want to get us locked up?’

‘They will accept three hundred dollars a kilo,’ Sam replied confidently.

‘I knew I should have left you in Portsmouth. What was I thinking, bringing a jumped-up negotiator like you to Beijing?’

‘The Chinese government trusts me. They’ve been working with me on this deal for over three years and they insisted on having me here to lead the Sovereign negotiations.’

‘More fool them.’ Sir Mac stormed away from Sam in disgust. He took out a cigar from his top pocket and lit it up near the fountain. Unable to contain his nerves, the CEO

paced up and down on the manicured lawn.

Sam stared at Sir Mac's broad back and wondered how such a pompous man had bluffed his way through life so successfully. A wave of nausea interrupted his thoughts while a crushing headache took a vice-like grip on his head. As he doubled over in pain, he could taste the acrid bitterness of green tea in his mouth and he retched into the azaleas. Benny Lim rushed over in concern and helped Sam to sit down on a bench near the fountain.

'Are you okay, Sam?'

'I'll be better in a little while. I think it was the tea.'

'They must have slipped you a potion of Ku,' said Benny, anxious at the sudden turn that had overcome the Englishman.

'What's "Ku"?' Sam managed to say in between the surges of pain. Sam placed his head between his knees and gripped the sides of the bench.

'It's an ancient poison prepared by sealing many toxic insects and poisonous snakes into a vessel until there is only one survivor, which is called the "Ku". The concentrated poison secured from the Ku is administered to the victim, who becomes sick and usually dies. But if the victim survives, the poisoner acquires the powers of the victim.'

'I could survive this torture?' gasped Sam. His stomach felt as if a living creature was devouring him from the inside.

'If you survive, the poisoner will attempt to make you his captive to acquire your powers.'

'I don't have any powers.'

'Not in your culture, but Wang Jing believes your skills of negotiation are remarkable. He wishes to acquire them in his quest to lead the Communist Party.'

Sir Mac gazed over at Sam from his position near the fountain and made no move to assist. As Sam's vision blurred he thought he saw the faint traces of a smile appear on his CEO's face.

'According to Chinese legend there are only two ways to beat the Ku,' said Benny.

'Tell ... me,' implored Sam as the pressure in his head became unbearable.

'The ancients believed the victim must eat the raw flesh of a fire-breathing dragon to turn the tables on their poisoner.'

Sam groaned in despair as he fought off another wave of nausea.

‘Or you must consume two gallons of running water poured over a sprig of azalea to flush out the Ku.’

‘Let’s go,’ said Sam. He stood up slowly and uncoiled his lean six-foot frame from the bench. He walked with Benny’s assistance to the azalea bushes in the garden and broke off a sprig, even though he suspected it was the water and not the azalea that would cure him. Benny guided him towards the decorative bathroom that was on the opposite side of the gardens.

‘I must leave you here,’ said Benny. The idea of seeing the serpentine Ku spirit emerge from Sam’s tortured body did not appeal to him.

\* \* \*

The pain in Sam’s stomach eased after five minutes of drinking from the taps of the sink in the sumptuous bathroom. However, the agony in his head intensified.

‘You have overplayed your hand again, Sam’ said the voice of his father.

Sam wheeled around but he was alone in the bathroom. His father was five thousand miles away in a nursing home in Barnsley suffering from advanced dementia.

‘I always knew you would embarrass the family,’ the voice continued. Sam was shocked to realise the voice was coming from deep inside his head.

‘Leave him alone,’ came the voice of his long-dead mother. ‘He can’t help that he suffers from schizophrenia.’

‘I don’t suffer from schizophrenia,’ Sam yelled at the voices. ‘The doctor was a charlatan.’

‘Let’s face it,’ said the voice of Sally his ex-girlfriend, who had left him for an American investment banker. ‘You’ve always been a failure. You couldn’t even afford to take us to New York last year.’ Sam clutched at his head in an attempt to shut out the voices.

‘You do know that I have made a deal with Wang Jing?’ said Sir Mac. Sam spun round to confront his boss but even Sir Mac’s voice was coming from inside his head.

‘He will concede to your demand for three hundred dollars a kilo, but he wants you

arrested in return. He will claim that you achieved the price by spying on the Chinese government. Wang Jing has agreed to pay me a life-long annuity in return for regular updates on the latest technical breakthroughs from the British technical research programs. That should keep the petrol flowing in the Rolls, don't you think?'

Sam sank to his knees and clutched at his head. Sir Mac laughed loudly and the noise of his guffaws echoed inside Sam's skull.

'See? I told you he was schizophrenic,' said his mother. 'Sam's just come up with another conspiracy theory.'

Sam stood up and focused all his willpower in an attempt to clear the voices from his head. His father tried to criticise him again but Sam swept his voice away into the deep recesses of his brain by sheer force of concentration.

Minutes later, the pain had evaporated and he experienced a rush of adrenaline that energised his whole body. Sam tidied himself up in front of the mirror. He splashed water over his face and brushed his thick sandy coloured hair back into place. His dark brooding eyes and easy smile softened the tough Viking features he had inherited from his father's side of the family. He pulled up his silk tie knot and adjusted the silver cufflinks on his white shirt. After brushing down the jacket of his light grey suit, he took a deep breath and stepped back into the garden, ready to face the Chinese government negotiators once more.

'Ah, there you are, Mr Jardine. We were worried about you.' For a moment, Sam thought the voices in his head had returned, but he turned to see his friend Xao Zhijun standing by the camellias.

'It must be the jetlag. It seems to have set something off in my stomach. I'm sorry to have delayed the meeting. Perhaps we should hurry back to the boardroom?'

'There's no need. The committee has agreed to your price of three hundred dollars a kilo. They have asked for a twelve-year contract though. I hope that's not an impediment?'

'Not at all. Has Sir Mackenzie Reigate agreed to this?'

'He's already signed the contract and left the meeting with the honourable Politburo member, Mr Wang Jing. They're going to celebrate at the gentleman's club in Jinbao Jie Street. Sir Mackenzie Reigate said he would meet you at the airport lounge later this

evening.'

'Do you have the contract?' asked Sam.

Zhijun opened a manila folder and produced a beautifully scripted contract drafted in both English and Mandarin on old-fashioned vellum paper. Zhijun held it out with both hands to signify the importance of the document. Sam accepted the document and bowed his head to Zhijun to acknowledge the critical role he had played in the negotiation. He quickly checked it over and confirmed that all the clauses he had negotiated over the preceding three years were in order. Everything was properly dated and signed. He looked up at Zhijun, who had a concerned expression etched on his face.

'You have worked very hard for this, Mr Jardine. You have earned the trust and respect of everyone on the Chinese negotiation team. You have behaved like a gentleman throughout.'

'But I can see there is a problem. What is it, Mr Zhijun?'

Zhijun could not look Sam in the eye. 'I should not be telling you this, Mr Jardine. I have a family and the party can be ruthless if I betray its trust.'

'You do not need to say anything. Am I going to be arrested by Wang Jing's henchmen for spying?'

Zhijun looked surprised that Sam had predicted his own fate. 'It's not personal, Mr Jardine. He wants your powers of negotiation. They are highly prized in China.'

'You would not be telling me this if you didn't intend to help me escape.'

'My orders are to bring you back to the meeting room and open a bottle of wine to delay you for as long as possible. The police from the Ministry of State Security are already on their way to arrest you. They will be here in about five minutes.'

'But you are going to show me a secret way out of the Forbidden City?' Sam asked.

Xiao Zhijun merely pursed his lips, which Sam knew was an affirmative answer.

'I don't suppose your government will honour the dysprosium contract?' said Sam bitterly.

'I think that is the least of your problems, but actually the government will do so. You correctly surmised that if we do not reduce our prices, then competing rare earth mines would open up all over the world. It was only a matter of time before someone like you worked it out.'

‘I am indebted to you for what you are doing.’ Sam bowed again to his friend.

‘Nonsense. It is just a shame that your culture does not value your profession. Sir Mackenzie Reigate is a fool.’

Zhijun hurried Sam out of a discreet side gate in the garden, through a maze of buildings, down an alleyway and out onto the edge of Tiananmen Square. As they shook hands and bade farewell, they noticed a convoy of black and white police vehicles heading towards the Forbidden City.

‘You need to go straight to Beijing Capital International Airport and be on the next flight out of China. Any destination will do. You must pray that Chinese bureaucracy is not quick enough to load your arrest warrant onto the airport computer systems before you check in.’

‘Thank you,’ Sam said simply, knowing his words were inadequate for the risk Zhijun was taking.

‘I must get back to the boardroom,’ said Zhijun. ‘I will try to convince the police that you are still in the Forbidden City to give you as much time as possible to get to the airport.’

Ten minutes later, Sam was still stranded in Tiananmen Square trying to flag down a taxi when he noticed the police vehicles returning from the Forbidden City. They fanned out in a classic search pattern. One of the police vehicles headed straight in his direction. Sam was about to turn and run when a large black limousine cruised alongside him. To his dismay, he noticed the official red flag of the Communist Party flying from the bonnet of the state vehicle. With as much dignity as he could muster, he squared his shoulders and waited for his inevitable arrest.

‘You look like a man in need of a lift,’ said the elegant woman in the back of the government vehicle. She had a mane of unruly blonde hair, sharp Scandinavian features and spoke with a cultured East Coast American accent. ‘Where are you going?’

‘Thank you for stopping,’ said Sam. He was confused to see an American woman in a Chinese government vehicle with two high-ranking Chinese officials, but he was not in a position to refuse the lift. ‘I need to get to the airport, but if you’re not heading in that direction, please drop me off at the nearest taxi rank.’

‘You’re in luck. My gracious hosts are driving me to the airport. Hop in.’

Sam climbed into the seat next to the woman. Opposite him were the two elderly Chinese men who appeared to be senior Politburo members. The woman introduced Sam to them and he shook their hands with as much deference as he could muster. It was obvious the two party officials had completely fallen for her charms. They smiled and laughed every time she glanced in their direction. It was hardly surprising, Sam thought – she was incredibly beautiful. Although she could be barely thirty-years-old, she carried herself with an authority and confidence of someone much older. She was elegantly dressed in a white blouse and navy blue skirt that revealed just a glimpse of her knees. Around her neck was a string of delicate pearls and she wore matching earrings. Her luxurious stockings shimmered with every movement of her long legs, drawing the eye down to her classic, well-polished high heels. A pile of documents surrounded her as if she were closing a critical business deal with the men opposite.

‘Rachael Beckett,’ said the woman holding out her hand to Sam.

‘Steve Jones, procurement manager for Rio Tinto Zinc,’ Sam lied, not wanting to divulge his real name. He looked out of the corner of his eye at the two officials, unsure if they could speak English or if word had spread about his arrest warrant.

‘And why are you in Beijing, Steve?’ asked Rachael studying him intently.

‘I have been negotiating for the supply of rare earth metals with my CEO.’

‘And were you successful?’

Sam was flattered by her attentions. ‘Somewhat. We negotiated a price of three hundred dollars a kilo for dysprosium. That’s quite a discount.’

‘Forty per cent off the market rate, I believe. Very impressive, Mr Jones.’

Sam was taken aback by her knowledge. The rare earth metals market was highly specialised.

‘We buy large quantities of yttrium and samarium at Napier & Beckett,’ Rachael explained. ‘We could sure use someone with your negotiating skills. Are you freelance or permanent with Rio Tinto?’

‘I’m a self-employed contractor.’ Soon to be unemployed and languishing in a Beijing prison, Sam thought despondently.

‘You must take my business card.’ Rachael searched through her Chanel handbag and fished out a card. Sam studied it with interest.

‘You’re the Chief Transformation Officer of the London office?’

‘Yes, I moved to London last year. My grandfather Nathaniel Beckett wants me to hold a senior leadership position there before bringing me back to the head office near Washington DC.’

Sam understood why Rachael exuded such authority. She was heir to the CEO of one of the world’s most successful pharmaceutical companies. He remembered reading about her in the business section of *The Times*. Her role was to turn around the loss-making London affiliate of Napier & Beckett. She had a reputation as a tough executive who demanded absolute loyalty from her staff and did not tolerate poor performance.

‘Which flight are you catching, Mr Jones?’ asked Rachael.

‘I was scheduled to catch the evening flight to London. But there’s been an emergency back at the office, so I’m hoping to catch an earlier flight. BA at 11:15 am, I believe.’

‘How marvellous. I’ll be on that flight too. I do hope you make it. Have you sent your luggage ahead?’ she asked, noticing that Sam was only carrying a flimsy manila folder in his hands.

‘Yes, Rio Tinto has taken care of it,’ he lied again.

The limousine proceeded serenely along the Airport Expressway until a traffic jam blocked their path. Rachael leaned forwards and in perfect Mandarin asked the driver what the problem was. She translated the driver’s response for Sam.

‘It appears that the Ministry of State Security has put up a roadblock just ahead of us. They are searching for a Western spy called Sam Jardine. How annoying. I hope we don’t miss our flight.’ Rachael looked at her watch. ‘It seems to happen every time I fly. If it’s not mechanical failure, it’s bad weather or my baggage goes astray.’

Rachael’s apparent distress was too much for one of the party officials. He turned around and barked an order at the driver. The driver responded by grabbing the siren that was on the seat next to him. He leaned out of his window and attached the siren to the roof of the limousine. A high-pitched wailing pierced the air as the vehicle drove over the central reservation strip and onto the opposite side of the road, into the path of the oncoming traffic. Most of the oncoming traffic pulled over immediately to allow the limousine through. Vehicles that were slow to move received a stream of invectives and

fist-shaking from the driver of the stately limousine. Sam closed his eyes as they weaved through the oncoming vehicles. Rachael calmly continued to discuss her business deal with the two officials in Mandarin as if she was in the comfort of her own office. Their vehicle slowed as they approached the roadblock. Sam held his breath and sank into his seat but the police saluted the driver and waved them through. The driver removed the siren and moved serenely back onto the correct side of the road. Sam exhaled with relief as Rachael briefly thanked the driver and continued to close her business deal.

Twenty minutes later, the limousine approached Terminal 3 at Beijing Capital Airport. Two police vehicles blocked the taxi lane and checked inside each taxi for the Western fugitive. A further two patrolled the car park while a fifth blocked the drop-off zone and checked the documentation of every Westerner. The limousine cruised into the VIP lane as it approached the terminal and bypassed the police checks. The VIP lane led to an inconspicuous underground entrance to the terminal. The car cruised to a halt and several smartly dressed airport staff sprang forwards to open the car doors and remove the luggage from the boot. They whisked the four passengers and Rachael's mountain of luggage directly to the private airport lounge that catered for Politburo members and visiting heads of state. Rachael walked up to the solitary check-in desk. Within a minute, her bags had disappeared into the carousel and she was clutching her first class boarding card.

'The honourable secretary of the state council will get you on the 11:15 BA flight to London and send on your baggage,' said Rachael to Sam. 'The plane leaves in twenty minutes.'

The party dignitary was engaged in a long, heated discussion with the young man at the check-in desk. Sam felt his bowels loosen as he sensed a problem brewing. Rachael translated for Sam.

'The honourable secretary apologises, but he cannot get you a seat in first class. There is a diplomatic delegation flying to London on the same flight. He hopes that you will not be insulted by flying in business class.'

Sam handed his travel documents over to the man behind the counter, who frowned in confusion at the name on his passport and tickets. He studied Sam's passport photograph intently and then peered at his computer screen. The honourable secretary barked at the

check-in clerk, who cringed at the Politburo member's verbal onslaught. In a flash, he cancelled Sam's old ticket and booked him on the 11:15 flight, handing Sam back his passport and his business class boarding card. Sam was shaking as he accepted the documents.

'The honourable secretary regrets that he cannot join us for a glass of wine in the lounge, but wishes us a safe flight home. He apologises for the rudeness of the check-in clerk for taking so long to issue your boarding card and assures you that he will be disciplined if he inconveniences you further,' Rachael translated for Sam.

The second dignitary looked crestfallen as he grasped Rachael's right hand with both of his.

'Have good trip, Miss Beckett,' he said in broken English.

Rachael rewarded him with a charming smile and then turned and beamed at the secretary of the state council. Sam shook hands with the officials and watched them disappear out of the lounge.

Rachael made herself comfortable in a sumptuous leather armchair and gazed around the VIP lounge. There were about twenty high-profile passengers relaxing in the lounge and half a dozen security staff that made Sam feel nervous. Rachael halted a passing waiter and took a glass of Shiraz for herself and a beer for Sam from his tray.

'Shouldn't we be boarding, Miss Beckett? It does say "*FINAL CALL*" on the display board.'

'Nonsense. There is always time for a high-quality Shiraz. Take a seat and relax, Steve.'

'I really think we should be going,' Sam said as he sat opposite her.

'Now, Mr Jardine. You haven't been entirely honest with me, have you?'

Sam opened his mouth to speak but his vocal chords failed him. His adrenaline levels soared as he tried to work out whether Rachael would betray him to the Chinese authorities. Eventually he stammered, 'How did you know?' He felt sweat trickle down his collar.

'I've been interested in your activities in Beijing for a while now, Mr Jardine – may I call you Sam? Your achievements against the state negotiators surpassed my expectations.'

‘Will you report me to the security police?’

‘Why would I do that?’

‘You seem to be very friendly with the Chinese.’

‘That’s just business, Sam. They want Napier & Beckett to build a research centre here in Beijing. It will give them access to neurological technology that they currently don’t possess.’

‘But why would Napier & Beckett want to set up a research facility here?’

We need to lower our costs. We have three major drugs coming off patent next year with nothing to replace them until 2017. We have to survive two years with very little income. It’s going to be touch and go for Napier & Beckett unless we can obtain approval for our new Alzheimer drug.’

‘So you think I can help you negotiate down your costs?’

‘We have a full team of procurement specialists in Washington DC, but I’m responsible for the profitability of the London office. I need a negotiator like you, Sam.’

‘I already have a job.’ Sam looked at the display board; the 11:15 flight to London was flashing an angry red.

‘I suspect that Sir Mac is terminating your employment contract as we speak, Sam, so I believe that you will need a new employer when you arrive in London.’

‘How do you know about Sir Mac?’

‘He’s a fool. The Politburo bought his soul and he’s now dancing to their tune. He threw you to the wolves as part of the bargain.’

The mention of wolves unnerved Sam. He looked around the lounge in a panic. Security guards were everywhere.

‘I have to warn you, Sam, that if you join me at Napier & Beckett I will not tolerate any more deceit. I didn’t appreciate you lying to me in the limousine.’

Sam was lost for words at Rachael’s brazen arrogance but he was in no position to argue. ‘What if I decide not to join your company?’

‘I hardly think you’re in a position to refuse my offer.’ Rachael calmly sipped her Shiraz.

Sam looked again at the security guards who were conversing with the check-in clerk. They were looking in his direction. ‘Relax, Sam. I meant financially. You have a large

mortgage and a car loan of twenty thousand pounds. And for a man of thirty-five years of age, your career has not exactly been a raging success.'

'You've been checking my personal data? That's illegal.'

'Really? I'm not the one with an arrest warrant for spying hanging over my head.'

'What salary are you offering?'

'One hundred and fifty thousand.'

'That's outrageous. I was on one hundred and sixty thousand pounds at Sovereign Computers. But I suppose you already knew that.'

'You misunderstand me, Sam. I'm only offering you one hundred and fifty thousand US dollars.' Rachael took another sip of wine and crossed her long legs in a casual but provocative manner. 'You have to earn my respect before you get that kind of money.'

Two of the security guards were pointing at Sam. The hairs on his neck stood on end. 'Plus a car allowance and health cover?' he asked hurriedly.

Rachael leaned across to Sam and shook his hand. 'It's a deal. Welcome to Napier & Beckett. Now let's get on the plane before we overstay our welcome.'

## CHAPTER 2

### *London, England.*

On a damp, grey London morning, Thomas Briggs donned his Lycra cycle outfit and programmed his Garmin Edge 810 bike computer. The middle-aged man selected his destination of 32 Leadenhall Street on the GPS and entered the road conditions as 'wet'. At precisely 7 am, he slipped on his mirrored wrap-around sunglasses and burst out from the garage of his Wandsworth home. He was attempting to achieve his first ever sub-thirty-minute journey to work. Despite the early hour, the traffic was building. At Borough station, the Garmin Edge showed his pace was falling behind schedule. Briggs got back on level terms with a clever diversion through Montague Close. At this point, he felt his thighs burn like cinders, but he pushed himself faster to speed past the London drivers on their way to work. Their dull world of breakfast radio and intermittent windscreen wipers was in pale contrast to the exhilaration Briggs was experiencing. He could sense his thirty-minute goal was in sight. He had one mile to go before the finish line at the entrance to his workplace at GIA Insurance. His thigh muscles were burning again and his lungs were straining to pump the required levels of oxygen through his chubby body. Briggs had learned to embrace the pain; it was a comfort to him now.

An unexpected red light at the junction of King William Street and Cannon Street frustrated him. He knew he should stop, but the lights had only just changed and the cars to his left in Cannon Street were still stationary. He made a split-second decision to dash through the red lights.

The motorcycle courier coming from Cannon Street on a collision course with Briggs was also in a hurry. The instructions on the small parcel he was delivering stated that he must be at the loading dock of the pharmaceutical company Napier & Beckett by 7:30 am at the very latest. He was doubtful he would be there in time. Luckily, the traffic lights at Cannon Street turned green as if by sheer force of his willpower. He sped through the green light without changing gear. To his horror, he saw that a thickset cyclist wearing lurid yellow and black Lycra had jumped the lights to his right and was heading directly into his path. The courier was a skilled motorcyclist but despite his deft manoeuvre to

avoid the cyclist, he momentarily lost control and had to fight to keep the powerful Honda CB500 Twin from crashing into the oncoming traffic. Having regained his balance, he accelerated to overtake on the cyclist's outside. Briggs was unaware that he had nearly caused an accident and chose that moment to clear his heaving lungs of phlegm, which passed within a whisker of the motorcyclist. Briggs, now aware of his blunder, tried in vain to convey an apologetic look to the courier. The motorcycle courier's visor was as dark as Hades but Briggs sensed the outrage emanating from beneath the helmet. The motorcyclist shook his fist at Briggs and lashed out with his booted foot. Briggs cycled on while the motorcyclist lost his balance again and came close to overturning his Honda. Briggs considered stopping in an attempt to reason with his adversary, but something about the demeanour of the motorcyclist scared him. Instead, he tried to lose him in the Leadenhall Market rat runs. He turned right into Fenchurch Street and then left into Lime Street to escape his would-be assailant. The surge of adrenaline flowing into his body eliminated all feelings of fatigue. Having regained his centre of balance, the motorcyclist accelerated and within seconds was closing in on the cyclist. He cruised alongside Briggs and rammed him into the middle of the road.

When Briggs collided with the bollard that was in his path, he was travelling at a speed of thirty-five kilometres per hour. The bollard had been installed in Lime Street after the bombing of Bishopsgate in 1993. It was designed to stop a semi-trailer carrying a full load of Semtex in its tracks, and was embossed with a decorative City of London coat of arms. Briggs' last conscious thought was how beautiful this design was as he slammed into the road beyond and felt his neck shatter on the unforgiving bitumen. Then mercifully, the heavy, swinging boot of the motorcyclist plunged his world into blackness. The attacker continued to vent his fury on the body of the former underwriter of GIA Insurance even after he had expunged all life from the cyclist's limp form.

Four security personnel from Napier & Beckett watched the murder with alarm from their black VW van across the road. They piled out of the van and descended upon the motorcycle courier, who barely comprehended what he had just done. After tranquillising him with an injection of a fast-acting sedative, two of the men pulled him into the back of the van, while the third security guard jumped into the driver's seat. The fourth guard

stayed behind as the van sped away.

\* \* \*

The patient trials facility at Napier & Beckett was state-of-the-art, modelled to resemble a modern corporate hotel. The building was decorated throughout with bright but relaxing colours and had thick, expensive carpet on the floors. The seven wards of the facility known as 'B3' each had a concierge desk at their entrance manned by staff dressed in smart corporate uniforms. The motorcyclist walked unaided in a subdued and compliant manner as he was led by a medical technician down the labyrinth of corridors towards the post-traumatic stress disorder clinic. Eventually, they came to the most secure ward in the building. The sign above the concierge desk read 'Buenos Aires ward', which was named after one of Napier & Beckett's fifty global offices. Staff and patients knew it better as the 'Berserker ward'.

Once undressed and in bed in a private room on the ward, the motorcyclist was connected to an array of monitoring equipment. The medical technician pressed a button on the central console. The readings from the equipment were transmitted to the app on his tablet computer. A series of graphs were displayed on the computer together with a diagnosis of the motorcyclist's illness. What the technician saw made him experience a rush of concern. He ran out of the room, past other patients of the Berserker ward who were resting in chairs or watching television in the central lounge area. He continued along the maze of corridors to a glass-fronted office near the main laboratory complex. Dr McDonald, director of research was inside looking through the case notes of half a dozen of his newest patients.

'What's this?' asked Dr McDonald.

'It's Patient 65,' the technician said breathlessly, 'Ex-Second Battalion, Parachute Regiment. Diagnosed with extreme PTSD. He's on the rehab program but has had a major relapse – he just murdered a cyclist.'

'What drug was he on?' the doctor frowned, anticipating the answer.

'The Berserker antidote ... Novalis.'

'Dear God.' Dr McDonald ran his hands nervously through his hair. He picked up the

phone and punched out a five-digit extension number. ‘Mr Cross?’ Once the London affiliate’s general manager answered he said, ‘We have a problem with Novalis. The trial needs to be stopped – immediately.’

\* \* \*

After the van had left, the fourth security guard stood in the heavy rain and surveyed the scene of the unfortunate Thomas Briggs murder. The back wheel of his Raleigh Militis was still spinning and front forks were bent skywards at an impossible angle. Several feet away, the cracked screen of the Garmin Edge 810 ticked over to thirty minutes and continued its remorseless count. The cyclist’s body was a full six feet further on, lying in a pool of blood that mingled with the steady downpour and trickled into a nearby drain. His Lycra top was shredded in several places, the gaudy yellow fabric turning red as blood oozed from a large gash in his torso. The dead man’s neck was twisted unnaturally and his face had been shredded by the bitumen. The guard circled the body twice. It looked like an accident but he was concerned that the boot prints on Briggs’ abdomen would indicate foul play. Luckily, the rain was already washing them away. He made a quick phone call to his contact in Scotland Yard and a second call to the head of security at Napier & Beckett. Knowing the incident would be dealt with discreetly, the guard walked over to the motorcycle. Its engine was still running but there was no obvious evidence to indicate that the courier had ever been at the scene. The guard mounted the Honda and rode it the short distance to the Napier & Beckett building in Leadenhall Street. He cruised into the staff car park on level two, where he washed down the motorcycle and changed its number plates.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Alexandria, Virginia.*

Cindy Reineker was the first female recipient of America's highest military award, the Medal of Honor, in nearly one hundred and fifty years. Her medal was as much part of her identity as her Native American heritage and made her severe case of PTSD seem almost bearable. She was only twenty-eight years old, but she looked much older because of the trauma she had experienced in Afghanistan. She could have been pretty had she made the effort, but her lack of confidence made her dress to look invisible rather than attractive. The three years of psychiatric treatment and medication she had received at Napier & Beckett's Alexandrian research facility had helped with her trauma and she had recently joined the company's rehabilitation program. Her assigned job as an office cleaner at Napier & Beckett and the use of a small unit in Silver Spring to the north of Washington DC gave her a degree of independence. It raised her hope that she might one day rejoin the US Army and resume her old life. The army was the one place where she felt a sense of belonging and where her Native American heritage was accepted without prejudice. She kept up her exercise routine so she could fit right back into the army if the time ever came.

Reineker's cleaning shift had finished at six o'clock in the evening and she clambered aboard the tidy little metro train at Alexandria's King Street-Old Town station. She opened her small bag, removed the little velvet case that held her Medal of Honor and gazed at the gold five-pointed star in wonder, as was her custom each day. She was still unable to explain what had possessed her to track down a murderous band of Taliban terrorists single-handedly for three days after they had captured her platoon's Afghan interpreter. Reineker had ambushed and destroyed the war band while they rested for water at a mountain ravine. She took out four of the Taliban soldiers with her M-203 40mm grenade launcher and then picked off the other three with her standard issue M-4 combat assault rifle as they scampered for their lives. She shot her final victim from a distance of over four hundred yards, the bullet going clean through the tribesman's skull. Reineker and the interpreter staggered back over fifty miles to the American base of

Camp Dwyer in the Helmand district of Afghanistan, half-starved and weak from thirst.

Her reverie was interrupted when the metro pulled into Pentagon City station and a tall skinny man in a navy pinstripe suit entered her carriage. His receding black hair was oiled back along his scalp and he had a long thin nose that gave the impression he wore a permanent sneer. He was talking loudly on his mobile phone while he looked for a spare seat. He saw the seat next to Reineker was empty but double-checked first to see if there was anyone more eye-catching that he could sit next to. With a loud sigh, he decided that she was the best of a bad bunch and dropped his gangly frame onto the seat next to her.

‘No, I don’t usually take the subway, Hank,’ he shouted into the phone. ‘The driver is double-booked and Congressman Adams somehow has priority with the Buick tonight.’

He looked across at Reineker and saw her put her Medal of Honor back in its velvet case and into her bag. He frowned before resuming his conversation. ‘You will have to speak up, Hank, I am about to enter a tunnel ... no, I will have to stop by the Capitol first to drop my report to the committee.’

The man leaned back in the small seat and crossed a large foot over his bony knee. The dirty underside of his shoe rubbed against the one pretty skirt that Reineker possessed.

‘Hello? Hello?’ the congressman shouted into the phone before realising he had lost reception. He stared at the mobile in disgust. He put it in his pocket and looked around the carriage. He uncrossed his leg, kicking Reineker in the knee as he did so, and then slipped a long arm along the back of her seat like a teenager on his first date. With one hand closing in on her shoulder, he pulled a report out of his briefcase with the other. He spread his left leg wide so that it pressed against her knee. As Reineker moved her leg out of the congressman’s range, she felt his left hand drop onto her shoulder like a tarantula from a tree. A few moments later, the bony, wrinkly hand caressed the fabric of her blouse and dropped closer towards her breast. Reineker turned to stare threateningly at her accoster but he seemed absorbed by his report. As his hand reached her breast, Reineker slapped it hard. The congressman withdrew his arm and put his report back into his briefcase. He leaned over to Reineker and whispered into her ear, ‘If you think that I’m interested in a Native American slut like you, my dear, you are mistaken. I can take my pick of half the women in DC. I suggest you sit there quietly or I will alert the

transport police to your behaviour. They can ask you where you stole that Medal of Honor from, at the same time.' He sneered down his long nose at the shocked woman.

Reineker felt her anger rise and her mind cloud over. She recognised with a sense of panic that the symptoms of her dreadful illness were overwhelming her. Although she had already taken her daily dose of the PTSD drug Novalis, she decided to delve into her bag and take one more tablet to control her fury. The congressman sneered at her once more as if he 'just knew' she was a drug addict.

With his entertainment over, the congressman decided to change seats. His long spindly legs kicked over Reineker's bag and the velvet case containing her Medal of Honor spun across the carriage floor. The congressman gave it one more kick as he moved to the opposite end of the carriage. Reineker scrambled at the feet of the disapproving Washington commuters to retrieve her precious medal.

Reineker should have changed trains at Metro Central to take the red train to Silver Spring. Instead, she delved deeper into her bag to retrieve her old army dagger. She slipped it under her thin, threadbare jacket and followed the congressman out of the metro train at Capitol South. In her tortured mind, the monumental government buildings that lined 1<sup>st</sup> Street SE were not buildings at all, but the deep cliffs and dangerous ravines of the Afghanistan province of the Helmand. She imagined herself once more on the trail of fundamentalist terrorists. As she closed in on the congressman, dagger in hand, her mind no longer saw a blue pinstripe suit; she saw the white flowing robes of a Taliban warlord.

\* \* \*

The board of directors were gathering at the corporate offices of Napier & Beckett in Alexandria, Virginia near Washington DC for a crisis meeting. Rachael always enjoyed returning to Alexandria, which she considered an affluent and attractive town with a deep sense of history. She directed the taxi driver through the sprawling collection of medical and office buildings set in eighty acres of prime real estate. Breakthroughs and treatments for all kinds of neurological illnesses had been developed in Alexandria. Napier & Beckett had derived its earliest medicines from ancient Native American herbal remedies.

More recently, the Alexandria facility was at the forefront of treatments for mood disorders, ADHD, schizophrenia, epilepsy, bipolar and dozens of other mental conditions.

The boardroom of Napier & Beckett was in the biggest of the forty buildings. At nine storeys high, the gleaming glass-clad building was the centrepiece of the campus. Three smaller replica buildings cascaded from its frontage like Russian dolls. Although the design was controversial in a traditional city like Alexandria, the overall effect was pleasing to the eye. In front of the main building, a large fountain surrounded by a well-manicured oval of grass softened the harsh geometric lines of the main building and drew many of the employees out during the lunchtime recess to sit and enjoy the unseasonably warm spring weather.

Rachael Beckett was running twenty minutes late for the executive board meeting after fog had delayed her flight from London. Her role as the chief transformation officer of the London affiliate would not normally qualify her for an executive position but she was as important as royalty to Napier & Beckett. Rachael's own father, Jethro Beckett had been a Vietnam War protester and dropped out of corporate society during the 1970s. Rachael's disappointed mother subsequently eloped to the Mediterranean with a Greek shipping tycoon, leaving Rachael and her older sister in the care of their childless paternal Aunt, Barbara Mendel. Just as Nathaniel was beginning to despair about the Beckett family dynasty, Rachael had displayed a flair for business. She worked harder than old Nathaniel had managed in his prime and was as sharp as a razor blade. Nathaniel postponed his plans for retirement so that he could mentor his beautiful and shrewd granddaughter until she was fully capable of walking in his impressive footsteps.

The eight men in the room all rose from their chairs as one and welcomed her into the room.

'Rachael, my dear,' said 89-year-old Nathaniel Beckett. Despite his age, he was still a handsome man. He had lost much of his once imposing stature and his cheeks had developed a skeletal hollowness. His thinning hair was pure white. Rachael suspected the old man was seriously ill, but he insisted on levering himself painfully out of his chair to embrace his granddaughter. The tension that had been in the room before Rachael entered dissipated for the time being while they indulged the old man's display of affection for

her.

‘I’m going to need you more than ever during this meeting, my dear,’ he whispered into her ear. ‘Our firm may collapse unless we can get this vote through.’

Rachael took her seat at the end of the long, polished oak boardroom table at the furthest point from her grandfather. As she pulled out her files and laptop from her briefcase, she gazed around the familiar boardroom. Rachael’s favourite display was the large glass cabinet that contained an authentic Shawnee headdress complete with magnificent eagle feathers, leather straps and elaborate beading. At the base of the display was a colourful patchwork leather and cloth bag with beads of all shapes and sizes spilling out of it. The display was symbolic of the early neurological cures that originated from Native American herbal remedies. She admired the old paintings that adorned the wood-panelled room that depicted battle scenes from the Anglo-American war of 1812. Her grandfather had told her that it was after this war that the British soldier and scientist George Napier and the American financier – the original Nathaniel Beckett – had founded the company. From those small beginnings, the pharmaceutical partnership had grown into a twenty-five billion dollar company, employing fifty thousand skilled employees around the world.

Rachael knew her grandfather was planning to set her up as his successor at this meeting, but it would not be easy. His fellow directors were impatient for him to retire and coveted his chief executive role. The respect for the Beckett name did not stretch to the point where they would easily endorse an inexperienced thirty-year-old woman as the CEO of a twenty-five billion dollar pharmaceutical empire. A few would be nostalgic that the two hundred year Beckett dynasty had ended – but what mattered more was the share price.

Nathaniel Beckett resumed the meeting. ‘Now that we have a full board, I would like to table “item two” of the agenda. It appears that our application to the FDA for Phase III approval of Senzar has failed. As you know, Senzar is our Alzheimer drug upon which the entire future of the company depends. Dr Kearney, would you mind giving us the background to this setback?’

Doctor Jed Kearney was the director of research. He leaned back in his chair and put his hands behind his head. He was a man in good shape and dressed sharply as befitted

someone whose job was to influence the decision-makers of Washington DC.

‘The official finding was that the clinical trials’ data did not prove the effectiveness of Senzar beyond reasonable doubt.’

‘How could they say that? That’s bullshit,’ said Paul Knight, director of sales.

The director of manufacturing, Chuck DeVere, looked at Dr Kearney. He was a big no-nonsense Texan and had an empty production line waiting for the FDA’s approval.

‘This delay is costing me a hundred thousand dollars an hour. I can’t shift the workers to the bipolar line; the demand just isn’t there. Unless we get approval, I’m going to have to let thousands of production line workers go.’

‘The absurdity of the FDA’s decision is that the British authorities approved the London trials on a lower correlation of certainty,’ replied Dr Kearney. ‘We need two successful Phase III trials before we can sell Senzar. London only counts as one.’

Rachael had led the London approval presentation to the UK Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency. She had rehearsed the London team for three weeks leading up to the presentation. The MHRA had congratulated Napier & Beckett on the quality and openness of the information provided, having been reassured and charmed in equal measure by Rachael’s team.

‘The only thing that makes sense is that we must have fallen out of favour in DC,’ said Kearney. ‘We ran the most professional and well-funded campaign in the history of Napier & Beckett to get this approval through the FDA. I just can’t put my finger on what’s going on.’

‘To be frank, if we had a few more drugs in the development pipeline, we would not be sweating on the Senzar approval right now,’ said Paul Knight, who was wondering if he would have anything to sell in 2015.

The deputy CEO cleared his throat. The room quietened. Walter Mendel had been the public face of Napier & Beckett for the last ten years. Tall, lean and photogenic, with a thick crop of blond hair that was greying at the temples, he was popular with the press and the Wall Street analysts. Although he had married Nathaniel’s daughter twenty years ago, he often clashed with his CEO and father-in-law.

‘It’s time to acknowledge the elephant in the room,’ he said. ‘The FDA will continue to block our approvals unless we come to some form of arrangement with the government

on Berserker.’

‘We cannot manufacture or sell Berserker until we have developed an effective PTSD antidote drug for it,’ growled Nathaniel.

‘It has not been conclusively proven that Berserker needs an antidote.’

‘How are the London PTSD trials going, Rachael?’ asked Dr Kearney.

‘The London trials of Novalis were suspended last week. Our first patient on the community release program battered an innocent cyclist to a pulp,’ she replied.

‘My God,’ said Nathaniel.

‘I don’t bloody well believe this,’ echoed Knight.

‘By good fortune, his chaperones were able to tidy things up but it is unacceptable to continue these trials with an inherent risk to the public.’

‘Has the British government been informed?’ asked Nathaniel.

‘Yes,’ said Rachael. ‘We told them we have stopped all trials. However, they insisted on a supervised destruction program of all Novalis samples, paperwork and electronic records.’

‘Have we complied with the order?’ asked DeVere.

‘Our London general manager, David Cross would be in prison if we hadn’t,’ said Rachael.

‘We are, of course, conducting parallel trials in Alexandria,’ Walter Mendel reminded the board.

‘We should stop them,’ said Nathaniel.

‘My understanding was that the motorcycle courier suffered from a “road rage” incident. It may not have been anything to do with the PTSD trials,’ said Mendel.

‘He was our first Novalis patient. It could not have been a coincidence,’ said Rachael.

‘So why is the US government so keen to get hold of Berserker now?’ asked DeVere. ‘They know we have held the formula for nearly two hundred years.’

Walter Mendel looked around the room as if weighing up whether he could trust his fellow directors with the information he was about to impart. Unless he opened up, he knew he would not carry the impending vote.

‘It’s an open secret in Washington circles that China is going to attack Taiwan in 2020 or sooner,’ he began. ‘China regards Taiwan as a renegade province. Until now, that

country has been wary that the US would defend Taiwan with their troops and superior weaponry. However, the gap in weapons technology is now zero. The Pentagon estimates that China will invade with over three million troops, making it impossible for us to defend the island of Taiwan.'

'What about nuclear weapons? Surely China would not risk a nuclear war?' said DeVere.

'China has correctly assessed that the US would not go nuclear over Taiwan. However, the Pentagon's modelling suggests that if China so chose, it could dominate international relations for the next two hundred years. Take America for example. China owns over 1.3 trillion dollars of US government debt and if they were to call it in, then the government of America would cease to function in a matter of hours.'

'So we want to bluff China with Berserker?' said DeVere.

'It's not a bluff. The Pentagon has modelled the scenario that half a million well-entrenched troops equipped with US combat technology could defend Taiwan against three million Chinese.'

'But the Taiwanese could not possibly hold out against three million Chinese troops,' said Dr Kearney.

'The wildcard in the modelling is Berserker. History shows that a small army can beat an enemy ten times its size if it is fanatical enough to die for its cause.'

'How the hell did we acquire this godforsaken drug in the first place?' asked Knight.

'The drug that we call Berserker was a narcotic cultivated by the Native American Shawnee tribe in what is now Canada. They would smoke the drug in the hours before battle to whip themselves into a state of frenzy. Legend has it that in this state, neither fire nor iron harmed the warriors; they were almost invincible. The narcotic effects of the drug suppressed all feelings of fear and vulnerability. The drug also gave the warriors clarity of thought in battle that made them superb fighters. They said it felt like their enemies were fighting in slow motion while they were fighting in real-time, and that they could see arrows coming towards them and grasp them from the air. More significantly, it built up a rage of unimaginable proportions. After the battle, the warriors had to be pulled off the corpses of their enemies; such was their fury.'

'I heard there was a high rate of post-traumatic stress among the Shawnee,' said Dr

Kearney. 'It stands to reason. The greater the fury in battle, the deeper the depth of despair that must follow. I heard that such people were called 'Sleepwalkers'. They would roam the plains of America committing murders and atrocities years after the battles in which they fought. Worse still, their descendants were rumoured to have inherited the condition.'

The room went silent for a minute.

'There are many myths and legends in Native American folklore,' Mendel scoffed. 'There is no proof that such people ever existed.'

'But the government is nervous enough of the legend to insist that we develop an effective PTSD antidote alongside Berserker,' said Dr Kearney.

'The Sleepwalker Legacy really is an old wives' tale, but nevertheless we are progressing with this "antidote" to Berserker, replied Mendel.

'So, let me get this straight,' the big Texan DeVere interjected. 'The US government wants Napier & Beckett to sell them Berserker and develop a PTSD antidote that we are calling Novalis. This will allow US and Taiwanese troops to use Berserker to fight off a planned invasion of Taiwan by Chinese troops. By doing so, it will halt the financial and military domination of Asia and elsewhere by the Chinese. In the meantime, the government is strong-arming Napier & Beckett into cooperating with them by going slow on our FDA approvals.'

'Christ in a Cadillac!' said Knight, who did not like the scenario one bit.

'Napier & Beckett makes lots of money, the US government still looks like a superpower, and the Chinese continue their peaceful way to wealth and prosperity,' said Mendel, summarising for the board. 'Everyone wins.'

'It's not that simple,' Nathaniel spoke up. 'Once we manufacture Berserker, it becomes another step in the arms race. Unscrupulous dealers will sell it to Third World dictators and terror groups. Can you imagine the nightmare of Islamic State terrorists getting their hands on this abomination?'

Mendel was quick to answer. 'The alternative is worse, Nathaniel. We could be looking at a new Roman Empire run by Communist China.'

Nathaniel shook his head in disagreement but Mendel continued. 'In addition, we have a responsibility to our shareholders and the community. Napier & Beckett cannot

survive the next two years without the Alzheimer's drug Senzar. The government will not approve it unless we also sell them Berserker.'

'I will not allow Berserker to be manufactured in my lifetime,' reaffirmed Nathaniel. There was a long pause while those in the room considered the impasse.

DeVere proposed the inevitable vote. 'It appears that we must make a decision on whether to negotiate with the government on the manufacture of Berserker and the development of Novalis or risk financial ruin.'

Old Nathaniel levered himself to his feet. 'I must make this statement before the vote is taken. If the vote to sell Berserker to the government is carried, I cannot remain CEO of Napier & Beckett. I will not be judged by history as the man who unleashed a new mental disorder on the world that could lead to a state of perpetual war with China or anyone else.'

Nathaniel took a sip of water. His hand was shaking and he spilled droplets onto his board papers. 'Furthermore, it is evident that at eighty-nine years of age, I lack the energy to carry Napier & Beckett through the next two tumultuous years. I propose that regardless of the outcome of the vote, that my granddaughter Rachael replaces me as CEO of this company.'

The room had been expecting such a statement from Nathaniel. The rumours about his declining health were widespread. Even so, it was a profound moment to realise that this giant of the pharmaceutical industry was about to step down after forty years at the helm.

Rachael looked fondly at her grandfather. The old man had not made a rash decision. He had worked the phones for the last two days. He had secured promises from the majority of the board that they would support him and vote his granddaughter into the top job. She knew that only four of the nine board members would support Mendel.

As she pondered the numbers and prepared herself for the vote, the boardroom door opened. A catering officer in a smart white uniform wheeled in refreshments. A variety of cakes and cookies were piled high on white porcelain plates. The catering officer circled the table dispensing six coffees and three teas. Mendel took the first of the teas. It had a yellow-tagged teabag in the cup labelled 'Earl Grey'. Mendel's political ally, DeVere took the second cup of Earl Grey. Nathaniel Beckett's most loyal supporter, Paul Knight

accepted the third and final cup. He was partial to English Breakfast. Knight swirled the red-tagged teabag around in his cup for a full two minutes. He liked his tea strong. When he finally took a sip, he scowled at the catering officer.

‘This tea tastes like shit,’ he complained.

The catering officer wheeled his trolley smartly out of the room with his head lowered and the voting began.

\* \* \*

Administrative staff arriving early at the Capitol Building the next morning were the first to confront the gruesome sight. Tied to a nearby tree by his wrists and ankles was the tall, skinny congressman: stone dead. He was naked from the waist up and his congressman’s badge had been crammed into his mouth. His lips had been sewn together to stop him from screaming or spitting out the contents. However, the sight that appalled the office workers most was the congressman’s scalp, which had been cut from his head and placed neatly at his feet.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Chichester, West Sussex.*

Sam crawled out of bed at his house in Chichester at 4:45 am. His video conference call with Napier & Beckett's Japanese affiliate started at 7 am. He had recommended that all Magnetic Resonance Imaging machines required to scan brain function at Napier & Beckett's research offices worldwide be placed under one contract. The savings to the company's research costs would be three million dollars a year. The Japanese affiliate would be responsible for negotiating the revised contract for MRI machines with the manufacturer Hitachi, and Sam wanted to brief the Japanese before the negotiations began in Tokyo the next day.

He gave himself twenty-five minutes to be out the door. Sam made himself a mug of tea and took it into the shower with him to save five precious minutes. He balanced the mug of tea in the soap dish with the shampoo and every so often ducked his head out of the jets of steaming water to gulp down a mouthful of tea. With his mop of sandy coloured hair still wet, and unsure whether he had put on matching socks, Sam ducked out of the back door to greet his newly acquired pet, Serko. Despite the early hour, the Jack Russell was a bundle of energy and looked crestfallen that Sam had to leave after only three minutes of rough and tumble. As he unlocked his Freelander car, Sam glanced up at the larks, finches and blue tits that were rising to greet the first light of dawn. He marvelled at the beautiful Roman walls and impressive Norman cathedral that dominated the town as he drove past. The early morning sunlight that reflected off the walls gave the city a majestic hue.

Sam parked in the commuter car park and jumped on the express train at nearby Havant railway station. He managed to secure a double seat and an hour's sleep before he woke up at London's busy Waterloo Station. From there, he caught a red London bus to Fenchurch Street station and walked the remaining five minutes to Napier & Beckett's office in Leadenhall Street. Sam had made good time; it was 6:30 am and he had a full thirty minutes before his video conference call with Tokyo.

Sam's desk was right outside Rachael's office, alongside her administrative assistant,

Cassie. He had remonstrated with Rachael about this, protesting that he'd had an office of his own at Sovereign. Rachael had shot him down with an offended look, stating he should be proud to have a cubicle next to Cassie.

He sat at his desk, turned on his PC and scrolled through his emails to pass the time. He skipped the first email on 'longer lasting sex' that had somehow bypassed the company firewall. The second was an upbeat UK sales forecast on Napier & Beckett's Kanubis product for neurotic dogs. The next email caught his eye. It was from Nathaniel Beckett's Deputy CEO, Walter Mendel. It was headlined '*TRAGIC NEWS*'. Sam clicked on the long, sombre message.

*'I regret to announce the tragic death by suicide of our former chief executive officer.'* Sam stared at the first sentence in case he had somehow misinterpreted the wording. Then he continued reading.

*'Nathaniel Beckett was a powerhouse of the pharmaceutical industry. He was one of the longest-serving chief executive officers in recent times, having been at the helm of our company since 1974.'*

My God, thought Sam, poor Rachael. Despite her hard-nosed approach to business, he had developed a genuine respect for her ability to work incredibly long hours, her obvious intelligence and her shrewd business acumen. It was apparent that the financial staff in the London office were thrilled Rachael had joined their team to prove herself capable of following in her grandfather's footsteps.

*'I am devastated by this tragedy as I have been a long-term friend and relative of Nat.'*

A relative? Sam did not know that.

*'My late father-in-law Nathaniel leaves a powerful legacy of growth, profitability and success behind him with many of our medicines now household names. In his forty years as CEO, countless millions of patients were treated by our products and have subsequently lived more fulfilled and healthier lives. I am sure they will be mourning his death, together with his friends, relatives and over fifty thousand Napier & Beckett employees who knew him as a father figure.'*

Although Sam had only been at Napier & Beckett a couple of weeks, he was already aware of the reverence the employees held for the old man.

*'I am writing this email to you so that you have the opportunity to grieve privately before you hear about Nathaniel's death on your television news channels or in your morning newspapers. You have the right to know the truth, as he was admired by his employees and friends and his reputation should not be sullied.'*

Absolutely right, thought Sam. He had no doubt that the press would sensationalise Nathaniel Beckett's suicide.

*'It is also my sad duty to report a double tragedy. Just before Nathaniel died, our fellow director, Paul Knight suffered an extreme and permanent nervous breakdown at our board meeting on Friday.'*

'Unbelievable,' Sam muttered at the computer monitor.

*'Paul Knight had been Napier & Beckett's sales director for over ten years. During his tenure, sales grew by over twenty per cent each year and he was taking the recent temporary dip in sales to heart. Paul is not expected to recover but is being cared for by the best scientists and medical staff at his home in Alexandria.'*

'Poor bloke,' muttered Sam.

*'Paul Knight suffered his nervous breakdown soon after Nathaniel Beckett resigned as chief executive officer. Paul was assisted from the room by our trained medical staff and was unable to take part in the board of director's leadership vote. Our deepest sympathies lie with Paul's family, his friends and his twenty thousand sales colleagues. In these sad times, it pains me to remind all employees that the business of caring for the mental suffering of the sick must continue as normal. So in this spirit I must inform you that my fellow directors have cast their vote for the new CEO and it is my duty to report the result of the vote to you.'*

Rachael's succession had been a vague concept that would take place in the distant future. Now that moment had come. Sam realised that he was passionate that Rachael should become the new CEO – and not for solely altruistic reasons. He was convinced she would be an excellent choice for the role but in addition, her personal knowledge of Sam's professional capabilities would assist his career. She might even ask him to accompany her to Alexandria to take up a senior procurement position. He read on.

*'I am proud and humbled to report that my fellow directors have asked me to accept the role of chief executive officer of this great and historic company. I am aware that this*

*would make me the first leader who was not born with the Beckett name. However, I am honoured to be part of the Beckett family through marriage to my beautiful wife, Barbara. My experience and passion for the business puts me in an ideal position to guide Napier & Beckett back to its rightful place as the fastest growing pharmaceutical company in the world. I therefore decided that it was my duty to accept the position and become your new CEO.'*

Sam was disappointed by the news. He felt sorry for Rachael and sorry for himself in equal measures. For the first time in his life, he was annoyed that an older man had been promoted at the expense of a passionate and talented female. But once he thought things through he realised that Rachael was probably still too young and unproven to be leading a multinational pharmaceutical company. Sam had heard good things about Walter Mendel. He was a strong and capable leader and was taking over at a time when Napier & Beckett needed an experienced hand on the tiller. Perhaps Mendel would mentor Rachael for a few years before handing the reins of power back to the Beckett family. Still, Sam could not shake off his feelings of dissatisfaction.

*'You will no doubt hear much speculation in the press about why Nathaniel took his own life. The reality is that we cannot understand why this great man would take such a drastic course of action. He may have been ill or he may not have been able to accept life outside of his beloved company. We will never know. The facts are these. After the leadership vote, Nathaniel remained present at the board as an observer while a second vote was taken to cooperate with the American government on the development and sale of an important drug. This vote was necessary to ensure good relations with the government and the continued success of our company.'*

Sam felt uneasy at this news. He couldn't work out the reason for his concern, but something unpleasant was bothering him nonetheless.

*'After the second vote, which Nathaniel did not support, he collected his board papers. He asked us to look after his much-loved company and be guided by our consciences and by God in all our future decisions. He shook the hands of the directors and embraced his granddaughter Rachael before leaving the room. About five minutes later, we heard a gunshot from his office. Nathaniel Beckett had killed himself with his old military pistol.'*

Despite himself, Sam had to wipe away a tear that had welled up in his eye. He leaned over, grabbed a tissue from the box on Cassie's desk and blew his nose before reading the rest of the email.

*'At this sad time, we must also think of his granddaughter Rachael Beckett, who Nathaniel loved so dearly. She is overcome with emotion and is staying with her sister in Norfolk, Virginia.'*

Sam skimmed over the rest of the email that exhorted the employees to honour the memory of Nathaniel Beckett by working hard and keeping focused on their jobs. He closed the message and leaned back in his seat. Poor Rachael. He composed a short email of condolence and sent it to her. He realised she would by now have received hundreds, if not thousands of similar emails and would only be able to read a handful, but it made him feel better to send it.

Ten minutes later, as he was preparing to lock down his computer and make his way to the video conference room, his PC beeped. It was an email from Rachael. She thanked him for his note of condolence and said she was looking forward to getting back to London next week. It was 1:45 am in Washington DC.

\* \* \*

Sam realised he had made a serious error of judgement when the Bangalore-based IT help desk told him they were unable to help him set up his video conference call. He only had five minutes to go before the 7 am start time and the array of remote controls, input cables and multiple screens completely baffled him. He should have arranged for someone to assist him set up the room in advance. He poked his head out of the conference room door into the corridor to see if he could solicit help from a passing technician but at that early hour, the conference suites were deserted. He knew his Tokyo-based procurement colleagues had invited their general manager to the conference call as a sign of respect for his project. In turn, the general manager had insisted that the conference be simulcast as a webinar to all Japanese employees on their PCs. It would be a model of the close cooperation between the two Napier & Beckett affiliates and an example to all. At that moment, the three thousand Japanese staff were staring at blank

screens and he knew he had screwed up his first major project at Napier & Beckett. With two minutes remaining before the call was due to start, he realised he had left his USB containing his PowerPoint presentation of the MRI business case on his desk. The Japanese could not negotiate without the pack. He sat back in his chair and exhaled heavily in exasperation. It would be a long while before his reputation would recover from this stuff-up.

A timid knock on the door made Sam jump. Rachael's petite executive assistant, Cassie came in carrying two steaming coffees. She had raven-black hair and was dressed in a neat top, denim skirt and black boots.

'I thought I would check to see if you were okay setting up the video conference equipment. It can be daunting the first time around,' said Cassie in her delightful Edinburgh accent. She set one of the coffees down in front of him.

In the two weeks since he had arrived at Napier & Beckett, Sam had barely exchanged half a dozen words with Cassie, despite the fact they sat at adjoining desks outside Rachael's office. She seemed moody and unapproachable and he sensed that Rachael's staff of strategic analysts were wary of her. He had heard rumours that she was an ex-patient on a rehabilitation program. Cassie picked up three of the remotes and in quick succession turned on the LCD screen, the projector and the computer. The image of the Tokyo boardroom filled the massive screen at the end of the conference room. Thirty smiling Japanese faces stared at Sam. Cassie unmuted the sound and the room came alive, as if Sam was sitting at the table with his Tokyo colleagues on the other side of the world.

Sam's spirits lifted. He figured he could ask Cassie to run up to level five and hunt for his USB among the detritus on his desk while he bluffed his way through the first ten minutes of the conference. He watched Cassie make a few adjustments to the camera position. Once she was satisfied, she produced Sam's missing USB from her pocket and inserted it into the computer. Moments later, his PowerPoint presentation containing the MRI data appeared in the bottom quarter of the screen. Cassie handed him the remote and showed him how to toggle between his MRI data and the image of the Tokyo boardroom staff. She made a discreet exit from the conference room just as the digital clock at the very bottom of the screen clicked over from 6:59 am to 7 am.

## CHAPTER 5

The Napier & Beckett induction training room for new employees was on the tenth floor and had breathtaking views of the City of London through its panoramic windows. Sam had a perfect view of the new ‘Gherkin’ building. Further to the west was the monument commemorating the Great Fire of London. He could also see the Bank of England building and further on, the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral. The London vista was shimmering in the late spring warmth and the magnificence of the London skyline sent Sam’s spirits soaring.

The presenter, Chris Castledine, was the public relations manager. He was tall, dark-haired and good-looking. He presented several case studies that stressed the need for complete integrity in the pharmaceutical industry.

‘Can anyone tell me what the going rate is for fines for off-label promotion of drugs in the pharmaceutical industry?’

‘What’s off-label promotion?’ Sam asked.

‘It’s when the pharmaceutical company is claiming a drug has benefits that have not been approved by the authorities. Anyone know the answer?’

‘About two billion dollars?’ suggested a studious graduate.

‘That’s about right,’ Castledine confirmed. ‘GlaxoSmithKline paid a three billion dollar fine last year for claiming that its product Wellbutrin had properties that had not yet been approved as safe and effective by the FDA – that’s the Food and Drugs Administration of America. That’s not to say that Wellbutrin did not have those properties, it’s just they hadn’t yet gone through the appropriate approval processes.’

‘That seems a bit harsh,’ said Sam.

‘It may be harsh, but the pharmaceutical industry has to be the most highly-regulated industry in the world.’

‘Has Napier & Beckett ever been fined?’ asked Sam.

‘Not for ten years.’

‘What were we fined for?’

‘We were fined for making false representation to the FDA about an ADHD drug.’

The inductees were fascinated by what Castledine had to say.

‘What was false about our submission?’ asked an attractive young saleslady.

‘We overstated the number of clinical trials that had been carried out. It was a technical issue, but we were nevertheless fined four hundred million dollars.’ There was a collective gasp around the room. ‘The FDA forced us to revamp our clinical trial processes,’ Castledine added. ‘Not only that, we had to accommodate a representative of the FDA in our research and development department for five years and pay her wages.’ The room was silent.

‘That doesn’t seem right,’ said Sam. ‘Was our ADHD drug eventually approved?’

‘No. We had to withdraw the application. The additional clinical trials that we carried out on the drug highlighted an unexpected side effect.’ Chris Castledine glanced at his watch and frowned. ‘Look, we need to move on as we are behind schedule.’

‘What was the side effect?’ insisted a production line recruit.

‘One trial patient was reduced to a state of imbecility, but the result was seen as a statistical aberration.’ ‘Imbecility?’ the recruit echoed.

‘Yes. The fifteen-year-old girl at the centre of the allegation regressed over a period of five months to an equivalent mental age of a four-year-old. But her condition could have been due to a host of other unrelated factors.’

‘Could this have been our own Thalidomide scandal?’ asked the new facilities manager.

‘What’s Thalidomide?’ asked the graduate trainee.

‘It was the most notorious pharmaceutical scandal in history. Thalidomide was released into the market in 1957 to alleviate nausea in pregnant women. It caused over ten thousand babies to be born with terrible deformities. Only half survived.’ There was a look of horror around the room, particularly among the women. ‘Such an event could not happen today because it provoked the drafting of a whole new regime of regulations and controls.’

‘Even so, it sounds like we have a terrible reputation.’ Sam said.

Castledine looked annoyed. ‘You have to remember that Napier & Beckett has enhanced the lives of countless millions. We have helped families who would otherwise not be able to cope with disruptive and sometimes violent children. We have successfully integrated tens of thousands of paranoid schizophrenics into society. Our products have

stopped hundreds of murders, thousands of violent assaults and countless antisocial acts. You should be proud to be part of the pharmaceutical industry.’ He paused for effect. ‘Does anyone know Napier & Beckett’s mission statement?’

There was silence. Castledine continued. ‘Our purpose is to ease the mental suffering of society’s least fortunate so that they might enjoy a fulfilled life.’

The occupants of the room were impressed and all sat up a little straighter in their seats.

‘It’s not just people!’ said the sales woman. ‘My product Kanubis comforts the mental anguish of neurotic dogs so they can live fulfilled lives too!’

‘Yes, pets too,’ agreed Castledine.

\* \* \*

That afternoon, the head of the Patient Research Facilities, Dr Grant McDonald asked Sam if he would like a tour of the three basement laboratories. The doctor was about forty, wore black-framed spectacles and a sharp suit under his white coat. Sam readily agreed.

‘We are going to tour the most advanced, well-equipped patient trials facilities in Europe. They are located in the three basement levels of the building, but don’t let that deceive you. The standard of décor would put the London Hilton to shame.’ He handed a white coat to Sam as they approached the discreet lift well on the ground floor.

‘The facilities you are about to see are audited every month by the UK Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency, or MHRA. The MHRA is the UK version of the Food and Drug Administration in the States.’

‘Are any of the patients violent?’ asked Sam.

‘We will not be visiting the compulsive aggressive disorder unit in B3. However, the nature of Napier & Beckett’s market sector in neurology means that all of our patients are “disturbed” in some way, but very few are violent. Every patient is monitored by our expert staff and medicated depending upon the severity of their illness.’

‘How many patients are there in the research laboratories?’

‘About three hundred and eighty. But this afternoon about one hundred patients will

be outside at their places of work.’

‘They are allowed out?’

‘All patients are here of their own free will and our goal is to eventually release them back into society on our rehabilitation programs. That includes those who are classified as criminally insane.’ Dr McDonald pushed the lift button to level B2.

‘Each ward has its own set of bedrooms, kitchens and recreation lounges. Our aim is to prove that our drugs can assist with the complete integration of violent and antisocial individuals back into society who would otherwise be a burden on our prisons or social services.’

‘Which units will we be touring?’ Sam asked.

‘We will be touring four different wards including the Tourette wing, the Asperger’s unit, the acute bipolar ward and the schizophrenia research facility.’

They stepped out of the lift at the second basement level. It did indeed have the atmosphere of a hotel lobby. Dr McDonald looked conspiratorially at Sam. ‘I have arranged a test for you. Based on your selected profession and employment profile, you should be able to spot someone who is lying and someone who is telling the truth, right?’

‘I guess so,’ said Sam.

‘I have arranged for you to meet two people this afternoon. One is a real paranoid schizophrenic. For the sake of argument, we shall call him Bob. Bob lives in a land of conspiracy theories. Everything he sees and hears is proof that there is a plot against him and the wider community. The more you try to tell him otherwise, the more you will convince him there is a conspiracy. Sadly, this belief is common in this ward. Even more regrettable is that Bob is on a placebo drug so his condition will not improve.’

‘That’s terrible!’ protested Sam. ‘If we can cure him, isn’t it immoral not to do so?’

‘Unless we have a control group living in exactly the same conditions as the group on our schizophrenia drug Persilias, we will not be able to prove its efficacy. For example, a reduction in schizophrenic symptoms could be because the patient is living in a comfortable and safe environment and may have nothing to do with the drugs.’

‘Where have the patients come from?’

‘Most come from a deprived background, but not all. Some of the kids in here have grown up in abusive families. Some were alcohol or drug dependent. Others have been

bullied throughout their lives.’

‘So will Bob be telling the truth or lying?’ asked Sam.

‘He is not telling the truth as we would understand it, but in his mind he’s being factual. You can treat him as the one who is telling the truth.’ Dr McDonald stopped to place his ID card against a security-card reader and the double doors opened. They headed to the reception area of the schizophrenia ward.

‘What about the other guy?’ asked Sam.

‘Ah! That’s Joe. Now Joe, for today only, will be a pathological liar! In his day job, he works with me in development and he is going to spin you the biggest cock and bull story you ever heard. But being a trained negotiator and procurement manager, you will no doubt pick him out as the actor that I have planted in the ward to confuse you.’ Sam had indeed received training at Sovereign on non-verbal communication. He still held the record test score.

‘With all due respect, what’s the point of this test?’ asked Sam.

‘This will be the closest you will ever be to getting inside the heads of the people in this ward. If you don’t understand what they are going through, then you will never have a successful career in the neurological industry. By being a little bit unsure of what is real and what is not, you will develop a little empathy towards their condition.’

‘How should I talk to the patients?’

‘Introduce yourself. Talk slowly and clearly, be friendly, show an interest but don’t patronise them. They are just like ordinary people. But remember, while you are having one conversation, they may be having a totally different conversation with you and several more with the voices in their heads.’

Sam thought back to his early childhood. An only child, he had a string of imaginary friends he would play with for hours on end. His pious mother became increasingly concerned about him and summoned the local vicar, who dabbled in psychology as a hobby. He announced that seven-year-old Sam had schizophrenia. The vicar suggested his mother take him to the nearest church-funded mental hospital for further tests. Only the intervention of his great-uncle Roy had persuaded his parents that Sam was a normal, healthy child and the tests would do more harm than good.

Dr McDonald continued. They may display one or two strange characteristics such as

laughing for no apparent reason or talking in meaningless phrases. However, it's important not to laugh *at* them; they are intelligent and creative people. You may end up making a friend!

Dr McDonald opened the door to the main recreation room. It was large, bright and airy and smelled of fresh carpet and paint. Table tennis and pool tables were located throughout the room. There was a kitchenette at one end for refreshments and five or six separate TVs where groups of young men and women huddled. There was a library area stocked with new books. It was a relaxing and safe environment for the patients. There were twice as many young men as women. Scattered among the youngsters were half a dozen older men and a sprinkling of older women. They wore clean but dowdy T-shirts, jeans and trainers. Half a dozen medical staff relaxed with the patients.

Dr McDonald introduced Sam to a young man who was sitting on his own in front of a TV.

'Hi Josh!' Dr McDonald said to the young man who was glowering at the TV. 'Can I introduce a colleague of mine? He is called Sam and he works upstairs.' 'Upstairs' was the term the patients used for Napier & Beckett's offices and laboratories above the basement complex.

'Hi!' said Sam.

'Hello,' the young man said without looking up from the TV.

'What are you watching?' asked Sam.

'A recording of the kitchen from yesterday.'

Josh peered at the screen. It appeared to be CCTV footage of the kitchenette area.

'What are you trying to find?' asked Sam.

'Someone is putting drugs in the teabags. They are doing illegal experiments on us.'

Sam looked at Dr McDonald and raised an eyebrow.

'The guests know that we take video footage of the research facilities. It's part of the patient monitoring regime that the MHRA demanded. We allow the guests to view any piece of footage from the public areas that they choose. We have found that it reduces the incidence of paranoia. Josh likes to check out the kitchenette footage.'

Josh paused the recording and turned to stare at Sam. He had piercing blue eyes and long, tightly curled blond hair. Josh studied Sam for what seemed like minutes then he

turned to Dr McDonald.

‘He’s one of us, Doctor! Sam should stay here and you can make him better.’

Sam felt a shudder run through his spine and he felt the presence of his mother press on his soul.

‘Don’t be silly, Josh,’ said Dr McDonald. ‘Sam’s here on a visit and will be leaving the ward soon.’

‘But Sam hears voices just like the rest of us. Why aren’t you treating him?’

Sam heard laughing all around him. Many of the patients were staring at him, but he could not detect the source of the laughter. Could it actually be coming from within his mind? Sam focused hard and pushed the thought away. He wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead.

‘Are all the teabags drugged?’ asked Sam, trying to change the subject.

‘Jeff died three weeks ago after drinking the red teabags. Sandra went crazy two months ago and slit her wrists. She used the red teabags too,’ said Josh without a flicker of emotion on his handsome face.

‘I can ask the staff to take the red teabags away if that will help,’ Sam offered.

Josh looked panicky. ‘Don’t do that. They will put the drugs into different coloured teabags and then I won’t know which is which.’

‘True,’ said Sam. He could not fault Josh’s logic. ‘But are you happy here at Napier & Beckett?’

‘No.’

‘Have you ever thought about leaving?’

‘Can’t.’

‘I thought you could leave anytime you wanted?’

‘I can’t leave because Maurice is at home,’ he said with a dark expression on his face. Sam imagined Maurice must be an abusive guardian or relative. However, Josh had now lost interest in both Sam and Dr McDonald. He was playing and replaying video footage of the kitchenette.

‘I believe we just met “Bob”,’ said Sam, as they wandered towards the pool table area.

‘You think so?’ said Dr McDonald. ‘Perhaps you should reserve your judgement till

you have met our next guest.'

Before they could meet "Joe", Dr McDonald's mobile phone vibrated in his pocket. He stopped in his tracks and answered the call. His pleasant demeanour changed as he digested the information given to him by the caller. Dr McDonald hung up and looked at Sam.

'Problems in B3, I'm afraid. I am so sorry, but I'll have to leave you. You can stay here if you wish and I will organise for a researcher to finish the tour for you. Perhaps you could wait at a table in the meantime. Just try not to engage with anyone till the researcher arrives.'

He gestured to a man at the pool table, who put down his cue and rushed to join Dr McDonald. Sam assumed that the man was 'Joe' from development. As Dr McDonald was about to leave the unit he winked at Sam and said, 'Best not to drink the tea with the red label!'

Sam wandered to the kitchenette and selected a mug. He grabbed an English Breakfast teabag with a red label from the airtight container and poured in some hot water from the boiler.

'Mind if I join you?' said an obese man in his late thirties.

'Sure. English Breakfast or Earl Grey?'

'Can't stand Earl Grey,' replied the man.

Sam selected a second English Breakfast teabag and made another cup.

'Milk and sugar?'

'Milk and five sugars.'

Sam brought the freshly brewed mugs of tea to the nearest table in the recreation room and sat down. He gave the second mug to the obese man.

'Hi! I'm Sam.' He extended a hand.

'I'm Alec De Souza,' said his companion, ignoring Sam's outstretched hand. 'Look, this might seem strange, but can we move to that corner table over there?' He pointed to a darkened corner by the library area.

'Sure,' said Sam, picking up his mug.

Sam walked slowly to allow De Souza to move his bulky frame across the room. They settled into a sofa next to a pile of scattered books. De Souza did not seem happy.

He looked up at various points in the ceiling and appeared to be working out the angles.

‘Can we move the sofa a bit to the left?’

‘No problem,’ replied Sam.

Once they had resettled, De Souza visibly relaxed.

‘This is the only spot in the rec room that is not covered by the cameras.’

‘Cool.’

‘So you are from upstairs?’

‘That’s right.’

‘I used to be from upstairs too.’

‘Really?’ said Sam without much conviction.

‘This whole patient trials facility is an elaborate fraud,’ De Souza whispered. He looked around to check no-one was listening.

‘Is that right?’ said Sam, trying not to sound condescending.

‘People get hauled off the street; they’re not volunteers. At least – not all of them,’ said De Souza.

‘Why would Napier & Beckett need to haul people off the street?’

‘They need to meet a volunteer quota to get their drugs approved. There are never enough referrals from hospitals or the social services.’

‘But people can come and leave at anytime.’

De Souza laughed. ‘And they take people from “upstairs”.’

‘That’s terrible.’ Sam wondered how he could end the conversation without upsetting De Souza.

‘I need you to get a message to my partner.’

‘Sure. What would you like me to tell him?’ asked Sam.

‘Tell Jacques that although I signed the forms agreeing to take part in the Persilias trials, I was blackmailed into it. Tell him I was stupid enough to commit fraud at work. When Rachael found out, she threatened to report me to the police unless I volunteered for the Persilias trials for three months. It’s now been six freaking months and I’m still stuck in this shithole with over eighty paranoid schizophrenics.’

It became clear to Sam. De Souza was part of Dr McDonald’s elaborate little test. His so-called emergency phone call was a ruse so that Sam would lower his guard when he

met the real 'Joe'. De Souza had begun to freak him out but as the realisation hit him, he relaxed and decided to play along with Joe's delusional scenario.

'Sure. How do I get hold of Jacques for you?'

De Souza looked left and right, then he gave Sam a piece of paper with a name, address and phone number written on it. Sam guessed that if he rang the phone number he would get Dr McDonald's smug voice at the end of the phone telling him he had failed the test.

'I will call Jacques this afternoon,' said Sam. De Souza looked relieved. This guy was a great actor, Sam thought.

'What department do you work in?' De Souza asked.

'Procurement,' replied Sam.

'No shit?'

'I got the job two weeks ago.'

De Souza moved closer and Sam became aware of the man's body odour.

'Look. You have to get out of Napier & Beckett,' said De Souza. 'I was the procurement manager six months ago. I was sacked for awarding a company contract to my cousin.' He ran his hands through his greasy black hair. 'It was my own fault, I suppose. The most stupid thing I have ever done in my life. But I have the feeling I was set up by that bitch Rachael Beckett.'

Sam was tiring of the charade.

'I will talk to Jacques this afternoon. But now I must be getting back to my desk.'

De Souza moved closer and grabbed Sam's arm. 'They will test you. They will give you the opportunity to take a bribe. Don't take it and don't ever challenge Rachael Beckett. That's when things will go pear-shaped for you.'

Despite himself, Sam was intrigued. 'Did you challenge Rachael?'

'She told me to award the firm's print business to some useless American outfit. What the hell does she know about procurement? I stuck to my guns and awarded the contract to SurePrint.'

'I've never heard of them,' said Sam.

'My sister had just bought a shitload of shares in SurePrint, so I thought they must be good,' he explained. 'Anyway, that's when I knew Rachael was out to get me. I came

into work early one morning at 6 am. As no-one was around, I decided to shoot a couple of lines of coke at my desk. Then would you fucking believe it, Rachael crept up right behind me while I was in mid-snort. I damn near snorted the mirror up my nose along with the coke. From that moment, she had me by the bollocks.'

Sam listened to the story with increasing discomfort. Despite knowing that he was listening to a cock and bull story, he did not appreciate De Souza's sordid comments. He knew he should stop the whole farce but if there was even a small chance that he was talking to a genuine schizophrenic, he felt compelled to listen.

'So what did Rachael do when she had you at a disadvantage?' he asked.

'Nothing to start with. I thought she was ignoring me, which was fine. A month went by, but then I noticed that she was looking for mistakes in my work. When I did the stationery tender, she told me bluntly that she did not trust me to award the contract to the best supplier. I told her in no uncertain terms that she was Napier & Beckett's flowchart jockey and I was the procurement professional. She didn't like that at all.'

'I don't suppose she did.'

'She looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Are you defying me, De Souza?" Fuck me; the look she gave me scared the living bejesus out of me.'

'What happened then?'

'She told me to look at her computer screen. The bitch only had a recording of me snorting two lines of coke on her PC. Did you know they have cameras above every desk?'

'No.'

'Well they do, so I would be careful if I were you. Anyway, the next day she called me into her office and handed me a shoe polishing kit!'

'A shoe polishing kit?'

'Yes, an expensive looking kit in a small black leather case. She told me without a shadow of shame that she was running late for her Senzar presentation to the MHRA and would I mind polishing her shoes.' He shuddered. 'If I had just walked out the office, the worst she could have done was report me to the police for snorting coke. They would have rapped me on the knuckles and that would have been it. But to my eternal shame, I just took her shoes to my desk, opened the tin of polish and cleaned them. I have never

been so humiliated in my life; it nearly broke me.'

'It was a very important presentation, Alec.'

'She was screwing with my head, Sam. Don't you get it? She was daring me to defy her.'

Both men were silent in contemplation for a while. Finally, De Souza said, 'There are others at Napier & Beckett that would like to pull her down a peg or two. Some are very powerful. You could benefit considerably if you join them, Sam.'

Sam had heard enough. 'Well it was nice talking to you, Alec. I have to head back to my office now.' He picked up his mug and drained what was left of his tea. He grimaced at the taste.

'The milk must be a bit sour.'

'Did I tell you about the time Rachael's secretary, Cassie Gilchrist, took me to the drugs stockroom?' said De Souza hastily. Sam stopped in his tracks and sat back down. 'Cassie has chronic bipolar by the way,' he added.

'What?'

'She came from the trials unit in B1. Rachael is integrating her back into the workforce but she is a moody little bitch. She has been out a whole year now. Has to go back in for regular check-ups though.' Sam had to use all his willpower to remain calm. De Souza continued his story.

'Well, shortly after the shoe polishing incident she asked if I wanted to help her do a stocktake on the E.D. drug.'

'What's "E.D."?'

'You really came down in the last shower, didn't you? Are you sure you're a procurement manager?'

'Alec, I am going to walk to the kitchenette right now. I am going to wait for the researcher to escort me out and then I am going back to my desk. It was nice to meet you.'

'Okay. Calm down. It's erectile dysfunction. Cassie told me that Napier & Beckett marketed a specialist brand of E.D. drugs that catered for the S&M market. That's Sadism and Masochism, Sam – you should try it. It was nonsense, of course. Napier & Beckett doesn't even do erectile dysfunction drugs but I was so hot for these thrill pills

that I just believed her. What a dumb arse! She told me that they were the most expensive drugs in the world if they are sold on the black market. We had to go through more security than the Bank of England. Of course, I pocketed a bottle. Managed to fool the cameras.’ De Souza moved closer to Sam and gripped his arm. Sam tried to put more distance between the two of them but he was jammed up against the end of the sofa.

De Souza continued. ‘When I started taking the drugs, I knew they were not for E.D. I got no boner at all but they did give me hallucinations. They gave me feelings of paranoia and confused the hell out of me. Before I know it, I’m displaying classic symptoms of schizophrenia. So when I handed the stationery contract to Cousin Carlos, Rachael Beckett gave me the choice of taking part in the Persilias trials or prison – and here I am.’ He looked at Sam. ‘You will phone Jacques, won’t you?’

‘Sure,’ said Sam, ‘I’ll be in touch.’ He strode over to the kitchenette, happy to leave De Souza to his own thoughts, strange as they may be. He was washing out his mug when a busy looking woman in a white coat with round glasses hurried in to meet him.

‘Sorry I’m late,’ she said. ‘Dr McDonald speaks highly of you. He has asked me to complete the tour for him. He has even arranged a little surprise for you in the Tourette ward.’

## CHAPTER 6

The drive to Fort William in the Highlands region of Scotland was murderous at the best of times. Sam was eight hours into his drive from Chichester and it was always the last stage of the journey that frazzled his nerves. The scenery was breathtaking with the beautiful Loch Linnhe and glimpses of Ben Nevis to his left. However, the road was impossibly narrow for the volume of traffic while tourists and heavy goods vehicles choked the road. A posse of large trucks thundered along the road that eventually led to the large Highlands town of Inverness.

A car overtook him as he approached a bend. As it did so, a semi-articulated truck materialised on the other side of the road and flashed its lights. Sam braked his Freelander hard to allow the overtaking vehicle to pull in. It cut in sharply and almost ran him off the road. The big truck blared its horn as it passed by. Sam swore silently at the driver in front. The offending driver raised the middle finger of his right hand at Sam and then accelerated into the distance. Rain beat down from the heavens. He flicked on the wipers, but they struggled to keep up with the torrential downpour. He had slowed to about fifty miles an hour, but a monstrous truck soon filled his rear-view mirror. He sped up but the colossus behind him moved across to overtake. As it pulled level, the truck spewed out a torrent of filthy water from its eighteen massive wheels, obliterating his view of the road ahead. The truck crawled past him and struggled up a slight incline. Sam felt like he was sailing a fishing boat into a tsunami.

As the rain eased, he wondered what had persuaded his great-uncle Roy to move from his native Yorkshire to the remote town of Fort William. Then Sam gazed to his left and caught his breath at the spectacular sight of a rainbow arching across Ben Nevis beyond the shimmering Loch Linnhe. Roy was now his only living relative not suffering from Alzheimer's and remarkably, he was still going strong at ninety-two years of age. He was fit and energetic and had lost none of his considerable intellect. By rights, Roy should not have lived past his twentieth birthday. He had been drafted into the army at nineteen years of age and had taken part in the D-Day landings as a Sherman tank gunner. He had fought through some of the worst tank battles of the war, during which his tanks had suffered two direct hits. He had battled through months of torrid close range combat and

yet managed to return home physically unharmed. Mentally however, Roy still suffered from severe claustrophobia and night terrors.

Sam regularly talked to Roy on the phone and drove the four hundred and fifty mile trip to Fort William every other month. During their last phone call Roy, who was usually chatty, had sounded agitated and upset. He told Sam that he wanted to share some family history with him that related to his new job at Napier & Beckett. Sam was intrigued to discover what he had to say.

Sam turned off the A82, leaving the juggernauts and cars to their private battles. On the outskirts of Fort William, Sam pulled up at a set of red lights. He was second in the queue and gazed at the ancient brown Mini Minor in front of him. A fading sticker displaying the Scottish thistle clung to its rear window. Two large men in the front seats were holding an animated discussion. The lights turned green but the Mini Minor was slow on the uptake. The driver of a silver BMW behind Sam let loose a loud blast from his car horn that went on for much longer than was necessary. Sam watched with concern as the driver of the Mini took offence. As he unfolded himself from the Mini, he revealed his bear-like physique to the drivers behind him. He hoped the BMW driver was a smooth talker; he would need all his charms to get out of the impending encounter. Much to Sam's surprise, the Mini driver began banging on Sam's window.

'Get the windae doon!' the man demanded.

'It wasn't me,' Sam explained pointing over his shoulder, 'it was the BMW.' Sam's explanation only served to enrage the large Scotsman further. A string of invectives and spittle showered Sam. He struggled to keep up with the large man's thick accent. To Sam's dismay, he saw that the offending BMW had managed a neat U-turn and was disappearing in the opposite direction. The Mini driver went back to his car and returned with a short iron bar in his hand. He slapped the bar several times in his giant paw and looked over Sam's car for the point of maximum impact. He sprayed out several more insults, although Sam only recognised the words 'English' and 'git'. Sam looked around his car for something that would assist his defence. There was no suitable weapon but his eyes fixed on the six-pack of beer nestled in the passenger seat beside him. Sam offered the beers to his would-be assailant through the open window as if he was in the habit of sharing beers with total strangers. He watched the big man's demeanour change as he

accepted the beers. The iron bar disappeared.

‘Ye wee beauties,’ he said to the six-pack as they vanished into his overcoat.

The second man, who had been taking a keen interest in the activities behind him, extracted himself from the Mini and joined his companion. He was a few inches smaller than the driver. He offered his hand to Sam through the open window, which Sam shook like an old friend.

Several red lights came and went but none of the drivers in the queue of cars behind Sam was plucky enough to touch their car horn.

‘Hoos it gaun?’ the second man asked Sam.

‘Hey, it’s going great,’ replied Sam. ‘I am up here visiting my great-uncle Roy.’ Sam was anxious to demonstrate his link with Fort William. ‘He’s a World War Two veteran, but he’s still fit as a fiddle.’

‘Nae Roy Jardine?’ asked the second man in astonishment.

‘That’s him!’ responded Sam.

A look of respect appeared on both men’s faces. His Uncle Roy was the oldest war veteran in Fort William. He had laid the wreath on the war memorial in the town centre on Remembrance Sunday for the last two years.

‘Och! Will ye tell Roy that Jock ‘n Wee Robbie said hallo?’

‘I certainly will,’ said Sam.

Jock split two beers from the six-pack that Sam had just given him and tossed them back through Sam’s window.

‘Get these bellywashers doon yers when ye get tae Roy’s hoose.’

‘Thanks very much, Jock,’ said Sam in appreciation.

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, Sam was calming his nerves with a mug of tea in Roy’s tidy and comfortable front room. Roy laughed as Sam recounted his experience with Jock and ‘Wee’ Robbie.

‘The Dalgety boys are lively lads,’ said Roy in his cheerful Yorkshire accent. ‘They both help me with the garden each spring, so they are not all bad. It’s the elder brother

Mungo you have to worry about. He's ex-SAS like quite a few of the locals round here but he's serving his last few months in Glasgow Prison for arson.'

'Remind me to steer well clear of the Dalgety house when he gets out.'

'He makes his two brothers look like choirboys,' agreed Roy.

Sam was delighted to see Roy in such great shape and marvelled at how he refused to sit still. Roy and Sam passed the afternoon engaged in small talk and memories of Sam's childhood. Roy enquired about Sam's father and they consoled each other about his father's declining mental health.

At six o'clock in the evening, they decided to go for a drink at the Maryburgh Inn. Although late in the day, the sun was still shining. The landlord greeted Roy with a mixture of friendliness and respect and welcomed Sam to his pub.

'I heard Jock and Wee Robbie gave you the traditional Dalgety welcome,' said the landlord, laughing at Sam.

'Word spreads fast! I thought my car and I would be spending the weekend at the panelbeater's,' agreed Sam.

Roy and Sam settled into a quiet nook by the fireplace and continued their small talk until Sam broached the topic that had been bothering Roy.

'Roy, you were upset with me on the phone when I mentioned I had joined Napier & Beckett.'

Roy was silent for a while and downed the last two inches from his pint of beer. No sooner had his empty glass touched the table than the landlord replaced it with a full jug of Cotleigh Tawney Bitter and two clean glasses.

'Compliments of the Maryburgh. It's for both of you,' said the landlord.

'Thank you,' said Sam as the landlord retreated to the bar.

'I met your old boss once,' said Roy. 'Of course, he was only eighteen-years-old at the time. I was sad to hear how he died.'

'You met him in the war?'

'I did. I met his uncle too. Nasty piece of work.' Roy took another drink.

'You do realise that I now work directly for his granddaughter Rachael?'

Roy was shocked. 'I thought the Becketts were based in a small town near Washington DC. What's she doing in London?'

‘She was trying to prove herself to Nathaniel by turning around the London office. Of course, now that Nathaniel is dead she may decide to go back to Alexandria to be closer to the action.’

Roy was silent for a while and Sam thought he might have lost his train of thought.

‘Sam, our family has a long history with the Becketts. There’s a lot of bad blood between us. You should be careful.’

‘What do you mean?’ Sam was staggered by this news of a connection with Rachael’s family.

‘It goes back a long time. My grandmother Alice Jardine knew them well. She talked about the ‘Napier inheritance’ and how the Becketts had cheated us out of several million pounds. She was very bitter about it all.’

Sam was intrigued. ‘What did your grandmother say?’

‘She lived with us for a few years but died in the 1930s when I was only fourteen. To be honest, Sam, I didn’t pay too much attention to her at the time. She was quite eccentric and enjoyed a glass or two of sherry. I do remember that she spoke with a slight American accent but other than that, I can’t remember much about her.’

‘So how did you meet Nathaniel Beckett?’

‘I was briefly assigned to the American 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during Operation Clipper.’

Sam settled himself in for a war story. There was a time when Roy would not say a word about the war. Then after the fiftieth anniversary of the VE Day celebrations, the country rediscovered its war heroes. Roy found that people were interested in his wartime exploits. The more he talked, the more the demons that had haunted him for so long lost their grip. They would never disappear altogether but his nightmares were becoming a rarer occurrence.

‘I was with the British 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division for the duration of the war. We modified armoured vehicles for specialist roles. I was in the Buffalos during the Rhine crossing. I also trained on mine clearing tanks, Crocodile flamethrower tanks and Canal Defence Lights.’

‘So how did you meet Nathaniel Beckett during Operation Clipper?’

‘It was six months after the D-Day landings in Germany. The British were tasked

with clearing out a German-held salient that protruded into the British and American front-lines. The German position was part of the Siegfried line and neatly divided the American and British armies. Unless we cleared the salient, the Germans could attack our flanks at anytime. It also meant that our two armies could not manoeuvre and supply their front-line troops effectively.’

‘Why were you assigned to the American division?’

‘Operation Clipper was a joint British-American operation. The area was heavily mined and there were German bunkers and pillboxes everywhere. The Americans loved our Crocodiles – our flamethrower tanks – and needed the flail tanks to clear a path through the minefields.’

‘Which tanks were you in?’

‘At that stage I was in the Crocodiles. I had to aim and fire the flamethrower. You could not pick a more dangerous job in the army!’

‘So what happened?’

‘It was a freezing rainy day in late November 1944. Our boys had just captured the German town of Geilenkirchen and my American division was advancing towards the River Wurm. The river was our final objective. The fields had become waterlogged and one by one, our tanks became bogged down. After about four hours, our tank was the last mobile Crocodile. Our commander wanted to turn back and we all agreed. When you’re in an isolated tank towing four hundred gallons of highly flammable liquid, you become vulnerable and edgy. We had a bad leak in one of the hoses and we had been smelling flamethrower fuel in the turret all day. One hit from a bullet in the wrong place or a Panzerfaust in our belly and we would have been blown to the heavens.’

Roy took a sip of beer. He was visualising the cold and the danger of the front-line all those years before. Sam could imagine the smells and sounds of the tank as Roy recounted his tale in the comfort of the Maryburgh Inn. A piece of wood crackled in the fireplace. Sam poured more beer into Roy’s glass and he continued.

‘Before we made our decision, a young American sergeant came running towards us waving his hands. It was your old boss, Nathaniel Beckett. He looked terrified. He clambered aboard and told us that six of his men were stuck in a farmhouse. They were facing an infantry attack by a company of one hundred Germans that had emerged from a

wood. The Americans had thought the wood was being cleared by their own troops and had been surprised when troops emerged wearing the grey garments of the German Army. The Americans had no tanks of their own and no supporting artillery. Ben the shell loader and Pete the commander ran back to the fuel trailer and pumped up the pressure on the flamethrower for all they were worth. Danny the driver got us going and I sat young Nathaniel Beckett next to me in the turret. Nathaniel told me the farmhouse was about a mile away and it took us about fifteen minutes to get there. I thought we were going to be stuck two or three times. As we got close, we ran straight into the ferocious German attack that was threatening to overwhelm the farmhouse. The Americans had fixed bayonets to their rifles as the Germans closed in.'

'Six American soldiers were facing one hundred Germans?'

'Most soldiers facing impossible odds like that would have surrendered. But Beckett's troops were fighting like demons. Their rate of fire was extraordinary. I asked Ben to load some shells and I fired a couple of 75 mm shots at the Germans to get them to back off.'

'I thought the Crocodiles fired flames, not shells?' Sam asked.

'The flamethrower replaced the hull mounted Besa machine gun, not the main gun barrel,' explained Roy. 'The Germans didn't run away but our action encouraged the six Americans in the farmhouse to open up with everything they had left. They killed half a dozen more of the attackers. When we got to within one hundred and fifty yards, I gave the Germans a two-second squirt with the flamethrower. You can feel the heat when it goes off. I had no eyebrows for about six months after leaving the Crocs. The flames fell short. The effect of the flamethrower was usually enough to send most soldiers packing. In this case, about twenty of them did scarper but the others began firing at the Croc. That made me panicky, as the Croc was not designed for open field combat – it was designed to be used against pillboxes and buildings. If the Germans had been smart, they would have spread out and surrounded the tank. Then it would have been curtains. I tell you Sam, my stomach felt like it was going through the wringer.' Sam shuddered at the image of his uncle in such dire peril.

'I spotted a tree about fifty yards away and decided to show Jerry what would happen to them if they took a direct hit from the flamethrower. I showered the tree with a 'wet

burst' of unlit fuel and then followed with a second burst of ignited fuel. The tree exploded and caused an almighty flare-up. You would have enjoyed it, Sam – you always did love bonfires! I then turned the turret straight towards the main body of Germans. I have never seen men in full combat uniform run so fast. Most of them left their rifles behind. The Americans from the farmhouse hit five more as they ran towards the woods. I yelled at Ben to load another 75 mm shell into the breach of the main gun and I sent it heading their way to keep them running. I am sure one or two of them were picking fragments of Sheffield steel out of their arses that night.'

'I bet the Americans were relieved,' said Sam, enthralled by the story.

'The funny thing was they continued shooting even after it was obvious the Germans had gone. We stayed in the tank for another hour in case Jerry returned but it was clear they had scarpered for good. George, Pete, Ben and I closed down the tank and primed down the flamethrower. Then we met the Americans.

'Where was Beckett at this stage?'

'He was with his six men. I can tell you, Sam, we did not get the welcome we had been expecting.'

'Why? What happened?'

'All six of Beckett's men pointed their rifles at us, bayonets still attached. They had a look of cold fury on their faces that scared the living daylights out of us. If Beckett had not been yelling blue murder at them, I am convinced to this day that they would have slaughtered us. Their eyes were not normal. I suffered from nightmares for years afterwards. The nightmares were always about those six men and the craziness that was in their eyes. The soldier who levelled his rifle at me had short, blond hair, the squarest jaw I have ever seen and a slight rip in his left ear where he had a close encounter with a German bullet. His eyes were burning with hate as if I was vermin and deserved to be butchered where I stood. I could see his trigger finger go white as he applied pressure. I tell you, Sam, I know what it must feel like to stand over a trapdoor with a noose round your neck.'

Roy stopped his story briefly and made an excuse to visit the bathroom. When he returned, Sam could tell that Roy had splashed water on his face in an attempt to regain his composure.

‘Beckett was unaffected, but the troopers would not stand down. Beckett eventually got his men to accept my tank crew as allies but they were still as tense as coiled springs. Then Beckett said something strange.’

‘What did he say?’

‘He said, “It was the Berserker”.’

‘What did Beckett mean by that?’

‘I wasn’t sure at the time. I let it go, as I was keen to get back to base before it got dark. That was when it happened.’

‘When what happened?’ asked Sam, intrigued.

‘Hundreds of soldiers began appearing from the woods again and we thought we were caught like rats in a trap. We had already shut our tank down. But this time, it wasn’t Germans – it was the Yanks of the 84<sup>th</sup>. It was like the old Hollywood movies when the US cavalry comes riding to the rescue. Then Beckett’s troopers began freaking out again. They were convinced the Germans were back. Beckett was yelling at his troopers that they were American soldiers but it made no difference.’

‘Did Beckett get them under control?’

‘The troopers fired off at least a dozen rounds at their own men. One soldier pointed his rifle at me and the Croc boys. If we had made any move to stop the shooting, I am convinced he would have killed us.’

‘Did they hit any of their own men?’

‘Three Americans were killed and one was hit in the leg.’

‘My God. How did it stop?’

‘Beckett threw himself at them. I thought they would kill him, but they finally realised what they had done. The fury just left them and they slumped to the ground as if their world had just ended. In a way, it had.’

‘What happened then?’

‘One or two of the Americans fired back at us. They assumed we were Germans. Beckett ran from the farmhouse waving his arms to convince the 84<sup>th</sup> that we were allied soldiers. He succeeded only because the commanding officer was his own uncle – Colonel Abraham Beckett.’

‘I bet at least he was pleased that you saved his nephew and his men.’

‘Not a bit. He couldn’t believe his own men had shot and killed their comrades in a “friendly fire” incident. Guess who he blamed?’

‘You’re kidding?’

‘He pinned the blame fair and square on me and the Crocodile lads. He had us put under immediate arrest and threatened us with the firing squad.’

‘Did Nathaniel reason with him?’

‘It took Nathaniel a full hour to convince his uncle that we were not to blame. For a second time, I heard him mention the word “Berserker”. I can tell you the six soldiers acted like barbarians. When we were released, Colonel Beckett told us that we were never to mention the incident to anyone.’

‘And did you?’

‘You bet. I told anyone who would listen, American or British. It was embarrassing to the brass and no-one wanted to know.’

‘What happened to the six men?’

‘Later that day, the Americans made one last sortie to clear the woods of Germans. They took the six men involved in the friendly fire incident with them. Our Croc could not get into the woods so we stayed behind. They ran into a German machine gun nest, which pinned them down for hours. Beckett’s six men charged the nest in an act of incredible bravery. It was a suicide run. I don’t know if they were ordered to do it or whether it was their way of atoning for what happened earlier. Five died within the first twenty yards. The sixth managed to drop a grenade into the nest, which destroyed the German position. The man who threw the grenade was my blond Berserker friend.’

‘When did you leave the farmhouse?’

‘We stayed there for two days. It just bucketed down and no-one could move. The battle was won, even though we didn’t get to the river. We had destroyed the German salient and the threat was removed.’

‘Did you meet Nathaniel Beckett again?’

‘Just before I left with the boys in the Crocodile, I asked to see Sergeant Beckett in a private room. He spent the best part of ten minutes thanking me for what we had done. I just listened in silence. When he had finished, I unholstered my pistol and jammed it straight in his face. I asked him how it felt when someone on your own side threatens you

with a gun. I then asked him what had caused his men in the farmhouse to act the way they had.'

'What did he say?'

'He didn't say anything, he just pulled out a tin from his coat. He was shaking as he did so. The tin contained a brown powdery substance. If I had not read the label I would have brewed it up and served a cuppa to the lads. It even smelled like PG tips for God's sake.'

'What was on the label?'

Roy paused. He took a long drink and poured more beer from the jug. Then he rummaged through his jacket and produced an old, rusting tin the size of a tobacco container. It had a fading label on the top but the writing was still legible. It displayed the Napier & Beckett logo and underneath the wording read 'hazardous substance'. More writing provided the chemical compound of the substance that had once been in the tin.

'Nathaniel told me it was a compound they had named Berserker and that his platoon was trialling it.'

Sam stared at the container and struggled to make sense of his divided loyalties. His uncle continued.

'I slipped off the safety catch on the pistol and told Nathaniel that he owed me and my crew his life after the farmhouse incident. I swore that if I ever heard of Berserker again, then I would track him down to the ends of the earth and take back that life. He knew I was serious. Nathaniel looked straight back at me. He showed no fear. He told me that even if I had not pointed the gun at him, he would have made that promise to me. He said that as long as he lived, Napier & Beckett would never produce Berserker again.'

Sam looked at his uncle in awe. He opened the tin but it was empty. Roy anticipated Sam's next question.

'As we prepared to take the Crocodile back to base, I emptied the powder into an old German helmet and put it in the middle of the field where so many had died. We drove the tank to the helmet and I gave it a two-second burst with the flamethrower. The old Viking gods in the sky got their last smoke.'

'It appeared that Nathaniel kept his word to the end.'

'True. But the next CEO of Napier & Beckett is not bound by my oath.'

Sam changed the subject. 'Do you know what happened to the blond soldier?'

'I thought you would ask that. I came across him one last time.' He delved back into his overcoat and pulled out a yellowing newspaper clipping. It was from the 1950s. He unfolded it and passed it over to Sam. It was a report from the *Daily Telegraph's* foreign correspondent about a death row inmate in Massachusetts. The headline read '*Son of Satan serial killer to get lethal injection*'. Roy's blond man had gone on a killing rampage. Over a two-year period, he had picked up six victims at gunpoint, restrained and locked them in the trunk of his car. After dark, he had transferred them to a specially constructed cellar where they died appalling deaths. No-one could understand why a war hero would commit such gruesome murders. The photo did indeed look like a son of Satan. He had a square jaw, cropped blond hair and a piece missing from his left ear. His eyes were full of hate and anger. The man stared out across the dimension that separates the living from the dead and across sixty years of time at Sam. He was smirking as if he had discovered another victim to restrain and mutilate. Sam felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise and handed the yellowing clipping back to Roy.

'You are part of it now, Sam,' said Roy sadly. 'You have to decide if you can live with the moral consequences of what that company does to the minds of decent people.'

'It doesn't have to be that way. I am sure that Berserker has been confined to history. In any case, I am getting pretty close to Nathaniel's granddaughter so I will know if anything changes.'

'You can't trust her. She is a Beckett after all.'

'I promise you, Roy. I will use my position of trust with Rachael to find out what is going on. If Berserker still exists, I will find a way to destroy it once and for all.'

\* \* \*

Sam woke up early next morning and emerged sleepy-eyed from the spare bedroom of his uncle's house in Fort William. He had not slept well. Roy had been moving about the house in the small hours – he had experienced night terrors again. Sam felt guilt-ridden for dredging up Roy's memories. He showered, dressed and went into the lounge to look for Roy. A quick search of the house revealed that Roy must have gone for a walk

to clear his head. He may even have disappeared into his greenhouse for a smoke to calm his nerves. Roy would sometimes sneak in among his tomatoes and runner beans to indulge in one of his few bad habits when things became fretful.

Sam wandered into the lounge and browsed through the old family photographs that were on display on the longboard cabinet. He saw a photo of Roy in his army uniform looking young and dashing. Alongside Roy's photo was one of his wife Grace taken around the same time. Suddenly, his eye was drawn to a small photo nestling at the back of the collection. The photo was ancient and out of place compared to the others. Sam picked it up and studied the sepia coloured photograph. It was not in good condition and had a piece missing from the top left corner. An elderly military man in a British uniform was standing erect and proud with long side-whiskers bristling from his face. To his right was a serious looking delegation of Native Americans who sat on high-backed chairs. They wore fierce expressions on their broad muscular faces framed by neatly plaited long hair hanging down the front of their white tunics. The men had patterned blankets over their knees with a diagonal black stripe running towards their feet. One man had his arms crossed over his chest. The warrior to his right held a peace pipe across his knees. Further to his right, a majestic looking brave displayed a haughty expression. The fourth seated man appeared to be the chief and a small European child sat on his lap. The chief was the only man in the photograph who appeared to be laughing as if he was sharing a joke with the child. The child was a young girl about ten-years-old and wore a long white dress. She was staring up at the chief's magnificent headdress and was playing with a patchwork bag of beads that presumably belonged to the chief. The European child gave the photograph an air of mystery. What was this young girl doing in such a serious photo of the old American Wild West and why did Roy have it in his collection?

'That was your great-great-grandmother, Alice Jardine,' said Roy who had returned from his walk. The smell of smoke that accompanied Roy suggested his walk had been to the greenhouse rather than the shops.

'The relative that we talked about last night?' asked Sam.

'Pretty, wasn't she? The photo had been in an old suitcase of stuff under the spare bed ever since I can remember. When your Auntie Grace died, I went through the suitcase and it caught my eye. I had it framed last year.' Grace had died two years ago and Roy

had taken it hard.

‘Did Alice ever say what she was doing in America?’

‘She said that she went there with her grandfather when he went on a long business trip. Her own father had died in the Crimean War and her mother died of smallpox three years later.’

‘When was this photo taken?’

‘She was still a girl when she came back. It must have been the 1860s.’

‘Is the British officer in the photo her grandfather?’

‘I think so.’

‘Who are the Native Americans?’

‘Alice did tell me but I have long forgotten.’

‘Have you had anyone look at the photo?’

‘No. To be honest, I didn’t think anyone would be interested. But I do remember that Alice called it her “Black Kettle” photograph. We all laughed when she said that.’

‘Black Kettle?’

‘I told you she was a bit batty.’

‘Did she talk much about her time in America?’

‘There was one occasion. It was an amazing story about the old Wild West. I was so enthralled that she gave me the photo.’

‘Can you still remember the story?’

‘It was such a long time ago – I was only about thirteen or fourteen. She did say that she was involved in an event that was so tragic its horrors remained with her forever. Although she was proud of her American background, she was always bitter about her time there.’

‘May I take a copy of the photo?’ Sam asked.

‘You can have the photo.’

‘Really?’

‘I think for your own safety you need to find out why there is such bad blood between the Becketts and our family. This photo may help.’

‘I could dig around a bit,’ Sam agreed.

‘Be discreet. The Becketts wield a lot of power and they may not react well if they

know we are poking our nose into their affairs.’

## CHAPTER 7

‘We could make this worth your while, Sam. We’re not talking about a couple of grand here or there. This is the big time.’

Sam studied the man who was trying to induce him into signing a contract for automated drug manufacturing equipment at all Napier & Beckett locations outside of America. He had known Gordon Liversedge for many years. He had a reputation as a hard-nosed sales negotiator who didn’t mind bending the rules to close a deal. But Sam had never before known him to be corrupt.

‘The problem is, Gordon, your proposal doesn’t stack up. You can’t meet the delivery deadlines and your machines are five per cent more expensive than the competition.’

‘We’re in the middle of a model upgrade, hence the tight timelines, and we can’t go any lower on price. We would lose money on the deal.’

‘That’s why we can’t do business, Gordon.’

‘We can always do business, Sam. You just have to name your slice of the pie. Think of it as a personal commission for your time and effort.’

‘You could get me fired. Salesmen like you get commissions and all expenses paid trips to the Bahamas if you meet your sales targets. Procurement managers get nothing.’ Sam was starting to feel bitter about his career. He hadn’t paid his electricity bill and Southern Electric was threatening to cut him off.

‘Okay, Sam, you’re forcing my hand. I have authority to name the amount. Your slice is half a million pounds if you sign today. You know our production equipment is the best in the business. No-one would query why you signed with us. You have even driven a hard bargain for God’s sake.’

Sam’s mouth went dry at the scale of the inducement. He grabbed his tea and swallowed half a cup in one gulp. It was stone cold and tasted odd.

‘You’re wasting your time, Gordon. I’m sorry but I don’t do business that way.’

Suddenly, a fireball of pain exploded in his head and took a vice-like grip of his brain. It had happened several times before that week but never in the middle of a negotiation. Gordon’s voice sounded like it was coming from another room.

‘Hear me out, Sam. We have set you up with a bank account in Switzerland; it cannot

be traced. In addition to the half million, we can add ten grand for every month that the contract continues.’ The salesman’s voice tailed off as a jumble of voices from deep inside Sam’s head competed for his attention.

‘Take it, Sam. You will never get an opportunity like this again.’ It was the voice of his father.

‘It will set you up for life. You can pay off your mortgage and get a new car. Your financial worries are over,’ said the voice of his dead mother.

‘I will come back to you, Sam,’ said the voice of his ex-girlfriend, Sally. ‘We can go on that trip to America and I can buy a whole new wardrobe of clothes. My new boyfriend is not half the man that you were.’

With supreme effort, Sam forced himself to speak. ‘I cannot be bought. If you have money put aside for Swiss bank accounts, Gordon, then you must have money to reduce your prices by five per cent.’

The voices clamoured for his attention.

‘What are you doing? He will withdraw his offer and storm out.’

‘Change your mind, Sam. Take the money!’

‘Sam, you are such a loser. I can’t believe I said I might come back to you. What was I thinking?’

Sam stood up and walked around the room in an attempt to clear his head. ‘I am prepared to push out the Asian delivery schedule by two weeks, but I need twenty machines in Europe by mid-June at the latest. If you can meet the revised schedule and drop your prices by six per cent, we will say no more about the so-called “personal commission” you tried to offer me. As you say, your equipment is the best in the business.’

‘But you said five per cent,’ said Gordon, who was shocked at the turn of events. ‘We have known each other for years, Sam. We are almost friends. You can’t put me in this position. I have to report back to the board.’

‘And you have given me a massive headache and put me in a bad mood. It’s six per cent or no deal.’

Gordon looked like he was about to argue, but realised he had lost his bargaining position by offering Sam a failed bribe. He held out his hand and they shook on the deal.

\* \* \*

Sam staggered out of the building wondering what was happening to him. He recognised that he had been tempted by Gordon Liversedge's offer of half a million pounds. He prided himself on his moral integrity and only the pathetic example of Alec De Souza languishing in B2 had given him the moral fortitude to resist the offer. Cock and bull story or not, Alec De Souza's story had unnerved him. He also wondered if he should see a doctor about the voices, but he had spent his entire life in denial that he was schizophrenic. The thought of enduring the battery of tests required for a diagnosis had terrified him as a seven-year-old and left him with a permanent phobia of doctors and psychoanalysts. There had to be a rational explanation and Sam was convinced the answer lay in his search to discover what was really going on at Napier & Beckett.

Sam remembered that the strategy team had suggested meeting up at the Lamb Tavern in the Leadenhall Markets after work that Friday. Everyone was still feeling morose about the death of Nathaniel Beckett. The team was incredibly loyal to Rachael Beckett and was disappointed that she had missed out on the top job. Sam made his way to the pub and pushed his way through a throng of dark grey suits belonging to the usual Lloyds insurance crowd. He bought a pint of Cotleigh Tawney Bitter and threaded his way to the corner of the Lamb where the strategy team was chatting. Sam was content to stand on the fringes and make small talk. His colleagues did not really understand his world of suppliers, commercial negotiations and costs reductions – it was all a bit grubby to the strategic analysts.

They debated the death of Nathaniel Beckett and the appointment of Mendel. One or two suspected foul play, but the overwhelming consensus was that the old man was terminally ill and did not want to live out his remaining life in pain and inactivity. There was frustration that Nathaniel could not hang on for another couple of years to allow Rachael to have a real tilt at the top job. Discussion then centred on how to treat Rachael when she returned to the office on Monday. A number expressed surprise that she would be returning so early.

Sam drifted out of the conversation. He noticed that Cassie was on the fringe of the

group, just out of conversation range. She occasionally attempted to chat to one of the team, but after one or two polite words, they would turn their back on her and rejoin the main conversation. Cassie was tiny in comparison to the overweight ladies from strategy, but she stood proud and defiant as if their rejection of her was fuel to the fire that burned deep inside her. Cassie's raven-black hair framed a pretty face with green feline eyes and exotic cheekbones. She was dressed in fashionable black from head to toe, including a pair of high-heeled boots that added valuable inches to her short stature. Sam realised that he had mistaken her defiance against the world as moodiness and felt ashamed he had not made much effort to engage with her during the last few weeks.

Sam picked up his beer and walked over to Cassie. He noticed that the women from strategy were giving him disapproving looks. Sam decided to give Cassie a quick kiss on the cheek in an attempt to shock his judgemental colleagues. He was rewarded by the sound of tut-tutting from the women.

'That was to thank you for saving my career in the video conference centre the other day.'

Cassie smiled broadly, which illuminated her face and made her nose crinkle. Sam's pulse quickened as he realised how attractive she was when she smiled.

'You seem like a fish out of water at Napier & Beckett, Sam. Rachael asked me to look after you till you find your feet.'

'The office sometimes feels like a hospice. It's as if we are waiting around for the patient to die. I'm not sure I'm cut out for the pharmaceutical industry.'

'Sam, you need to stop feeling sorry for yourself. You will have more impact here than you ever had at Sovereign.'

'How so?'

'Napier & Beckett needs to survive the next two years while its Parkinson's, bipolar and ADHD drugs come off patent. To do that, it must cut costs dramatically. We need someone in London to help us who has exceptional negotiating skills. That's where you come in.'

'Is Napier & Beckett in real trouble?'

'The only person in London who knows that for sure is Rachael. But there is some good news. The MHRA has just approved our Alzheimer's drug Senzar. That's a world

first. If the FDA in America also approves it, then we can start manufacturing and our future will be secure.'

'My father is in an advanced state of dementia,' said Sam sadly. 'I asked Dr McDonald if he could take part in the trials, but I was told that any cure will be much too late for him.'

'That's so sad.' Cassie took a sip of her wine and touched Sam on his arm. 'The race for the cure for Alzheimer's is the next big thing. The company that wins the race will sit on a river of gold. There are over twenty-six million sufferers around the world just like your father and we can help at least half of them.'

'And you think that will be Napier & Beckett?'

'I hope so. We are the only company to have won regulatory approval for an Alzheimer's drug. It has taken us fifteen years and three billion dollars of development costs to get where we are now. Your job is to keep the company viable with your cost savings until we get approval in America to produce Senzar. There cannot be a nobler job in the world than that!'

'I think Cassie needs to get home,' interjected Elsie from audit. Sam looked at Elsie then back to Cassie. Sam prided himself on his non-verbal communication skills and nothing was indicating to him that Cassie needed to get home. He ignored Elsie.

Ali, the senior strategist tugged at his sleeve. 'A word with you, Sam, if I may?' Sam excused himself politely from Cassie and joined Ali's group.

'Sam, we are not ignoring Cassie to be rude; we are trying not to stir up her psycho boyfriend, Dwayne.' Ali discreetly indicated Cassie's boyfriend, who was propping up the bar several metres away. Dwayne was staring directly at Sam as if he was working out whether Sam's recent conversation with Cassie was work-related or had more sinister, sexual overtones. Sam noticed that Dwayne was sizing him up like a rutting stag checking out a rival young buck. The man was about Sam's height but his neck, chest, biceps and forearms were disproportionately large compared to his skinny hips and legs. His brown hair was close-cropped and he displayed a Chinese triad character tattoo on his bulging neck. He could have been good-looking had he not been wearing an expression of outright hostility and aggression.

'At the Christmas party last year, Cassie's boyfriend broke the jaw of the medical

director. He had only offered to buy her a drink,' Ali whispered. 'They ended up having to call in the police.'

Sam looked across at Dwayne, who immediately appeared affronted by Sam's scrutiny. He downed his beer, slammed it on the bar and stormed over. Ali and the rest of the strategy team hastily took their leave and headed towards the door.

'See you on Monday, Sam,' Ali said without much conviction as he left the pub. The Lamb Tavern quietened as Dwayne approached Sam.

Cassie stepped in to intercept her boyfriend. 'Hi darling. We've been waiting for you to join us.' She gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Sam was shocked to realise that he felt jealous as Cassie draped herself around her boyfriend.

'Dwayne, this is Sam Jardine, the one that I have been telling you about.'

'Hi Dwayne.' Sam extended his hand. Dwayne freed himself from Cassie's grasp and took Sam's hand. He clamped down like a vice. Sam had been expecting a crushing grip and matched Dwayne for strength. Dwayne stepped deep into Sam's personal space and stared him straight in the eyes. Sam stood his ground and proffered a smile that suggested he was not intimidated. Dwayne stepped back reluctantly.

'So what do you do for a living, Dwayne?' Sam asked, trying to lower the tension.

'This and that,' he muttered.

'Dwayne is an entrepreneur, but things are a bit quiet at the moment,' said Cassie. 'Rachael has given him some temporary long-distance delivery work with the company.'

Dwayne glared at Cassie. Sam suspected Rachael's charitable assistance to Dwayne was a sore point between the couple. Rachael almost certainly wanted Dwayne as far away from Cassie as possible.

'Do you work out?' Sam asked, trying to find some common ground. He suspected Dwayne's physique was based more on steroid abuse than long hours at the gym.

'RippedZone. Three nights a week,' Dwayne replied, puffing out his oversized chest. Dwayne looked down at Sam's stomach and silently congratulated himself on his superior six-pack.

'Well it's been a pleasure meeting you, Dwayne, but I have a long trip ahead of me.' Sam slapped Dwayne on the shoulder and made a move to the door. As he walked to the

exit, he looked back at Dwayne. Dwayne smirked at Sam as if satisfied he had seen off yet another rival for Cassie's affections. Sam paused. He turned around and headed back to the couple.

'So sorry, Cassie. It was terribly rude of me not to say goodbye.' He put an arm around her shoulder and kissed her gently on the cheek.' Dwayne's face was a mask of cold fury.

\* \* \*

In the street outside Napier & Beckett's office, Gordon Liversedge met with the Napier & Beckett security manager, Steven Wilkinson.

'Your boy is clean, Mr Wilkinson. I thought I had him for a moment but I could not get him to take the bait. I told you that you'd be wasting your time. I have known Jardine for many years.'

'Pity,' replied Wilkinson, 'Sam would have been wise to take the bribe. Now we are going to have to get nasty.'

'What are you going to do about the six per cent that I have just given away to Sam Jardine? It's cost my company nearly half a million quid.'

'I didn't ask you to give away half a million pounds. What were you thinking?'

'Your boy got the better of me.'

'I don't see how you can make it my problem.'

'If I don't get my half million back, I miss my sales targets. Then bang goes my trip to the Bahamas this year, just like your boy said.'

'So what's that got to do with me?'

'What's half a million to you lot? You spend billions a year developing party drugs for erectile dysfunction and the like.'

'It doesn't work like that, Gordon. Security has a budget. Half a million pounds would wipe my team out until 2015.'

'So you don't get to swan around like James Bond for a year! Big deal.'

'Do you know who you are dealing with, Mr Liversedge? I suggest you keep the wisecracks to yourself.'

‘You didn’t think I would be stupid enough to take on this assignment without recording every conversation we have had on this sordid arrangement, did you?’ Liversedge paused. ‘Including the one we are having right now.’ He pulled his iPhone from his pocket, which was displaying a big red recording light on the Dictaphone app.

Steven Wilkinson felt nauseous. He was going to have to explain his budget blowout to head office in Alexandria.

\* \* \*

As Sam relaxed at his house in Chichester the next day, he decided to open an ancestry account. He was keen to work out what his great-great-grandmother Alice Jardine had been doing sitting on the lap of a fierce looking Native American nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. He also wanted to know what she meant by the ‘Napier inheritance’ and how she had known the Beckett family. He typed ‘ancestors’ into his search engine and picked a suitable site. He entered his details into the required fields. He then opened a second page that asked for his mother’s and father’s names and years of birth. Much to his amazement, he was able to download an electronic copy of his parents’ marriage certificate from 1978. On the certificate were references to his grandparents’ names. He decided to do a search on his grandfather, Albert Jardine. He then added Albert’s younger brother, his great-uncle Roy, to the family tree. Overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data available and research required, he decided to take a shortcut and phoned Roy.

After tea and a long conversation about their mutual relatives and their years of birth, Sam added a dozen new relatives to his tree. Some he had known well, some he vaguely recalled and others he had only heard about in childhood. It took him a further five hours of painful ancestry research and two more calls to Roy before he tracked down his great-great-grandfather George James Jardine and his wife Alice, who were living in Hume, Manchester in the 1891 census. He looked once more at his photo of ten-year-old Alice and the Native American chiefs. Alice looked like she was on the adventure of a lifetime and had a place in history that needed to be told. Sam promised the little girl in the photo that he would bring her story back to life and share it with Uncle Roy and the legions of

historians.

## CHAPTER 8

At 8:30 am on Monday, the office was humming with activity. They were expecting Rachael Beckett back in the office that morning and everyone was anxious to appear diligent and professional. Sam was surprised that his colleagues in strategy, who were usually bright and cheery, were hostile towards him. Elsie glared as he passed by. Ali deliberately kept his eyes down at his work when Sam walked past his desk. Sam didn't care; he was looking forward to talking to Cassie.

'Morning, Cassie,' he said as he took off his jacket. 'How was your weekend?'

Cassie did not look up or respond.

'Has Rachael arrived back from the States?' Sam asked, trying to make polite conversation.

'She'll be in later in the day,' she replied flatly. 'A bird flew into the engine on take-off and the plane had to return to Dulles Airport for repair.'

Sam noticed Cassie was wearing dark sunglasses, a silk neck scarf and excessively heavy makeup. Yet the makeup was unable to hide the ugly bruising that disfigured the right side of her face. Sam stared open-mouthed at her injuries. He attempted to keep his emotions in check. He had expected Dwayne to be aggressive, but Sam had assumed he would direct his aggression towards him, not Cassie. Sam was tempted to march out of the office and track down the bastard but he suspected that Cassie would not thank him for it. She probably felt in some twisted way that she deserved a beating from her boyfriend. Sam dismissed the idea for the moment, suffering the guilt of knowing that his flirty behaviour on Friday had resulted in the savage assault on Cassie. His colleagues in strategy were laying the blame squarely at his door. It was obviously not the first time that Dwayne had beaten Cassie.

'Are you okay, Cassie?' Sam asked, his voice cracking with emotion.

'I'm fine,' she replied quickly.

'Is there anything I can do?'

'You could keep your distance.'

Sam was appalled at the injustice of the situation. He wanted to protect her from the scum who had disfigured her but she was pushing him away and making excuses for her

abusive boyfriend.

‘But you know I will always be here for you if you ever need me,’ he replied lamely.

‘Rachael has asked that you prepare a procurement report for her review when she arrives.’ She turned away from Sam and busied herself on the computer.

\* \* \*

Cassie had gone for lunch and had left Rachael’s office door unlocked in a rare act of carelessness. Sam suspected she had slipped out to the chemist to treat her bruising before Rachael arrived. Sam picked up his procurement report and looked around the strategy department. It was half-empty, although a number of staff were still diligently working at their PCs. No-one looked like they would head towards Rachael’s office. Sam slipped into the room. It was a bright and airy corner office with spectacular views of the city. It was obviously a woman’s office; it had the slight smell of Rachael’s perfume ingrained in the soft furnishings. In the corner of her office, a designer jacket and silk shawl hung on a coat stand. A small vase of flowers sat on top of a side table that Cassie had placed there that morning. Sam made a point of placing his report in the centre of Rachael’s desk and scanned the office for cameras. There was nothing above her desk, but he noticed what looked like a miniature lens on the wall near the light switch. He walked casually towards the wall and moved the coat stand half a metre to the left so it was in front of the lens. He returned to her desk and tried the drawer. It was locked, but he had a series of master keys that he had ordered on eBay. The third key opened the drawer. He rifled through the folders and found what he was looking for – a dossier on Berserker. He scanned through the papers and glossed over the chemical breakdown and technical specifications of the drug. He read with concern about its impact on the brain.

Also in the file was a recent business proposal written by Walter Mendel. He was shocked to discover that Mendel was proposing full-scale production of the drug and its subsequent sale to the US military. Sam felt his anger rising and wondered if Rachael had contributed to the document. He turned the page and was pleased to see that Rachael had handwritten a whole series of counterarguments in the margins. Sam surreptitiously took the folder to the photocopier outside her office and copied the technical specifications

and compound formula. He returned to Rachael's office and replaced the folder. As he did so, he noticed a beige HR folder with his name on it. He opened the folder and scanned through the contents. He was surprised to see a series of photos of him in Beijing together with Wang Jing, the rising star of the Politburo and his friend, Xiao Zhijun. There were other photos, including one of him making his acceptance speech as 'Negotiator of the Year' at the Institute of Procurement last year. Sam winced at a particularly bad photograph of himself looking worse for wear at the institute's after-party. He pulled out what looked like his family tree and saw that he was not alone in his research into the background of Alice Jardine. The family tree went back a further two generations than Sam had been able to research. His great-great-grandmother Alice Jardine was the granddaughter of the joint founder of Napier & Beckett, General George Napier. Sam whistled to himself and wondered whether Rachael had recruited him for his negotiation skills or for some other reason to do with his family connections. Sam noticed the increasing activity in the office as staff returned from their lunch break. Sam returned the folder to Rachael's desk drawer and locked it with his skeleton key. As he was about to leave the room, he noticed a small pink diary on the floor under the desk. He guessed it must have fallen there when Rachael rushed off to catch her taxi to the airport last week. He picked it up and decided he would give it to Cassie for safekeeping. As he bent down to retrieve it, he noticed written on the open page in Rachael's neat handwriting '*Alice Jardine. 1854-1937 (Born Alice Napier, granddaughter of George Napier). Witness to the Sand Creek massacre of 1864.*' Sam stared at the wording in bemusement. Roy had mentioned a family feud with the Becketts. Could this be the origin of that feud? Had George Napier fallen out with his co-founders? He quickly flicked through the rest of the diary to see if there were any other clues or evidence that Rachael had been checking up on him but noticed nothing sinister. He closed the diary and placed it back under Rachael's desk where he found it. That was when he noticed the lens of a camera blinking at him from the wall near the filing cabinet in the corner of the room.

## CHAPTER 9

‘Rachael is in her office,’ said Cassie. Sam had just returned to his desk after a meeting with the supplier of inactive ingredients that were required to keep the form and shape of the pills that Napier & Beckett manufactured in the UK and Europe. ‘I must warn you, she’s in a filthy mood. Something has upset her.’ Sam’s heart skipped a beat. It was surely not possible that she had already seen the recording of him looking through her desk drawer and diary. ‘She asked that you go straight to her office when you arrived.’

That didn’t sound good. He dallied on his way to Rachael’s office. Rachael beckoned him in and pointed to the chair opposite her. Rachael was dressed in black in recognition of the recent death of her grandfather Nathaniel. Despite her sombre dress, she looked the picture of elegance.

‘Are you trying to defy me?’ she said in a low, menacing growl that made his blood turn cold. He wondered if he should just come straight out and confess that he had been snooping to make things as easy as possible for himself. Rachael spotted his discomfort and pushed the mute button on her iPhone.

‘Sorry, Sam,’ she said. ‘Problems with the laptop. I’m on the phone to the IT help desk in Bangalore.’ She indicated the earphones she was wearing. ‘They are not being at all cooperative. I will be with you in a minute.’ She pushed ‘unmute’ and continued her threats to Bangalore. ‘If I do not get a new login password in three minutes, you will all be looking for new jobs.’ She hung up.

‘Ever since we outsourced the help desk to Bangalore, the service has been lousy,’ she said to Sam.

Sam, whose heart rate was slowly returning to normal, managed a smile. ‘I was so sorry to hear about your grandfather, Rachael.’

‘Thank you, Sam. He was an inspiration to me throughout my life. I am going to miss him.’ Rachael smiled at Sam. ‘And thank you for your email. That was sweet of you.’ Then she was all business. She picked up Sam’s procurement report and scanned through it.

‘Do you think we could have pushed for an eight per cent discount from Neo Manufacturing Equipment?’

‘Gordon Liversedge has never discounted his machines by more than five per cent in ten years. We were lucky to get six.’ Rachael nodded and put the report back on her desk.

‘How is the global MRI tender going?’ she asked.

‘The Japanese need a lot of coaching, but they are performing better than expected.’

Rachael continued grilling Sam for a further twenty minutes before she leaned back in her chair.

‘You have done well in so short a time. I am impressed.’

‘Thank you, Rachael. That reminds me of a conversation we had at the Beijing Capital International Airport about my meagre salary,’ said Sam. His monthly car repayment was overdue.

‘Keep going the way you are and you will earn my respect.’

Despite Sam’s mistrust of Rachael’s motives, he glowed with pride at her compliment. Rachael’s desk phone rang and she snatched it up. It was the IT help desk calling back from Bangalore. Moments later, she slammed it back down looking visibly distressed.

‘I’ve been trying to get through to the help desk for three days for a new password to no avail. Now they tell me it will take two hours to reset. Did you know that Walter Mendel is in London?’

‘Really?’

‘He has called a meeting of the London executive team at four o’clock.’ The time was now two-thirty. ‘He wants me to run through the latest UK sales and profitability data. I had prepared a presentation before I left the office last week, but I can’t access it without my password. I may need you to help me draft a new document and plug in some numbers from these files.’ She indicated the two large box files that were on her desk. She picked them up and put them on her lap. She skimmed through the bulky files looking for the relevant information.

‘When did you last have your password?’ asked Sam.

‘Why do you ask that?’

‘Most people write it down when they change it. It may be on a piece of paper.’

‘The problem is I lost my diary in Alexandria. It had a lot of personal information in it.’ Rachael hammered at the keys of her PC in frustration as she tried one more time to

remember her password.

‘Does it look like the one under your desk?’ asked Sam.

Rachael tried to bend down and look, but she was restricted by the box files on her lap.

‘Would you mind, Sam?’ Sam stood up from his chair and walked around to Rachael’s side of the desk. He kneeled down near Rachael’s chair, acutely aware of his proximity to her long, elegant legs. She made no effort to move them out of his way. As he reached for the diary he had placed there that morning, he noticed she had kicked off her Christian Louboutin heels and her feet were crossed, displaying her shapely ankles.

For a sickening moment, Sam could not find the diary and suspected it may have been moved. As he fumbled around under Rachael’s desk, Cassie walked in. She had touched up the makeup on her bruising and Rachael seemed not to notice her injuries. She had Rachael’s morning mail and a large internal envelope, which she put in Rachael’s in-tray. She also had a coffee, which she put near the pile of mail. Cassie looked down at Sam with a puzzled expression on her face. He was still under Rachael’s desk looking for the diary. With some relief, Sam found it and passed it up to Rachael. Still on his hands and knees, he carefully reversed from under the desk so as not to bump his head or touch Rachael. He was about to get to his feet when he became transfixed by the label on the internal envelope that was at his eye level in the in-tray. In bold red letters, it screamed out ‘*SECURITY BREACH. For Ms R. Beckett’s eyes only. Contains photographic material. Do not bend*’. As Cassie turned to leave the office, her trailing hand knocked the coffee. It did not overbalance but a large quantity of coffee landed over the internal envelope.

‘I’m so sorry, Rachael. I will get rid of the envelope for you,’ said Cassie in a fluster. Rachael hadn’t noticed the envelope. She was already punching her password into the computer. It sprang into life. A look of relief spread across Rachael’s face.

‘No problem, Cassie,’ she muttered. ‘Stay there for a minute, Sam. There is something I want to show you on the computer.’ Sam was still kneeling next to Rachael’s chair. She swivelled the monitor in his direction and typed a message for him to read. ‘*There is a surveillance camera on the wall near the filing cabinet. Please do not say anything. Just read the text.*’ She changed programs on the computer and loaded the

presentation that she had prepared last week. She selected twelve copies then hit 'print.' She yelled out to Cassie. 'Cassie, dear. Would you pick up the presentations from the printer?'

'Yes, Rachael,' Cassie answered.

Rachael opened her emails. She scrolled down and opened an email from the president of the Pharmaceutical Guild. Rachael was speaking at the Guildhall on behalf of the industry at 6:30 pm on Wednesday the following week. The topic was '*Is this the end for the pharmaceutical industry? Rachael Beckett, Chief Transformation Officer of Napier & Beckett UK argues the case for a bright industry future.*'

Sam raised a quizzical eyebrow as if querying the meaning of the email.

Rachael continued to type: '*I need to prepare you for the most important negotiation in the history of Napier & Beckett. The Guildhall and nearby Threadneedles Hotel are safe locations in which to prepare. I need to meet you there after the presentation.*'

Sam nodded. Rachael continued to type. '*I need you to be ruthless in this negotiation as this may determine the future direction and ownership of the company. Are you with me?*'

Sam nodded again. Rachael then spoke. 'Thank you for finding my diary, Sam. How did you know it was there?'

'I could see it under your desk when I walked into the office,' he said.

'What a relief. You can get back to your work now. Sorry for keeping you.'

Sam got to his feet and walked back to his desk with his head spinning. Only a few hours earlier, he was preparing himself for a clash of wills with Rachael. Yet somehow, he had committed to assisting her in what appeared to be a major dynastic struggle for control of Napier & Beckett.

\* \* \*

'You were pathetic!' Cassie said to Sam in the Lamb Tavern. It was not the ideal conversation opener from Sam's point of view. He had managed to persuade Cassie to have 'one drink' with him on the pretext of thanking her for removing the offending photographs of Sam from Rachael's in-tray. There were six separate photos of Sam

reading Rachael's diary in her office.

'I was not on my knees to Rachael.'

'Yes you were; I saw you.'

'I was retrieving her diary from under her desk.'

'When I saw you grovelling, I was tempted to open the internal envelope and shove those photos under her nose. I assumed you knew about the photos and were spilling your guts to Rachael.'

'I was not grovelling. It was thanks to me that she managed to get the presentation to Walter Mendel in time for the meeting.'

'For a while there, I thought that you were a real man. You have been the only one to stand up to Dwayne in two years.'

The barman collected Sam's empty beer glass and wiped the table down with a cloth. Despite the memory of his encounter with Dwayne, Sam was beginning to feel at home in the Lamb.

'Sam Jardine, if you want me to cover for you in the future, I expect to get the whole story,' said Cassie. 'I don't care if you were nosing through her diary – it's hardly a hanging offence.'

Sam was relieved there were no photos of him rifling through Rachael's desk drawers. 'I am most grateful to you, Cassie.' Sam said. He sensed that Cassie was relaxing for the first time since his encounter with Dwayne. Cassie tilted her head and smiled at him. Sam's heart skipped a beat. She was so beautiful, despite the awful bruising.

'So now you had better behave or you might find those photos reappear at the most inconvenient moment!' she said, her nose crinkling with good humour.

'You mean that this glass of wine does not wipe out the debt?'

'Not even close.'

'Perhaps a meal at Georgio's may balance the ledger?'

'Oh Sam, I'm sorry, I can only have one glass of wine. I have an appointment in B2 in thirty minutes.'

'An appointment?' said Sam with some concern.

'Do you mind if we walk back to the office?' she said. Sam stood up and helped

Cassie out of her chair. They walked out of the Lamb and strolled side by side towards the Lloyds building on Lime Street. It was still light but most of the city workers had already headed home for the evening. The heels of Cassie's boots echoed on the pavement as they ambled past the iconic building.

'It's not something I like to talk about.' She paused as if deciding whether she should confide in Sam. 'I'm taking part in a clinical trial. I was born with a mental condition. It makes me dreadful company at times. I've been taking part in the trials for three years. I was in a bit of a mess.'

'What made the difference?'

'When Rachael arrived in London from the Alexandria office, she went on a tour of the patient trials facilities. She saw me in B3 and became my mentor.'

'B3?' Sam was shocked. B3 was for the compulsive aggressive disorder patients.

'Rachael was amazing. She mixed with the patients as if we were all good friends. We loved her for it.' Sam could not picture Cassie in B3. Half the patients were sedated for their own safety.

'How did she meet you?'

'I was arguing with a medical assistant. I was starting to lose it with him. She came over and told the assistant that she wanted to talk to me. Two security guys moved in to protect her from me.'

'From you?' Sam could not believe that that this slip of a woman could harm anyone.

'You'd be surprised. I pack a lethal punch and I'm a dead shot with a catapult.'

Sam laughed. 'So what happened to the security guards?'

'Rachael confronted the two guards and they backed off. Rachael spent an hour talking to me and then insisted that I come up to strategy and work for her.'

'Straight from B3 to Rachael's strategy team?'

'Not quite. She took me shopping for new clothes, cleaned me up and organised a small flat for me in Camberwell. She even paid the first three months' rent.'

They turned right into Leadenhall Street. The night air was warm and comforting. Cassie took Sam's arm and pulled closer to him.

'She can be amazing,' he said.

'You like her, don't you Sam?'

‘Yes, I do. She’s a remarkable woman, although she can be a bit intimidating. She seems to be one step ahead of us all the time.’

‘Be careful, Sam. There is a ruthlessness about her that you haven’t seen yet. I have seen her crush people who get in her way. She has influence. She comes from one of the richest families in America.’

‘Are you talking about how she dealt with De Souza?’

Cassie looked shocked. ‘How did you know about De Souza? But yes, De Souza and others.’

‘Other procurement managers?’

‘Not just procurement managers. Rachael cannot tolerate weakness or disloyalty. She is up to something. I’m not sure what it is.’

‘Perhaps she wants Mendel’s job?’

‘There is more to it than that. Whatever it is, I don’t think it’s a good thing, Sam. If she suspects that you are not on her side, she will destroy you.’

‘You can’t know that, Cassie.’

‘I can tell when people have good or evil intent in their hearts.’ She looked serious as if she genuinely believed she had that capability.

‘Do I have evil on my mind?’ Sam said with a sly look etched on his face. They stopped walking and turned to face each other.

‘Now let me concentrate.’ Cassie closed her eyes for a moment then pretended to be shocked. ‘You are a wicked boy, Sam Jardine! I know exactly what is on your mind and it’s entirely sinful.’ She opened her eyes and smiled once more. Her nose crinkled and Sam could not help himself. He kissed the tip of her delightful little nose, then pulled her towards him and wrapped her in his arms.

‘You had that coming, Cassie Gilchrist! Now what else did you see?’

Cassie nuzzled closer to Sam. ‘You’re a good man, Sam. You have many talents. You can read people’s emotions well, but you’re too trusting. I’m worried that Rachael may use you for the wrong reasons if you’re not careful.’

‘Let me look into your heart, Cassie and I will tell you what I see,’ said Sam.

A shadow crossed Cassie’s face. ‘I don’t know, Sam. There’s a lot about me that is beyond scrutiny. Believe me, many have tried.’

Sam looked down into her mesmerising green eyes. They were sparkling back at him with warmth and good humour. He was drawn deeper into those windows to her soul and sensed the intense passion of her spirit. He felt her yearning to break free from the constraints of her present circumstances. Sam leaned down and kissed Cassie tenderly. Cassie, initially hesitant, gave in to the moment and kissed him back with the pent-up passion of someone who had been released from a lifetime of emotional control. They embraced for over five minutes before Cassie pulled back and pointed to her watch. They walked arm in arm back to the office. As they approached the office, Cassie pushed her Napier & Beckett identity badge against a door that Sam had always assumed was the entrance to a dentist surgery. The door buzzed and Cassie pulled it open. She drew Sam to her and kissed him once more. Sam experienced the fragrant taste of her mouth before Cassie let him go and disappeared inside. He stood there unmoving, savouring the smell of her perfume and remembering the warmth of her body. It felt good and filled him with desire.

\* \* \*

Rachael Beckett looked through the contents of the internal envelope that she had picked out of Cassie's waste bin once more. She studied the photographs of Sam looking through her diary then re-read the internal memo from Steven Wilkinson. The memo stated that Samuel Jardine had failed the ethics test set up by internal security. He had seriously considered the bribe offered by Neo Manufacturing. According to the memo, he was an immediate security risk to Napier & Beckett and Rachael should terminate his employment contract while he was still in his probationary period. His overt consideration of the bribe was consistent with his behaviour at Sovereign where he had been fired for negotiating contracts contrary to Sovereign's company policy. Jardine had a track record of accepting corporate gifts such as promotional pens, baseball caps, bottles of wine at Christmas and attending rugby matches paid for by the suppliers. Wilkinson had attached to the memo a list of the ten corporate events Sam had attended in the last five years. He ended the memo by reminding Rachael that failure to terminate his contract would contravene the arrangement with the FDA and MHRA for reporting

corrupt practices.

Rachael placed the memo and photographs back inside the internal envelope and into Sam's HR folder in her desk drawer. As was her habit each night, she locked it securely. She wrote a brief email to Steven Wilkinson terminating his employment contract for exceeding the security department budget by half a million pounds. She warned him not to enter the Leadenhall premises again or he would face dire consequences. She then picked up her coat and made her way out of the building.

\* \* \*

Dwayne could barely contain his anger as he searched through Cassie's handbag after staggering back to her house from the Walthamstow dog track at one o'clock in the morning. Cassie had probably gone to bed several hours earlier and he was free to rummage through her belongings as she slept. Cassie had only given him fifty quid to go out to the races earlier that evening, claiming that was all she had. The fifty pounds had lasted him the first three races before he ran out of money and had to cadge some credit off the bookies. He found seventy pounds in her purse hidden in a tampon packet, which he put straight into his back pocket. He was going to have to teach the lying cow a lesson. He noticed a receipt from Marks & Spencer in her bag and scrutinised it. It was for a dress that had cost her £49.99. He suspected it was the black dress she had worn to work on Monday. When he had challenged her about it that day, she had sworn she bought it from the Brick Lane markets for twenty pounds. He was tempted to wake her up there and then and confront her with the receipt. He had told her many times that he needed all her spare money to build up his new sports supplements business.

Dwayne had met a couple of Italian guys from Calabria in the pub the previous week. He had been consoling himself after losing his delivery job at Napier & Beckett. He complained to the two men that he had been victimised by the company on the pretext that he was unreliable and could not keep to deadlines. They sympathised with him then expressed admiration at his well-toned physique. After the fourth pint, Dwayne had eagerly agreed to their offer to become the new sales director for their business that supplied and distributed sports supplements and growth hormones to local gyms. His

territory was to include all the fitness gyms between Brixton and Wapping. They assured him that the first supply of protein powders, hormones, syringes and needles would be on credit, but Dwayne would need to repay them the seven thousand pounds within a month. They then advised him which gyms were classified as 'home turf' and those who represented potential new sales opportunities.

When Dwayne told Cassie that he needed to go to Walthamstow that evening to collect his merchandise from his new employers, he was shocked by her reaction. Cassie was normally so placid, if a little moody. This time, she had been very different. The look in her eyes scared him – and he was not a man easily scared. She rounded on him and told him that they had a longstanding dinner party commitment at Rachael Beckett's house in Fulham. It had been on the calendar for over a month and she had reminded him about the dinner party every day that week. The truth was that Dwayne never had any intention of going to Rachael's dinner party. He detested the high and mighty American bitch with a passion. He could tell that Rachael disapproved of him and wanted him out of Cassie's life. Sure, Rachael had found the cute little flat in Camberwell for Cassie and paid for her first three months' rent, but that didn't give her the right to stop Dwayne from making himself at home in Cassie's flat. There was something odd about Cassie's relationship with her boss, and Dwayne had to give Cassie a good slap to remind her who was really in charge of her life.

Dwayne pulled out his iPhone and selected his Spymaster app. He had bought an infrared spy camera a few months ago and installed it in her bedside lamp. He wanted to check if Cassie was definitely asleep before he went into the bathroom and performed his nightly routine. He stared at the grey image of his beautiful girlfriend Cassie, her breasts rising and falling in deep rhythmic movements. Satisfied that she was asleep, Dwayne opened his package and selected a vial of equine growth hormones and a syringe before padding upstairs to the bathroom. He stripped off his shirt and flexed his muscles in the bathroom mirror for a full five minutes.

'Respect, bro,' he said deferentially to his reflection. He ripped the lid off the vial and drew ten milligrams of clear fluid into the syringe. He carefully injected the hormone into his thigh before putting all the discarded materials into a plastic bag. He knew that Cassie would not tolerate his habit if she found out.

Dwayne flexed for a further two minutes in front of the mirror before he noticed the wash basket in the corner of the bathroom. He wandered over and pulled out Cassie's dirty laundry. He told himself that he was only checking to see if she had wastefully spent her money on new clothes, but he could not help himself from burying his face in her clothes and underwear. He took a deep breath. Dwayne was shocked to realise there was a distinct scent of male aftershave on her blouse that he knew was not his. It took him two minutes to recall where he had last come across the same smell. It was at the Lamb Tavern in Leadenhall Market when he was standing inches from Sam Jardine. He distinctly remembered the conversation he had shared with him at the time. He stormed into Cassie's bedroom and turned on the lights to confront her with the evidence. The thought of the impending violence to come was strangely arousing for Dwayne as he tore back the duvet and pulled Cassie from the bed by her hair.

## CHAPTER 10

It was late afternoon when the Instant Messenger icon appeared in the corner of Sam's PC. It was from someone called Josh Hunter. Curious who it could be, he accepted the invitation to chat.

*'Hi Sam, it's Josh from B2. Do you remember me?'*

*'Hey Josh! Of course I remember you. How are you doing?'* Sam remembered the good-looking kid who was suffering from schizophrenia.

*'They're after me, Sam. I need your help.'*

*'That's terrible. Who's after you?'* Sam wrote.

*'The Chinese government. They're trying to kill me.'*

*'Why would they want to do that, Josh?'* Sam wondered how to end the conversation without offending Josh.

*'Because I found out what they are up to.'*

*'And what are they up to?'*

*'They have compromised our computer systems. I need to meet you – I can't tell you online.'*

Sam's heart sank. He had a pile of work to get through and he wasn't qualified to hold discussions with paranoid schizophrenics.

*'Have you talked to Dr McDonald about this, Josh?'* Sam typed.

*'Dr McDonald doesn't believe me.'*

*'I don't know what I can do to help.'*

*'I trust you, Sam. You're one of us.'* Sam bristled at Josh's insinuation he was a schizophrenic.

*'That's not true, Josh. The doctor made a mistake and it was many years ago.'*

*'I know who tried to murder the sales director, Paul Knight in Alexandria. I worked it out, Sam, and I have written a report for the police. I don't trust anyone else. I have to give it to you.'*

Sam rolled his eyes. There seemed to be no end to Josh's conspiracy theories.

*'I hate to say this, Josh, but no-one tried to murder Paul Knight. He was under stress and it just got to him. Sometimes these things happen. Just send your report to me in the*

*internal mail. I have to get back to work now.'*

*'The Chinese will intercept the report if I send it in the internal mail.'*

*'Josh, I don't think the Chinese care about Paul Knight.'*

*'I really need to meet you, Sam. I must give you the report.'*

*'I don't have access to B2. I would need to ask Dr McDonald to let me in.'* Sam's last trip to B2 had unnerved him. He didn't like the idea of returning there one bit.

*'Cassie can get you in. She's one of us too.'*

*'Josh, I don't think it's a good idea for me to go to B2. I could get fired.'*

*'I want to meet you in the Buenos Aires ward on B3. I want to show you they are still conducting experiments on traumatised soldiers.'*

Sam had read in Rachael's confidential files that the Buenos Aires ward was also known as the Berserker ward. He liked the idea of meeting Josh there even less.

*'It's true. You need to see it and you can't tell anyone because David Cross and Rachael Beckett are behind it all.'*

*'Josh, it doesn't make any sense. I'll talk to Dr McDonald and arrange to see you next week. That way I don't lose my job.'*

*'I also found out why you're hearing voices and who's doing it to you. But you need to come now, Sam, before it's too late.'*

\* \* \*

Sam stepped out of the lift at B3 onto the soft carpet. He saw a large reception desk straight ahead of him and two well-dressed receptionists smiled pleasantly as he approached. A concealed sound system was playing the New Seekers song *'I'd like to teach the world to sing'* softly into the halls and common areas of the complex. He could have been at the Mayfair Hotel.

'Can I help you, sir?' asked the male receptionist. He was about fifty-years-old and Sam assumed he was an ex-patient on a rehabilitation program.

'I have an appointment with one of your patients in the Lima Ward.' The Lima ward was adjacent to the supposedly empty Buenos Aires ward and accommodated psychotic patients. Sam handed over the letter that Cassie had forged for him. A perfect replica of

Dr McDonald's signature was on the bottom of the letter.

'That's fine, sir. Do you know your way?' asked the receptionist.

'I can find it,' replied Sam.

'Would you like me to organise security to accompany you?' asked the female receptionist. 'We have had a few unfortunate incidents in the Lima Ward this week.'

'That won't be necessary,' Sam responded.

'The Lima ward is down the corridor then third left. Keep going until you pass the Buenos Aires ward. The Lima Ward is on your right. If you need any help just ask one of the medical staff in the corridors and they will look after you.'

'Thank you. You have been most helpful.'

Sam headed in the direction he had been instructed. He headed down a long brightly lit corridor. It was wide enough for two medical trolleys to pass, but he saw no-one. The lighting was soft and the colour scheme was a mix of pale and darker blues. The sound of Tom Jones' *'It's not unusual'* was playing discreetly in the corridor. Despite his growing unease, Sam found himself humming along as he progressed towards the turnoff for the Berserker ward. As he approached it, he saw a lone patient emerge from an alcove and stand right in the middle of the corridor as if he were directing imaginary traffic.

'Are you lost, mate?' the man in his late twenties bellowed at him. Sam was unnerved by his sudden appearance. He was dressed in jeans and despite the warmth of the building, he wore a thick woollen jacket. Sam detected a smell of stale urine on the man. He smiled reassuringly in an attempt to keep him calm.

'No, I'm headed to the Lima ward. I've been told where it is.'

The patient moved two steps closer and Sam shuddered. His eyes were bloodshot as if he had not slept for several days. He was a big man with broad shoulders and had a wild, unstable look about him.

'What're you gonna do in the Lima ward?' the patient yelled. Sam prepared himself in case the patient became violent.

'A guest has asked to see me.'

'Who're you seeing?' The man belched in Sam's face. It was obvious he had been drinking alcohol. Sam recoiled.

'Frank.'

‘Oh.’ The man had no idea who Frank was, but the answer seemed to satisfy him. He stepped aside and Sam walked past. As Sam made a left turn, he looked over his shoulder but the man in the corridor had gone. He walked a little faster down a second corridor. A lone nurse pushing a trolley of medications smiled as she passed him in the opposite direction. Sam found what he was looking for. On his right was a reception desk in front of a sign that displayed ‘*Buenos Aires Ward.*’ There were no receptionists and the reception desk had an abandoned feel to it.

‘Hello?’ Sam said in a shaky voice.

There was no reply. Sam walked towards the double doors of the ward and peered through the glass. He saw a lounge area similar to the schizophrenia ward on B2, but all the furniture and recreation equipment had been removed. Even the books in the corner bookcase had gone. Sam pushed at the doors and to his surprise, they opened. He hesitated before walking into the area known by the patients and staff as the Berserker lounge. The piped music was playing ‘*Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree.*’ The music was loud and did not comfort him.

‘Josh?’

There was no response. Sam considered walking out but the need for answers spurred him on.

‘Josh?’

He thought he saw a slight shadow in the kitchenette at the far end of the lounge. He walked slowly towards the kitchenette, his heart thumping to the rhythm of the piped music as he went. The shadow in the kitchenette became clearer as he approached. It was swaying from side to side like the pendulum of a grandfather clock. He heard a sound from the double doors behind him that he had just entered, but he walked towards the swaying shadow like a mouse to a king cobra. He walked into the kitchenette and gasped at the sight that confronted him.

‘Josh! No! What have you done?’

Josh was looking down at him with unseeing eyes and blue lips from a height six inches below the ceiling. Thin bootlaces cut savagely into the grey pallor of the skin on his neck. Only his shower of blond curly hair was as he remembered it. The ends of the laces were tied around the water pipes of the sprinkler system on the ceiling. His laceless

shoes were placed on the floor next to the dishwasher and his folded jumper sat neatly on top of the draining board. His body was swaying from side to side and rotated in a circular motion as if keeping time with the rendition of *'Live and let die'* that was now coming from the hidden speakers. Josh had evidently been clutching a pile of papers but they had spilled from his hand while he was in his death throes and were now scattered around the floor a metre below his feet. Josh's left sock was almost falling off his foot.

'Josh! I'm going to cut you down. Stay with me!' Sam shouted. Josh did not appear to be alive but Sam knew he couldn't have been hanging there very long. He climbed onto the kitchen bench next to the hot water boiler and attacked the laces for several minutes. Eventually they snapped and Josh slumped to the ground like a sack of meat in a butcher's shop. Sam checked for a pulse, checked Josh's carotid artery and then laid his head on the dead boy's chest.

'Nothing. Nothing,' said Sam despondently. Nevertheless, Sam breathed into the cold limp mouth of Josh's dead body and then applied compressions to his chest for a full five minutes. Finally, he slumped back against the fridge, exhausted. Sam noticed a little pile of broken glass next to the fridge and looked up at the ceiling. A security camera attached to the ceiling had been smashed and the lens was broken. Sam wondered if Josh had deliberately smashed the camera. Or could it have been someone else covering their tracks? He searched his own pockets and pulled out his mobile phone but there was no reception. He looked at the papers that were scattered near Josh's lifeless head and decided to gather them all up. Just as he placed them inside his jacket pocket, Sam heard the clicking of a camera phone.

'What have you done?' the man yelled. It was the patient he had passed in the corridor. Sam jumped back from the body and braced himself for a possible attack. However, the man was pulling at his own hair and was in obvious distress at the sight of Josh's body. The smell of stale urine filled the kitchenette.

Sam looked up into the man's bloodshot eyes. 'What's your name?' Sam asked.

'Peter.'

'Well, Peter, I want you to do something very important. I want you to rush to find a doctor or a nurse and tell them to come to the Buenos Aires Ward quickly. Then go and find Dr McDonald and tell him what has happened.'

‘But you killed him! I saw you. You did it. I’ve got pictures.’ Peter was working himself into a frenzy. ‘You did it. You did it,’ he repeated waving his camera phone at Sam.

‘No, Peter, you need to think clearly. Go and get a doctor. The boy might still be alive.’

‘There is no need, Peter. I have it under control.’ Sam looked up and saw Rachael striding towards them from the lounge entrance. She had a two-way radio in her hand.

‘Rachael! What are you doing here?’

Rachael reached down and felt Josh’s carotid artery.

‘He’s dead, Sam.’

‘He did it. He did it,’ Peter babbled at Rachael. He pointed straight at Sam and held up his camera phone.

Rachael turned and whispered something to Peter. Peter handed the phone to Rachael who looked at the photos on the phone.

‘I am afraid the photos did not turn out, Peter,’ she said, deleting the images from the camera phone. Peter moved away from the gruesome scene and headed towards the exit. Before he reached the double doors, he stopped and shouted, ‘you must make him stay downstairs, Miss. He needs mental treatment like the rest of us but he won’t admit it.’

‘It’s okay, Peter. You may leave us,’ said Rachael.

Peter turned and left the ward.

‘But why? What happened to Josh? Did somebody kill him?’ Sam asked Rachael. He was still sitting beside the body.

‘I know you liked him. I am sorry, Sam.’

‘He wanted to talk to me. He asked me to come down here and see him.’

Rachael pulled out a cloth and wiped down the surfaces where Sam may have left his prints. She then reached down and laid a hand on Sam’s shoulder. ‘When you have over a hundred schizophrenic patients in a building, these things do happen. Josh probably had a dozen voices in his head telling him to hang himself. He was one of the most paranoid cases we have ever had.’

‘But he wanted to tell me something.’ Sam looked up at Rachael but she was talking into her radio.

‘The medical staff are coming now, Sam. They will take care of things.’ She reached her hand down to him as if imploring him to get up off the floor. Sam grasped her hand and rose up from the ground. Rachael put an arm around his shoulder.

‘I am sorry you had to experience this. It must have been disturbing.’

‘How did you get here so quickly?’

‘Cassie told me you were here. She was worried that you might run into one of the more dangerous patients’

‘Who is Peter?’

‘He used to be a soldier in Afghanistan. The Taliban captured and tortured him. Believe it or not, he has made huge strides in the last six months. I am hoping we can rehabilitate him eventually.’

‘Why was he so insistent that I had killed Josh?’

‘You must realise that his mind has been damaged by his experience with the Taliban. In his head, nothing ever happens unless there is malicious intent involved at every level. You just happened to be the man on the scene.’

‘So now he thinks I’m the evil mastermind behind every unfortunate event at Napier & Beckett?’

‘Don’t worry about him, he’s harmless. But next time you have any more ideas about wandering around B3 unescorted, please let me know first.’ She looked at Sam sternly and then squeezed his shoulder to reassure him.

Sam felt the wad of thick notes in his jacket pocket weighing heavily like a guilty secret.

## CHAPTER 11

It was twelve years since Sam had last spoken to his old history tutor, Professor Woodstock from City University in London. The professor had the ability to make Napoleonic history come alive for his students. Professor Woodstock himself could have planned each battle he described in detail to his class. He agonised over poor decisions made by generals and politicians two hundred years before. He bled for the poor soldiers or innocent bystanders caught up in the turmoil of war. He viewed Napoleon as a god-like colossus striding the avenues of military and social history.

City University was an understated institution located in the heart of North London. Sam met the professor in his study at the Northampton Square history faculty. The room was well-organised for an academic. A bookcase containing volumes of Napoleonic histories lined one whole wall. The professor was dark-haired with emerging tinges of grey. His bushy beard was still a proud feature of his amiable face.

Sam wanted to discuss the Sand Creek massacre and mentioned that his great-great-grandmother Alice Jardine was probably a witness to the event.

‘The American Civil War theatre is not my area of specialisation,’ Professor Woodstock said. ‘I might have to involve some of my colleagues. However, it would be an extraordinary case if you have a living relative who held a conversation with a witness to the massacre of 1864.’

Sam leaned forwards and said quietly, ‘It’s a bit sensitive. I have reason to believe that a group of powerful people also have an interest in Alice. I would like to keep the number of people involved in this research as small as possible.’

The professor seemed unaffected by Sam’s request. ‘The material on the Sand Creek massacre is sketchy. It’s been brushed under the carpet of American history. I believe there’s a monument in Colorado that might be worth visiting.’ He pulled out a thick book on the frontier wars from a shelf behind him. ‘The massacre took place towards the end of the American Civil War. There are two opposite schools of thought. On the one side, the Cheyenne warriors were attacking white settlers and their wagon trains in Colorado during the summer months of 1864. The celebrated case of the Hungate family was fresh in the minds of the American soldiers. A man and wife and two babies were murdered,

scalped and their bodies mutilated by the Cheyenne. A war of nations was taking place and the brutality of the attacks had traumatised the settlers of Denver. The citizens of Colorado raised a volunteer army and attacked the camp of the Cheyenne warriors, who put up a fierce fight during the battle.'

'Why was it so controversial?' asked Sam.

'Even by the standards of the time, the event caused considerable debate. There was a congressional investigation into the behaviour of the third regiment of the Colorado volunteers. There was controversy about whether the Native Americans had been induced to remain at the nearby Fort Lyon and whether they had been promised protection by the commanding officer there. Some reports stated that up to seventy per cent of the victims were women and children, as the bulk of the warriors were away on a buffalo hunt.'

'Why isn't it better known?' Sam asked.

'Terrible things happen in wars, Sam. This was one of the most unpleasant incidents in American frontier history. It's not something the victors want to remember. In my view, enough time has elapsed for the event to be viewed dispassionately and for the current plight of the Native Americans to be acknowledged.'

Sam produced his Black Kettle photograph. 'That is my great-great-grandmother who is seated on the lap of Black Kettle.'

Professor Woodstock took the photo frame from Sam. 'My goodness,' he said, 'where did you get this from? It may have serious historical implications.'

'From my Great Uncle Roy. He inherited it from Alice.'

'Do you know who the British officer is in the photograph?'

'We believe it is her grandfather, George Napier.'

'Napier? Now that is a fine Napoleonic fighting surname,' said Woodstock.

'Do you think there could be any connection with the pharmaceutical company Napier & Beckett?' Sam asked.

'Most definitely. There was a surge of new companies set up by ex-soldiers after the wars of the nineteenth century.'

Woodstock flipped through the pages of the book he was reading and settled on a photograph of a Native American delegation. He compared the two photos. 'There is no doubt. That is Black Kettle in your photograph. And there is Chief Neva of the Arapaho

tribe. That one with the peace pipe is One Eye. Quite remarkable. I wonder what a British officer was doing in Colorado. Did you say that your great-uncle spoke to Alice about this incident?’

‘He did. But my uncle was only thirteen or fourteen at the time. He can’t remember any details from the conversation.’

‘That’s not surprising. How old did you say he is?’

‘Ninety-two. You should meet him.’

‘I might well do so. This is quite extraordinary. Do you realise that through your uncle, we can establish a living bridge that stretches one hundred and fifty years in time?’

‘Except that Uncle Roy can’t remember the conversation.’

‘But there are techniques to enhance memory recall in our senior citizens. I must consult with Dr Clayton from the psychology department.’

‘What happened at the congressional investigations?’

‘The commanding officer who led the massacre was censored, as was the governor of Colorado. It was quite an enlightened verdict considering the times.’

Sam paused for a moment then asked the question that had been burning in his mind. ‘Did the soldiers display any unusually aggressive or barbaric behaviour at Sand Creek? I mean extraordinarily inhumane behaviour?’

‘I believe they did, dear boy. One would suspect they were not in control of their own minds.’

\* \* \*

‘Walter Mendel wants to see you in the executive offices,’ Cassie told Sam when he arrived back at his desk after his lunch break.

‘Me?’

‘Unless there is another Sam Jardine working in the office.’ She looked around theatrically. ‘No? Then he must mean you.’ Cassie smiled at Sam. Sam would have smiled back but his nerves were getting the better of him.

‘Did he say why?’

‘Maybe he wants to learn some new chat-up lines from the master of seduction.’

‘Very funny.’ Sam grabbed his working file from his desk and strode to the lifts. He waited a minute for the lift to arrive and then descended to the first floor where the executive offices and London boardroom were located. He smiled at David Cross’ personal assistant and she ushered him into the boardroom where Mendel had taken up temporary residence.

A tall, distinguished looking Mendel stood by the open window talking on his mobile phone to his secretary in Alexandria.

‘I can’t believe the woman quit her cleaning job with only one day’s notice. Barbara is furious as she is holding a party tomorrow night ... I need you to get me another one urgently ... what do you mean the cleaning company is refusing to send another one? ... I am not bloody rude to the cleaning staff. I will have them for slander ... look, just get one of the Napier & Beckett cleaners ... no, I’m not going to pay her; she is damn lucky to be on the rehabilitation program ... just threaten to withdraw her medications if she refuses. I need to know her name so that I can tell Barbara ... what was that? Cindy Reineker did you say? Okay, I got it.’ Mendel hung up the phone and extended his hand to Sam. ‘Thank you for taking the time to come to see me, Sam.’

‘My pleasure, sir.’ Sam had never called anyone ‘sir’ since his school days. The man’s obvious charisma overwhelmed him.

‘Rachael has told me some great things about you, Sam.’

‘Thank you, Mr Mendel.’

‘I heard that in two months your negotiations have saved the company over five million dollars.’

‘Five million *pounds*. That’s about right, Mr Mendel.’

‘That is amazing work, Sam. You must be aware that every cent is going to count during the next two years as we push our products through the development pipeline. Our goal is to be the highest growing pharmaceutical company in the world once again.’

‘There should be another three million coming next week when we sign the distribution centre outsourcing contract.’

‘That’s *pounds*, I’m assuming,’ joked Mendel.

‘Of course.’

‘You can help Napier & Beckett get back to where we belong, Sam.’

‘I would be honoured to do my bit, Mr Mendel.’

‘Have you ever thought of working in the States?’

Sam felt a rush of excitement. Alexandria was where the action was. In reality, London was a sideshow as far as Napier & Beckett was concerned.

‘Often. It would be a huge opportunity,’ he replied.

‘I wanted to ask you Sam, as a representative of the London office, if you thought my niece Rachael would be a worthy general manager of the London affiliate.’ For a moment, Sam considered that Mendel might be marginalising Rachael away from the centre of power in Alexandria. However, Mendel seemed so genuine and affable that he dismissed the thought. He understood why the media loved this man so much.

‘I am flattered that you ask for my opinion, Mr Mendel. I have never worked for a more gifted manager as Rachael Beckett. She would be an excellent choice.’ Sam thought for a moment. ‘But I am sure David Cross, the current GM, is doing a great job too.’

‘David is getting a promotion. He will be running the Latvian office. Latvia is a critical emerging market at the centre of our East European expansion plans.’

Sam had heard the Latvian affiliate referred to as a ‘basket case’ ... Mendel was putting David Cross out to grass.

‘I’m sure the Latvian affiliate will prosper under David’s capable leadership,’ agreed Sam.

‘You got it,’ replied Mendel. Sam was keen to get back to the topic of a potential move to Alexandria.

‘Mr Mendel, I hear that the procurement department in Alexandria is looking for an assistant vice-president?’ The title sounded grand to Sam.

‘Really, Sam? For a moment, I thought you had genuine ambition. We have much bigger plans for you – starting right here in London. Rachael and I want you to consider the role of commercial director. You will be Rachael’s right-hand man. We want you to be at the centre of every business and contractual negotiation carried out by Napier & Beckett in London.’

‘I don’t know what to say. I am most grateful, Mr Mendel.’

‘It’s Rachael you should be thanking; it was her recommendation.’

‘I will certainly do that.’

‘I have to say that for such a brilliant negotiator, you accepted a very low salary when you joined us. I am raising your salary by two hundred per cent, backdated to the day you joined.’

Sam’s spirits soared. His unpaid bills had been suffocating him, but he would be able to clear them all with his next pay cheque. ‘That is most generous, Mr Mendel.’

Mendel looked Sam straight in the eye. ‘Sam, there is one small thing that you could do for me.’

‘Absolutely, Mr Mendel.’

‘This is quite sensitive, but I believe that you are a man I can do business with. Rachael is young and ambitious. Although she is a gifted woman, she can also be a bit headstrong at times.’

Sam smiled. Mendel knew his niece well.

‘I need someone to keep an eye on her. Someone she trusts. Someone like you, who is that little bit older and has the traditional male values of hard work and loyalty to their own. Do we see eye to eye on this, Sam?’

‘I have the best interests of Napier & Beckett at heart.’ Sam was not sure quite where the conversation was headed. ‘What would you like me to do?’

‘Of course, I want you to support Rachael and be a loyal associate to her in all matters.’

‘You have my word on that.’

‘But if her exuberance and ambition take her down the wrong path, you would be doing Napier & Beckett a great service by letting me know. There is no doubt that Rachael will make a great ambassador for the pharmaceutical industry in twenty or so years’ time, but right now when the company’s future is on the line, I do not need her rocking the boat. Do you get my drift?’

‘I’m sure Rachael also has the best interests of Napier & Beckett at heart.’

‘I need your clear commitment on this, Sam. You have a bright career ahead of you, and I will ensure that your loyalty to Napier & Beckett will not go unrewarded.’

‘You can count on me to do the right thing.’

‘Splendid.’ He looked at his watch. Sam’s time was up.

Sam stood up and prepared to leave. ‘It’s been an absolute pleasure to meet you, Mr

Mendel.’

‘Oh, Sam. There was one other thing.’

Sam sat down again. ‘Yes, Mr Mendel?’

‘My office took a call from a gentleman called Gordon Liversedge from Neo Manufacturing last week. He asked if I would help to clear up a small misunderstanding.’

‘And what misunderstanding did Gordon claim had taken place?’ Sam felt his irrational antagonism towards authority boil to the surface. He forced himself to calm down.

‘Nothing to be concerned about, Sam. He stated that you claimed a six per cent saving when nothing had been agreed.’

‘We shook hands on six per cent, Mr Mendel.’

‘I am sure it was an easy mistake to make on your part. After all, I know that you have been under a lot of pressure working on so many cost savings in so short a time.’

‘I am sure that the security cameras in the negotiating room will confirm that a six per cent reduction was agreed between us.’

‘The thing is, Sam, we have checked and there is no video footage of any such negotiation taking place. We do have the ethics and reputation of Napier & Beckett to consider. We cannot go around making unsubstantiated claims. It would not be good for business.’

‘I agree, Mr Mendel.’

‘I knew you would see the logic of the situation, Sam. That is why we have put such faith in you.’

‘When I asked Mr Liversedge to send me a copy of the contract, he refused.’

‘Because there was a misunderstanding. So we can just let the matter drop,’ Mendel said reasonably.

However, Sam had not finished. His blood was up. ‘So I complained to the managing director of Neo Manufacturing and told him what a low life weasel he had as a sales manager.’

‘That was not smart, Sam.’

‘The managing director, Frank Gambier agreed to honour the deal. At least he is a man of principle.’ Sam pulled out a contract from his working file that had been signed

by Frank Gambier. He turned to the pricing schedule, which showed the six per cent discount and placed it in front of Mendel.

‘We received the first consignment of production equipment in the Munich plant this morning at the agreed six per cent discounted rate,’ said Sam. ‘There are still some businessmen who understand ethics and reputation. Don’t you agree, Mr Mendel?’

Mendel stood up rather quickly and walked to the window of the boardroom. He looked out across London’s financial district and for a while seemed lost in thought. Finally, he spoke.

‘I am going to put that last remark down to youthful inexperience, Sam Jardine. Many people at Napier & Beckett have been crushed like cockroaches for comments less offensive than that.’

## CHAPTER 12

‘I would like to introduce you to Dr Anneka Clayton from the department of psychology,’ said Professor Woodstock.

Sam shook her hand. Dr Clayton was in her late forties. She looked more like a groupie from an eighties rock band than an academic. She wore a multi-coloured dress that flowed down to her ankles, had straggly blonde hair and a permanent smile was etched on her face. Yet despite her easy-going appearance, she possessed a razor-sharp mind.

‘I phoned my uncle last night. He’s not keen on hypnosis,’ Sam said. ‘He joked that at his age you would never be able to wake him up again.’

‘Sam, we are not proposing to use the theatrical hypnosis that you see on stage,’ explained Dr Clayton.

‘So what is it all about?’

‘We will create a relaxing environment to allow his brain to focus on one specific conversation that he had over seventy-five years ago. We will attempt to recreate the conditions that were in place when he had that conversation.’

‘That doesn’t sound too bad. How much will he remember?’

‘Perhaps nothing at all.’

‘I thought that hypnotism was supposed to bring back the conversation like a tape recording of the original discussion?’

‘The brain doesn’t work like that, Sam. We cannot reconnect the paths in which the original neurons travelled in your uncle’s brain; they have changed forever. We must remember that your uncle was still a child when he had that conversation.’

‘What happens when someone is hypnotised?’

‘No-one knows for sure, but we can measure changes in brain activity as a subject enters the hypnotic state. The subject is not sleeping but his brain activity shows a boost in activity associated with dreaming and sleep. By comparison, the brain shows a drop in activity associated with wakefulness. In this state, the subconscious mind takes a more active role.’

‘But I don’t see how it will improve Roy’s memory.’

‘Roy will be in a state where he believes that he is fourteen-years-old, talking to Alice about the events of 1864. We can create an environment in which the sole focus of his brain is on recalling that one moment in time. The brain is a remarkable organ, Sam; we may get some astounding results – or we may get nothing.’

Professor Woodstock paced his office. ‘Imagine the possibilities! A window into a historical event that we all believed was closed forever. We could present an entirely new theory of why the massacre took place.’

‘I still think it’s a long shot,’ said Sam.

‘Which is why I would also like to introduce a second interview technique,’ Dr Clayton announced.

‘You’re making Uncle Roy sound like a lab rat. I’m not sure about this.’

‘Far from it. This is a technique that works wonders on senior citizens.’

‘Tell us about this technique, Anneka,’ said Professor Woodstock.

‘We call it the “Enhanced Cognitive Interview”. City University has had great success in training the police in this technique; they love it. It has boosted memory recall in witnesses who have difficulty remembering what happened at the scene of a crime.’

‘So how does it work?’

‘We try to recreate the environmental and personal context for the witness surrounding the to-be-remembered event, or TBR. In Roy’s case, the TBR is his conversation with Alice in the late 1930s.’

‘That all sounds rather academic,’ said Sam.

‘We will mock up a room that reminds Roy of where he was when he was fourteen. The interviewer – that will be me – will dress up as Alice as she was when they had the conversation. We can evoke smells from the time and have period objects in the room.’

‘The house that Roy grew up in is still in the family,’ said Sam.

‘That would be a great help,’ Dr Clayton enthused. ‘Do you have any of Alice’s possessions?’

‘Roy told me he had an old pair of her gloves.’

‘And do you have a photo of Alice as she looked at the time?’

‘We do, but surely you are not going to try to look like her?’

Dr Clayton grinned. ‘I have always enjoyed amateur dramatics. There is one other

thing.’

‘I don’t want to hear it.’

‘I would like to spend two days with Roy prior to the interview.’

‘Why is that?’

‘This won’t work unless Roy trusts me and wants it to work, otherwise he won’t open up.’

‘That makes sense.’

‘I also need to get some background on Roy’s upbringing; his hobbies, attitudes – what he was doing at the time. That additional information will support the cognitive interview process.’

‘I’m still a bit uneasy about this. How long will it take?’ Sam asked.

‘A maximum of two hours. We may not get much information in the first thirty minutes, but the window of maximum recall will be the hour after that. Most subjects tire rapidly thereafter.’

‘Then please keep the interview to a maximum ninety minutes.’

Dr Clayton smiled at Sam. ‘It’s obvious you care about your uncle. If I suspect he has any doubts about hypnosis or that it will be too tiring for him, we will not proceed.’

‘I will hold you to that, Dr Clayton.’

\* \* \*

Sam sat at a guest table at the Pharmaceutical Guild dinner with nine other guests from the pharmaceutical industry. There were fifty similar tables in the magnificent Great Hall of the London Guildhall. He pulled at the stiff collar of the dress shirt he had hired along with a bow tie and dinner jacket for the evening’s event. Sam stared at the magnificent stone arched roof and the impressive clustered columns that lined the sides of the Great Hall. At the end of the hall was a beautiful Gothic window that occupied its entire width. Through the centuries, heads of state and royalty had been entertained in this hall. Dick Whittington had met Henry V and his queen in this room. Sam gazed at the head table where Rachael was commanding the attention of the president of the Pharmaceutical Guild and his guests of honour.

Rachael looked breathtaking. She wore a simple but elegant floor-length Tom Ford gown in red and black chiffon. The halter neck design showed off her long neck and graceful décolletage. She wore barely any jewellery – a pair of exquisite diamond drop earrings and a Tiffany gold cuff on one wrist. Her hair was swept into a simple chignon, with soft wisps of hair framing her lovely face. Sam caught Rachael glancing down at her handwritten notes for about five seconds. It was the only sign of nerves he had seen from her all evening. On stage, a gentleman from the guild thanked the organisers and his guild colleagues. To polite applause, he announced the headline speaker, the recently appointed general manager of Napier & Beckett, Miss Rachael Beckett.

Rachael glided onto the stage, her Jimmy Choo heels made her appear even more statuesque. Her shimmering gown was in stark contrast to the starchy formal attire of the audience. Rachael began her speech without notes and made a string of self-deprecating jokes about her Gen Y background and lack of experience. A large PowerPoint presentation illuminated behind her that Rachael ignored as it flowed in perfect coordination with her unscripted delivery. She enthralled the audience, describing the many problems the pharmaceutical industry was facing. Drugs were taking longer to develop and many old blockbuster drugs were moving off patent. The companies who had spent billions developing them could only watch in frustration as they became ripe for the picking by Indian and Chinese generic drug companies. Rachael tackled the issue of Napier & Beckett's drugs pipeline black hole. She described how the company was meeting the challenges with a program of innovative research, shortened development cycles and aggressive cost-cutting. She looked straight at Sam and described how Napier & Beckett had hired young, talented staff dedicated to getting the company back where it belonged. Rachael concluded with a reassuring message that the industry was here to stay. Patients would continue to benefit from the new drugs under development and Napier & Beckett intended to be at the forefront of that success. The audience were uplifted and applauded her from their tables.

After half an hour of small talk and business card swapping, Sam left his table and wandered over to the far end of the hall where a temporary bar had been set up. He pulled and fidgeted at his ill-fitting shirt collar. Five minutes later, Rachael was at his side. Sam had been enthralled by her stage performance. She looked glamorous enough on the stage

but standing next to him, she took his breath away.

‘Sam, go easy on the drinks, we have work to do,’ she whispered. The subtle scent of Chanel No. 5 intoxicated Sam’s senses. She looked him up and down with her crystal blue eyes. ‘I see you’ve finally done something with that mop of hair,’ she said. ‘It’s lucky you don’t wear your dinner suit in the office; I’m not sure I would be able to concentrate.’ Her seductive flattery made Sam’s pulse quicken and he felt beads of perspiration form on his face. He felt his collar choking him as he gulped down his drink to remove the lump in his throat.

Despite being a beautiful evening and barely a five-minute walk to Rachael’s hotel, she insisted they hail a cab. ‘I cannot walk in these heels,’ she said to Sam. The cab driver grumbled as he dropped them off at the Threadneedles Hotel one minute later. He had queued outside the Guildhall for forty minutes in anticipation of a big fare. Rachael was oblivious to his complaints, but Sam gave him a twenty-pound tip. Rachael took hold of Sam’s arm and they walked into the hotel. The doorman opened the door for them as they approached and the concierge gave a polite bow as they walked past. The hotel foyer was resplendent in marble and mahogany and was dominated by a huge domed glass ceiling. They took the lift to the penthouse apartment. Sam opened the door for Rachael, and they walked into the sitting room annex of the apartment. The sitting room on its own was larger than Sam’s house in Chichester. Sam was aghast at the opulence. The furniture was modern but styled to suit a Georgian town house. The TV and entertainment units were state-of-the-art but blended into the décor. There was a well-appointed bar in the corner. The bedrooms, bathroom and kitchenette were off to the side of the sitting room. Sam took Rachael’s tiny bolero jacket from her shoulders, placed it on a hanger and hung it in a small closet. Rachael flopped down onto one of the sofas and sighed heavily. It had been a long and challenging day. She kicked off her Jimmy Choo heels in an untidy heap and rubbed one of her black stockinged feet, frowning in pain.

‘You men are so lucky you don’t have to wear high heels,’ she said.

‘It’s our practical choice of attire that keeps us one step ahead in the gender war,’ replied Sam. He undid the top button of his stiff collar and rubbed at the chafe that had blemished his neck.

‘And I believed that you were an enlightened thinker, Sam Jardine!’

‘Don’t get me wrong, Rachael. There’s hope for the ladies yet. I thought your presentation was superb. And thank you for your compliment!’

‘Are you sure it was directed at you?’ she teased.

‘Wine?’ Sam enquired, looking at the well-stocked bar in the corner.

‘Don’t make yourself too comfortable. We are here to work out a strategy for the future of Napier & Beckett.’

Sam sat down next to Rachael. ‘I have a feeling that this strategy may not meet with the full approval of Walter Mendel.’

‘Most unlikely,’ agreed Rachael.

‘Your uncle asked me to spy on you last week. Should I be telling him that you do not have his best interests at heart?’

‘My uncle has chosen to take the company down a path that will lead to its inevitable destruction. He’s also planning to abandon the values that my family has held dear for nearly two hundred years.’

‘But Mendel just promoted you.’

‘Hardly. He is keeping me away from the executive power base in Alexandria. He also wanted a male minder to keep an eye on me that he assumed he could control. That’s you Sam, if you were not already aware.’

‘I assume you were talking about Berserker when you said Mendel was abandoning your family values?’

For the first time that evening, Rachael looked rattled. ‘The existence of Berserker is known to fewer than twenty people on the planet. How did you come into this knowledge?’

‘I know a lot more about Napier & Beckett than you think, Rachael.’

‘So you know that this drug could change the nature of human aggression to the extent that it could wipe humanity off the face of the planet within a generation?’

‘Why didn’t Nathaniel Beckett destroy the drug and its compound formula when he had the chance?’

‘Because we are paid tens of millions of dollars a year by the US government not to. There have been at least three times in our history when we would have gone out of business had we not had access to the government’s Berserker funding.’

‘Including 1944 and 1864?’

‘Someone has been doing their homework.’

‘So what will happen to Napier & Beckett if we don’t toe the US government line?’

‘I can’t deny it, Sam. We will go close to the wire. We may even go out of business.’

‘Thereby depriving millions of dementia patients the chance of a cure for at least another ten years.’

‘Someone will buy our drugs pipeline, but Berserker is one of the products that they would also get their hands on and they may be tempted to exploit it. Commerce has always been about balancing moral expediency with making profits.’ She tucked her long, elegant legs underneath her, reminding Sam of a cunning Siamese cat. He resolved to keep his wits about him.

‘So what are we talking about here, Rachael? I don’t know how I could make a difference to Napier & Beckett’s strategy. I’m not at the executive level of management.’

‘It’s all about negotiation, Sam. Mendel is not popular with the US government. He’s rubbed them up the wrong way too many times. A different approach and a change at the top may make them see things differently. We may be able to get our dementia drug Senzar approved by the FDA without having to sell Berserker if we negotiate carefully.’

‘The new person at the top would be you?’

‘It’s what my grandfather wanted.’

‘I don’t doubt it. But there is the issue of corporate governance to consider. You can’t go around deposing CEOs just because you don’t like the board’s decisions.’

‘You don’t have to do this, Sam. You’re free to accept the way things are. I just hope that you don’t regret your inaction later.’

‘I cannot negotiate properly if I haven’t embraced the cause.’

‘I am sorry, Sam. I appreciate I haven’t made my case yet.’

‘I would need your word that Berserker would never see light of day while you were CEO.’

‘This whole strategy is about eliminating Berserker, Sam.’

Rachael was offering him the prize that Roy had extracted from Nathaniel. He was desperate to trust her, but he was uncertain whether Rachael was using him to settle her family rivalry and whether Berserker was the bait. His instinct told him he could trust

Rachael – despite all the forewarnings he had received to the contrary.

‘Then I am with you, Rachael.’

‘That wine sounds appetising now.’ She smiled disarmingly at Sam.

Sam stood and headed to the corner bar. ‘White or red?’

‘You choose for me,’ Rachael smiled lazily. Sam selected a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc from the wine bar fridge and poured two glasses. He handed one to Rachael and returned to the end of the sofa.

After sipping her wine, Rachael said, ‘Talk me through your ideas, Sam. I need to unwind for a while.’ She untucked her long legs and stretched them out along the sofa. She placed her stockinged feet on Sam’s lap. ‘Massage my feet for me, Sam.’

As he dutifully rubbed her feet, he articulated some ideas as to how he could apply leverage on Walter Mendel and the US government. He outlined a list of his requirements and people he would need to meet. He stressed the importance of timing and of building up relationships and alliances. He asked for her reassurance that she never mention any aspect of his strategy to anyone else for fear of impacting the negotiations. Rachael was strangely silent at this request. He looked over and saw that her eyes were closed and that she was breathing deeply and rhythmically. Despite his resolve to remain professional, Sam felt terribly disappointed. He wondered if he should wake her up and try to seduce her. Was that what Rachael was expecting? Somehow, the nobility of the task that Rachael had set him made such thoughts feel unseemly. He gently removed her feet from his lap and took her half-empty wine glass from her hand. He found a blanket and a pillow from one of the bedrooms and made her as comfortable as he could without waking her. He picked up her shoes and placed them by the desk. Sam watched her for a moment or two, thinking how beautiful she looked in her long gown, her face peaceful and expressionless in sleep. He leaned down and kissed her gently on her forehead. He was not certain, but he thought he saw a flicker of a smile on her lips. He gathered his jacket and tie, and set off on the long journey home to Chichester.

## CHAPTER 13

Sam logged onto his PC the next morning and prepared himself for the inevitable avalanche of emails. At the top of his list was an email from Rachael headed 'Good Morning'. The content consisted of one simple phrase: 'Ever the Gentleman!' Sam was not sure whether Rachael's email was complimentary or critical, but he smiled nonetheless. No sooner had he deleted the email than an instant message request popped up on his screen. It was Alec De Souza. Sam debated whether to ignore the invitation for a conversation. Since learning that De Souza was indeed the genuine article, he had been meaning to follow up with the mysterious Jacques. However, the grubby nature of De Souza's fall from grace had led Sam to procrastinate. Sam accepted the invitation to chat.

*'Sam. Get down to B2 right now.'*

Sam felt his blood pressure rise. Who the hell does he think he is? Sam pounded away at the keyboard. *'No can do. I have a negotiation with British Telecom at 10 am.'* Why did he feel the need to justify himself?

*'I don't care if you have a negotiation with Pope Benedict. Get yourself down here for your own good.'*

Sam considered ending the chat session there and then but the words 'for your own good' sounded ominous. He concentrated hard and typed, *'I can see you after my meeting around 11 am.'*

*'You are not hearing me, buddy. If you are not here by 9:30, Jacques will drag you down seven flights of stairs to B2.'*

*'I will see what I can do.'* Sam shuddered as he remembered how his last visit to the patient trials facilities had ended so disastrously.

*'9:30, Sam. Don't be late.'* The instant message box disappeared from Sam's screen.

Cassie sauntered up to his desk and rested an arm on his shoulder. 'Are you okay, Sam? You look white as a ghost.' Her Scottish lilt was calming. Sam felt a conflict of emotions but was thankful he had behaved like a gentleman the night before. He looked at Cassie.

*'Bit of an emergency. I have to cancel my British Telecom meeting at ten o'clock.'*

*'Let me take care of that for you.'* She looked at Sam. 'I need the whole story if you

want me to cover for you again.'

Sam weighed up the situation. 'Cassie, I need your help to get me into the patient trials facilities again.'

'I don't know, Sam. Do you know what you're doing?'

'Probably not.'

'Okay. Give me five minutes.' Cassie returned to her desk. She rearranged Sam's BT meeting then phoned the maintenance manager. She had a lengthy conversation with him about the state of the security cameras in B2. She returned to his desk five minutes later. 'Leave your security card in your desk drawer and join me outside the building in five minutes.'

Cassie walked out of the office and headed towards the lifts. Five minutes later, Sam met Cassie on the street outside the building.

'Sam, you have to be quick. The security cameras in B2 will shut down for a one-hour maintenance check. You have until ten o'clock, but make sure you're out of the lounge area by 9:55 at the latest. I will need to put on a bit of a performance to get you past reception.'

They walked to the innocuous door with the dentist signage attached and slipped in using Cassie's security badge. 'If you walk through this door with your badge, you will set off the alarm system,' Cassie told Sam. She opened her bag and produced a white coat and a doctor's clipboard. 'Put the coat on. I hope this is all worth it, Sam.'

'So do I.'

They descended two flights of fire escape stairs and came to a heavy white door.

'You need to inform the receptionist that I've received a bad batch of medication for my condition and you think I'm minutes away from a violent episode.'

'You have violent episodes?' said Sam, shocked.

'There is a lot about me that you don't understand.'

Cassie activated the door with her pass and the two of them walked in. The receptionist knew Cassie well.

'Are you okay, Cassie? You don't look at all well.'

'We need to get her new medication quickly,' Sam said, 'She's going to have an episode.' He looked at Cassie and was shocked at what he saw. Cassie's eyes were an

angry shade of blood red and she was trembling with agitation.

‘Oh, my God. I will get Dr McDonald. Please wait here.’ The receptionist scampered to a back room. Cassie’s expression was returning to normal, but Sam noticed that she was still shaking.

‘That performance deserves an Oscar, Cassie. For a moment, you had me convinced.’

‘Sam, that is how I really am. It is how you see me act each day that deserves an Oscar.’

‘I don’t believe you, Cassie. That can’t be true.’

‘The medication I take does calm me down, but my treatment is not based on drugs. There is no cure for what I have. I have to spend three or four hours a day on an assisted meditation program. Then I have to feign normality twelve hours a day. I am burnt-out when I get home. One day I’ll crack and then I won’t be able to control my anger. I might kill someone.’

‘Cassie, I can help. I know I can.’

‘No, Sam, you can’t. No-one can. You’ll get hurt if you become involved with me. That is why I have to share my life with people like Dwayne. He doesn’t care what happens to me and I won’t care if he gets hurt when I crack.’

‘You aren’t going to break down, Cassie. We will find a way.’

‘Sam, you must go now. Be back at 9:55. I will tell the receptionist and Dr McDonald that I am feeling better and that you were called away to see another patient.’

Sam entered the Schizophrenia ward and made a beeline for the little corner library area where he had last seen De Souza. Sure enough, De Souza was waiting with a book in his hand, unable to conceal his impatience.

‘You have half an hour, De Souza, and then every security officer in the building will storm into this lounge. The cameras are back online at ten o’clock.’

‘Nice to see you again too,’ he said.

‘So what is so important that I had to cancel my negotiation with one-hour’s notice?’

De Souza put down the book that he had been reading. ‘Get me a cup of tea, would you?’

Sam looked aghast at De Souza. ‘Come on. You know you want one too,’ said De Souza.

Sam stomped over to the kitchenette and made them both an English Breakfast tea. He added five sugars to De Souza's mug.

'You have been making quite a name for yourself upstairs. I am quite proud of you, Sam,' said De Souza as he took a sip of tea. He grimaced at the taste. 'It's a shame your tea-making skills don't compare to your negotiation successes.'

'You are well informed for a Persilias trial patient.'

'You're a smart boy, Sam, but I can't believe you haven't worked it out yet.'

'Worked what out?'

'I have turned whistleblower for the MHRA. It's the only way I can get out of here.'

'Napier & Beckett is under investigation by the MHRA?' said Sam incredulously.

'We dropped you enough hints, for Chrissake. But would you take them up? Jacques is my handler and has been trying to get hold of you almost non-stop since our last meeting.'

'I assumed you were part of Dr McDonald's elaborate practical joke.'

De Souza went red in the face. 'A practical joke! Thanks a lot. While you've been swanning around upstairs screwing every attractive woman in the building, I've been stuck in here and fed a diet of mind-altering substances by Dr McDonald and his army of charlatans.'

'I thought you were into mind-altering substances.' Sam reached for his tea and took a long swallow. De Souza was right; it wasn't the best brew he had ever made.

'The doctors claim nothing is working. They are threatening me with electroconvulsive therapy. They want to fry my fucking brains and I'm not even sodding sick.'

'Okay, calm down. I just don't understand why you couldn't have been honest with me from the beginning.'

'Are you kidding? With your choirboy innocence, Rachael Beckett would have rumbled you in two minutes and then you would have been stuck in here with me. Or worse.'

'What has Rachael got to do with this?'

'Oh, I forgot that she's your latest lover.'

'I don't have to justify anything to you, but we are not lovers.'

‘If I were you, not that it’s my thing, I would get in there quick because she’s only weeks away from spending the next five years in the slammer.’

‘I don’t believe you,’ Sam scoffed.

‘If you don’t want to be standing in the dock next to her as an accomplice you had better start cooperating with the MHRA. You can start by phoning Jacques when you get back upstairs.’

‘What is she supposed to have done?’

‘She has restarted trials of a PTSD drug that was supposed to have been shut down last month.’

‘I’m sure that has nothing to do with Rachael.’

‘So why did Rachael take you to that swanky hotel last night?’

Sam was surprised. ‘How do you know about the hotel?’

‘Jacques has you under surveillance since you refuse to cooperate with us.’

‘I am the new commercial director and she wanted to work with me on a new corporate strategy.’

‘Her strategy involved taking you by the arm and up to her room?’ De Souza said sarcastically. ‘It’s the classic honey trap and you fell for it. She has you trussed up like a turkey. Really, Sam, I thought better of you. Well, are you going to cooperate with us, now that you have the full picture?’ De Souza picked up his mug and drained the rest of the tea. ‘Dear me, Sam. Next time, I’m making my own.’

Sam ignored the insult. ‘I need details. I’m not going to send her to prison without a damn good reason.’

‘Okay, I get that. About three months ago, a motorcycle courier killed an innocent cyclist on his way to work. It turns out the motorcyclist was a ‘2 Para’ hero from the Afghan conflict. Napier & Beckett was paying him big money to take part in a trial for a new PTSD drug called Novalis. Anyway, it appears there were problems with the drug and the soldier ended up killing a poor bloke who was minding his own business riding his bike to work. The MHRA ordered the trial to be suspended and sure enough, the auditors were shown rows of empty beds in B3 the following week. But as soon as your lady friend took over from the old London boss David Cross, the beds were full of patients again – but in a different ward. The MHRA has concluded that the same drug

trials are back up and running.’ De Souza looked pensive then added, ‘She’s messing with the heads of our war heroes and in my book, that’s crossing the line. Don’t you agree, Sam?’

‘I need to think this through,’ said Sam. He scratched his head, seeking an innocent explanation.

‘Jacques needs information on what is happening in B3. There are rumours that the drug is one month away from production. The MHRA wants Miss Beckett behind bars well before that happens.’

‘There might be a rational explanation.’

‘I must warn you, Sam, the MHRA has your movements tracked pretty closely. If they find out that you’ve tipped her off about the investigation, you can expect to become familiar with the internal layout of Pentonville Prison.’

‘You’ve made your point.’ Sam looked at his watch. He had five minutes left before he had to meet Cassie in the B2 reception. He picked up his mug of tepid tea but the taste revolted him. ‘Help yourself,’ he said, handing it to De Souza.

‘Don’t mind if I do.’

\* \* \*

Sam rubbed at his throbbing temples and popped another paracetamol but he knew it would make little difference. The spreadsheet he was looking at swam before his eyes.

‘You look terrible,’ said Cassie. ‘You should go home.’

‘I have to prepare for the photocopier negotiation with Xerox tomorrow,’ he replied.

Cassie stood up from her desk and massaged his neck and shoulders. ‘You’ve been staring at the same page for over an hour. You need to go home.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Sam. He closed down his PC and picked up his jacket.

‘Do you want me to order you a cab to Waterloo station?’

‘No thanks, I might walk. It will clear my head.’

‘Let me walk with you.’

‘Really, I’m fine, Cassie.’

As Sam waited for the lifts, he noticed Cassie staring at him with a look of concern on

her face.

\* \* \*

Sam's headache crushed into his skull like a jackhammer. There was little room for thoughts other than the immediate pain inside his head. He clutched at the railings on Blackfriars Bridge to stop himself from collapsing. From deep inside his head, he felt the insecurities that had plagued him since childhood well up to the surface. He felt stricken that his poor, demented father would drift to an early grave knowing only disappointment and frustration at his underperforming son.

His ex-girlfriend had wasted the ten best years of her life on him. He could hear her chiding him from deep inside his head. 'What a loser. Why did I bother when you let me down time after time?'

From the depths of his brain, Sir Mackenzie Reigate was competing with Sally to castigate him. 'It's for the very best, Sam. The longer you live, the more people you will betray.'

'What are you talking about, Sir Mac?' Sam said to the voice in his head.

'I hate to say it, but Sir Mackenzie Reigate is right,' said his father. 'You must end it now. It's the only way, son,'

'I don't want to end it. I have to destroy Berserker and its antidote.'

An old lady shuffled past Sam as he clutched the side of the bridge, swaying like a drunkard and talking to himself. She looked away and hurried on.

'It will end the pain in your head,' said Sally. 'It won't take long if you jump from the side of the bridge. The current is fast. It will drag you down very quickly.'

The pain increased to another level as Sally harassed him.

'Stop it, Sally! I admit I have let everyone down.'

'You need to end it now before you change your mind,' she insisted.

Sam knew she was right and looked for a way to climb over the parapet.

'That's right, my darling, come and join me on the other side where I can look after you properly,' said the voice of his dead mother.

A crowd had gathered to gawp at Sam. No-one offered to help until a skinny young

man in a hoodie approached him.

‘You all right, man?’ he said. ‘Here, let me help you.’ He reeked of body odour and his lightning hands fished through Sam’s pockets and emerged with his wallet. Quick as a flash, he secreted the wallet into a pocket of his hoodie. ‘He’s all right, everyone,’ he said as he backed away and then jogged towards the South Bank.

The voices inside Sam’s head all sniggered. ‘You really are a waste of space!’ said Sir Mac in between his guffaws.

Sam felt his anger rise from deep inside his body. It hit him like a tidal wave and the voices scattered from his fury. His senses felt as keen as a blade and he felt himself rise above the bridge like a bird of prey. The onlookers that had surrounded him on the bridge looked like vermin far beneath his beating wings. He flew around in small circles from his vantage point in the sky in search of the scumbag that had stolen his wallet. He spotted the hoodie heading towards a large commercial building site on the South Bank. He flew out of the sun’s rays to intercept the man and found himself back on the ground running towards the entrance to the building site. He stalked the skinny man to the middle of the muddy, vacant commercial site. It was the perfect killing ground as it was surrounded on all sides by tall fences and there was no means of escape. The man in the hoodie turned around, astonished to see Sam. Sam punched him full in the face and felt several bones break under the impact of his blow. His victim crumpled onto the wet, muddy ground.

‘Please don’t hit me anymore, mister,’ he said, clutching his nose and holding Sam’s wallet out to him.

Sam reclaimed his wallet and looked down at the man. He was just a teenager and was shaking with fear. ‘Are you okay?’ said Sam. His anger had dissipated as abruptly as it had arrived. He felt his head; the headache had vanished along with the voices.

The sound of bottles smashing around the perimeter of the building site alerted Sam to the fact that he was in deadly trouble. He looked around. Four hooded men were walking purposefully towards him, one from each side of the fence boundaries. They looked much bigger and older than the man he had hit. They were holding broken beer bottles in their hands. The man that Sam had punched was guarding the gate to the building site.

‘Don’t take this personally, mate; it’s just that Mr Mendel wanted us to give you a lesson on ethics and reputation,’ said the tallest of the four men closing in on him. Sam recognised the man. He was Peter, the ex-soldier from B3. But his dishevelled clothes and wild look had gone. Now he resembled the air of a cold-hearted killer. Sam decided he would go down fighting. He looked at each of the four men in turn and decided that he would take the third man with the green hoodie. It might give him some sense of satisfaction before he succumbed to his inevitable beating – or to his cold-blooded murder, he reminded himself. He strode towards the green hooded man, adrenaline pumping. He saw shock in the man’s eyes as he did so. His target stopped in his tracks, but the ex-soldier Peter charged at him from behind. Sam felt his breath knocked out of him as he fell to the ground, winded. His head hit the surface hard and light flashed in his brain. His mouth tasted oddly bitter and reminded him of the worst tackle he had taken on the rugby field at school. He lashed out at the ex-soldier with his foot and managed to catch him right on the shin. He heard the snap of bones, followed by a roar of anger.

‘Okay, let the bastard have it,’ the big soldier said to his fellow attackers as he hopped on one foot. ‘Don’t hold back and make sure you finish him off.’

Sam closed his eyes and heard a soft thud but felt no impact. He turned his head and saw that the ex-soldier was flat on his back in the mud, his arms and legs thrashing. He had blood streaming from his left temple. The three upright would-be assailants were staring in bewilderment towards the building site gate.

In the distance, Sam saw Cassie about a hundred metres away. She stooped down and selected a perfect sized stone. She examined it closely and weighed it in her hand. Satisfied, she placed the stone in the leather pad of an old homemade wooden catapult she had brought with her. She stood side-on to her next target and placed her feet eighteen inches apart like an experienced archer. With her right hand, she pulled back on the rubber bands that she had cut from an old inner tube. Her left hand held the simple ‘Y’ shaped fork that she had cut years before from a suitable branch. Cassie tucked the leather pouch containing the stone under her chin and took aim at the man in the green hoodie for at least five seconds. Realising the danger, her target turned and bolted towards the opposite fence. He was at the extreme end of the range of Cassie’s catapult. She fired off the stone and it flew at the man like a bullet. It caught him squarely between

the shoulder blades. He fell forwards and screamed in pain as if he had been hit by a hammer blow. He picked himself up and continued fleeing to the perimeter. Peter, the ex-soldier that Cassie had felled earlier was moaning and clutching at his head. The two remaining assailants watched Cassie as she searched for another stone. They did not wait for their companion to recover but dropped their broken bottles and sprinted away in the same direction as the man in the green hoodie.

‘Well, are you coming or not?’ Cassie yelled at Sam. ‘You have a train to catch!’

‘On my way,’ he replied with relief and managed to jog towards the exit gates where Cassie stood patiently with one hand on her hip and the other holding her catapult.

\* \* \*

The university had transformed the ground floor of the house into a pre-war replica with meticulous detail. The house was large for the Barnsley area. It was built in the 1880s, and fronted the beautiful Victorian gardens of Locke Park that stretched out for fifty acres. The house had four sizeable bedrooms and an upstairs bathroom. The ground floor contained two sitting rooms, a study and a generous kitchen. The house also incorporated a network of rooms in the basement. These rooms had once been the servants’ quarters, but had fallen into neglect in the last fifty years. The basement rooms smelled of mildew; cobwebs hung from the ceilings and clung to the dusty old furniture. The university had restored the best of the basement furniture and moved it into the two sitting rooms. Old radios, clocks, ornaments and rugs had been bought from antique shops or borrowed from local museums. As a final touch of authenticity, the university team had pre-prepared Roy’s favourite childhood dish of ‘tattie ash’ – a stew of boiled potatoes, chopped onion and corned beef, heaped on a pancake base.

‘I can’t believe your university has gone to all this trouble just for me.’ Roy had a trace of emotion in his voice. ‘It really does feel like I am back in my childhood home.’

‘You can’t fault their attention to detail,’ Sam agreed.

‘They have asked me to change into some 1930s style clothes that they have picked out for me. They insist I use carbolic soap when I shower to remind me of how I used to smell as a kid. Not that I used much soap back then,’ he said with a smile.

‘Are you sure you want to do this, Roy?’

‘We need to get to the bottom of what the Becketts are up to and why they fell out with our family all those years ago. It could be for your own safety, Sam.’

‘I can’t be with you in the room, Roy. Dr Clayton feels that my presence would be inconsistent with your memories of the 1930s.’

‘She did tell me that too. Relax, Sam. I know you’ll be in the next room watching it on TV. I have complete confidence Dr Clayton will look after me. And by the way, she is a real charmer.’

‘I am sure she is. Good luck in there, Roy!’

## CHAPTER 14

The closed-circuit TV display showed Roy seated alone in a comfortable armchair dozing in one of the ground floor sitting rooms. Dr Clayton's research assistant, Murt, was watching the monitor with Sam and Professor Woodstock in the second room. He was interpreting the events on the screen for Sam and the professor.

'We established through earlier advanced cognitive interviews that the conversation with Alice took place during the summer of 1938. That was helpful, as we can cut down the number of questions required to focus on the to-be-remembered event.'

'How long will it be before Roy remembers the details?' Sam asked.

'At least twenty minutes. Some subjects never get there. Dr Clayton will need to establish a set of parameters for Roy that act as a compass for his memory. Ah, here she comes now.'

On the colour monitor, Sam saw the sitting room door open. A little grey-haired lady with stooped shoulders shuffled into the room and sat next to Roy. Sam did not recognise Dr Clayton. He looked at his fading black and white photo of eighty-year-old Alice and compared it to the little old lady on the TV screen.

'She's good,' Sam said to Murt.

'A natural,' he agreed.

Dr Clayton spoke to Roy in a clear, authoritative voice. 'Roy, your grandmother Alice Jardine has just entered the room. It is late summer 1938 and you are fourteen-years-old. I am going to count to three. When I reach three, you will feel alert and keen to talk to Alice about her childhood in America.' Roy was already stirring from his slumber.

'One ... two ... three.'

Roy lifted his head and was instantly alert. 'Now then, Grandma,' he said, looking at Dr Clayton.

She responded in the voice of a weak old lady accented with an American dialect. 'Hello, Roy. I need to ask you something important and I want you to concentrate very hard.'

Roy looked worried. 'I can't tek thi t' Bingo Grandma! The Reds are laiking football this afternooin.'

Dr Clayton looked confused.

‘We may have a problem,’ said Murt. ‘Roy has a strong regional dialect that has become obsolete during the last sixty years.’

‘No, it’s still alive and kicking. Roy wants to watch Barnsley play football.’

Murt muttered into his microphone and Sam saw Dr Clayton listen on a hearing device hidden under her wig.

‘I don’t want you to take me to the Bingo, Roy. You can go to the football when we have finished talking.’

Roy relaxed. ‘We’ve gorra new striker, tha’ knows. A reight Bobby Dazzler!’

‘Don’t worry about the football, Roy. We can talk about that later.’

‘He’s called, um, whatshisname?’ Roy looked distressed that he could not recall the name of his football hero from 1938.

‘Roy, I am going to put you back to sleep for one minute and then when I count to three you will be back in 1938 as a fourteen-year-old, but you will have lost your Yorkshire accent.’ She clicked her fingers and Roy fell asleep at her bidding. Dr Clayton began her count.

‘One ... two ... three.’ Roy sat upright again.

‘Johnny Steele!’ he said triumphantly.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Our new striker. Last week he ran rings around the Oldham defence.’ Roy was speaking without his childhood accent but had lost none of his boyish enthusiasm.

The conversation meandered onto various unrelated topics. Roy asked Dr Clayton not to let on that he had been wagging school and had been scrumping for apples in the neighbour’s garden. Dr Clayton attempted to get Roy to focus on the to-be-remembered event.

‘Roy was a real ‘tyke’ when he was a kid,’ Sam said proudly.

In desperation, Murt turned up the pre-war music in the room and ordered the kitchen to cook Roy’s favourite dinner. Five minutes later, the smell of potatoes, onion and corned beef stew permeated the two sitting rooms.

‘Roy, I want you to see if you can remember the story I told you yesterday about my childhood in America. I am getting old and starting to forget things. You can help me

with my memory. Can you remember who was in the Black Kettle photograph?’

‘It’s teatime, Grandma,’ said Roy, sniffing the air. ‘Can we talk after we’ve had something to eat?’

Murt looked over to Sam. ‘This isn’t working, Sam. We should consider terminating the session.’

‘Five more minutes and then we will stop,’ agreed Sam.

‘Grandma, you told me that it was your grandfather George Napier in the photo,’ said Roy. Everyone sat up and looked at the monitor.

‘Okay, we are in business,’ said Murt.

‘Of course I did,’ said Dr Clayton to Roy with an encouraging smile. She pulled out Alice’s old lace gloves and put them on to give Roy more situational context. ‘I get so cold now, especially my hands. Did I tell you what my grandpa and I were doing in that photo?’

‘You were trying to find the American Indian lady. The one that your grandpa fell in love with many years before.’

‘You remembered!’ said Dr Clayton. ‘What can you tell me about the old Indian lady?’

‘She was called Nova and was the daughter of a famous Indian chief.’

Professor Woodstock looked at Sam with raised eyebrows. ‘Can Roy remember the name of the chief?’ he asked Murt.

‘I will ask Dr Clayton to include that question as we progress,’ he replied.

‘Roy, I want you to help me remember the beginning of the story. Did I tell you why George Napier and I went to America in the first place?’

‘Your grandfather owned a big drug company with an American man in a place near Washington. Things were not going well because of the American Civil War. He wanted to get the company back on its feet. He took you with him because he thought it would be an education for you.’

‘Excellent. Let’s just call my grandfather “Napier” or “Mr Napier” if you like.’

‘But you said he was a general.’

‘Of course I did. You can call him that too, if you wish. Did Napier get the company back on its feet?’

‘No. You said that there was a big argument between General Napier and the other man. They never spoke to each other again.’

Dr Clayton continued. ‘Can you remember the name of the other man?’

‘No, I don’t think you told me.’

‘Of course not. I am getting so forgetful. What happened then?’

‘You and General Napier met Chief Black Kettle in Washington.’

‘Why was the chief in Washington?’

‘The Indians were being driven out of their homes and off their lands in Colorado by the white settlers. The chief was trying to persuade President Lincoln to help the Indian people. The president gave the chief a large American flag and said that it was a symbol of peace and respect between their two peoples. The chief was delighted with the flag and said that the “great father” was a true friend of the Indian people.’

‘And what did we talk about when we met the chief?’

‘Black Kettle said that he feared for his people. There were so many white settlers and they had so many guns. General Napier asked Black Kettle if he had heard of Princess Nova, who would be over sixty-years-old. She had helped the British win a great victory over the Americans many years before at the Battle of Niagara Falls.’

‘My God,’ said Professor Woodstock staring into the monitor. ‘Your ancestor was looking for Tecumseh’s daughter, the warrior princess.’

‘What did Black Kettle say?’ asked Dr Clayton.

‘He said that he knew her and that she was living on his lands. She was still strong for someone that old, but crazy. People feared her.’

Sam turned to Murt. ‘Do your subjects usually remember this much detail? This is incredible stuff.’

‘This is about the best we have experienced considering the time that has elapsed. Alice’s story must have made a big impression on Roy as the neurological pathway in his memory is very well developed. He may have heard Alice repeat it several times over many years as a youngster.’

‘Did we find Nova?’ asked Dr Clayton.

‘Black Kettle said he could take you and the general to see Nova in Colorado, but you would need to get a special pass from President Lincoln. It was wild and dangerous in

America at the time. There was a civil war between the north and south and a frontier war between the Americans and the Indians. He told General Napier to wear his British general's uniform at all times. The Americans and the Indians would know to respect him.'

'Did we get to Colorado?'

'Yes. It was in the middle of a gold rush and there were prospectors travelling with you. At Denver, you had to wait six months because the governor of Colorado would not let you travel through Indian Territory.'

'Why was that?'

'It was incredibly dangerous. Atrocities were happening on both sides. The Indians were taking hostages and some white families were scalped and murdered. At the same time, the Indians were being driven off their traditional lands and herded into camps where food was scarce and conditions were brutal.'

'So how did we find Nova?'

'Black Kettle rode into Denver and tried to sign a peace treaty with the Colorado governor. But the governor refused.'

'Was the photo taken at that time in Denver?'

'Yes Grandma. You only told me that yesterday! You said that you and the British general fascinated the seven Indian chiefs. They knew that the general had fought with their people against the Americans fifty years before and that he had loved Nova, the warrior princess.'

'So what happened then?'

'The governor advised Black Kettle and all friendly Indians to gather at a place called Sand Creek where they would be safe. At the same time, he ordered the citizens of Colorado to track down and kill all hostile Indians. You said that it was a terrible time.'

'Indeed it was,' said Dr Clayton. 'But I forget things so easily now. I am so lucky to have you to help me with my memories. They are all that I have left now. Did we travel to Sand Creek?'

'Yes. Black Kettle tried to dissuade you. He said that the omens were bad and he did not believe that it was safe, even though the governor of Colorado promised to protect his people. Black Kettle relented when he saw how desperate the general was to see Nova

one more time.'

'Were the Indians safe at Sand Creek?'

'The governor said they would be safe. If anything was to happen to them, they should fly the American flag the president had given him and a white flag as a sign that they were peaceful Indians.'

'What did we do then?'

'You became the guest of Black Kettle and his wife.'

'Did we meet Nova at the Camp?'

'No. Nova knew that you and the general were coming and she refused to meet you. She sent a message saying that she was old and mad and that the general should remember how she was when she was young. After a week of trying to persuade her to meet you, the general decided he would leave the Indian camp and go back to Washington. All the Cheyenne warriors had already left for a buffalo hunt and only the elderly, the sick, the women and the children remained at the camp.'

'So how did we find Nova?'

'On the morning that you were preparing to leave the camp there was a huge commotion outside the perimeter. About seven hundred American militia had arrived and fired bullets and mortars into the camp.'

'Yes, I remember that. But what happened then?'

'Black Kettle sent an Indian brave to parley with the American militia. The message he sent was that they were friendly Indians and were under the protection of the great father, President Lincoln and the governor of Colorado. There were no warriors in the camp and they were no threat to the soldiers.'

'Did that work?'

'The brave died where he stood. He was shot by a single militia bullet. Black Kettle ran up the American flag and the white flag as he had been told.'

'Did that make a difference?'

'No, the Americans renewed their attack like men possessed by the devil. Chief Black Kettle gave you, the general and your American interpreter an escort of five braves from his own bodyguard and instructed them to take you safely to the American lines.'

'Did we get through safely?'

‘No. As you got close, the Americans started firing at you. The interpreter yelled out to the soldiers that you were white non-combatants and to cease their fire.’

‘Did they stop?’

‘No. One of the militia soldiers shouted that you were “Indian lovers” and should die with the rest of them.’

‘How terrible!’

‘You said that you managed to shelter behind a rocky outcrop, but two of your Indian bodyguards were killed. The firing continued. You said that you could see the eyes of the militia soldiers that were shooting at you and they had the look of the devil in them. They gave you nightmares for years afterwards.’

‘How did we escape?’

‘The Americans had formed up and were preparing to overwhelm the camp. But an old Indian woman on a black horse had managed to organise the elderly, sick and young Indians into a line of defence to protect the main camp. She was firing arrows at the American militia and encouraging the braves to do the same. The American militia attack stalled. The old woman fired an arrow that pierced the heart of one of the soldiers that had been shooting at you. The general recognised the old Indian woman. It was Nova, who had fought by his side at the Battle of Niagara Falls fifty years before. He yelled out her name, but she ignored him. You said that she was proud and strong like a warrior. It was as if she had been waiting fifty years for this one moment to find her purpose in life. She showed no fear, just a cold, calm determination to save as many of her people as she could.’

Professor Woodstock leaned forwards and hastily scribbled down copious notes. Sam listened with rapt attention.

‘Was anyone with her?’ asked Dr Clayton.

‘Yes, you said that Nova’s granddaughter, Tiva was firing arrows at the American troops alongside Nova.’

‘Nova had a granddaughter?’

‘She was your friend for many years, Grandma. How could you forget that?’

‘Of course. How silly of me. What happened then?’

‘Nova killed the last two of the soldiers that had been firing at you with her arrows.’

She then signalled to the general that you should leave the outcrop and join the American troops. The general shouted Nova's name once more. Again, she did not respond. The general saluted her instead as one brave soldier to another and fled the outcrop with you and the interpreter to the American lines.

'It's such a horrific story,' said Dr Clayton.

'But it got so much worse, Grandma. The General went to the American militia colonel and complained that they were attacking defenceless friendly Indians.'

'The colonel started arguing with your grandfather and said that they did not look defenceless to him as more American soldiers were being killed than Indians. The militia were building themselves up into a frenzy. They had experienced many years of living in fear of the Indians but their attack was failing. Two American units fired on each other. The general suspected that something was wrong with the American soldiers. He went to the supply wagons and saw a cauldron brewing nearby with a line of soldiers holding out tins ready to consume the hot liquid. Many soldiers had already drunk from the cauldron. The general yelled out, "What is this foul brew?" He then kicked the cauldron over and the liquid spilled out onto the grass. The general marched up to the American colonel and accused him of drugging his troops with Berserker.'

'What is Berserker?'

'You said that you did not know and that your grandfather forbade you to ever speak of it. The colonel flew into a rage and said that the soldiers should concentrate their fire on the 'old hag.' If she died, the battle would be over. As a hail of bullets and mortars rained upon her, Nova did not even flinch. She continued to fire off her arrows at the Americans and encouraged her few remaining braves to protect the fleeing Indians who were escaping from the camp. Because of her brave actions, more than half the Indian camp were able to flee to safety, including Black Kettle and his wife – even though she was shot in the leg. The Indians could not hold out for much longer. A bullet hit Nova in the chest and she slumped from her horse. She died instantly. The general told you that Nova would have felt no pain. It was how she would have chosen to die. You said that you cried for many days after she was killed.'

'That is so sad. What happened to Tiva?'

'Once Nova was killed, the Indian braves lost heart. The Americans advanced and

were soon among the Indians. You said that what followed was sickening. The troops were in an absolute frenzy. They took no prisoners and killed every living person. Some soldiers scalped the Indians, some hacked off heads and limbs and some smashed the brains out of the Indians with their rifles. The general had commandeered a horse and managed to ride to protect Nova's corpse. Tiva was hiding behind her grandmother's body but she knew that she was safe with the general. He drew his revolver and ensured that no militia soldiers came too near. The slaughter was terrible, but because of the brave defence by a small band of Indians led by Nova, most of the camp escaped the slaughter.'

'What happened after that?'

'Tiva would not leave the general's side and stayed with you for many years. The general found the man who was responsible for producing the drug that had caused such hatred and fury in the soldiers. To his eternal shame, the man was the general's own business partner from Alexandria near Washington. It was General Napier's own drug company that was responsible for the death of Nova and so many of her people.'

'What did he say to his business partner?'

'The general vowed that he had a God-given duty to destroy Berserker and those who sought to make profit from it. The general disowned his business partner and sold out of the company for a fraction of what it was worth. He never saw or spoke to him again.'

'Was that the end of the story?'

'The general gave Nova a traditional Indian chief's burial. He gave Nova's magnificent eagle tail feather to Tiva and told her to keep it safe and wear it with pride. You stayed in Colorado for five more years to ease the suffering of the Indian survivors. You then returned to Edinburgh where the general doted on you and Tiva for the remaining years of his life.'

'What happened to Tiva?'

'Tiva suffered from terrible moods and had a ferocious temper. The general told you that she had inherited a mental sickness from her poor grandmother Nova, but that she had a pure heart and possessed the nobleness of her warrior ancestors.'

'Thank you, Roy. You have done brilliantly. You must be so tired. I am going to let you sleep now but when you awake, you will be relaxed and comfortable. You will never again be troubled by the nightmares that have plagued you for so long.'

With that, she clicked her fingers and Roy slipped into a deep relaxing sleep.

## CHAPTER 15

Rachael slid a United Airlines envelope across the table.

‘I won’t be travelling with you,’ she informed him. ‘I’m flying ahead tomorrow and will be staying with my sister in Norfolk, Virginia. I will join you when you arrive at your hotel on Monday night; that’s a week from today. I want you to be familiar with the facts and the various scenarios we’ve been rehearsing. Our meeting with Walter Mendel is scheduled for 9 am on Friday morning in his office – that’s August 22<sup>nd</sup>.’

Sam sighed as he remembered the lesson in ‘ethics and reputation’ that Mendel’s henchmen had tried to convey to him the previous week. He asked himself whether he was getting in over his head by helping Rachael with her dynastic squabble. His recent meeting with De Souza had also undermined his confidence in Rachael’s stance on Berserker. Only the fact that De Souza lacked any credibility and clearly detested Rachael stopped him from verbally challenging her on the issue.

‘Sam, I don’t want any sudden change of heart. You have to believe in what we are doing. Tell me now if you can’t go through with it.’

‘It’s fine, Rachael. I believe you are the only one who can destroy Napier & Beckett’s capability to produce Berserker.’ He picked up the envelope. It contained a business class ticket to Washington dated the following Monday. On the attached itinerary, Sam noted that he had been booked in for five days at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Alexandria Old Town.

‘Good.’ She slid a chunky file about three inches thick towards Sam.

‘What’s this?’ asked Sam, flicking through the reams of technical paperwork contained in the file.

‘It’s the paperwork for the Alzheimer drug Senzar that we submitted to the MHRA a few months ago. The submission was successful.’

‘Why do I need it?’

‘After our meeting with Walter Mendel, we have a negotiation with the US government.’

‘But I’m not a neurological scientist. I wouldn’t be able to convince the government to approve Senzar in the US.’

‘It won’t be a medical negotiation. Senzar is not being blocked for medical reasons – it’s all about politics, Sam. The government wants Berserker and its antidote Novalis from Napier & Beckett but we want the FDA’s approval for Senzar without giving away Berserker.’

‘Berserker requires an antidote?’

‘Berserker triggers an extreme form of PTSD that can last a lifetime. The condition is known as the “Sleepwalker Legacy”. Approval for the antidote Novalis was fast-tracked last week by the FDA’s classified drugs unit.’

‘The FDA has a classified drugs unit?’

‘Yes. It approves drugs that the government doesn’t want the public to know about.’

‘My God, I didn’t even know such a thing existed. Where was the antidote developed?’

‘Right here in Leadenhall Street.’

‘But I saw the empty Berserker facilities in B3, and I happen to know that the MHRA suspended the program’s trials; it’s not possible.’

‘The trials were completed under David Cross’ leadership. He did close down the unit, but sufficient patient data had been gathered to put the application forward to the FDA. There has been no support for Berserker or Novalis here in London under my watch. All medical records, patient data and scientific research relating to Berserker and Novalis have been erased from London’s computers.’

‘How effective is the antidote?’

‘It has a ninety-five per cent efficacy. There was an original herbal remedy that was used by the Shawnee tribe that was one hundred per cent effective, but the remedy disappeared without a trace over two hundred years ago.’

‘So five per cent of Berserker users will develop the Sleepwalker Legacy?’

‘It is the deterrent effect that the US government is seeking. They don’t believe Berserker will ever be used in the field of battle. The government needs Napier & Beckett to produce stockpiles of Berserker and Novalis to make it a credible deterrent.’

‘But that’s madness. Of course it will be used.’

‘That’s where you come in, Sam. You need to develop a strategy to ensure the US government approves Senzar without linking it to Berserker. I don’t know of anyone else

who would be capable of succeeding in such a negotiation.’

‘So whom will I be negotiating with?’

‘I am trying to fix up an appointment with the vice-president of the United States in the White House.’

\* \* \*

Sam was relaxing on his sofa watching Newsnight on TV. Serko had been fed and was snoring at his feet. He opened the package that had been delivered to his front door earlier that day. It was from Roy. In the package was a collection of old documents that smelled of mildew, and a leather-bound book of indeterminable age. All the documents had a damp and fragile feel to them. Roy had attached a card to the top of the bundle. After the usual pleasantries, Roy described how he had come across the documents.

*‘I spent a week at the house in Barnsley after the interview, making sure it would be in a fit state for your father when he comes out of the nursing home. I must admit, I lingered there longer than was necessary to soak up the memories. I went down to the basement and explored each room as carefully as I could. My interview with Dr Clayton triggered so many memories about my childhood and Alice. One thought just refused to go away. Alice gave me a box of old treasures, which included the photo, gloves and the eagle feather. There were also some old Native American toys, such as a bag of beads, a slingshot and a clay doll. But I remembered there was a second box that she said held the clue to the Napier inheritance. Alice said she had placed it in the family safe in the basement. I was never shown where the safe was. It took two days of searching but I found it behind the old wrought iron cooker in the basement kitchen. It took me two hours to crack it open with the drill. I am not sure what the documents reveal as the writing is old fashioned and impossible for me to read with my eyesight. I hope you have better luck. Let me know what you find out. Best wishes. Roy.’*

Sam flicked through a number of the old documents. He was reluctant to handle them further for fear of causing irreparable damage. He turned to the handwritten memoir of their ancestor, General George Napier who was present at the Sand Creek massacre and had fought in the Napoleonic and the Anglo-American war of 1812. Napier was evidently

a skilled illustrator as well as a soldier and scientist. He had sprinkled illustrations of plants, Native American camps and battle scenes throughout the memoir. The introduction was written in the 1860s but chronicled major events throughout his life. Roy was right; the handwriting was spidery and sloped so far to the right that Sam struggled to read it.

As he skimmed through various chapters at random without making sense of the handwriting, Sam decided the best course of action was to hand the entire package over to Professor Woodstock. He would know best how to preserve the documents and would know what to do with them.

As Sam felt himself drifting into a light sleep, Serko woke up with a start. He cocked his head to one side as if he was straining at the limits of his hearing. He emitted a long snarling growl and the hairs stood upright on the nape of his neck. Sam jumped up from the sofa just as a baseball bat came crashing down where his head had been moments before. The after-effects of sleep slowed Sam down so that he was unable to evade the second blow that was aimed at his face. It was only a glancing blow but it was enough to blur his vision and cause him to stagger off balance. His body filled with a rush of adrenaline but he also had to fight off a wave of nausea the blow to his face caused. Seeing Sam was off balance, Dwayne rushed forwards to push home his advantage. Realising he had been caught off guard and that he was in serious trouble, Sam prepared himself for the impact. Serko, who was barking with all the fury that his small form could muster, launched himself at Dwayne's right leg and managed to sink his teeth into his muscular calf. Serko's attack did not stop Dwayne but nearly caused him to trip and lose momentum as he charged at Sam. Dwayne swung his baseball bat wildly at Sam but missed by some distance. His bat crashed and splintered against the mantelpiece, smashing Sam's collection of boyhood sporting trophies. Dwayne now turned his attention to Serko, who still had a firm grip on his calf and showed no signs of letting go.

'Get your fucking dog off my leg or I will break its neck,' Dwayne yelled at Sam. Sam swung a haymaker of a fist at Dwayne's head and caught him flush on the temple. Sam's knuckles and wrist jarred in pain as he felt the tendons in his right hand strain to their limits. Dwayne did not go down as Sam expected but the blow had scrambled his wits. Sam used the next few seconds and his undamaged left hand to land a blow into the

centre of Dwayne's solar plexus. Sam's left hand felt the shock of Dwayne's solid central muscle group. He realised that it had little impact so he aimed a kick at Dwayne's groin area. Dwayne was recovering fast and turned away from the kick. He was still hampered by the dead weight of Serko on his leg and was unable to avoid the full impact of Sam's kick. Still Dwayne did not go down and Sam realised he was running out of options. Dwayne was unable to bend down to prise Serko off his leg for fear of receiving another blow from Sam. He tried stamping down on the Jack Russell. Serko yelped in pain as Dwayne managed to kick the dog free. Dwayne rushed at Sam, who sidestepped his lumbering assailant and shoved him hard in the back as he went by. Dwayne crashed headlong into the hi-fi unit, striking his head on the sharp corner of a steel amplifier. He sprawled in a tangled heap on the floor. Realising he only had a few seconds to finish off his adversary, Sam ran towards Dwayne. As he ran, he stepped on a cricket ball that had been part of his 'hat-trick' trophy on the mantelpiece. His ankle gave way underneath him. He fell hard onto his back and hit his head on the wooden floor. Sam's vision slipped away from him like dregs of water down a plughole and he drifted out of consciousness. As Dwayne lumbered to his feet, Serko tried to revive his master by tugging at his shirt collar with his teeth. Sam did not stir.

'Fucking rat!' said Dwayne as he aimed a kick at the Jack Russell. Serko yelped as he caught the full force of Dwayne's boot. Dwayne aimed a second kick, but this time at Sam's head. Serko snarled like a miniature wolf. His top lip curled, exposing a row of razor-sharp teeth. Every hair on his body was raised as he tried to protect the unconscious Sam from being battered to death. Serko flew at Dwayne's ankle and ripped several inches of flesh from the bone. Dwayne screamed in pain and lashed out at the Jack Russell. Serko, who was bred to hunt and fight large rodents, was too nimble for Dwayne's flying feet. Dwayne backed off and looked around the room for a weapon with which to finish off Sam and his dog. He settled on a sturdy aluminium lamp that was several kilos in weight. He cast a wary eye at Serko then decided to grab a sharp bread knife from the kitchen. He returned to the lounge with the aluminium lamp in his right hand and the bread knife in his left. Sam began stirring but was too groggy to get himself off the floor.

'Time to pay the piper, lover boy,' said Dwayne as he bore down on Sam. His right

arm arced in readiness to strike Sam on the head with the lamp. Serko hurled himself at Dwayne's arm as it came down, but this time Dwayne was ready with the bread knife. He plunged the knife deep into the dog's chest, piercing its heart and killing Serko instantly. Dwayne pulled his knife free from Serko's limp body and wiped the blade on the sofa.

'Now it's time to join your overgrown rat in its sewer,' he said to the groggy and prone Sam. He lumbered towards Sam with the lamp raised ready to strike. Sam forced himself to clear his fuzzy head and looked around for a weapon. He saw the heavy marble base of an old school rugby trophy lying on the floor just next to his right hand. He seized the object and lifted his torso off the floor with his left arm. He hurled the trophy base at Dwayne's head with every ounce of his strength. Dwayne was encumbered with the knife and the heavy aluminium lamp and could only turn his head to one side. The solid marble base hit Dwayne squarely on his left eye socket and Sam heard the sickening sound of breaking bone. Dwayne dropped his weapons and clutched at his shattered eye socket.

'You fucking bastard. You've taken my eye out.' He staggered in a circle, still clutching at his eye. With the fight taken out of him, he headed towards the kitchen door. 'You're a dead man, Jardine. Keep looking over your shoulder day and night. I know people. You will die like a stuck pig!' He ran out of the kitchen and into the back garden where he disappeared into the night.

Sam went over to the dead body of his Jack Russell terrier. He checked to see if there were any signs of life but finding none, he cradled the dog to his chest and mourned his canine companion who had given his life to protect him.

## CHAPTER 16

Sam limped into his new commercial director's office in Leadenhall Street. It was on the lavish first floor of the building adjacent to the boardroom and opposite Rachael's new CEO's office. Cassie's new desk was in an alcove just to the side of Rachael's office. As he walked by, Cassie looked appalled at the state of Sam's face. His face was a mass of purple bruising and his right hand was swathed in a badly dressed bandage. There was a golf ball sized lump at the back of his head. Sam closed his office door and slumped in his chair. His right hand ached, his face looked a mess and he was struggling to walk properly. He was now under a death threat from a bodybuilder with underworld connections and he was certain that someone within the company was trying to poison him. In less than a week, he would be negotiating with two of the most powerful people in the world. He could not dispel a nagging doubt that he been manipulated into leading the negotiations for all the wrong reasons. He heard a tap at the door. Sam made a pretence of looking busy and called out, 'Come in.'

Cassie marched into his office as if she was determined to take control of the situation. Despite his depressed state of mind, Sam could not help but catch his breath at the sight of her. Her long dark hair, which she usually tied back, was flowing down her shoulders. She was wearing a silk patterned dress that clung seductively to her small, firm figure and her black high-heeled boots made her look tall and proud.

'Sam! What happened to you?' Cassie asked.

She walked around his desk and cupped his face in her hands, studying his bruising. She winced at the sight of his injuries. Sam suspected that Cassie had endured much worse treatment at the hands of Dwayne. She ran her fingertips over the egg-shaped lump at the back of his head.

'Did you see Dwayne last night, Cassie?'

'Dwayne hasn't been home for about a week. He's in Germany looking for work.'

Sam wondered if he should burden Cassie with the news that Dwayne was clearly not in Germany and had murder rather than career aspirations on his mind. 'I had a break-in last night. I disturbed the burglar.'

'No! Did you report it to the police?'

‘The bastard killed Serko.’

‘Oh, Sam, I’m so sorry.’ She clutched his hand in sympathy. Sam gasped in pain.

‘You poor thing.’ Cassie kneeled down beside his chair, unwound the bandages and examined his injured hand. The swelling had subsided but the bruising was angry and multi-coloured. She kissed his damaged fingers. ‘Have you put anything on the bruises?’ she asked.

‘No,’ Sam admitted.

‘Come on, I’m going to sort out your injuries. I’m an expert at treating and hiding bruises,’ she said.

Cassie stood up and pulled Sam gently out of his chair. She walked out of his office to the little kitchen area next to the boardroom and opened up a medical cabinet that hung on the wall. She took out a range of gauzes and sports tapes and selected a small pair of scissors. She then stopped by her desk and pulled out a number of lotions and powders that were in her bottom drawer and put them into her bag. Cassie paused for a moment and then opened her top drawer. She pulled out a key with a little green fob that was labelled ‘CEO’s office’.

‘I had Rachel’s new office swept for cameras and bugs last week. It’s about the only place in the building that’s private.’ She unlocked the door and ushered Sam inside. ‘Rachael had it repainted and carpeted before she moved in.’

The office was large and comfortable. Rachael’s old desk and chair had been brought down from the strategy department on level five and took up one end of the room. At the other end was an informal black leather sofa, two matching leather easy chairs and a low coffee table with a smoked glass top. Rachael had chosen soft feminine tones for the new décor, and had converted one of the oak-panelled storage units into a wardrobe where a dozen business suits and dresses hung from the rack. At least six pairs of expensive shoes were displayed in purpose-built storage shelves. The office smelled faintly of Chanel No. 5. Cassie locked the door behind them and took Sam by his undamaged hand. She led him to one of the comfortable black leather easy chairs by the smoked topped glass table.

‘Fancy a drink?’ asked Cassie opening the door of the refrigerated wine cabinet.

‘Are you sure Rachael got on the plane to Washington DC yesterday?’

‘Positive. I had to complete the paperwork for her lost luggage last night.’

Sam relaxed. 'Does she stock any whisky?'

Cassie opened another drawer and pulled out a bottle of Glenfiddich 21.

'Ice?'

'No thanks.'

Cassie poured Sam two fingers of whisky and handed him the glass. Sam relaxed in the black leather chair while Cassie examined Rachael's wardrobe of clothes and shoes. She took off her boots and pulled out a pair of Rachael's nearly new Christian Louboutin heels from the shoe shelf. She tried them on but they were at least four sizes too big. Cassie pouted like a disappointed teenager as she placed them back on the shelf. She padded barefoot back to her bag she had placed on the coffee table and pulled out the tapes and lotions.

'Let's get you fixed up,' she said in a business-like manner. Cassie unbuttoned Sam's shirt and helped him ease it off his back. She wound a thin length of gauze expertly around his wrist, hand and half way up his fingers. Sam studied Cassie as she cut several strips of sticky sports tape to various lengths and laid them out on the table. Cassie was clearly enjoying her role as nurse and Sam had to admit she was something of an expert. Cassie caught Sam staring at her and she wrinkled her nose at him. Sam laughed and her whole face lit up in pleasure at Sam's change in mood. His pulse quickened as he absorbed the beauty of this exotic looking woman. Sam felt the stress of the last few weeks evaporate as he watched her complete her handiwork. She took the first of her strips of tape and wound it around his wrist. She then added more and more strips until they covered his entire hand up to the first joint of his fingers.

'Try and flex your hand,' she said. Sam did so. The tape restricted his movement but also gave his damaged ligaments some much-needed support. 'That should keep you out of mischief for a while,' Cassie said, smiling once more. She helped him remove his shoes and socks and repeated the process on his damaged ankle.

'Now let me look at the bruising to your face.' She picked up a lotion from the table. 'Lean forward a little.' Cassie took the empty whisky glass from his unbound hand and placed it on the coffee table. She sat down on Sam's lap and gently turned Sam's head to examine his bruising. She sucked in her breath as she realised the extent of his injuries. Sam marvelled at how light she was and was aroused by her closeness. He breathed in

her sweet female scent and his heart rate soared. She dipped a finger into the little jar and shifted on Sam's lap to get a better angle to apply the lotion. As she did so, she hooked one foot around Sam's calf to anchor herself into position. Sam held Cassie around her waist to steady her. The warmth of her body and the softness of her silk dress felt heavenly.

'Sit still, Sam, or I will poke you in the eye,' she admonished, gripping him tighter with her legs. Slowly and gently, she massaged the lotion into the side of his face. The pain that he had felt only moments earlier dissipated under her soft nurturing fingertips.

'When was the last time anyone really lavished some attention on you, Cassie?' Sam asked as he took the little jar from her hands and placed it on the soft carpet.

'I can't remember, but I think I'm about to find out,' she replied, kissing him gently on his bruised face.

'You're reading my mind,' he teased. 'Your exotic powers have caught me out again.'

He put one arm around her waist and the other under her legs and picked her up. As he carried her across to the black leather sofa, Cassie snuggled into his warm embrace.

'I may have finally broken through that gentlemanly reserve,' she said, unbuttoning the front of her silk dress down to the waist.

Sam wasn't listening; he began kissing her tentatively at first, like a teenager in the first throes of love. Cassie pulled him to her and kissed him passionately. He felt the warmth of her body pressed against him and forgot the pain of his injuries. He kissed her neck and felt her nimble fingers undo his belt and pants. Sam hadn't been with a woman since Sally, but this was much more than sexual need; Cassie stirred something deep inside him. As they made love on Rachael's sofa, Sam realised he and Cassie drew strength from each other's vulnerabilities. Both were at odds with their internal voices and yet together, they drew strength from each other. Afterwards, their sweat-covered limbs entwined, Sam gently pushed a strand of hair from Cassie's face and knew nothing else mattered but helping her find a cure for her illness, and wiping Berserker from the face of the earth.

\* \* \*

With four days to go before he was due to fly to Washington, Sam decided to exorcise the last demon that had been eating away at him. He brought up his Instant Messenger and clicked on the address that Alec De Souza had given him. Then he typed into the dialogue box.

*'Alec, can we meet in B2 later today?'* No response. He tried again two more times. On his final attempt, he still received no response from De Souza but a dialogue box appeared from a user named 'Jacques.' Sam accepted the invitation.

*'Sam, you have been trying to contact Alec. What is it you need from him?'*

*'I need to talk to Alec. I want some advice from him.'*

*'Alec took his own life last week. He was found hanging from a coat hook in his room.'*

Sam paused at the computer keyboard, his mind filled with possibilities. Was it the same day as his Blackfriars Bridge episode? He resumed his chat. *'Could it have been murder?'*

*'The police don't seem to think so. They are blaming it on a cocktail of drugs that unbalanced his mind.'*

*'But what do you think, Jacques?'*

*'The evidence points conclusively to suicide. You should get out of Napier & Beckett while you can. You are out of your depth, Sam. Things are going to move rapidly from this point.'*

*'De Souza was wrong about Rachael. She did not restart the Novalis trials.'*

*'Ian was obsessed with Rachael. She did not treat him well. You should have told us she was leaving the country.'*

*'Rachael wants Berserker destroyed as much as we do.'*

*'You may be right. But on no account should you trust her.'*

*'I will keep an open mind.'*

*'You should check in regularly at this address. It is a secure channel and we can provide you with expert IT and security assistance if you need it. We ask only that you update us when Berserker and Novalis commence production.'*

*'I will contact you if I need your help. Thank you for your offer of assistance.'*

*'You are welcome. Good luck, Sam.'*

\* \* \*

Two nights later, Sam returned home from a late session at the office. His train carriage was nearly empty but he did recognise a few fellow commuters who were also running late. He let himself into his house and deposited his briefcase in his study. He was conscious of the oppressive silence in the house since Serko's death. He opened the fridge and grabbed a can of beer. He was emptying the can into a glass when he heard the doorbell ring. Sam looked at his watch. It was nine-thirty at night. He hadn't received a visitor this late for a few weeks. After his episode with Dwayne, Sam was feeling jumpy. He went to his bedroom and grabbed his cricket bat that was next to his bedhead. The doorbell rang again. Sam opened the front door with the bat in his left hand.

'Hello?' he said from the doorway. There was no-one there. He scanned the garden but as far as he could tell in the dark, it was empty. He decided to walk down his front path to see if there was anyone in the street. He took a step towards the gate and immediately stepped onto something soft and furry. It felt like a dead animal. He bent down and picked it up. He saw to his disgust that he had blood all over his trousers. 'Bugger it!' he said aloud. He would have to go to the dry cleaners tomorrow. He turned the object around in his hand and tried to identify the head of the dead animal but someone had sliced it off with a knife. He wondered what kind of sicko would have skinned an animal and left it on his doorstep. He examined the fur a little more closely. It looked remarkably like human hair. Slowly it dawned on Sam that it *was* human hair – identical to Dwayne's closely cropped brown thatch.

'Jesus Christ!' he swore in disgust. He threw it into the garbage bin and ran back inside to the kitchen sink to scrub his hands. He ripped off his shirt and trousers and shoved them into his washing machine. His mind raced about what could have happened and what he should do. He realised he had no option but to call the police.

\* \* \*

‘I retire from the Force in six months’ time and I was hoping to get there without having to endure a sight like this one,’ said Detective Inspector Root. ‘So how do you know the deceased?’ he asked Sam.

Sam had been driven in a police car to Goodwood, about ten miles north-west of Chichester. They trudged up the steep hill of the Iron Age fort known as ‘the Trundle.’ The summer views of the surrounding countryside were spectacular. The sight of Dwayne, stone dead and staked out naked on the grass in the exact centre of the circular hilltop fort was sickening even for the hardest stomach.

‘I was responsible for his redundancy a few weeks ago. He had been late for a series of pick-ups and we had to let him go. He was pretty pissed off at me.’ Sam didn’t mention the fact that he was also sleeping with Dwayne’s girlfriend. ‘He came around to threaten me three days ago but left after we had a heated argument.’

‘That sounds like our man Dwayne. He was a nasty piece of work who was mixed up with some B-grade organised crime figures. You were lucky he didn’t come around with a gun or at the very least a baseball bat.’ Sam involuntarily touched the back of his head. The lump had settled down nicely.

‘He was a bit hostile,’ Sam admitted.

They strolled up to Dwayne’s naked body where Sam confirmed Dwayne’s identity. The young police officer who was accompanying them, WPC Sarah Mercer peeled off to the left and vomited into the grass. They paused to allow a young crime scene investigator to run blue and white tape around the scene.

‘Why would the crims dump Dwayne’s scalp on your doorstep, Sam?’

‘I can only guess. I have been responsible for quite a few redundancies at Napier & Beckett in recent months. Perhaps it was a warning to stop the program?’

‘You might be right,’ DI Root said, nodding slightly.

Sam had been cleared of suspicion within an hour of calling the police. Two of his fellow commuters had verified they had seen him on the train from Waterloo at the exact time that the murder was deemed to have had taken place. The police profiler had stated that Sam was the least likely witness he had ever interviewed to have committed a murder of this type. Sam was not sure whether he was insulted or relieved at the profiler’s conclusion.

‘I once saw a James Stewart cowboy movie where the victim was staked out on the ground like this,’ said DI Root. ‘The difference was that the victim in the movie still had a full head of hair and a scalp.’

‘Was the movie “Broken Arrow”?’ Sam chipped in.

‘It might have been. Now I think back, I don’t recall that the victim in the movie had his genitals cut off and stuffed into his mouth either.’

‘Nice needlework,’ said Sam. Dwayne’s lips had been stitched closed around their grizzly contents to stop him from screaming or spitting them out. The crime scene investigator who had finished taping off the scene was staring at Dwayne’s mutilated body. He sank to his haunches and covered his face with his hands.

‘Geoff, go and get yourself a cup of tea,’ DI Root said to the young investigator. ‘We can handle it from here.’

‘Thanks, boss,’ replied the investigator. ‘I’m not normally this squeamish. You won’t let on at the nick, will you?’

‘It’s okay, Geoff. We have all been there at some stage.’ The investigator left the crime scene and headed to the incident van that was parked at the base of the hill.

‘This can be the worst job in the world at times,’ said DI Root shaking his head.

‘Is it significant that his wrists and ankles have been pegged to the ground with leather straps and wooden tent pegs?’ asked Sam.

‘It certainly is,’ said the DI. ‘It means that we are dealing with a venomous gang of sick bastards.’ He pointed to what was left of Dwayne’s face. ‘I mean, look at the victim’s left eye socket. What kind of degenerate animal would pulverise a man’s eye socket like that – even one that had it coming like Dwayne? I tell you, Sam, in the old days we would have given the malicious bastards that did that a taste of their own medicine.’ He winked at Sam.

Sam swallowed hard. ‘Perhaps the assailant shattered Dwayne’s eye socket in self-defence?’ he replied.

DI Root laughed condescendingly. ‘Leave the detective work to me, Sam, and I won’t interfere with your negotiations at Napier & Beckett. No, I assure you that was not the case. The deceased was tortured most foully before he was pegged out here to die. It smacks of a drug turf war. I suspect that Dwayne was peddling anabolic steroids and

growth hormones in somebody else's patch. I mean, look at the size of his pecs!' the detective said. 'He was certainly eating his own dog food.'

'So it couldn't have been his pissed off girlfriend then?'

Root gave a big belly laugh, assuming that Sam had made a joke. Even WPC Mercer, who had just recovered from her bout of nausea, could not stop herself from sniggering into her hand.

'Nice one, Sam. I must admit, it does help to have a sense of humour at a time like this. Dear, oh, dear.' He wiped his eyes with a tissue. 'I am working on the assumption that at least half a dozen heavily armed and violent thugs pegged the victim down like this. Somehow, I can't see Dwayne submitting timidly while he had his scalp torn off and his genitals sewn into his mouth.'

'Have you spoken to Cassie? She works at Napier & Beckett,' offered Sam.

'We interviewed her a couple of hours ago. She is such a sweet little thing. She was quite overcome with grief. We did assure her that we will do our best to catch the scum that did it.' He took one last look at Dwayne and then shook his head. 'I don't like talking ill of the dead, but between you and me, Sam, she is well shot of this piece of shit. Now come on, let's get you back home. I don't suppose you want to be up here any longer than you have to be.'

## CHAPTER 17

‘Please take me with you.’ Cassie sat up and grabbed her dressing gown. She slipped it on as she stood up and looked down at Sam, who was still lying naked on her bed. He was due to fly out to Washington DC later that afternoon. Cassie had examined the bruises on his hands and face and pronounced she was satisfied they had almost disappeared. To Sam’s chagrin, she insisted on applying concealer to disguise the last traces of his facial bruising.

Sam sat up and pulled on his pants. ‘Cassie, I don’t think I can swing it. Rachael and Mendel will want to know why I’ve brought you along.’

‘My illness is getting so much worse, Sam. I can barely think straight now. It only seems manageable when I am with you.’

‘Can’t Dr McDonald help you?’

‘I already told you Sam, no-one can help me; it’s something I was born with. My dark periods are getting deeper and I experience such terrible rages.’

‘I can’t imagine that, Cassie,’ Sam said softly.

‘Do you think I don’t know what’s going on? When you came in with those injuries last week, I knew it was Dwayne. I had to meditate for hours to keep myself sane. But when I left work, I flew into such a terrible fury. Things turned black. I couldn’t control my own mind. It was as if someone else was directing me.’

‘You’re on heavy medication, Cassie. You were probably suffering side effects.’

‘I had visions. I was like an eagle soaring to the heavens to hunt my prey. I felt warrior’s blood flowing through my veins. I had the strength of ten men. I knew I couldn’t be harmed by my enemies. I had an overwhelming desire to kill.’

‘My poor Cassie.’ Sam stood up and enveloped her in his arms. ‘It’ll be alright. We will find a cure and stop these awful nightmares you’re having.’

‘But they seem so real, Sam. When the police knocked at my door that morning and told me about Dwayne, it was as if I already knew.’

‘He got what was coming to him. The police told me that. He mixed with some real scum. It was probably payback for a drug deal that had gone wrong.’

‘Every day, it’s getting harder to push away these visions. I don’t know if I’ll be here

when you get back. I'm scared I'll do something terrible to myself, or God forbid, to someone else.'

Sam held her tighter. She felt so fragile. He imagined she might break if he squeezed her too hard. He felt angry that Dwayne had abused such a vulnerable young woman. It served him right he had been murdered by a bunch of ruthless thugs. Sam felt the stress disperse from her body as he held her tightly. She reluctantly broke free from his embrace and moved to her dressing table. She sat before the mirror, picked up a hairbrush in one hand and ran the fingers of her other hand along an ancient looking carved object that was on the dressing table. Sam saw her reflection in the mirror close her eyes as if she were making a silent wish.

'What are you doing?' asked Sam as he stood behind her and watched her brush her lustrous black hair.

Cassie looked embarrassed. 'I am making a wish on my family totem.' She picked up the wooden carving that resembled a cat and handed it to Sam. 'It's a wooden panther and it protects the females of our family line.'

Sam examined the old carving. It was about the length of his hand and was clearly very old. It looked worn as if many generations of women in Cassie's family had caressed their fingers along the back of the totem.

'What are you wishing for?'

'That you will change your mind and take me with you.'

'Okay, Cassie, I'll run it by Rachael. God knows I am going to need some help in Alexandria. Pack some things and let's go to the office. If I get the nod, we'll book you a ticket.' He bent down and kissed her softly on the lips. 'We will get through this, I promise you.'

\* \* \*

Sam sat in a business class seat on the United Airlines plane and waited for the seats to fill prior to take-off. Cassie could only get a seat in premium economy and the United staff would not allow Sam to swap seats with her. A young, slim blonde lady placed her baggage in Sam's overhead locker and looked at the empty seat next to Sam. She double-

checked her boarding card and realising her mistake, sat in the empty seat across the aisle. A suave businessman in a shiny suit caught Sam's eye as the attractive woman sat next to him. He sneered at Sam as if his platinum frequent flyer status guaranteed that only petite lady passengers would be assigned to his row along with club lounge access and extra baggage allowance.

Moments later, a giant of a man lumbered up the aisle, dipping his head to make sure he didn't bang it on the roof of the plane. His shoulders knocked into the overhead lockers as he walked past all the empty seats and stopped next to Sam. He hauled a scruffy looking backpack into the baggage compartment and then wedged his bulky frame into the seat next to Sam. The man spread his legs wide and his massive arms and shoulders took up all of Sam's armrest and part of his seat. The man was not fat – his bulk was almost entirely lean muscle. He had black curly hair, a pronounced six o'clock shadow and was dressed in casual jeans and a checked shirt. Sam was pinioned against the window. He looked at his watch and sighed. It was going to be a tedious eight-hour flight. He looked across the aisle at the businessman in 7F and saw he was already chatting up the pretty blonde.

One hour after take-off, the food trolley approached. Sam struggled to get his tray out of the armrest and past his neighbour's bulky arms.

'Sorry, mate,' Sam found himself saying, although he wasn't sure why he was the one apologising.

'Nae problem.' His neighbour was evidently Glaswegian.

The cabin crew came by and handed out the meal trays. A presentable rump steak and roast potato dish was served together with a fruit platter and a small dish of cheese and biscuits. Sam fiddled with his cutlery like a man in a straitjacket. He looked over at the giant Scot and was astonished to see that he had already demolished his dinner and was now looking enviously at Sam's tray. It reminded Sam of how Serko would stare at his dinner plate with big, round eyes.

'I am not that hungry,' Sam said to his neighbour. 'Would you like my tray?'

'Och, ye're a gentleman.' The Scot whipped away Sam's tray before he could change his mind and replaced it with his own empty tray. Sam decided to look at the Senzar file once more, even though he knew its contents by heart. Before he had read the first page,

the giant Scot wiped his chin with his napkin and stared at Sam. Sam tried to ignore the man, but it soon became evident that something was amiss. Sam's adrenaline levels rose alarmingly. There was no way he could get past this behemoth if things turned nasty. He hoped he was not due for another of Mendel's lessons on 'ethics and reputation'. The Scot peered at Sam for what seemed like an eternity, and just as Sam's nerves began to shred, he leaned across and handed Sam a thick manila folder.

'Yer Uncle Roy thought these documents would be a wee bit more useful tae yer than that nonsense yer reading.'

'I beg your pardon?' said Sam, astonished.

His neighbour thrust out a dinner plate sized hand. 'Mungo Dalgety at yer service. Nice tae meet yer, Sam.' Sam shook Dalgety's hand. 'Yer uncle was a bit concerned ye were getting yerself involved with some wee bastards. He asked me tae keep an eye on ye.'

'I thought you were in prison for arson?'

'Released last month. Ma sentence was commuted fer good behaviour.' Mungo grinned triumphantly.

'That's reassuring.' Sam swallowed hard.

'Roy had the memoir and the documents transcribed afore he sent them tae yer. The transcription is in the folder. Ye should read it all afore yer land. It will help ye with yer negotiation and may have the answer tae the Napier inheritance.'

'What else did Roy tell you?'

'That yer up tae yer arse in a situation that is spinning rapidly oot of yer control.'

'Thanks a lot.'

'And he expects me tae help yer detect and eliminate every last smidgen of Berserker at Napier & Beckett.'

'It's not that simple, Mungo. I have to destroy the computer files relating to the drug; otherwise, they will just set up a new production line somewhere else. Then there is the small matter of the antidote.'

'The bastards have produced an antidote already?'

'It's due to roll off the Alexandria production line anytime now.'

'Ye get me in tae the production facilities and I will take care of the rest.' He reached

into his pocket and drew out a Bic disposable cigarette lighter. For dramatic effect, he flicked the wheel and lit its flame.

‘For fuck’s sake Mungo, put it away. My God, how did you get that in here?’

‘I din’nae go anywhere wi’oot ma kit.’

‘I don’t mean to sound ungrateful, but it’s going to take a bit more than a Bic lighter to stop Napier & Beckett flooding the world with the most dangerous drug ever known to mankind.’

Mungo let out a deep chuckle. He nudged Sam with his elbow.

‘Och, I was only jesting, ye wee numpty.’

‘Uncle Roy said you were ex-SAS?’

‘Dishonourably discharged in 2012 fer setting fire tae the colonel’s Volvo.’

‘Did you pick up any useful skills in the SAS?’

‘Aye. I speak three languages.’

‘Really?’ Sam was impressed.

‘English, Farsi and Arabic.’

‘That will be a big help in Alexandria.’ Sam wondered what Farsi sounded like when spoken with a Glaswegian accent.

‘And covert sabotage.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘Breaking in’tae secure military establishments and disabling their operational capability. I was a wee bit of a legend in North Yemen. I was known as “Al-Qabas” – or in English, “The Firebrand”.’

‘I wonder why,’ said Sam rhetorically.

‘The SAS was a brilliant outlet for ma ... um ...’ Mungo struggled for the words.

‘Pyromania?’ suggested Sam.

‘... Hobby. For the first time in ma miserable life, I felt I was able tae use ma skills tae serve ma country and rid the world of terrorists.’ Mungo looked melancholy for just a moment. ‘Did yer uncle Roy tell ye that I lost ma granny when the plane fell oot the sky at Lockerbie Sam? But when I joined the army I felt I was looking oot fer the little guy who was just trying tae get on wi his life.’

‘That’s exactly it, Mungo! Can you imagine what these fanatics would be like if they

got their hands on Berserker?’ Sam opened the manila folder and flicked through the typed transcripts. There were at least a dozen documents. He looked through a number of old share certificates. There were acrimonious letters between the general and Bartholomew Beckett dated 1864 and a deed of sale where George Napier had disposed of his shareholding in Napier & Beckett while imposing numerous conditions. Finally, while Mungo fiddled with his headphones and searched for a suitable movie, Sam switched on the overhead light and settled down with the memoir. The pilot advised the passengers it would be a pleasant twenty-eight degrees centigrade in Washington and that there were six and a half hours’ journey time remaining. Sam read the first paragraphs of the memoir.

***Memoir of George Napier***  
***The Anglo-American War of 1812.***  
***Lieutenant George Napier, 1/1<sup>st</sup> Royal Scots.***

***9<sup>th</sup> July 1814 – Niagara Falls.***

*It was the first and only time I had ever tasted defeat and I found myself a prisoner of the grey-coated American lieutenant, Nathaniel Beckett. In the preceding two years, I had served with the Duke of Wellington in the Iberian Peninsula and won many honours, including the battles of Vitoria, San Sebastian and Nivelle. I had never been wounded before, nor had I faced such sturdy troops as the American Yankees.*

*At the Battle of Chippawa, we advanced against the well-defended American position but expected their poorly trained troops to fall back in disarray after the first few British volleys. As we approached, the wings of the American brigade formed into a U-shape and we were caught in their heavy crossfire. Their gunners were pouring canister into our ranks and our infantry faced much butchery. The British general, Phineas Riall ordered an orderly withdrawal to be covered by our artillery. During this manoeuvre, I received a spent musket ball to the back of my head from an unfortunate ricochet. I passed out from the shock and when I came to, the Yankees were approaching. I tried to fight my way back to British lines but I realised that capture was inevitable once Lieutenant Beckett*

*and a dozen of his soldiers surrounded me.*

As he read the memoir, he no longer saw typed words on the page but found himself fully immersed into the world of his four times great-grandfather. Just as he was able to play with imaginary friends as a child and visualise Professor Woodstock's Napoleonic history lectures as if he were actually there, he quickly transported himself into the shoes of his illustrious ancestor. The memoir played out like a film set in his head as the words gradually receded and images took over in his mind. Sam felt the fear of battle, smelled the stench of death and the shame of his ancestor's capture as he listened to the words of his enemies.

## CHAPTER 18

*9<sup>th</sup> July 1814 – Niagara Falls.*

*'You have fought well, soldier, but if you wish to keep your life you should ask for quarter,' said the dashing American, Lieutenant Beckett. I raised my hands and was taken, together with seven of my fellow Royal Scots. My head wound was roughly bandaged but I lost much blood on the journey south towards the American prison camp. Lieutenant Beckett himself was tasked with accompanying us on the fourteen-mile journey to Fort Erie. From there, we were to be transported across the Niagara River to the notorious American prison camp in Buffalo.*

*Lieutenant Beckett told us, 'You may keep your sword and your musket on condition that you or your men do not try to escape.' The road to Fort Erie was dangerous. There were many creeks to cross and the woods were thick in places. The risk of attack by Indians was ever present.*

*Beckett's men crossed themselves. They feared the Indians more than they feared the British.*

*I was given a fine black horse on account of my weak condition and head wound. Lieutenant Beckett rode with me while two of his men rode ahead as scouts. The remaining eight American soldiers were on foot together with my seven fellow Scots.*

*Lieutenant Beckett proved an amiable companion, although he annoyed me with his insistence that the Americans had fought better than the British at Chippawa. Beckett asked me about my family and I told him I was from Edinburgh. I had been studying the science of neurology at university in Edinburgh before the war against Napoleon beckoned me. Beckett told me that his family were well-known financiers in Alexandria near Washington and that they were looking to invest in new medicines.*

*'There will be a great future for people like you in America once the war is over,' Beckett said. 'You must promise to look me up in Alexandria when this is finished.'*

*We entered a dark wood and Beckett's scouts had not reported back for some time. The leading American soldier came to an abrupt stop. We could see three unarmed Indians straight ahead. They were tall, powerful men wearing deerskin garments. One of*

*them was naked from the waist up but his torso was painted with bright colours. They had tanned complexions and long black hair, which they tied in braids.*

*'I hope to God they are Parkes' Iroquois,' Beckett said, referring to the Indians that were supporting the invading American army. Several of the Americans crossed themselves. I had only been in the country for two weeks, but I already knew their fearsome reputation as warriors and that they did not treat their captives well. The three Indians disappeared into the woods and we continued our march. After two hundred yards, we were confronted by the sight of the naked and mutilated body of one of Beckett's scouts tied to a tree. His throat had been slit, but the most galling sight was the mutilation of his head. His scalp had been cut off, leaving it bleeding and ghastly. Lieutenant Beckett shuddered at the sight. Beckett's troops raised their muskets and pointed them into the trees but we could see no Indians. I felt the wind of an arrow as it passed within inches of my face. An instant later, an American soldier was clutching at the arrow that had lodged in his throat. Blood was spraying the ground around him. A few seconds later, another arrow flew but this time from our right. A second soldier fell with an arrow lodged in his belly. For a while, there was silence. Then an eerie voice came from somewhere behind us shouting in broken English.*

*'Surrender Yankees! One hundred braves surround you.'* The American soldiers did not move. Their muskets were still pointing at unseen ghosts in the woods. A third arrow came from behind us. It tore through the back of an American rear-guard soldier who slumped to his knees. He clawed at the arrowhead and watched in disbelief as his lifeblood pumped out of his stomach. An American soldier dropped his musket and ran into the woods in panic. We lost sight of him, but we heard the whooping of several Indians who had given chase. Moments later, we heard another terrifying scream, which was cut short by the sound of a tomahawk cleaving through flesh and bone.

*'Drop your weapons, men, and raise your hands,' commanded Beckett.*

*A minute later, about twenty-five Native Indians emerged from all sides of the woods. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw the British issue Brown Bess muskets in the hands of the fierce Indian warriors. They also carried bows, arrows and tomahawks that were as sharp as razors. The leader of the Indian war party was a tall, muscular man. I later learned his name was Mantotohpa, or 'Two Bears'. His tomahawk was dripping with*

blood. He motioned to Beckett to dismount from his horse using hand movements to express himself.

'Get off horse,' said one of the warriors who was acting as translator. Beckett complied.

'I am an American officer escorting British prisoners to Fort Erie. I demand that you let me and my men continue our journey.' Two Bears ignored him and looked up at me on my horse.

'You British?' the translator said in broken English. He had seen the red jackets of the Royal Scots.

'Yes,' I replied. 'Can you take us back to Fort George?'

'It is three days' travel. You die if you not rest,' he said looking at my wound. 'You stay with us till wound heals.'

'Will you let the Americans go?'

'It is not our custom. They die painful death or they not fear us in battle.' Beckett and the American troops looked shocked.

'You cannot kill them,' I protested.

'You not interfere or you die with Americans.'

Our column of Indians, the Scots and the remaining American soldiers continued our march deep into the woods. I was allowed to continue on horseback on account of my head wound, which was now bleeding profusely. It was all I could do to stay mounted on my horse. We took a turn towards the west and forded a small creek. After about a mile, we emerged from the woods and out into the bright countryside. Just ahead of us was a party of thirty Indian warriors on horseback. They had been waiting for their fellow warriors and were holding their horses.

As we approached the group, I noticed a young female warrior at the front. She could not have been more than eighteen-years-old, but she sat astride her horse with the proud, erect posture of a leader. She was dressed in deerskins like the other warriors but had a single large eagle feather in her hair. She had a tomahawk sheathed at her belt and a bow slung over her shoulder. A full quiver of arrows was attached to her horse's saddle. Her raven-black hair flowed freely about her shoulders. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. She studied me closely before looking at my fellow soldiers and

*the American captives. Two Bears approached the woman and bowed to her. She uttered a few words in her native language and beckoned him to mount his horse and ride with her. It was evident that the woman was pleased with Two Bears.*

*We set off from the edge of the woods in single file and continued for eight miles in silence. Lieutenant Beckett walked like a condemned man with his fellow soldiers. He looked pale and was sweating profusely. At times, I saw him tremble – he must have been contemplating the cruel fate awaiting him and his men at the Indian camp. I rode up to the Native American interpreter.*

*‘Who is the woman?’ I asked. The interpreter looked ahead at the young girl who was riding at the front of the convoy.*

*‘Her name is Nova. It mean “chasing butterflies”. She only daughter of Tecumseh, great Shawnee warrior. He unite six great tribe in fight against white hoard who steal ancestral Indian land. He won great victory over American army at Detroit.’*

*‘Is she the chief of the Shawnee now?’*

*‘No, but she show great bravery in battle. She with father when he die at Battle of Thames.’*

*Tecumseh’s death was considered a great loss. The famous tribal chief had been a brigadier general in the British Army. He had mobilised a great confederation of Indian tribes in defence of Canada and tipped the balance of the war in favour of the British.*

*‘So she is a princess?’*

*‘Shawnee not say “Princess”. She chief of war band of one hundred braves. She shoot arrow better than any man.’*

*I considered his response. ‘If she were British, she would be a warrior princess.’*

*The interpreter liked my remark. He rode up to Two Bears and chatted to him in the Shawnee language. Two Bears turned to look at me and laughed. Not able to contain himself, he talked to Nova, who also laughed at my description of her as a warrior princess. After a while, the interpreter returned to me.*

*‘War party approve your title for Nova.’*

*‘In Britain, warrior princesses throughout our history have all shown mercy to their enemies.’ I indicated Lieutenant Beckett, who was going into shock as we approached the Indian camp. The translator looked horrified at my comment. He spat on the ground in*

*disgust and left me to find a new riding companion.*

*We arrived at the Indian camp two hours later. It was set in rich grassland and located close to a wood. A creek ran along the southern side and a steep slope made the northern approach difficult. I could not help but approve of its defensive location. Forty tepees were gathered around a large central tent decorated with images of buffalos and eagles. Small children ran out of their buffalo hide homes to welcome the safe return of the warriors and Nova, their leader. The squaws who followed their children clutched wildflowers and embraced their men. There was obvious relief that they had all returned unharmed. The smoke from the cooking fires rose through the conical roofs of the tepees and the smell of buffalo meat cooking on the fires made my mouth water. I had eaten nothing except dried biscuit for over a day. My fellow Royal Scots were each allocated to a family and treated like honoured guests in their host's tepee. The five Americans were herded into an animal stockade for the night. I protested as much as I could about their treatment, but I was weak from my head wound. I climbed into my host's tepee and collapsed on a bed of skins and cushions. The tepee smelled of buffalo leather and smoke but it was not unpleasant. I was asleep in minutes, but it was a restless sleep. I had developed a fever from my head wound and the squaw who was my hostess had to wipe my damp forehead many times during the night. I dreamed there were demons in the camp and that men were screaming in agony from their evil ministrations. But it was not a nightmare. The trial of the American prisoners of war had begun.*

*Despite my weakness from the fever and the mid-morning heat, I crawled from my bed and donned my scarlet jacket. I put on my lieutenant's regalia and staggered to the clearing where the Indian leaders had gathered. The braves had formed two lines for the American soldiers to walk through. They carried vicious looking clubs. The first American prisoner was forced to place his hands against a rock and an old toothless warrior then smashed the bones of his hands with the blunt end of a tomahawk. The young American soldier screamed out in pain and held his broken hands pitifully out in front of him. He was barely eighteen-years-old. Worse was to follow. He was confronted by two lines of Indian warriors and was being poked in the back by a large Indian with a spear. I felt sickened by the spectacle. I turned to the clan leaders who sat under a canopy of trees. They sat in a semi-circle away from the noisy crowds who were baying*

*for blood. I picked out Two Bears, who looked every inch the seasoned warrior. Next to him was Nova, the beautiful young daughter of Tecumseh. Despite her beauty, she looked as if she was still mourning the loss of her father and was carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders. The translator sat on the other side of Nova and half a dozen clan elders sat with them. I was unsteady on my feet from the fever and the heat but I walked up to Nova. I had seen a number of senior Shawnee braves squat on their haunches in respect when they approached Nova and I followed their example. I was about four feet away from her.*

*'The American lieutenant is my friend, Princess,' I said. 'He is a good man and I would like to see him and his soldiers spared.' I looked into Nova's deep green eyes, challenging her to respond.*

*'A panther does not beg for the lives of coyotes,' said Nova in excellent English.*

*'I have heard that coyotes can be brave and loyal animals.'*

*'They cannot be trusted. They steal compulsively and kill for pleasure.'*

*I looked over my shoulder at the American boy who was being pushed ever closer to the corridor of death. The next American soldier was having his hands placed on the large rock. Lieutenant Beckett was the last in the line.*

*'They can be sent to a British prisoner of war camp.'*

*The interpreter spoke up. 'Careful Englishman. These men not British prisoner. They captured by Shawnee alone and now they suffer Shawnee law. You not abuse our welcome.'*

*'The lieutenant is not English, he is Scottish,' said Nova to her interpreter.*

*Nova had thrown me into confusion with her knowledge of British affairs. My head was burning and I felt myself swaying.*

*'Bring him a stool,' Nova commanded. 'The man has the fever.' A brave helped me sit on the stool that the leaders found for me.*

*I explained how the American lieutenant was a cavalry officer and that with my encouragement he could help train their braves in the ways of the cavalry. There was no truth to my words but I had seen enough of the British cavalry under Wellington to instruct the Shawnee. There was much discussion among the Indian leaders. While they conversed, I looked again at the American prisoners. My vision was beginning to blur but*

*I saw that the toothless warrior with the tomahawk was about to bring it crashing down on the second American's hands.*

*'My Princess,' I said urgently pointing to the scene. 'A man cannot train your braves without the use of his hands.'*

*Nova stood up and bellowed a command. The old warrior lowered his tomahawk and the Indian with the spear ceased goading his captive towards the gauntlet. The crowd went quiet and stared at the strange sight of a British officer negotiating for the lives of the American captives. Nova returned to her stool in front of me.*

*'I hope the coyotes appreciate the panther saving their worthless lives,' she said.*

*'Thank you, Princess. I am sure your Shawnee warriors will quickly learn the art of cavalry charge and will help the British win a great battle.'*

*Nova smiled for the first time since I saw her at the edge of the woods. Her smile transformed her from a beautiful woman to an angel. I could understand why over one hundred braves were willing to follow her into battle. But I had little time to reflect on her beauty. My head throbbed and my vision faded. I felt myself burning beyond any fever I had ever experienced. I tried to stop myself from swaying, but I collapsed into an untidy heap in front of the Shawnee Indians.*

*The Shawnee feared 'the fever'. They burned the tepee and bedding that I had been sleeping on and constructed a new shelter for me some way from the camp. In one of my rare lucid moments, I heard Nova and a newcomer to the camp discussing my fate. The newcomer was none other than Teyonin – or Captain John Norton, leader of the Confederate Indians. John Norton was half Cheyenne but was raised in Dunfermline by his Scottish mother. He had become a blood brother of Tecumseh and an uncle to Nova. After Tecumseh, he was the foremost Indian leader of the 1812 war against America. They conversed in English, as John Norton understood Mohawk but not the Shawnee language. Despite my fever, I could clearly hear their discussion.*

*'Lieutenant Napier will not survive his fever. It is a pity, for he was a brave and capable officer at Chippawa,' said Norton in his Dunfermline accent.*

*'He will not die,' Nova contradicted him. 'We can cauterise the infection with a hot iron and treat the illness with mould from the yellow dock.'*

*'The source of infection is too near the brain. Cauterising his wound would kill him.'*

*'He could handle the pain if he were to smoke Berserker.'*

*'Berserker has been forbidden by the British. It is dangerous and leads to a breakdown in discipline.'*

*'It will save his life.'*

*'Berserker has never been used before in medicine. I will not allow it,' said Norton.*

*'Teyonin, you came here to ask for my support in the coming battle against the Americans. Do not forbid me anything in my own camp.'*

*'It is indeed your decision, Nova.' He bowed graciously. 'Make it wisely. I pray that you also administer the Maneto antidote within one hour of his taking Berserker, or cut his throat to spare him the agony if the antidote fails.'*

*Six strong braves lifted my limp form from the cot on which I was lying and placed me on a sturdy chair. I was wet with perspiration. Nova wiped my fevered brow with a damp cloth and whispered reassuring words in the Shawnee language into my ear. Two Bears brought me a large war pipe from which grey smoke was curling from the bowl. The Indians all covered their mouths and noses with a damp cloth. They put the stem of the pipe in my mouth and bade me to breathe in the smoke. After five minutes, they withdrew the pipe and put a thick pad of buffalo leather between my teeth. They bound my wrists and ankles to the chair with leather straps and waited.*

*After a minute or two, I felt my strength return. My muscles seemed to fill out, and I felt a sense of power and euphoria fill my soul. Despite the fever, my body took on an immense strength that I had never before experienced. I soared above the tepee like an eagle hunting for prey. I sensed great danger. It came from the north. I flew over the lush grasslands and then soared above the Niagara Falls, pausing to take in the majestic sight that was below me. A hundred thousand cubic feet of water per second poured over the horseshoe shape of the falls and sent columns of spray upwards towards me. I tilted my eagle wings and saw the army of the Americans advancing towards the falls. I was tempted to swoop down and scatter the army with my beak and talons, but I knew that even with my great strength there were too many foes to deal with alone.*

*Then I was back in the chair, bound hand and foot with six Indian braves holding my head to one side. The brave that I knew as Two Bears was advancing on me with an iron rod in his hand. Its tip was glowing red with heat. I pondered whether to break free of the*

*puny leather straps and destroy the people who dared threaten me. Then I noticed the beautiful Indian princess and saw her fear and concern for me in her deep green eyes. I knew that neither fire nor iron could harm me so I allowed Two Bears to apply the hot iron to my head. I heard the sizzling of flesh and smelled meat from the iron, but I laughed at their attempts to hurt me. Did they not know I was indestructible?*

*I slept for a while but when I awoke, I felt the most terrible rage in my heart. As the Indians gave me a second herbal medication from the war pipe, I contemplated all those who had done me harm and I decided I would tear them limb from limb. The rage built irresistibly in me and I tried to spit out the leather pad that was in my mouth to scream at those who restrained me. But just as the hate and the anger built to a degree that threatened to overwhelm me, I felt my strength dissipate and the heat of the fever took its grip on me once again.*

*I moaned softly as the pain in my head built up in terrible waves. The Indians released me from the chair and placed me back in my cot. Nova applied a poultice to my wound and wrapped a dressing gently around my head. The pain eased but did not stop. I felt the urge to rip at the dressing on my head but Nova had gently secured my wrists to the sides of the cot to stop me from doing so. She made me drink a pleasant tasting potion and then mercifully, I fell into a long, deep sleep.*

*When I awoke, three days had passed. The pain in my head was still wretched and I tried to scratch at the source of my pain but my wrists were still bound to the sides of the cot. I felt a terrible thirst and needed water to ease the dryness in my throat. I looked around my tepee. Nova was asleep in the chair beside me. Her moccasin-clad feet were propped up on the sides of my cot. There was a pile of damp cloths, bandages and lotions of various types around her chair.*

*'My Princess,' I said weakly trying to awaken her, 'may I have water?' Nova opened her eyes. She looked down at me and her face lit up in a broad smile. She pulled a leather pouch of water from her belt, supported my head and held the pouch to my lips. I drank greedily. She then leaned over and untied the leather straps at my wrists. She wiped my forehead with a cloth once more. I sat up in the cot and smiled at Nova, love and gratitude filling my heart. Nova wrapped her arms around me and held my head to her breast. She kissed me gently before letting me go.*

*'Out of bed, you lazy Scotsman,' she said with a mischievous glint in her eyes. 'You have five American coyotes that need whipping into shape. They need to teach me the way of the cavalry charge.'*

**23<sup>rd</sup> July 1814, Niagara Falls.**

*My love for Nova grew stronger each day. Despite the entreaties of the Indian leader John Norton and my seven Royal Scots, who were anxious to return to their regiment, I lingered at her camp. I used every excuse to visit her tepee and reported to her how the training of her cavalry squadron was progressing. In return, Nova said that she was disappointed with my weak and skinny appearance since my illness. She put me on a diet of lean buffalo steaks and insisted that I drink a foul brew of powdered pumpkin seeds, which she said would clear my stomach of white man's intestinal parasites. I tried to reject her medication of black willow bark that she gave me for my aches and pains but Nova threatened me with the gauntlet if I disobeyed. On the fifth day of my recuperation, I presented Nova with the black horse that had carried me to the camp as a gift for saving my life. It was a good three hands taller than the Native Indian horses and Nova was delighted by its strength and beauty.*

*We rode together in the woods and fields around her camp for many hours. We discussed the affairs of the world and the future of her people. We talked of the British plan to create a large independent Indian state in the Midwest that would give peace and prosperity to her people. I declared that I would travel with her to those beautiful lands once the war was over. We danced in the moonlight, held hands when no-one was looking and we were intimate in the nearby woods. I was never happier than in those precious days before the battle.*

*On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, John Norton made his final entrance into Nova's camp with a dozen of his Mohawk soldiers. They were escorting a baggage cart, which contained British military supplies for Nova's warriors. He jumped down from his horse and embraced Nova. He then turned to me.*

*'It is time, Lieutenant Napier, to return to your regiment. The Americans are advancing on Lundy's Lane. We expect a decisive battle to take place there. If we can*

*defeat the Americans at Lundy's Lane then the future of Canada is safe. They do not have the numbers to continue their advance and they run the risk of complete annihilation if they are caught in Upper Canada without supplies.'*

*'But what if we lose?' I asked.*

*'Do not countenance the thought,' replied Norton. 'They would take Fort George, which is the key to Upper Canada. They must be stopped at all costs.'*

*The Shawnee Indians were unloading the baggage cart under Nova's guidance. There were Brown Bess muskets and even a number of modern Baker rifles with their seven grooved barrels for increased range and accuracy. There were trays of ammunition, uniforms and fifty cavalry sabres.*

*'I am still wary of your plans for a Shawnee cavalry squadron. The Indians are much more effective as light troops and skirmishers. Are you sure they will have the necessary discipline?' asked Norton.*

*'With Nova as their leader, I am sure of it.'*

*'She does know that a woman can never serve as a British soldier?'*

*'I could not tell her. It would break her heart.'*

*Norton looked annoyed. 'I will have to tell her, Lieutenant. She will not forgive the British if she is turned away from the battle.'*

*'I will tell her,' I said. I knew I would have to find a moment when she was in the right frame of mind for the bad news.*

*'I have a gift for her in the cart,' said Norton. We strolled up to the cart and unloaded a small trunk. We carried it to Nova's tepee and awaited her return.*

*'I have some bad news' said Norton.*

*'What is it?' I asked.*

*'The Americans captured the fields that contained the Berserker crops last week.'*

*'My God. Will they use Berserker against our troops?'*

*'We have sent an emissary to the American Major General Brown under a flag of truce. We advised him that the drug is lethal to his own soldiers without the antidote.'*

*'What did the general say?'*

*'He said that he knows where the fields are that contain the Maneto antidote plant and he intends to capture them too,' said Norton.*

*'Can he do that?'*

*'Almost certainly.'*

*'So what are we going to do?'*

*'The fields cannot be defended easily but we can destroy the plants and poison the fields with Strychnos before they arrive. The British governor of Upper Canada, Lieutenant General Drummond has ordered that anyone keeping an antidote plant or its seeds will be hanged. That message has been passed on to the American general.'*

*'So Berserker will be unusable and the Indians will lose one of their historic advantages against their enemies.'*

*'It is not before time. Berserker was effective when only a small number of tribes knew its secrets and respected its dangers. If its use ever became widespread among the Americans or Europeans, I would fear for mankind. The world would descend into a state of perpetual war. We must tell those tribes that still have provisions of Berserker or Maneto to destroy them.'*

*I made a mental note to tell Nova.*

*Nova entered the tepee.*

*'Ah, Nova, we were just talking about you.'* Norton unlocked the small trunk. He pulled out a lavishly decorated pearl handled pistol from the trunk and handed it to Nova. She caressed the beautifully engineered weapon. Norton then produced a brand-new steel sabre. Its edge was razor-sharp and its polished blade sparkled.

*'A present from Lieutenant General Drummond in recognition of your father's contribution to the capture of Detroit. And here we have a gift from the 19<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons.'* He pulled out a pair of white breeches, a pair of gleaming black cavalry boots and a set of silver spurs. There was a selection of clothes and uniforms in the bottom of the trunk.

*Nova laughed with delight as she took the breeches and the boots and asked to try them on immediately. John Norton and I walked out of the tepee for a few minutes before we were summoned back in. Nova looked every inch the warrior. She was slashing her sabre through the air like an experienced fencer. Her buckskin jacket, breeches and black boots gave her a cavalier appearance. She looked the fierce Indian warrior that she was, and elegant British cavalry officer that she wished to be. Without warning, she dropped*

*her sabre and launched herself into my arms with her legs wrapped around my torso. Caught somewhat unawares, I nearly overbalanced but regained my composure just in time.*

*'I see my panther is getting old and slow,' said Nova, embracing me with such passion it took my breath away.*

*'I will leave the two of you for an hour,' said Norton. 'Then Lieutenant, I suggest that you hurry to Lundy's Lane and report to your commanding officer. Nova, you should join us there with your troops when you have organised your supplies.'*

*'Ma'am.' He bowed elegantly to Nova. Then he added to us both, 'Excuse me, but there is a battle to be won.'*

## CHAPTER 19

Mendel glanced up at Sam. His expression was one of mild irritation, as if he had swatted a fly buzzing around his morning coffee only to have it land in his sugar bowl.

‘You have ten minutes,’ he said flatly. He took off his glittering Omega watch and laid it next to a large pile of papers and memos he was reading. He picked up a report and wrote notes in the margin. Sam remained silent and looked around at the opulence of Mendel’s oak-panelled office. The carpet was deep piled Axminster, and the desk that separated him from Mendel was antique mahogany and smelled of polish. There were numerous eighteenth century paintings around the walls. A crystal cut whisky decanter set was placed near the patio window for ‘important’ guests. Mendel made no move towards the decanter. A minute passed by and Mendel glanced at his watch.

‘Well?’ Mendel said irritably, still not looking up from his work.

‘What I am going to tell you needs your full attention, Mr Mendel.’ Sam replied evenly.

‘I will be the judge of that,’ said Mendel, finally putting down his gold Schaeffer pen and looking Sam in the eyes. Mendel smiled patronisingly at Sam as if he were a headmaster indulging an errant schoolboy. ‘Then you had better tell me what is so important in the eight and a half minutes you have left.’

‘Your executive assistant was kind enough to extend our meeting. She said that you had nothing important on until eleven o’clock.’

‘That was presumptuous of Libby. I will have to correct her when you are thrown out of the office.’

Sam opened his briefcase and pulled out a file. He skimmed through the conclusion of the thesis that had been written by Josh Hunter before he hung himself in the Berserker ward.

Mendel could not contain himself. ‘Have you come in here to read or to talk?’

Sam closed the report and looked up at Mendel. ‘Do you prefer English Breakfast or Earl Grey tea, Mr Mendel?’

‘What on earth are you talking about?’

‘One of the London schizophrenia patients wrote a two hundred page thesis on what

caused the insanity of the sales director, Paul Knight.’

‘Why are you wasting my time with the ravings of a schizophrenic patient?’

‘I can assure you, the thesis makes conclusive reading.’ On cue, the door to Mendel’s office opened and a catering officer in a smart grey uniform wheeled in a trolley. He was the biggest man Mendel had ever seen. The buttons on his grey uniform looked like they were hanging onto the jacket for dear life. On the trolley were two cups of tea, a glass of orange juice, a glass of water and a plate of chocolate biscuits. The catering officer’s huge hands placed the biscuits and the cold drinks in the middle of the table.

‘English Breakfast or Earl Grey?’ Sam again enquired of Mendel. Mendel remained silent.

‘The research document concluded that Paul Knight drank English Breakfast tea minutes before he suffered symptoms of imbecility consistent with being drugged with Cerebulin. I will have the Earl Grey, if you don’t mind,’ Sam said to the catering officer.

The giant handed Sam a cup of the yellow-labelled tea and gave Mendel the red-labelled English Breakfast tea. Sam slurped from his cup.

‘Do drink up. Your tea will go cold,’ said Sam.

‘I think I would prefer water,’ said Mendel, pushing his teacup as far away from him as possible. Beads of sweat appeared on Mendel’s furrowed brow. ‘This is all rather meaningless, Jardine, but I am intrigued to learn more about your so-called “research”.’

‘I paid Paul Knight a visit yesterday. He is well on the road to recovery and looking forward to returning to the board next month. He passed on his best wishes and said he can’t wait to even up the score – whatever that means.’ Sam sipped his tea and looked at Mendel over the top of his cup.

Mendel reached for the water and took a large sip.

‘You’re bluffing, Jardine.’

‘As you said, it is all rather meaningless – you can talk to him anytime you wish. One thing is certain, he will be voting against you at the next board meeting.’

‘I will still have a majority on the board.’

‘Unless the board is put in the embarrassing position of having to explain to the FDA why the banned drug Cerebulin was found in the bloodstream of one of its own board members.’

‘No-one can prove that.’

‘A blood sample was taken when Paul Knight was first admitted to hospital. The toxicology reports are due just before the next scheduled board meeting.’

‘I know for a fact that you would not send the toxicology report to the FDA,’ Mendel said, smiling.

‘Really?’ countered Sam.

‘Because you want Rachael to be the new CEO and you would not destroy the company in the process.’

‘You misunderstand me, Mr Mendel. My only goal is to destroy Berserker and its antidote Novalis. It helps if Rachael is CEO, but it’s not critical.’

‘I understand everything about you, Jardine. All this time you have been trusting people who now work for me. You are so gullible. That is your Achilles heel.’ Mendel chuckled to himself.

Sam looked for the giveaway signs that Mendel could be lying, but his adversary displayed the confidence of a man who was sure of his position. Could Mendel mean Rachael? Sam had not been able to establish contact with her since arriving in Alexandria four days earlier. He had considered cancelling the negotiation but decided to pursue his own Berserker agenda with Mendel while he had the opportunity.

‘Can you tell me why Rachael declined to attend the meeting this morning?’ Mendel enquired with a smirk.

‘Rachael cannot contain her anger when she confronts you. She told me all about your sordid history with her many years ago.’ Sam had no basis upon which to make his assertion, but Rachael’s irrational hatred for her uncle and Mendel’s deep mistrust of her could have only one explanation. Yet his heart rate raced as he waited for Mendel to reply.

‘Rachael is lying. The bitch has no right to make groundless insinuations,’ he exploded. ‘She will be hearing from my solicitor.’

Sam breathed easier. He had touched a raw nerve.

‘She is untrustworthy and has ambitions beyond her capability,’ Mendel continued, after taking another large sip of water. ‘I bet she didn’t tell you that she voted against her own grandfather in the last board meeting! Why do you think the old man shot himself?’

His beloved granddaughter broke his heart. After all he had done for her!’

Despite himself, Sam was shocked at Mendel’s accusation.

‘What do you think of Rachael now?’ Mendel continued. ‘I did try to warn you, Sam. I offered you advancement, a senior career in Alexandria, respect and success. But you threw it all in my face because you fell for her feminine guile. We have all been there, Sam. When her mother ran off with a shipping tycoon, she left Rachael and her sister in our care. Rachael was always flirting around with her long legs and short skirts. She may have only been a teenager at the time but my God, she had the confidence of a movie star. I was infatuated. She seduced me into doing those things to her and then she threatened to tell Barbara. She could have ruined me.’

Sam was disgusted at Mendel’s self-justification for his predatory behaviour all those years ago, but for the time being he decided to keep his opinions to himself. He was going to need Mendel’s cooperation if he was to close the deal.

‘She is a strong-willed woman,’ Sam admitted.

‘And now she is using you to get rid of me. Well, this time I’m fighting back. I am going to crush her once and for all. You have backed the wrong horse, Sam. You will be roadkill on the corporate highway. It’s a shame – I quite liked you.’

By now, Mendel was looking red in the face and had lost some of his suave composure. He took another long drink of water and smoothed back his mane of greying hair.

‘You are manufacturing Berserker against the specific terms of the Articles of Incorporation of Napier & Beckett that were drawn up in 1814,’ Sam stated bluntly.

‘So now that we have arrived at the real purpose of your visit, it’s time for you to meet my “deep throat”. I must admit, it was a complete surprise to have this lady offer her services to me.’ Mendel pushed a discreet button under his desk and the door to his magnificent office opened again. An elegant woman dressed in a navy-blue business suit, white blouse and shiny black heels sauntered into the office. Mendel rose from his desk and rushed to meet her half way. The lady offered Mendel her manicured hand and he stooped to kiss it like a fifties film star.

‘I believe that you have already met Dr Clayton,’ said Mendel. ‘She is my new director of psychology and will be helping me with the rest of this discussion. To be

honest, I am growing tired of your mind games and Anneka is eminently qualified to determine when you are bluffing and when I should take you seriously. We may even have a few surprises of our own to throw at you.'

Sam stared at Dr Clayton in disbelief. Her carefree 'groupie' image had been discarded and she had taken to the corporate lifestyle like a duck to water. Dr Clayton took her seat next to Mendel.

'Mr Mendel must have deep pockets if he can lure one of City University's finest psychologists to Alexandria,' said Sam.

'It wasn't a difficult choice. Napier & Beckett offered me world-class facilities, research assistants and funding that I could only dream about in London. The results of my work will have an immediate impact on medical science,' Clayton explained.

'I have offered Dr Clayton a seat on the Napier & Beckett executive board. Of course, she has promised to side with me in all votes for the next two years. Not that I promoted her for that reason; it's all about equal opportunities and respect for women. Isn't that right, my dear?' He patted Dr Clayton's knee to emphasise his point. Dr Clayton squirmed in her seat as Sam rolled his eyes.

'I am sure the big salary will help you cope with your new "responsibilities",' said Sam to Dr Clayton in a sarcastic tone.

Mendel stood up and walked behind Dr Clayton's chair. 'You might pretend to care about diversity, but I'm taking affirmative action.' He put his hands on her shoulders and massaged them. 'Women like Dr Clayton are the future of Napier & Beckett. Bright, charming and yes, I will say it, sexy.' Despite her new sophisticated corporate image, Dr Clayton blushed like a schoolgirl.

\* \* \*

Cassie was ushered into a spare cubicle at the administrative block of the Alexandria campus. The Alexandria staff knew her well as Rachael's London executive assistant and everyone that she met was friendly and helpful.

'I hear Rachael is still with her sister in Norfolk, Virginia,' volunteered the woman in the neighbouring cubicle. 'I think she returned to work way too early. Rumour has it that

she is having a breakdown. I mean, you can hardly blame her. First losing her grandfather and then seeing that pig Mendel take her job.’ The woman looked around to make sure that she was not overheard.

‘It’s very kind of you to look after me this way,’ said Cassie, ‘but I do need to get on with my work.’

‘What a sweet accent you have, Cassie. Is it Irish?’ the woman asked.

‘Scottish actually.’

‘I never would have guessed from your emails; they sound so ... American.’

‘That’s modern technology for you.’

‘Well, I must leave you to it. Let me know if there is anything you need from me. It’s so sad that you came all this way just as Rachael fell ill.’

Cassie logged into the computer terminal using her remote access password. She checked for hidden cameras and looked suspiciously at the elaborate coat hook on the partition. It had an unrestricted view of her face and computer terminal. She placed her jacket directly in front of the offending lens. Feeling more secure, she fired up her Instant Messenger. Within seconds, Jacques was on the line.

*‘Good morning Cassie.’*

*‘Have you written the code?’*

*‘We finished it about an hour ago. It is ready for you to download.’*

*‘What software are we downloading?’*

*‘It is best that you do not know.’*

*‘Don’t give me that bullshit, Jacques. I need to know.’*

*‘Okay, it’s a Trojan horse designed to give us control over the server on which the Berserker files are stored and malware that will corrupt the data once we are ready.’*

*‘How do I know what you will do with the data once you have control of it?’*

*‘Sam told you to trust me. That should be enough.’*

*‘It is me you are dealing with now and frankly, I do not trust you.’*

*‘Cassie, we don’t have time for your paranoia. We know that Napier & Beckett is about to replicate the Berserker data across eight different servers in different locations around the world. Once that happens, we will not be able to isolate the Berserker formula and eliminate it.’*

*'You need to amend your code so that it destroys the data on contact. I don't want you or anyone else to have control over the Berserker server.'*

*'Cassie, you are overstepping your authority. I need to talk to Sam.'*

*'Goodbye, Jacques, you arrogant jerk.'* Cassie moved to close down the conversation.

*'Wait, Cassie. We can amend the software, but it will take us an hour.'*

*'You have thirty minutes.'*

*'You do not understand the complexity of what you are asking.'*

*'Don't mess with me, Jacques. You have obviously not done your background check on me. I will know.'*

*'We will try to amend the code in thirty minutes.'*

*'I assume you are using a variant of the backdoor Trojan horse called "Beast" and the "Sodom and Gomorrah" rootkit software?'*

*'You have made your point, Miss Gilchrist. You will have the code in thirty minutes.'*

\* \* \*

Thirty minutes later, Cassie leaned across the cubicle to speak to her neighbour.  
*'Jemima, I need help.'*

*'Oh, Cassie, you look dreadful. What has happened to you?'* Jemima stared at Cassie's blood red eyes and terrifying expression with rising panic.

*'I need to get to the campus psychosis facilities quickly and I don't have access.'*

*'Are you sick? My God, let me get the medicos.'*

*'It's not necessary, Jemima, as long as I get to the psychosis facilities within twenty minutes.'*

*'You poor dear. Okay, let me sort this out.'* She looked at Cassie, then averted her eyes and picked up her phone.

Twenty minutes later, Dr Jed Kearney, director of research greeted Cassie at the psychosis reception. He did not seem fazed by Cassie's frightening expression but gave her a hug and a kiss on each cheek.

*'Cassie, I almost feel that I know you. We have exchanged so many emails related to*

Rachael's visits that I sometimes think you work here on the campus. Let's get your medication quickly.' He signed Cassie in and gave instructions to the receptionist.

'Call the duty doctor. Tell him we have a hereditary Berserker syndrome patient. We will be in the recovery lounge. I won't be able to stay with Miss Gilchrist for more than fifteen minutes as I have a meeting at eleven o'clock.' He looked at Cassie kindly. 'Cassie, I am so sorry that I won't be able to stay with you longer, but my meeting is critical if we are to get Senzar approved.' They walked towards the recovery lounge. Jed put a comforting arm around Cassie's shoulders.

'I didn't know that you were a Sleepwalker. If I may say so, you are handling your condition with exceptional grace and dignity. If you can cope with the symptoms for another year or two, we may be able to reverse them to a manageable degree.'

'I am not sure I can last that long, Dr Kearney. The nightmares are getting much worse. They are so much more vivid and they feel so real. Something terrible is going to happen to me – I can feel it.' Jed stopped walking and looked straight into her tortured eyes.

'If there is anything I can do for you, Cassie, you only have to ask. I was a great friend of Nathaniel's and it pains me to see the direction that Mendel is taking the company. I could not bear to think that millions would experience your suffering if Berserker usage becomes widespread.'

'There is one thing, Dr Kearney.'

'Please call me Jed. Anything you like, Cassie.'

'I have to send a personal email to the London office before they close for the weekend. Can I use your office after I have had my treatment? I will only be ten minutes or so.'

'No-one is supposed to go into my office. The FDA would kill me if they found out. All the latest research files are on my server.' He winked at Cassie. 'Just ten minutes, right? My office is down the corridor on the left. Make sure no-one sees you going in, and close the door after you.'

\* \* \*

After barely half an hour, Cassie left the recovery lounge. She walked down the corridor and saw Jed Kearney's office on the left. She knocked on the door and waited but there was no reply. She entered his cluttered office and sat down at his desk. She had about an hour before he was due to return from his meeting. She logged into the computer using Rachael's user identity and password. Rachael had high-level access to files and was likely to provoke fewer security concerns. She spent twenty minutes looking for databases relating to Berserker without success. The Trojan horse needed to be released directly onto the server where the Berserker files resided, otherwise it could do untold damage to Napier & Beckett's other research programs, including the Alzheimer's drug Senzar. Cassie just could not get into the Berserker server using Rachael's user identity. She pounded the keyboard in frustration. She was going to have to log in as Dr Jed Kearney. Cassie glanced at the door and prayed that no-one would come in. She pulled open his top drawer and looked for clues to his password, without success. She pulled open the second drawer but still no luck. The third drawer contained a series of personnel folders, including one labelled with his own name. She skimmed through the documents and found one from HR dated several years before. It contained most of his confidential Napier & Beckett information, including his system user ID. Cassie carefully put back everything where she had found it and looked for evidence that might yield clues to Kearney's password. She looked at her watch. She had half an hour before Kearney was due back at his desk. She reopened the top drawer once more and noticed a dog-eared pad of yellow post-it notes that Jed Kearney was using as a message pad. She flicked through the yellow notes, bypassing the numerous telephone messages and personal jottings. Towards the bottom of the pad was an obscure code word: '*Cass@b!anca34*'. He must be a movie buff, thought Cassie. She typed Kearney's user ID together with the password into Kearney's PC. It fired up. Cassie exhaled a long breath of relief and opened Kearney's research folders. There were about forty-five different folders, each named after a neurological product. After five minutes of searching, she found the Berserker server. She created a new sub-folder, which she innocuously called 'databackup' and then copied the contents of the USB into the folder.

To give herself time to get off the campus before the software commenced its destruction of the Berserker files, she created a trigger event that would activate the

Trojan horse and malware remotely. The event that would pull the trigger would be Rachael Beckett's first email to any London-based employee after 7 pm. Rachael was one of the most prolific users of email at Napier & Beckett, so there was little risk of the trigger not being pulled. She looked at her watch. It was 11:50 am in Alexandria and 4:50 pm in London. Cassie set the trigger for the Trojan horse and logged out of Kearney's account. Before she left the office, she decided that she should send at least one email to the UK under her own name to confirm the story that she had told Dr Kearney.

\* \* \*

Brett Walsh was about to close down his PC for the week. He was still basking in the satisfaction of being promoted to UK head of security following his colleague Steven Wilkinson's termination. He never had liked the pompous ex-security manager. It was Brett's weekend to have custody of his son. His ex-wife always made a fuss if he was late picking up Alex. Their divorce had been tetchy and the finances were not yet settled. He did not need that bitch complaining to her lawyer again. He had already paid thousands of pounds in legal fees. He started to close down his PC but noticed a minor security alert on his system. Three different users had accessed the same computer within one hour. Two of those users were Leadenhall employees. There could be any number of rational explanations and the PC was based in Alexandria so Walsh was tempted to let it go. Following up the alert would involve a series of calls to the US and cause him to be late for his pickup. He was not in the mood for being accused as an irresponsible father yet again. Instead, he fired off an email to his US counterpart, John Evans and provided him with the location of the PC and the nature of the breach. With his conscience clear, Walsh signed off and hurried to the Napier & Beckett car park to begin his weekend.

\* \* \*

Group head of security John Evans was at his PC two hundred yards away from the research block as Cassie was shutting down Dr Kearney's computer. When he received Walsh's email, he experienced the thrill of the chase and decided to investigate why Dr

Kearney had allowed Rachael Beckett and Cassie Gilchrist to use his office. It would take him three minutes to rush over to Dr Kearney's office.

Cassie double-checked Dr Kearney's desk and rose to leave. Before she could do so, she saw the handle of the office door turn and the tall, rotund figure of John Evans walk in. He was wearing the smart blue security uniform of Napier & Beckett with his name emblazoned across the top left pocket. He had a cropped beard and a receding hairline. What was left of his hair formed unruly wisps above his ears like the stunted wings of an ostrich. Evans had a sneer on his face like a store owner who had caught a child stealing sweets.

‘Ah! You must be Miss Gilchrist. Do you have authorisation to be in this office?’

‘I am Miss Beckett's personal assistant and she asked me to send a confidential email on her behalf to London before the office closes for the weekend. Dr Kearney kindly offered me the use of his office,’ Cassie replied as sweetly as possible.

‘And I suppose the FDA also sanctioned this breach of protocol?’

‘I have had a terrible day, Mr Evans. I have not been feeling at all well and I am not in the mood for petty-minded bureaucracy.’

Evans was not used to employees standing up to him. ‘I'm afraid I will have to escort you to the security office, Miss Gilchrist. There will have to be a full investigation.’ Evans' arrogant manner triggered an intense reaction deep inside Cassie's head.

‘Of course, we will also have to quarantine the office,’ Evans continued.

Cassie began to breathe rapidly. A wave of uncontrollable anger consumed her. A red mist blurred her vision and she felt herself transported to another time and place where grassy plains stretched out in front of her as far as the eye could see. Her hunter's instincts were whetted by her adversary who had challenged her status as the foremost warrior in the land.

‘We will have to confirm with Dr Kearney exactly what was discussed between the two of you and if he has accessed his computer in the last thirty minutes. The consequences of non-compliance are severe ... ’

Cassie opened Kearney's top drawer and pulled out a long, sharp pair of scissors. In her tortured mind, her enemy's odious spymaster was trapped and she would bestow upon him a terrible and agonising death. She hoped he would die bravely but she

suspected that this miserable specimen would dishonour her by begging for mercy as she delivered the coup de grâce.

## CHAPTER 20

The director of manufacturing, Chuck DeVere was impressed with the work ethic of the giant new temporary foreman. He was standing in for the idle, good-for-nothing Derek Scudamore who had failed to turn up without explanation for the third time in a month. When Scudamore wasn't making excuses for being late, he was obsessed with work-related health and safety issues, both real and imaginary. For DeVere, this was one unexplained absence too many and Scudamore was now HR's problem. Luckily for DeVere, Rachael's PA Cassie had contacted the employment agency and found a replacement candidate within ten minutes. When he read the candidate's résumé she sent through and saw it was packed full of impressive references, DeVere hired him on the spot. DeVere decided he would approach this giant foreman at the end of the morning shift and ask him if he would like a permanent position on the brand-new Berserker line. He had never seen anyone work with such a sense of purpose.

DeVere was delighted that his production lines were again running at full capacity. Thirty manufacturing lines were housed in giant double-skinned 'clean rooms' at the centre of the Alexandria drug making complex. Every production employee was dressed in white CleanTough overalls, facemasks, hairnets, rubber gloves and anti-static vinyl overshoes. Air was gently pumped into the sterile clean rooms so that dust particles could only flow out of the production lines and not in. The entire complex covered ten acres and was one of the most modern in the world.

DeVere felt uneasy that this new Berserker drug did not have the full support of the entire board but he trusted his long-term ally Walter Mendel. If Mendel supported Berserker, that was good enough for him. DeVere was also pleased the Chinese would be given a run for their money in Taiwan by an army prepared to fight to the death. Even if a few terrorists did manage to get their hands on the drug, he had every confidence the US special forces would deal with them.

He watched his new foreman for a few more minutes. The huge employee was the model of hard-working efficiency. DeVere enjoyed hearing the gentle hum of the production lines from his vantage point in his elevated office. To him, it sounded as beautiful as a Mozart concerto.

Twenty minutes later, an ear-piercing hooter shattered the tranquillity of the manufacturing complex. A revolving red light flashed urgently from the Berserker line. The workers stopped what they were doing and waited for instructions from the new foreman. Smoke was billowing from the motor of an industrial mixing bowl. The foreman immediately closed down the line and isolated the motor. He then guided the workers out of the clean room's airlocked doors until the area was empty. Picking up the communication phone, the foreman advised Mr DeVere in a perfect East Coast American accent that he had the situation under control. He had to replace a couple of bearings in the mixer and then the workforce would be able to return to their stations in less time than it would take for their usual mid-morning coffee break.

Mungo Dalgety unscrewed the cowling from the mixer's motor and removed all evidence of the potassium nitrate smoke bomb that he had placed in the motor's wiring system half an hour earlier. He replaced the cowling and retested the motor. All appeared to be working well. He tipped the black Berserker powder out of the mixing bowl into a large bag that he had carried into the clean room under his overalls. He considered for a moment that the powder smelled similar to his favourite blend of tea: PG Tips. He then removed the ten-kilogram bag of marijuana powder that he had smuggled into the clean room and poured it into the mixing bowl that he had just emptied. The first contaminated Berserker tablets would be rolling off the production line just in time for the FDA audit that he had arranged for later that afternoon. He returned to the phone and reported to DeVere that the situation was resolved and the workforce could return to their stations on the production line.

Mungo remained another ten minutes in the clean room while the incoming staff settled themselves back into their workspaces. He then exited smartly with ten kilograms of Berserker under his white overalls. Once in the changing room, he removed his clean room garb. He eased the plastic bag containing the black powder out from under his overalls and into the clothes locker in front of him. He threw his hat, overshoes, gloves and mask into the waste bin that was next to the lockers.

As he turned around, two Napier & Beckett security guards confronted him. 'Would you mind coming with us, sir?' said the taller of the two guards. 'Someone would like a quiet word with you.'

\* \* \*

Sam waited patiently while Mendel took a call on his mobile phone.

‘Hello, Barbara ... what? The silly bitch has smashed my golf trophy? ... You can’t find your diamond earring? Do you think the cleaning lady has stolen it? Well, I don’t care if Reineker is not being paid for cleaning the house. She is going to get the belting of her life when I get home ... look, Barbara, sometimes it’s the only way to make them learn ... must go. I have a spot of bother in the office ... you too, dear.’

Mendel took another drink of water and looked Sam up and down.

‘Dr Clayton tells me you are fond of your great-uncle Roy and that he lives on his own in a remote corner of Scotland,’ said Walter Mendel. ‘You must be concerned for his safety. After all, we live in violent times.’

‘Not at all. I don’t have any concerns,’ replied Sam.

Mendel laughed. ‘I don’t need the services of one of the world’s pre-eminent psychologists to tell me that you’re lying. You must do better than that, Sam, or I will have to terminate this discussion.’

‘I have no concerns for Roy’s safety because he has at least half of Scotland’s SAS special forces looking out for him at the moment. Napier & Beckett’s security thugs are not the brightest, but neither are they suicidal.’

Mendel looked at Dr Clayton, indicating he wanted her to determine if Sam was bluffing, but Sam’s body language was confident – even a touch arrogant. She shook her head at Mendel.

Mendel put on a pair of reading glasses and read a few lines from a memo that had recently been sent to him. ‘Professor Woodstock has told me that you may be under the misapprehension that you have some obscure claim on the company’s shares?’

Sam shrugged his shoulders. ‘I am George Napier’s closest living descendant.’

‘We have checked out the ownership rights to the company and Napier sold out his shareholding in 1864 for a fraction of their value. You have nothing. I suggest you walk out of the office door now while you still have some dignity, Jardine.’

‘You have obviously not checked out the original deed of sale. Napier imposed strict

conditions when he disposed of his shares. That was why he was prepared to let them go cheaply. Since you became CEO, Napier & Beckett has breached all of Napier's conditions.' Sam reached into his briefcase and produced a photocopy of the 1864 Deeds of Sale, which he handed to Mendel. The deeds were in Napier's spidery style of writing which Mendel struggled to read. He reached for his reading glasses once more but he still could not make any sense of the document. Sam handed Mendel the typed transcript.

'George Napier sold his shares to Nathaniel Beckett in December 1864 for two hundred thousand dollars. There were many conditions attached to the sale, as he wanted to lock in a mechanism to ensure that the company would continue to act in an ethical manner once he retired. If any of the conditions were breached then George Napier, his direct descendant or his nominated beneficiary would be granted an option to buy back a five per cent shareholding at the same rate of sale adjusted for inflation. That's around five million dollars and would make the buyer the single biggest shareholder in the company. The original intent was that this person of influence would steer the company back to its correct moral course.'

'We could challenge the conditions. We have not actually *sold* any Berserker to the government yet.'

'The conditions state that Napier & Beckett must not under any circumstances conduct research into, manufacture, distribute or sell Berserker or any antidote product related to the drug. My lawyers have checked the deeds; they're watertight.'

'I see there is a time limit to the conditions,' said Mendel.

'Correct. It's one hundred and fifty years.'

Mendel did a quick calculation in his head and his shoulders slumped, taking the edge off his arrogant demeanour. The conditions remained in force for a further four months. Enough time for Sam to pursue his agenda if he wished to do so.

'You don't have five million dollars, Jardine. We have checked out your finances and if I may say so, they do not make pretty reading,' said Mendel.

Sam reached into his briefcase and brought out a loan document faxed from the Yorkshire Bank made out for five million dollars.

'Five million dollars for a five per cent shareholding in a company worth nearly thirty billion dollars was an easy decision for the Yorkshire Bank. They even offered me an

Amex Black card to go with the loan.’

‘I will still have control over the board. You cannot force me to resign or to scrap the Berserker program.’ Mendel’s face was becoming redder by the minute.

There is an additional condition in the deeds of sale document. If it is ever proven that Berserker has been used in a military conflict situation, past or present, then the current CEO must tender his immediate resignation.’

Mendel took off his reading glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. ‘No-one will be able to prove that we have ever used the drug in a military situation. The last known user of Berserker died over seventy years ago.’

Sam produced the tin that Roy had given him at the Maryburgh Inn. The tin had the faded Napier & Beckett logo on the lid and the Berserker compound formula on the label. Sam also had a certificate from the MHRA confirming that tiny amounts of Berserker drug had been detected in the tin. He handed the certificate to Mendel.

‘This is meaningless. No-one can prove it was used in battle. We have checked. Everyone involved in the Operation Clipper trial died in battle or by lethal injection after the war.’

‘That is true of the American soldiers, but my uncle witnessed the effects of the trial firsthand. I have his sworn witness statement.’ He slid the five sheets of typed paper over to Mendel.

‘I assume you have more,’ said Mendel, looking at Sam’s sheaf of documents that were laid out in front of him.

‘My colleagues have gathered samples from the Alexandria Berserker production line and we already have copies of the Berserker files downloaded from the servers.’

‘What else?’ asked Mendel, resigned to the fact that he was going to have to make a deal with Sam.

‘So obsessed was George Napier with the ethical integrity of the company that he made the first Nathaniel Beckett swear that the company should only be headed by someone born into the Napier or Beckett families. You see, despite their differences, George Napier believed that the Becketts would honour their word. He wrote a condition that any decision to vote for a head of the company who was not a Napier or a Beckett must be ratified at an extraordinary general meeting. The most immediate descendant of

George Napier was to chair the meeting.’ Sam looked at Mendel. ‘Mr Mendel, in my opinion your recent breaches of the deeds of sale do not make you a worthy successor to the late Nathaniel Beckett.’

Mendel looked at Dr Clayton and nodded to her.

‘Mr Mendel has a proposition for you, Sam,’ said Dr Clayton. ‘As you know, Mr Mendel has always had the greatest of respect for you and your negotiating abilities. That was why he insisted on meeting you in London. He knows that you care deeply about the company. He will not ask much of you and will be happy to concede to your demands. Berserker was only ever a means of financing the development of Senzar and the eradication of Alzheimer’s, which we know is dear to your heart.’ Her voice was melodic and soothing, her words reassuring and reasonable. She leaned forwards towards Sam, pushing out her ample bosom.

‘Mr Mendel would like you to have a position on the board as head of ethics. Of course, you would be remunerated attractively and based here in Alexandria so that you could use your positive influence to the greatest effect.’ She fiddled with the exquisite diamond pendant that was hanging from a gold chain around her neck. Sam relaxed as he felt the powerful force of her personality and her deep, comforting voice soothe his mind.

‘You will make a brilliant team, Sam. Walter only asks that you vote for him in the boardroom for the next six months. It is a sign of his deep respect for you.’ The diamond pendant was taking on a rhythmic, swinging movement and was twirling on its chain. All the colours of the spectrum were reflecting off the beautifully crafted diamond. Sam felt like sleeping. It had been a stressful five days since he landed at Washington airport. The jetlag must be kicking in. He just needed Mendel’s signature on the resignation letter that he had ready in his briefcase and he could relax.

‘You know you can trust Mr Mendel. He has your best interests at heart. Sam, once you sign the documents we have prepared for you, you will experience a great feeling of inner peace and accomplishment. You must place your signature on these two sheets of paper and then you will be able to sleep away your jetlag.’ The diamond pendant was creating beautiful images in his mind as she handed him Mendel’s gold pen. Dr Clayton’s silky voice sounded reassuring and genuine. The thought was so comforting. The gold nib of the Schaeffer hovered over the signature box.

‘I’m so sorry about your glass of water, Mr Mendel. I really shouldn’t have done what I did,’ said Sam.

‘What the hell are you talking about?’ Mendel snarled, shocked at Sam’s latest revelation. Sam was stung by Mendel’s aggressive tone and tore his gaze away from Dr Clayton’s diamond pendant.

‘My colleague mixed a whole packet of Cerebulin into your water. We knew you wouldn’t drink the English Breakfast tea.’

‘You crazy limey bastard! I will have your throat ripped out for this.’

‘It’s okay, Mr Mendel. We have prepared the antidote in the orange juice. He looked at his watch. You still have at least five minutes in which to drink the antidote before you lapse into an imbecilic state.’ Sam picked up the orange juice from the middle of the table but held it away from Mendel. The top inch of orange juice spilled onto the Axminster carpet.

‘Be careful, you idiot!’ Mendel shouted. Sam spilled another two inches onto the carpet.

‘That was careless of me, Mr Mendel; it must be the jetlag. I can’t believe how tired this discussion has made me. I will try not to spill anymore.’

Mendel looked at him, imploring him to take more care.

‘I have been reassured that you have drunk from the same batch of Cerebulin that was administered to Paul Knight. His doctors said it was a miracle he was able to make a recovery. Most people would not have been so lucky.’

‘Tell me he’s bluffing, Aneka,’ Mendel implored, his eyes were pleading with her to do so. Dr Clayton looked confused. She did not believe Sam was capable of such an act but the look in his eyes was resolute.

‘What do you want me to do?’ Mendel asked, looking overwhelmed.

‘There is a chance he might be bluffing, Mr Mendel. His body language is mixed,’ said Dr Clayton. Sam tipped the glass again. The orange juice slopped around perilously close to the rim.

‘For God’s sake man, stop tipping the bloody glass!’

‘But Dr Clayton made me so tired,’ objected Sam.

‘It won’t happen again Sam,’ Dr Clayton said.

‘Did you not notice that the water tasted odd when you drank from the glass, Mr Mendel?’

‘It did seem slightly bitter,’ admitted Mendel. Sweat was trickling down Mendel’s forehead in rivulets.

‘He’s making auto-suggestions,’ warned Dr Clayton. ‘In your state of mind, you will internalise any plausible propositions that he puts to you. You should resist the urge to comply.’

‘For God’s sake, Anneka, shut your mouth,’ spat Mendel.

Sam reached into his briefcase and pulled out two copies of the resignation letter he had prepared for Mendel. He slid them both across the table.

‘You need to sign the documents in the two spaces indicated by the “*sign here*” stickers. If you would be so kind as to countersign the documents, Dr Clayton.’ He handed the Schaeffer fountain pen back to Mendel. Mendel did not hesitate and scribbled his signature on both documents. He passed them over to Dr Clayton.

‘Sign!’ Mendel said looking her in the eyes. She did so reluctantly and passed the documents back to Sam, who put them into his briefcase. He placed the orange juice glass in front of Mendel who drank the remaining liquid like a man who had just run a marathon.

‘You will be hearing from me shortly about the timing of the extraordinary general meeting,’ said Sam as he walked towards the door.

‘Sam, I have to know. Were you bluffing about the Cerebulin?’ queried Dr Clayton.

‘Does it matter, Dr Clayton? In the end, Mr Mendel and I finally hit some common ground on matters of “ethics and reputation”.’

‘You do know that you’ve wasted your time, don’t you?’ said Mendel, determined to get in the last word. ‘The first shipment of Berserker sets sail for Taiwan on Monday. The antidote production line has been installed in the most secure location on earth where even you could not negotiate your way past security.’

‘We shall see if I’ve wasted my time, Mr Mendel.’

‘I would be more concerned about staying alive, if I were you. You have done well to get to this point, but no-one that has crossed me to the extent that you have has lived to tell the tale!’ Mendel gripped the arm of his chair with one hand and pulled at his tie and

top button of his shirt with the other.

Sam's phone beeped. He was surprised to see a text from Dr Kearney imploring him to meet him outside his office as soon as possible. There was something terribly amiss with Cassie. Sam raced out of Mendel's office and sprinted towards the psychosis research building. As he ran, he shuddered at the thought of what Cassie might have done. Images flew into his head from the memoir he had read on the plane. He smelled smoke from a hundred campfires and heard the sharpening of swords and cleaning of rifles as seventeen hundred troops prepared for a battle that had taken place two hundred years ago.

## CHAPTER 21

*25<sup>th</sup> July 1814 – Lundy's Lane, Niagara Falls.*

*'I am sorry, Lieutenant. I tried everything in my power to persuade Nova's cavalry to join us today. She has decided to pack up her camp and will be heading towards the Midwest frontier as soon as she is ready,' said John Norton, the leader of the Confederate Indians.*

*'Did she leave a message for me?' I asked.*

*'She told me to send you her love and may your God protect you on this desperate day.'*

*I looked away from the tall, handsome figure of John Norton, for I did not want him to see the sadness in my eyes. This was to be a day for only the bravest of souls and there was no place for sentiment. Nova had been appalled when I told her that as a woman she could never become a British officer. Nova insisted that her braves needed her to lead them into battle as their chief and as a British officer; if not today, at least after she had proved her bravery and skill during a cavalry charge. There was no room for compromise. She would not look at me after that conversation and I feared I had lost her forever. I had hoped that Norton would be able to talk some sense into her, but she was a proud and wilful woman and she refused to discuss the matter further.*

*'Thank you, Captain. Good luck to you and the Indian light infantry.'* I saluted Norton, who rode off to supervise his troops. I had managed to locate my battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Gordon early that morning. He was delighted to see me, for he had seen me fall at Chippawa and had believed me dead until Norton reported to him that I was recuperating with the Shawnee.

*'Good to see you, Lieutenant.'* He shook me by the hand. *'Bad news though. The Royal Scots received such a mauling at Chippawa that we have been assigned to the reserve.'*

*'Terrible luck, sir,'* I replied, although a large part of me was grateful I would not be in the front-line for the second time in a month.

*'We will be positioned at the rear on the left side of the battlefield guarding the*

*Portage Road.'*

*The British had a strong position to defend. The hill would represent a formidable obstacle to the advancing American troops and our five field guns had an excellent field of view from which they could fire at the enemy. I could hear the roar of Niagara Falls less than a mile away to the south-east. The plume of spray hanging over the falls was so close, I felt I could almost reach out and touch it.*

*'We need to hold out for about three hours as we are expecting reinforcements from the north. Once the reinforcements arrive we should be in a strong enough position to halt the American advance,' said Colonel Gordon. 'Keep your head down, Napier. I wouldn't want to lose you twice!'*

*'No, sir!'*

*The Americans under Brigadier General Scott began their attack at six o'clock in the evening. Over one thousand American infantry soldiers stormed up the in an attempt to seize our guns. At that time, the British Army had about seventeen hundred men defending our position.*

*From my position of safety in the reserves, I did not yet know that the point of crisis in the battle was to shift from the British centre to the left flank where we were positioned. This American attack nearly cost me my life and put the fate of Upper Canada in the balance. The American battalion marched along the west bank of the Niagara River under cover of the woods in an attempt to outflank the British left. By sheer luck, the Americans found a disused track, which they used to bypass the British flank. The American major found himself at the rear of the British troops and caused such massive destruction that our entire left wavered and fell back. At that decisive moment, the American commander General Scott was assaulting our centre while Major Jessop and his battalion pushed home his attack on our rear and left. The British Army shuddered like a sword that had been caught between a hammer and an anvil. I watched Colonel Gordon of the Royal Scots assess the situation.*

*'Lieutenant Napier, take the Royal Scots and drive back the American battalion that is attacking our rear to the junction of the Portage Road and Lundy's Lane.'*

*'Yes, sir!'*

*'And Napier?'*

*'Yes, sir?'*

*'You are to hold out till the enemy is defeated. There can be no surrender or we will lose Upper Canada.'*

*'You can count on the Royal Scots, Colonel.'*

*'Of course. Good luck, Lieutenant.'*

*The Royal Scots gathered under the direction of the sergeants and corporals and we marched at the double to intercept Major Jessop's American battalion. As we closed to within fifty yards, we could witness the slaughter that they were wreaking on the British Eighth Regiment, who were shocked to find the Americans attacking their rear. Most were fleeing the battle scene as the Royal Scots approached the Americans. I ordered the Royal Scots to fire a volley of musket balls at our enemies. The Americans reeled at our volley but did not fall back. Their expert sharpshooters returned our fire and inflicted terrible damage on our troops.*

*We were holding our own but after an hour of fierce fighting, my muscles ached and my throat burned for lack of water. I saw Colonel Gordon about ten yards to my left. He was an expert swordsman. He and a dozen of his troops were keeping a party of attacking Americans at bay. I went over to his side. There was a standoff between his small party and the Americans. Neither side knew how to press home an advantage. Colonel Gordon looked at me.*

*'Ah, Lieutenant Napier. Good to see you are still alive.'* He had a deep cut running down the length of his thigh, but appeared unaware of the wound.

*'You had best get your leg seen to, Colonel. You are losing a lot of blood.'*

*'Later, Lieutenant, later.'*

*'Can we hold this position for much longer?' I asked.*

*'Unfortunately, we are isolated and exposed here. They will slaughter us if we remain here much longer. We could withdraw beyond Lundy's Lane and give our infantry better protection than we are doing now. It would also give us more time for our reinforcements to arrive.'*

*'Should I give the order to withdraw behind Lundy's Lane, sir?'*

*'Yes, we should do it now while the American troops are blown and before their marksmen have inflicted too much damage. Make sure we withdraw in good order, or our*

*Canadian Militia will panic.'*

*'Yes, sir!'*

*As we adjusted our position, Colonel Gordon asked about our reserves of ammunition.*

*'We used up a lot during the manoeuvre,' I replied.*

*'Take the ammunition from the militia and send them to the rear. They have done as much as they can today.'*

*'Yes, sir.' As we redistributed the ammunition, I glanced at the junction of the main Portage Road and Lundy's Lane, which had been taken by the Americans. I saw a large column of wounded British soldiers and messengers heading straight towards the junction. About fifteen horses of British cavalry were escorting them. They were unaware that the junction was now in American hands who were using the road to make their way to the rear of the British troops for medical treatment. I spotted our commander, Lieutenant General Drummond; he had been shot in the arm.*

*'My God, that's General Drummond and there is Merritt the Canadian militia cavalry captain,' said Colonel Gordon. 'They are heading straight into the arms of Major Jessop's light infantry. They will be killed or captured.'*

*'Should I try to intercept them?' I volunteered.*

*'I fear it will be too late but you can try.'*

*I asked for twenty volunteers and was proud to say that some of my finest soldiers decided to accompany me on this near-suicidal mission to intercept the wounded British before they blundered into the junction of the two roads. We sprinted down the hill towards a small cluster of trees that gave us some protection from the accurate fire of the American sharpshooters. We were too late to intercept the British column, but we directed murderous fire at the Americans in an attempt to warn the wounded column that they were walking into a trap. I saw the Canadian militia Captain Merritt look our way with a puzzled expression, but he kept on riding towards his inevitable capture or death. In complete frustration, we poured more musket fire towards the waiting Americans. I saw the look of surprise on the face of the wounded British soldiers as they came face-to-face with the muskets of an entire American battalion. I saw the British General Drummond exchange words with the American Major Jessop and then hand over his*

*sword in surrender. I fired my last musket ball. Most of my men had already run out of ammunition.*

*'Let's get out of here before Jessop realises we have no ammunition,' I said to my men. However, Jessop was one step ahead of me. As he was making plans to dispatch his high-ranking prisoners back to the American lines, he sent out a dozen men to block our retreat. Jessop had outsmarted me. I should have pulled back once Drummond and Merritt's capture was inevitable and before we had used up all of our ammunition. I found it difficult to look my men in the eye, for I had let them down. They faced death or the certainty of capture and the long hardships that imprisonment entailed.*

*'Should we fight them off with our bayonets?' asked a fresh-faced Private Doogan.*

*'We cannot face musket balls with bayonets, Private. They could stand their distance and pick us off.'*

*'Will Colonel Gordon come to rescue us?' asked Corporal Balnaves.*

*'Is that thunder I hear, or just the sound of the Niagara?' asked Private Murray looking to the sky.*

*'It is probably a cannon from the hill,' I responded. Jessop's troops were about fifty yards from us. They were getting bolder by the minute as they realised we were out of ammunition. An American skirmisher fired a round and hit Private Doogan in the shoulder. He fell to the ground, but bravely rose to his feet clutching at his wound.*

*'Five years in the Peninsular and I didn't suffer a single scratch,' he said bitterly.*

*Corporal Balnaves, who had one musket ball left fired off a shot and by sheer luck caught an American light infantry trooper in the leg. The Americans dived for the ground and sent a volley of musket balls flying over our heads. A dozen more Americans joined their colleagues in the open field to assist with our capture and they began firing murderously at us. Another of my men was hit in the chest. He was dead before he hit the ground.*

*'The thunder is getting louder,' remarked Private Murray.*

*'It's not coming from the hill, it's coming from the south,' I said. The thunder was unmistakable now. I looked behind us at the darkening horizon. There was a large cloud of dust billowing up into the sky about half a mile away. Jessop's detachment of American soldiers were now only about thirty yards away from us. An American officer*

*called on us to surrender, but I ignored him and listened instead at the wall of noise that was closing in rapidly on the battleground.*

*'It's a cavalry charge,' I said. I could pick up the sound of massed hoof beats pounding the earth. 'But there are no British troops to the south.'*

*'It must be the Americans then?' said Corporal Balnaves. There is nothing an infantry soldier fears more than being caught in the open by a sword wielding, merciless cavalry. I could see him shudder at the prospect of such a death. Out of the gloom, we saw a line of over a hundred horsemen emerge with flashing swords at the ready. A command was given by one of the leading riders of the approaching cavalry in a clear female voice. The command was in the Shawnee language. The Indian horsemen erupted into a cacophony of noise as they sang out their terrifying war cry. They had held their discipline for a long time but at this moment, they had blood lust. They had a large number of their adversaries caught and exposed in the open field. They charged past us with swords in hand right into the detachment of Americans who had come to capture us. My men cheered the Shawnee until their voices cracked. Too late, the American detachment realised that they were defenceless and about to be slaughtered. Most threw down their muskets and tried to sprint back to their lines, but it was futile. All were hacked down where they stood. The Shawnee showed no mercy, for it was not their custom. They wanted their enemies to fear them in battle. Nova was leading her braves and her sword slashed down on the remaining Americans in the open. Despite the heat of the battle, I felt much sympathy for my adversaries as they were slaughtered by the sword. This was the moment for Nova's cavalry to disengage from the battle. They had achieved their immediate objective.*

*However, Nova had tasted blood and wanted more. She could see the British prisoners being herded down the Portage Road by Jessop's main body of troops towards the American lines. She could see that his troops still threatened our left flank and that the battle was still in the balance. Nova wheeled her horse to the east and screamed out a most terrifying war cry. My remaining men crossed themselves for the scream foretold of the slaughter to come. One hundred Shawnee cavalry turned to follow her and they charged headlong towards the ranks of disciplined American light infantry in their entrenched position. The Americans prepared to fire a massed volley at the Indians. I*

*steeled myself for the inevitable slaughter of the Indian cavalry that had to follow. Had I not spent countless hours teaching the Shawnee the futility of a cavalry charge against a well-defended infantry position? I feared for Nova. All muskets and rifles seemed to be aimed at her. Nova's warriors took up her blood-curdling war cry and I was sure that I saw many American rifles waver in fear at that terrifying noise. The Americans unleashed their volley and the whole scene disappeared into a mass of gunpowder smoke and darkness. I could not see the impact of Nova's final charge, but I heard the screaming of men and horses, the discharge of muskets and the chopping and slicing of sword on bone and flesh. It was the sound from a nightmare, and all the time I agonised that Nova must have been killed in that last suicidal charge.*

*I led my small band of troops back towards the British lines. The Royal Scots were euphoric to have survived the American attack and were in awe of the bravery of the Shawnee charge, but I could not help being in a state of extreme anxiety for my love, the brave daughter of Tecumseh. We turned around at the sound of the returning Shawnee horses. More than half of the braves had survived the charge. The little Indian horses were blown, but the braves were in a state of exhilaration. I spotted Two Bears riding back on his piebald horse and he was grinning from ear to ear.*

*'Two Bears!' I yelled. 'Is Nova safe?' But he did not have time to answer. I heard the sound of horse's hooves cantering up behind me and Nova's voice shout out. 'I am behind you, my love!' She leaned out of her saddle and stretched her left hand down towards me. Her right hand was holding her bloodied sword aloft. I ran alongside her magnificent black horse, took hold of her hand and with surprising strength she helped me launch myself into the saddle behind her. I gripped her by the waist and whispered into her ear.*

*'My beautiful Nova, you came back! You have shown the world that you are a warrior princess.'* Nova coaxed one last effort from her tiring black horse. We galloped towards the British lines and Nova whooped for joy. The Indian braves, the Canadian militia and the British soldiers cheered us all the way back to our lines, for the Shawnee charge had destroyed Jessop's American light infantry battalion and most of their British prisoners had managed to escape.

**26<sup>th</sup> July 1814, Lundy's Lane, Niagara Falls.**

*It had been a desperate end to the battle. Twelve hundred fresh American reinforcements under Major General Jacob Brown had arrived at the battle scene with his 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade in the gathering darkness. His troops wreaked havoc on the fatigued British. But by this time, British reinforcements had also arrived at the battle scene. In some of the fiercest fighting ever to have taken place, the British launched three waves of attacks, each bloodier than the one before. At midnight, the Americans realised they had almost run out of water, ammunition and men. Only seven hundred of their troops were left standing and the American General Jacob Brown was severely wounded. General Brown ordered his American troops to abandon the battlefield. Our troops were in a state of complete exhaustion and could not pursue the retreating Americans. Both sides had suffered huge numbers of casualties but the British had gained a hard-fought and significant victory. The American invasion of Canada had been halted but they had proven themselves equal to the British in battle. The remnants of their forces retreated to Fort Erie and General Brown's plans to advance further into Upper Canada had been shattered forever.*

\* \* \*

*It became apparent something was wrong with Nova the day after her heroic cavalry charge. It took our soldiers until the early hours of the morning for the euphoria and terror of the battle to pass. Those who were lucky enough to have escaped unharmed from the nightmare of the conflict rushed to find out if their friends and colleagues had also survived. Many took to hard liquor and others slumped traumatised into whatever form of shelter they could find.*

*Nova and I walked hand in hand to my tent that was far to the rear of the battlefield. We kissed and caressed each other's bodies all the way there. No sooner had we entered the tent than Nova ripped off my jacket, trousers and shirt as if she knew we were about to be intimate for the very last time. The gift of Nova's body that night was one I had not expected, and our passion knew no bounds. Nova was young and beautiful and had the*

*energy and strength of a goddess. Time and again, we made love. Each time was more thrilling and sensuous than the last until I collapsed exhausted into her arms and fell into a deep sleep.*

*When I awoke, Nova had gone. I scouted the camp but there was no sign of her or her braves. I asked the sentries if they had seen the Shawnee leave, but they had departed like ghosts in the early light of the dawn. It was at that moment that a terrible thought struck me. In my distress over Nova's earlier decision not to join the British troops at Lundy's Lane, I had neglected to tell her that the British had burned the fields that contained the antidote plants for the Berserker drug. These were the plants the Indians referred to as the 'Maneto leaf'. I prayed that Nova and her braves had not taken the Berserker drug before their cavalry charge. However, their full-frontal assault straight into the teeth of the well-entrenched American light infantry position suggested they had done so. With rising panic, I rushed to find Captain John Norton.*

*'Captain, have you seen Nova this morning?'*

*'Good morning, Lieutenant. I assumed she was with you.'*

*'I fear that she and her braves may have taken Berserker before their charge.'*

*Norton looked at me with a furious expression. 'You did tell her that all traces of the Maneto leaf have been destroyed by the British?'*

*'I did not think to tell her. I assumed that she and her clan were migrating to the Midwest.'*

*'Then you have condemned her to a fate worse than death,' he said. 'She will have to roam the plains as an outcast with her mind in turmoil and her heart forever at war. If she ever bears a child, which is most unlikely as her people will fear her, then her child will suffer the same torment.'*

*'We must do something,' I said in desperation. 'Would some of your soldiers have concealed quantities of the Maneto leaf?'*

*'General Drummond has threatened to hang anyone found in possession of Maneto. I do not hold out much hope.'*

*'Perhaps Nova's clan have some of the Maneto leaf in their camp,' I said. 'For they are not aware of General Drummond's orders. Perhaps even now she is rushing back there to take the antidote.'*

*'Let us hope you are right.'* He paused thoughtfully then added. *'Lieutenant, we have not a moment to lose. Her camp is not far from the route that the Americans will be taking as they retreat to Fort Erie. If they attack her camp, she will be doomed to live out the rest of her life as a Sleepwalker.'*

*It took two hours to gather fifty battle weary soldiers for an expedition south. Most were Mohawk Indian light infantry troops. It was about eight miles hard riding to Black Creek and then a further three miles to the west as we followed the creek along its north bank. By mid-afternoon, it became obvious that something was amiss. We saw smoke rising in the distance and heard the occasional sound of wailing and shrieking carried on the wind. Twenty minutes later, we emerged at the grass clearing near to the woods. All the tepees had been torched and the spare horses and animals had been driven away. The American troops had spared the women and children but otherwise it was a scene of complete devastation. I saw Nova and Two Bears in the distance looking at the wreck that had been their camp. Her braves had ridden off in search of the American troops that had caused such devastation. We rode up to them. I was intent on asking them if they had taken the Berserker drug but I had no need to do so. Nova looked me straight in the eyes and I recoiled in horror. She looked as if she were possessed by a legion of demons and she was shaking violently. I have never seen such fury in the eyes of any person before or since that day. Murder was in her heart and could manifest itself at any moment.*

*'Nova, what have I done? I have destroyed the one thing that gives meaning to my life. I cannot fight on without you.'*

*Nova looked at me and her fury abated. It was replaced by a feeling of overwhelming sadness and she struggled to express her sorrow. 'If you have pity for me and my poor Indians, you must be strong, Lieutenant. If you have any influence with the great and the powerful, then you must use it for the good of my people, for I see storms of destruction looming over our ancestral lands.'*

*'That is not true, Nova! We will win this war and then your Indians will be free and prosperous in their new country.'*

*'We both saw the ferocity and the barbarity of the white soldiers at Niagara yesterday. There are too many white people with guns in their hands and designs on our*

*homeland. They cannot be stopped by courage and virtue alone. You must do what you can, Lieutenant, to help my people fight for their survival.'*

*'Let me come with you,' I implored. I went to embrace her but she held up a hand to stop me.*

*'We can never be together again, my love, for my destiny is to wander this earth alone and in torment.'*

*'No, my darling. We will find a way.'*

*'No-one can help me now. That is the curse of the Sleepwalker. I will kill at the slightest provocation. My people will fear me and try to destroy me if I return.'*

*'Nova, I swear to you that I will not rest till I have found a cure to this dreadful curse.'*

*'It may not be in this lifetime, my sweet Lieutenant.'*

*'Then I will build a company dedicated to the eradication of the Sleepwalker Legacy. It will be my atonement to you.'*

*'You are a good man, Lieutenant. You have my forgiveness. Do not torture yourself with grief. You have too much to achieve to waste your life on something that cannot be undone.'*

*'Nova, it can be undone. It has to be.'*

*'I must leave now. The one kindness I ask of you is that you remember me always as you saw me last night. I wish to remain forever in your heart as your warrior princess.'*

*I wished with all my being to hold her in my arms one last time, but Nova would not allow it. Instead, Captain Norton stepped forwards.*

*'Nova. General Drummond asked me to perform one last duty on his behalf.' He produced a bright scarlet cavalry captain's jacket from his saddlebag and a handwritten citation from the general. He read it to Nova.*

*'For extreme bravery on the field of battle, for repulsing the American light infantry battalion at our most extreme moment of danger and for freeing the British prisoners, you are hereby commissioned to the rank of captain of the British Cavalry. We ask you to accept the thanks and gratitude of the people of Britain and Upper Canada.' He handed over the scarlet jacket and the citation.*

*I felt inadequate after Norton had given her such a noble token. I delved deep into my*

*saddlebag and retrieved a modest carving that I had been working on in the days before the battle. It was a representation of a panther no bigger than the size of my hand.*

*'Please keep this trinket close to you always as a symbol of my undying love, Nova, and may God watch over you.'*

*Nova took the carving from me as if I had given her the most precious gift on earth and held it briefly to her lips. Before I could say another word, she mounted her horse and coaxed the black stallion into a gallop towards the setting sun.*

## CHAPTER 22

Sam met Dr Kearney outside his office in the psychosis research building. Sam was sweating after his run from Mendel's office.

'What is it, Jed?' he asked breathlessly.

'I'm afraid I've let you both down. I told Cassie she could use my PC to send an email to the Leadenhall office. It's against all the rules as my server is restricted due to the confidential research material it contains.' Dr Kearney looked dejected. 'Sam, I just saw the group head of security, John Evans, walk into my office. He is in there with Cassie.'

Sam experienced a feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach.

'I felt terribly sorry for the poor girl,' Kearney continued. 'I just found out she's a hereditary Sleepwalker. It's a dreadful condition and there is no known cure. Anyway, I thought no harm would come if I allowed her to use my office for ten minutes. It seems as though security is much tighter under Walter Mendel's leadership than it used to be.'

'Jed, I can sort out this little misunderstanding.'

'You think you can? I would be so grateful if you could. This could be the end of my career if word got out that I allowed someone unauthorised access to my office.'

'There's absolutely nothing to worry about. Rachael asked Cassie and I to carry out an audit on John Evans' security team and we needed your office to make the scenario realistic.'

'Should I have allowed Cassie in?' asked Dr Kearney, looking worried. 'Was that part of the audit?'

'Don't worry, Jed. You are not part of the scenario. But I'd be grateful if you would let me do all the talking if anyone asks about it later.'

'Anything. You have my support, Sam.'

Sam knocked on the door and entered Jed's office with all the confidence he could muster. The scene in front of him looked perilous. John Evans was becoming increasingly officious while Cassie was seething at Evans with open fury. Sam was alarmed to see that Cassie had a pair of sharp scissors in her hand that she was holding below the desk.

Evans was unaware Cassie held the scissors and was lecturing her. ‘Frankly, Miss Gilchrist, it is in your interests to cooperate with the impending investigation. It will make things much easier for you in the long run. I would advise you to follow me to the security office.’

‘Ah, Mr Evans – may I call you John? I see you’ve met Miss Beckett’s executive assistant, Cassie Gilchrist.’

Evans wheeled around to face Sam. ‘And who are you?’ He stared at Sam with a look of annoyance. Sam walked towards Dr Kearney’s cluttered desk and put himself between the two adversaries. He pulled up a spare chair and sat down. He also motioned to Cassie to sit down and she reluctantly complied. Evans remained standing, his expression was hostile and his bearing arrogant.

‘I’m afraid you are going to have to sit down to absorb the bad news that I’m about to impart, John.’

‘What are you talking about?’

Sam slipped his hand under the desk and, unseen by Evans, tried to ease the scissors out of Cassie’s iron grip. Cassie was not going to release them easily. He could feel the tension and anger in her taut wrist muscles. She was like a cobra on the verge of a strike. Sam rested his hand over the top of hers and stroked it with as much tenderness as he could muster. Cassie released her grip on the scissors and allowed them to drop onto the thick carpet. She reached for Sam’s hand and gripped it tightly. Sam responded with a tender squeeze.

‘There is no way to break this to you gently, John, so I will come straight out with it. I am Sam Jardine, head of procurement and commercial director in London. Three weeks ago, the procurement department was instructed to outsource the Napier & Beckett security function. I have been tasked with leading the project.’

Evans’ self-important posture deflated like a balloon with a pinhole. His expression changed to one of disbelief and shock. He slumped into the chair opposite Sam and Cassie.

‘This is preposterous. Security is core to any pharmaceutical business. The FDA would not allow it.’

‘Those are the same words the distribution director used when we outsourced his

department,' said Sam sympathetically.

'I need confirmation from Walter Mendel before I acquiesce to the dismantling of my department.'

'Of course you do,' said Sam. 'Although he's rather busy at the moment clearing out his desk following his shock resignation. However, I'm sure Rachael Beckett will give you all the moral support you're going to need in these challenging times.'

Evans, who considered himself a protégé of Mendel, felt his world imploding. 'This is ridiculous. I came in here to investigate the suspicious behaviour of Miss Gilchrist and then I hear this bullshit from you.'

'I can understand your anger, John. That is natural in situations like these. We can assign an outplacement specialist to your case if you wish. The specialist can help you deal with your anger.'

'I don't need a fucking specialist!' Evans retorted. Sam felt Cassie squeeze his hand under the table. She was enjoying Sam's performance.

'Of course, that is your prerogative, John. There's no charge for these services, you know.'

'I don't accept the validity of what you are saying, Mr Jardine. There has to be more going on here than meets the eye.'

'Unless you've been hiding under a rock, John, you will be aware that the only chance this company has of surviving the next two years is to slash its costs. I'm afraid your London security colleagues vastly overspent their budget this year. That put your entire global security operation under financial scrutiny. I hate to say it, John, but it seems that security took its eye off the ball at the worst possible time.' Sam looked at Evans in mock empathy.

'Then why wasn't I informed about this before?'

'The board of directors insisted I undertake an internal audit of your team's performance before we put your department out to tender. Frankly, John, the results have been alarming.'

Evans' jaw dropped. All Napier & Beckett employees were terrified of internal audits.

'What performance issues are you referring to?'

‘Let’s take this morning’s little incident to start with. How long were you in this office waiting for John to respond to our security breach scenario, Miss Gilchrist?’

‘Over one hour,’ replied Cassie. She let go of Sam’s hand and reached out to rest it on Sam’s knee.

‘Over one hour?’ Sam repeated as if he were dismayed at the answer. ‘And what is your performance target to respond to a security breach?’ He looked directly at Evans who just blustered. ‘The audit criteria for a pass on this scenario was twenty minutes.’ Sam said making the figure he had invented seem entirely reasonable.

‘But the circumstances were unusual,’ stammered Evans. ‘I was engaged on another matter. Look, can’t we redo the scenario?’

‘I am afraid the report that will go to the board of directors must be accurate. Can I ask what triggered you to investigate the security breach scenario?’

‘I received an email from London. They advised me that a PC linked to a secure server had been used by three different people in the last hour.’

‘So it took an email from London to prompt you to take action?’

‘Yes, Mr Jardine.’ Evans looked down at the floor.

‘It doesn’t look very good, does it?’

‘But as I said, there were valid reasons for my delay.’

‘I’m sure there were. For your information, the various actions Miss Gilchrist took were all part of the audit scenario. Jed Kearney was asked to provide his office in advance.’

‘So what happens now?’

‘I’ll be making a recommendation to the board that the tender to outsource the security team to a private contractor commences next week. There are some excellent security companies out there. If you cooperate with me, I could recommend that the successful security company hire you as an account manager. Things need not change for you at all – other than the name of your employer.’

‘I can guarantee I will cooperate. My two kids are going through private boarding school. I cannot afford to be out of work.’

‘Splendid, John. There is one small thing though.’

‘What is that, Mr Jardine?’

‘We have to adhere to a charter of respect and politeness to our Napier & Beckett work colleagues. I noticed Miss Gilchrist was distressed when I walked into the room. She was only carrying out her instructions on behalf of the audit team.’

‘Of course. Miss Gilchrist, please accept my sincere apologies. It will not happen again, I promise you.’ Cassie’s hand moved further up Sam’s leg and she squeezed his thigh.

‘Apology accepted, Mr Evans. We can forget this entire event ever took place,’ she said, smiling demurely.

\* \* \*

Mungo considered his options. He could easily take out the two security guards in seconds and make a break for the exit, but he decided to bide his time. He dropped his CleanTough overalls over the ten-kilogram bag of Berserker and closed the locker door. He smiled at the guards and followed them out of the changing room, past the maze of clean rooms. They arrived at the edge of the manufacturing plant and proceeded to climb twenty metal steps to DeVere’s elevated office. Mungo took a moment to look out of the large glass window that gave an unrestricted view of the entire manufacturing operation. Only the animal health products were manufactured in a non-clean room environment. DeVere joined Mungo by the window and followed his gaze.

‘We believe these are the most advanced pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities anywhere in the world,’ he said in his slow Texan drawl. ‘If you like, I can give you a personal tour.’

‘I would like that, sir,’ Mungo replied in his affected American East Coast accent.

‘The whole tour takes six hours. It may be easier if I just show you the animal health lines. That way, we won’t have to exhaust our stock of oversized overalls.’ DeVere chuckled as he looked at Mungo. ‘Did you ever play lineman for the Green Bay Packers?’

‘No sir, I’m more of a rugby man.’

‘You’re probably asking yourself why I invited you up here, Mr Smith. I’ve been looking at your résumé and I have to say, it is most impressive.’

‘Thank you, Mr DeVere.’

‘What you did for us in the clean room just now was inspiring. It was almost as if you handle emergencies like that every day. I could do with a man like you on my management team. Have you thought about a career with Napier & Beckett?’

‘It would be an honour, Mr DeVere, but the agency has me fully booked on other work for the next three weeks. I could consider a more permanent role after that.’

DeVere slapped Mungo on the back. ‘Why doesn’t that surprise me? A man like you must be in heavy demand.’

‘I would still be interested in the tour of the animal health lines – if it’s still on offer.’

‘Of course. I’ll take you round the Kanubis line. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder drugs for small dogs is our bestseller at the moment. It seems that dogs are more important than people in some states.’

\* \* \*

‘Sam, I can’t stay here any longer. I know I would have killed Evans if you hadn’t come in when you did.’

‘We can fly you back to London tomorrow, Cassie. I’m sure they can help you at the Leadenhall Research Centre.’

‘That’s not what I mean, Sam. My illness has progressed too far. I need to be on my own in a secluded place where I can be safe.’

‘Let me come with you, Cassie. I can help you. We’ll find a way together.’

‘No! You can’t, Sam; it’s too late. But you need to be strong. You must destroy every trace of Berserker along with the means of producing it. George Napier has spoken to you through the totem. You need to finish what you started.’

Sam had suspected for some time that Cassie was a direct descendant of Tiva, the granddaughter of Nova who Napier had adopted and brought back with him to Edinburgh. Cassie’s possession of the panther carving that Napier had described in his memoir solidified his certainty and a check of the ‘forefather.com’ website confirmed her ancestry beyond doubt. Sam grimly realised that along with her ancestry, Cassie had almost certainly inherited the Sleepwalker Legacy from Nova and that she was in real danger.

‘Where will you go?’ he asked.

‘Somewhere in the west. In my nightmares, I hear the ghosts of the past reaching out to me. I know I won’t find peace until I understand their message. Somehow, I think it’s all to do with the ghosts of Sand Creek and Denver in Colorado. If I can lay those ghosts to rest, it may help.’

Sam shuddered at the talk of ghosts and the mention of the 1860s massacre. ‘I don’t want to lose you, Cassie. When this is all over, I will come and find you.’

‘You may not like what you find.’

‘I insist you let Mungo watch over you – at least for a while.’

Cassie shrugged her shoulders. ‘If you wish. There’s something else, Sam.’

‘What is it?’

‘You shouldn’t trust Rachael.’

‘I heard she’s having a nervous breakdown and is staying with her sister. How can she be a threat?’

‘It’s just a feeling.’

‘You’re wrong, Cassie. She hates Berserker as much as we do.’

‘Let’s hope so, but I have learned to trust my feelings.’

‘Everyone I’ve spoken to here in Alexandria adores her. Now that Mendel has resigned, they expect her to take over. They are counting on Rachael to turn this company around.’

Cassie ran her hand down the side of Sam’s cheek and kissed him softly. ‘I expect you think I’m being jealous, but I wish it were only jealousy.’

‘I will be on my guard, I promise.’

‘That is all I ask. Did you know that she’s changed her email password and that she hasn’t sent a single email in the two days since I planted the Trojan horse? She still has control of the Berserker formula.’

## CHAPTER 23

*'I have real concerns about Cassie Gilchrist's mental state, Sam. I feel she is endangering the mission,'* wrote Jacques on Instant Messenger.

*'Leave Cassie to me, Jacques. Have you managed to crack Rachael's new email password?'*

*'No. I think she's planning something big. Have you managed to locate her yet?'*

*'Everyone says she's with her sister, but it seems extraordinary that she hasn't sent a single email to anyone with a Leadenhall email address in the last seven days.'*

*'Our information is that Napier & Beckett are going to replicate the Berserker server in the next two days. I don't need to tell you that we need to get the malware active before that happens.'*

*'I have sent her over three emails a day for the last five days. If she replies, that will trigger the Trojan horse, but so far she hasn't done so.'*

*'Is she coming to tomorrow's extraordinary general meeting of the board that you called?'*

*'I am certain of it. She has to be there to be elected as CEO.'*

*'I have to let you know, Sam. Cassie has been making some very strange requests for data from her location in Colorado.'*

*'Such as?'*

*'She asked for the customer contact details of all pet owners in Denver. Specifically, those who buy neurological medication for their pets from Napier & Beckett's major rivals. I hate to say it, Sam, but she has gone over the edge.'*

*'Did you give her the data?'*

*'Yes, but it's the last thing I do for her.'*

*'Understood.'*

\* \* \*

The election of Rachael was unanimous at the Napier & Beckett EGM. It seemed so natural that there should be a true Beckett at the helm and the directors were queuing up

to congratulate Rachael on her appointment as CEO. All expressed confidence that she would guide the company through the next two turbulent years and that Napier & Beckett would once again become the fastest growing pharmaceutical company in the world.

Sam did not have voting rights. He had exercised his one power as a direct descendant of George Napier to call the EGM and to address the meeting. He explained that Mendel had experienced a crisis of conscience over the ethical situation relating to Berserker. He also felt that the financial problems that Napier & Beckett was experiencing were beyond his ability to resolve. Sam explained that Mendel had tendered his resignation to Sam in a most unexpected manner at their recent meeting. Sam explained his role as a direct descendant of one of the two original founding partners was to call the meeting. He said that although he had no voting rights, he endorsed Rachael Beckett as the most suitable candidate to be the next CEO. His motion was duly carried.

Sam watched the dynamics at play in the boardroom during the ten-minute recess that was called after the vote. He stood alone in one corner of the boardroom. His arms were folded and he propped himself against the glass display case containing the ancient Shawnee headdress and the colourful patchwork bag of beads. He was at the opposite end of the room from the press of bodies that surrounded Rachael. He scrutinised her body language, trying to guess her next move.

Rachael had turned up to the EGM with seconds to spare before the midday deadline. She glided into the boardroom with the grace of a Hollywood leading lady. Each step she took to her seat at the top of the boardroom table was elegant and caught the attention of every male in the room. Even Dr Clayton stared at Rachael open-mouthed. Rachael wore a simple black and white dress that flowed stylishly from her shoulders to her narrow waist and down to her knees. Silky white stockings covered her long, slim legs and her shoes were a designer's masterpiece. She had done something remarkable to her hair. It was far shorter than Sam remembered and somehow gave her a professional but stunning appearance. The boardroom contained a hint of Rachael's delicate but extravagantly priced perfume. Sam watched all of those directors who had voted against her three months ago ingratiate themselves to Rachael. De Vere was using all his southern charm and exemplary manners to devastating effect. Sam watched appalled as Dr Clayton, Mendel's most notorious protégé, elbowed her way to the front of the sycophants. Sam

cringed as she curtsied to Rachael and then started a conversation about girls sticking together to break through the Napier & Beckett glass ceiling.

Sam felt happy for the sales director, Paul Knight, who made his first public appearance since his incapacitation. He was in a wheelchair and had two attractive nurses fussing over him, but his prognosis was that he would make a full recovery in time. Only Dr Kearney and Bradley Cooper, the new chief financial officer looked withdrawn and worried.

Rachael glanced through the pack of directors and across the room at Sam and smiled. It was the first time they had exchanged glances since the meeting had started. Sam nodded politely back at Rachael but his stomach was a whirl of conflicting emotions. He had never seen his boss look so beautiful, serene and accomplished. He desperately wanted her to justify the trust he had placed in her, despite all the contrary advice he had received. At the same time, he prepared himself for a battle that could be harder than the one he had experienced with Mendel. Rachael poured herself a half glass of water from the crystal decanter and excused herself from the company of her fellow directors. She sauntered across the room to join him. Sam moved to his left to allow Rachael to rest against the display case next to him.

‘Don’t break the display case, Sam; it’s my favourite,’ she said flippantly, trying to lift him from his mood.

Sam looked at the magnificent headdress and the coloured beads that were spilling out of the patchwork bag. He had to admit, they were spectacular artefacts.

‘I will try not to, Miss Beckett,’ he replied.

‘That’s very reserved of you. Is there anything I should know?’ She took a sip of water from her glass, leaving a perfect ring of pink lipstick on the rim.

‘You were out of contact for two weeks. I almost cancelled my meeting with Walter Mendel.’

‘I had complete trust in you, Sam. My presence would only have made your job harder.’

‘You haven’t replied to any of my emails.’

‘I had reason to believe my account had been compromised. I am also aware that you have not exactly been running to the script.’

‘The script had to adapt to take into account your absence, Rachael.’

‘I’m not criticising you, Sam. You will become successful beyond your wildest expectations if you stay loyal to me.’

Sam turned to face Rachael and looked into her eyes. He had to take a deep breath, she looked so lovely.

‘I’ve done everything you asked, Rachael. But you know there is one thing I want from you in return.’

He held her ice blue eyes, daring her to look away. She held his gaze. It was as if electricity were darting between the two of them. The directors were staring at them. They were out of earshot but they could feel the power of the moment.

‘You will get what you want, Sam, but it may not be exactly the way you intended. You need to trust me a little while longer.’

Before Sam could respond, the boardroom bell sounded indicating that everyone should return to their seats.

Rachael took her place at the head of the boardroom table. She commanded the board of directors with the natural authority of someone who had been Nathaniel Beckett’s granddaughter and favourite for thirty years. To Sam’s surprise, she beckoned him to the seat that she had just vacated to her immediate right. She made the first decision of her new role.

‘As my first act as CEO and managing director, I wish to propose that Sam Jardine be recognised with a vote of thanks for his astute commercial work since he joined our company four months ago. He is without doubt the most gifted commercial negotiator I have ever had the pleasure of working with.’ She smiled at Sam and touched his arm affectionately.

‘Seconded,’ said Dr Kearney.

A sea of hands went up. Dr Clayton was slow on the uptake, but seeing a unanimous vote taking place around her, she also raised her hand.

Rachael moved on to the next agenda item. ‘I would like Dr Kearney to address the board in relation to the recent Senzar negotiations with the FDA. As he will explain, the situation is dire.’

Dr Kearney stood up and gave a long account of the latest failure to obtain approval

from the FDA. The mood in the room, that had been optimistic only minutes earlier, plunged. Dr Kearney returned to his seat like he had just read an obituary at a funeral.

‘I would now like to call on the CFO Bradley Cooper to present us with an emergency financial update. I have to warn you that you must prepare yourself for the worst possible news,’ Rachael said.

Bradley Cooper was a no-nonsense accountant who told things as they were. He handed out a PowerPoint presentation pack to each of the board members. A sea of red ink dominated the accounts. He explained that without FDA approval of Senzar, the company had sufficient cash flow for only a further two months. He advised the board that the banks had all indicated their unwillingness to invest further funds in the company and that a capital raising was out of the question. Napier & Beckett was effectively bankrupt.

There was a stunned silence in the room. After a long pause, the room erupted into a sea of noise. The directors were fighting to make themselves heard over their colleagues. Rachael raised her hand and the room went quiet.

‘I’m afraid Walter Mendel was not as transparent as he should have been with the financial situation. There is no alternative to bankruptcy than selling the business to a competitor.’

The room erupted once more. Sam’s head dropped. He had just taken up his Napier & Beckett share options financed by the Yorkshire Bank’s five million dollars.

Rachael continued. ‘Since I learned the truth of the company’s dire financial situation from my uncle, I have spent the last two weeks in discussions with those competitors who are in a position to make a bid for Napier & Beckett. Only one of those companies is prepared to make a realistic offer.’

‘Which company is that?’ asked DeVere.

‘The pharmaceutical giant, Chivington Laboratories based in Denver, Colorado,’ answered Rachael.

Sam felt the ghosts from Cassie’s nightmares come out to haunt him. Despite the warmth of the boardroom, he shivered. He remembered Cassie’s parting words, ‘*It’s all to do with the ghosts of Sand Creek and Denver in Colorado.*’

‘Chivington Laboratories need a two-thirds’ majority of the board to approve the

offer before they are able to proceed. I am open to questions,' Rachael said.

'How much are they offering?' asked Dr Kearney.

'Two billion.'

'That's less than seven cents in the dollar. Can we get them to improve the offer?' enquired DeVere.

'Perhaps Sam can negotiate something of an improvement.' Rachael looked at Sam, who was still in shock at the sudden developments. He was relieved that his investment in Napier & Beckett's ordinary shares would still yield a healthy return. But at what cost?

'What happens to the directors?' asked Dr Clayton.

'Chivington will accept three Napier & Beckett directors to their board. They have asked me to nominate the appropriate people.'

'What about my shares? I have half a million dollars' worth,' enquired DeVere.

'If they are preferential shares, you will receive one hundred cents in the dollar. Ordinary shareholders will receive nothing.'

In that moment, Sam's fortune evaporated and was replaced with a five million dollar Yorkshire Bank debt. He felt sick to the core and his concentration lapsed as he wondered how he would deal with this new catastrophic financial situation.

The questions continued for twenty minutes. Just as they were drawing to a close, Sam's iPhone beeped. Several hostile glances were thrown his way.

'I do beg your pardon,' said Sam as he glanced at the message. He put the phone under the table. Rachael glanced around and asked if there were any more questions. There was silence.

'Does Chivington Laboratories know about Berserker?' Sam asked.

'Yes, they do. They insist that Berserker be part of the sale.'

'I cannot recommend the proposal unless Berserker is destroyed prior to the sale.' He looked belligerently at Rachael, suspecting he had been double-crossed.

Rachael laid her hand on Sam's arm once more. 'I understand that you have very strong opinions about Berserker, Sam. However, we have to face facts. Mendel has already organised a shipment of the drug to Taiwan. It's about to leave the dock anytime now and there is nothing any of us can do to stop it. He also set up a micro production line of the antidote drug Novalis in the basement of the White House. No-one can

interfere with the process now. It's too late for any of us to do anything about it, even if we delivered a resolution condemning its use. The genie is out of the bottle and it cannot be returned. Our best approach would be to lobby against further manufacturing as members of the Chivington board.'

Sam noticed that everyone around the table was nodding in agreement with Rachael. His shoulders slumped as he considered a new world where physical aggression and cold fury would be the order of the day in global politics.

'We must also consider the wellbeing of the fifty thousand Napier & Beckett employees who are counting on us to make the right decision,' added DeVere.

'I would like to propose a motion that we accept the offer from Chivington Laboratories to buy Napier & Beckett for two billion dollars,' said Rachael looking around the room.

'Seconded,' said Dr Clayton.

'You need to read this newsflash from the American Pharmaceutical Review before you vote on the motion,' said Sam holding up his iPhone.

'What is it?' asked Dr Kearney.

'Chivington Laboratories has just been fined a record three billion dollars for the false labelling of their canine ADHD drug in Denver, Colorado. They are also facing a massive class action from families that have been mauled by their pets after their dogs were prescribed Chivington's new drug, Vixacalm. It says the dogs just went ... berserk.' Sam passed his iPhone around the room. The headline read '*Denver's pampered pets in Chivington prescription scandal.*'

'Then Napier & Beckett is finished. It's all over,' said Rachael, her distress palpable.

'Not necessarily,' replied Sam. 'The US vice-president's office just texted me. He has agreed to see me at the White House on Sunday. He wants to discuss our FDA application to approve Senzar.'

'That will be your very last negotiation on behalf of Napier & Beckett or any other pharmaceutical company, Sam Jardine. I know what you've been up to and I'm going to make sure you pay a very heavy price for your betrayal,' Rachael swore under her breath at Sam.

## CHAPTER 24

Two staffers in dark suits greeted Sam at the entrance hall to the White House. They scrutinised Sam's invitation before one of the staff spoke into his radio.

'The vice-president is just finishing his morning swim,' he said. 'His private secretary will meet you here in five minutes and escort you to the Blue Room for morning tea. Please feel free to look around the hall while you wait, Mr Jardine.'

'Thank you,' said Sam.

He was dressed in a light grey tailored suit and royal blue tie. He had polished his shoes to a military gloss and his gold cufflinks flashed from under his jacket. He looked in awe at the magnificent columns and the huge chandeliers that hung from the ceiling. The lights reflected off the polished marble floor like droplets of crystal. He watched as a party of Chinese tourists entered the hall. They were shepherded into a corner of the room by their tour guide. Sam listened to the tour guide explain that it was two hundred years to the *very day* since the pesky British had burned down the White House in 1814 in an act of spiteful revenge.

Sam heard the click-clacking of high heels on the marble floor long before he saw the vice-president's private secretary approaching. She had a long mane of auburn hair tossed over her left shoulder, wore black-rimmed spectacles and powerful, bright red lipstick. A figure-hugging red dress accentuated her shapely hips. Her smile was spontaneous and attractive. She was about thirty-years-old.

'Hi, Mr Jardine. I'm Tara Vannier.

'Pleased to meet you, Tara,' Sam extended a hand to her. Tara held on for a second or two longer than was necessary before releasing his hand.

'If you ever need a private tour of the White House, you only have to ask,' she said.

She looked him up and down and laughed. 'Sam, you needn't have dressed so formally. This is the "people's house" on a Sunday morning, not cucumber sandwiches at Buckingham Palace.' She picked a tiny piece of fluff from his lapel before brushing it down with her hand.

Tara escorted Sam through the building towards the Blue Room.

'I have heard so much about you, Sam.'

'Really? How is that?'

‘I went to college with Rachael Beckett. We were roommates at Harvard together. She is such an incredible woman. She talks about you all the time. I have to say, when Rachael told me that you were seeking a meeting with Vice-President Winslow, I begged him to see you.’

Sam felt the despair of his wrecked personal and professional relationship with Rachael. Their irrevocable clash of strategy had left his career in tatters and the company on the brink of collapse. Only his determination to disrupt the progress of Berserker was driving him now.

After a fascinating walk through the White House, they arrived at the Blue Room where a setting of tea and coffee and a selection of pastries filled a small side table. Three high-backed chairs had been arranged around a small pastry table. The room was decorated in blue, although there were heavy overtones of gold in all the furniture. It reminded Sam of a typical scene from the Palace of Versailles he had visited a few years ago. A huge bouquet of flowers sat on a mahogany table at the centre, their colours coordinating with the overall blue and gold theme of the room. Paintings of previous US presidents hung in fancy gilt frames and added to the sense of the room’s history. After a few minutes, Vice-President Winslow made his entrance. He was dressed in a tracksuit and running shoes and was rubbing at his wet hair with a towel. Sam, who now felt rather overdressed, stood up to greet him.

‘I see that Tara has been the perfect hostess while I was taking my exercise,’ said Winslow. He smiled at Sam and they shook hands.

‘Thank you so much for seeing me on a Sunday morning, Mr Vice-President.’

‘I didn’t have a lot of choice. Miss Vannier would never have spoken to me again if I hadn’t agreed to see you. And please call me Mr Winslow.’

Tara blushed. ‘I was wondering, Mr Jardine, if I might join your meeting. The pharmaceutical industry is my area of specialty.’

‘Of course, Tara. It would be my pleasure.’

Winslow invited Sam to sit down, and poured tea while Tara offered Sam a pastry. Sam selected a dainty croissant.

‘Your letter suggested that Napier & Beckett’s application for FDA approval of its new drug Senzar was being blocked for political reasons,’ said Winslow, as he proffered

the cup and saucer of tea to Sam.

‘That’s about the size of it, Mr Winslow. The drug has passed all the tests that the MHRA could throw at it in the UK – and they are notoriously difficult to convince. Since then, the FDA have knocked Senzar back on three occasions. Each application was more thorough than the last and the efficacy results suggest that Senzar is nothing short of a medical breakthrough.’

‘Do you have positive proof that the drug is safe?’ asked Tara.

‘There are always side effects to any drug, but with Senzar, the only noticeable effect has been a slight weight gain in twenty per cent of the patients. The FDA is not concerned about those statistics.’ Sam explained.

‘I understand that to achieve FDA approval, Napier & Beckett must show that Senzar is a significant improvement on any other drug on the market. Is that the case?’ Winslow enquired.

‘Senzar is the first of its kind in the world. The trials have been conducted on over seven thousand patients. In each case, the patients have displayed statistically significant improvements in memory performance.’

‘What reasons have the FDA given for failing Senzar time after time?’ Winslow asked.

‘The reason has been different in each application. The latest application failed on the basis that the trials could have been tainted by the possibility of “false positives”.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘It means that Napier & Beckett’s trials contained data that could have been biased in our haste to get the drug to market.’

‘Could that be possible?’ he added.

‘It could, Mr Winslow. But it appears that the FDA cannot understand how Napier & Beckett has managed to steal a march on its competitors. We are at least two years ahead of the pack and that is quite unusual in the pharmaceutical industry.’

‘Shouldn’t we just allow the FDA to do their job? After all, they are the experts,’ said Tara. Sam felt a slight sense of irritation building, but he understood it was her job to ask challenging questions.

‘Mr Winslow and Miss Vannier, Alzheimer’s is the scourge of modern society. More

than five million Americans are living with the disease and one in three old people die of Alzheimer's. A new case is diagnosed every minute and the cost to America is over two hundred billion dollars a year.'

'Those are impressive statistics, Sam, but there are bigger killers out there. What about cancer and heart disease?' asked Tara.

'They too are dreadful conditions, but there are already numerous cancer and heart disease drugs on the market and many more in the pipeline. There is no effective drug available for Alzheimer's.'

'Let's face it, Sam, isn't it all about the money? The first drug company to bring out an effective cure will sit on a river of gold. It seems that you are here to help Napier & Beckett jump the queue,' said Tara.

'You are right to raise that issue, Tara, except that the financial aspect of this meeting is irrelevant to me. My father has been diagnosed with dementia caused by advanced Alzheimer's disease. His brain is now only two-thirds of the weight it was ten years ago. His cortex has shrivelled up like a walnut, meaning he cannot think, plan or remember. The shrinkage is so severe he is no longer able to form new memories. He will forget the beginning of a sentence by the time he reaches the end of it. My father now has more holes in his brain than he has cortex.'

'That sounds terrible. I am sorry to hear about your father,' said Winslow.

Sam could see that his graphic description of the disease had distressed the sixty-five-year-old Winslow. Tara, who was young, fit and probably considered herself immortal at this stage in her life was unmoved. Sam switched his focus to Winslow.

'Tragically, Ronald Reagan died of the disease. He would have benefited from Senzar had it been available at the time. Ironically, he founded the Alzheimer's awareness campaign when he was fit and healthy in 1983.

'I'm sure he would have been a proud sponsor of your cause,' said Winslow.

'Thank you, Mr Winslow. I'm sure he would have been.'

Tara grimaced at Winslow's sentimentality. Sam was becoming more than a little irritated by her negativity but he kept his delivery factual and unemotional.

'Charles Bronson and Charlton Heston also succumbed to the disease,' Sam added, noting that Tara had no idea who he was talking about.

‘You may have been too young to remember two of the finest American actors, Tara,’ said Winslow.

‘So what’s so special about Napier & Beckett’s drug?’ asked Tara.

‘It’s the only drug that reverses damage caused by the build-up of the beta-amyloid protein. This protein is sticky and causes plaque to form in the brain. Other drug companies have only managed to delay the effect.’

‘So Napier & Beckett may be able to reverse the effects of Alzheimer’s?’ Winslow asked.

‘Only in early onset and mild cases of the disease. But with early detection, it could save millions of lives.’

‘Does it do anything else?’

‘Senzar is showing evidence that it keeps the brain’s oxygen and blood transport systems open and stops it from developing “tangles”. Tangles and plaque are the major reason why the cells in the brain die.’

‘My wife accuses me of having dementia,’ said Winslow, ‘but I call it “selective forgetfulness”. It’s one of the few privileges of getting past one’s sixty-fifth birthday.’

‘I still cannot understand why you are coming to the White House with this problem,’ said Tara.

‘I don’t know how to put this delicately,’ said Sam, ‘but some people within Napier & Beckett suspect that the White House has been blocking Senzar as political leverage to encourage us to manufacture and sell Berserker to the government.’

‘I can assure you that is not the case,’ replied Winslow. ‘Walter Mendel raised this issue with me on several occasions. I found him to be a difficult and obtuse man. He would not see reason. As you know, the government already has a pallet of Berserker at the docks in Baltimore awaiting security and customs clearance to Taiwan. We have also installed a Novalis production line right here in the basement of the building. There is no reason for us to pressure your company.’

‘May I ask why you put a Novalis line here in the White House?’

‘The security in this building is so tight it can never be breached. It is the most secure building in the world. We are looking at a limited production run lasting two weeks. It will be dismantled once we have sufficient stocks. The drug almost guarantees America’s

dominant role in world affairs.’

‘Okay, that makes sense. But is there anything you can do to support our Senzar application, Mr Winslow?’

‘I am deeply moved by what you have to say about Alzheimer’s and we are both big admirers of Rachael Beckett,’ said Winslow. ‘I am going to write a letter to the FDA this afternoon requesting that they review their decision within three days. I am sure that is what Ronald Reagan would have done.’

‘Do you think that’s wise?’ asked Tara.

‘My wife would probably say it is the wisest thing I have ever done in my life. Now you must excuse me, Sam. Tara would be delighted to show you out.’

Tara was strangely sullen during their walk back to the entrance hall. She spoke only to give Sam instructions about the process for exiting the building. She asked him to sit in a chair next to one of the magnificent hall pillars while she whispered at length to one of the security guards. Sam noticed the guard glance in his direction several times during the conversation. Tara then headed back towards her office without saying goodbye or making eye contact. Her heels clicked angrily on the marble floor as she marched down the hall. Sam was left waiting for thirty minutes before a sombre-looking man wearing a dishevelled suit approached him.

‘Mr Jardine?’

‘Yes?’

‘I’m afraid that you are going to have to come with me. There has been a serious allegation made against you.’

‘That can’t be right. What allegation?’

‘Fraud on a massive scale and putting the lives of hundreds of families at risk in the Denver area. If the allegation is proven, Mr Jardine, you will not be coming out of prison this side of your one hundred and sixtieth birthday.’

\* \* \*

The first shift of the Novalis production line in the basement of the White House had been underway for three hours. Although the clean room was a small, temporary

structure, no expense had been spared in its construction and only the very best equipment and materials had been used. The walls of the clean room were double-skinned aluminium and the seals surrounding the doors and windows were so tight that not even dust particles one micron in diameter could enter. The White House boasted the tightest security on the planet and the eight production workers had been thoroughly vetted and possessed glowing references from their previous employers. The production line resembled an operating theatre more than it did a manufacturing process.

The clean room foreman was an exceptionally large man with a pronounced six o'clock shadow and a perfect American East Coast accent. He moved to the motor of the main mixing bowl with a look of concern on his face. He fiddled for a minute with the engine cowling and, once satisfied, stepped away to oversee the work of his elite production team. He radiated authority and his team looked up to him with respect and confidence. Here was a man who could handle a crisis – not that they were expecting one. Twenty minutes later, the smell of scorched wiring filled the clean room. An instant later, the clean room fire alarm sounded and a red, rotating beacon flashed its warning light to add to the commotion. Smoke filled the claustrophobic little room and the foreman sprang into action. He guided the production staff to the exit, taking absolute care to ensure their safety. He advised them they should proceed out of the building by the nearest exit. The foreman then re-entered the clean room in an attempt to isolate and extinguish the fire, but it spread rapidly out of control. The flames consumed the expensive machinery and all the raw materials in the room. Both the main and backup sprinklers malfunctioned and the foreman decided it was appropriate to beat a hasty retreat from the White House basement.

FBI investigations later revealed that the fire was deliberately lit and bore all the hallmarks of the legendary North Yemeni saboteur, 'Al-Qabas'.

\* \* \*

Sam was led to a small holding room adjacent to the main White House dining room, where a grey-shirted security officer was already waiting for him. The security officer was weighed down by an array of law enforcement equipment that hung around his wide,

black belt. He fiddled with the Velcro fastener that held down the flap of his gun holster with irritating regularity and he chewed his gum like a cement mixer.

‘You will be held here until the Feds arrive to take you off our hands,’ said the man in the dishevelled suit. ‘In the meantime, Antonio will make sure you don’t try anything foolish.’ He looked at his colleague. ‘Ain’t that right, Antonio?’

‘He would be plain stupid to try, Louis. I have some high-performance firepower in my holster.’ Antonio lifted the flap of his holster, making a loud tearing sound of parting Velcro as he did so. He lovingly caressed the grip of his semi-automatic Magnum pistol.

‘When will the police be here?’ Sam asked. His criminal record so far consisted of a low-level speeding offence on the A628 near Barnsley and an outstanding parking fine.

‘About half an hour. Maybe longer. I have better things to do than make small talk, so you can sit here with Antonio and think things over.’

Louis left the room, leaving Sam to sit opposite Antonio on one of the four chairs that were set around a square table. Sam sulked for ten minutes. Just as he was descending into the depths of despondency, there was a knock at the door.

‘Yep?’ said Antonio as he sprang to his feet.

To Sam’s surprise, Tara Vannier entered the room. She glanced at Sam with a look of disgust then spoke to Antonio.

‘Take a coffee break in the dining room next door for ten minutes, Antonio, I need to have a few moments in private with Mr Jardine.’

‘That’s against regulations, Miss. He could commit serious violence against your person.’

‘I will vouch for his behaviour. Please leave us.’

Antonio looked doubtfully at Sam.

‘I can’t allow that, Miss. The suspect looks like Ted Bundy to me – and he committed over thirty homicides.’

‘The worst crime Mr Jardine could commit in the next ten minutes would be to suggest I am wearing too much makeup,’ she said, looking at Sam.

‘She is,’ replied Sam.

‘If you’re going to be on your own with the perpetrator, Miss Vannier, then I insist he wear the bracelets.’

‘Fair enough,’ replied Tara.

‘What’s he talking about?’ asked Sam in something of a panic.

Antonio fished around his enormous security belt until he located the handcuffs in one of its many pouches.

‘You can leave them with me,’ suggested Tara.

Antonio handed the handcuffs to Tara and pointed to the panic button that was located near the door.

‘I don’t feel good about this, Miss. If pretty boy so much as breaks wind without your permission, just hit the red button on the wall there. I will be back in seconds and will blow his fucking brains out.’ He half pulled his Magnum out of its holster for emphasis and looked menacingly at Sam.

‘I can assure you there is absolutely no need for either the handcuffs or the panic button,’ said Sam, squirming in his seat.

‘I will be the judge of that,’ Tara threatened as Antonio left the room.

Tara laid the handcuffs on the desk in front of Sam and sat down opposite him. Sam tried to avoid looking at the handcuffs.

‘You may have fooled Vice-President Winslow, Sam, but don’t think you had me fooled for a second,’ said Tara.

‘I don’t understand what you mean,’ replied Sam, looking confused.

‘Wrong answer,’ Tara said. She ran a well-manicured fingernail along the steel of one of the cuffs. ‘I want to know what you did to cause so many small dogs to go on the rampage in Denver.’

‘Did Rachael put you up to this?’ Sam asked.

‘So you’re suggesting it was Rachael’s idea to slander Chivington’s reputation by tampering with its medicated dog food?’

‘No, I am suggesting that you are conniving with Rachael to have me arrested on some trumped-up charge for blocking the Chivington bid.’

‘Oh, Sam. You are so naïve! How did you ever manage to fool Winslow just now?’

‘You mean that you’re not working with Rachael on the Chivington bid?’

Tara laughed. ‘We may have shared rooms at Harvard, Sam, but that’s just about the only thing we had in common. Everyone thought we were the best of friends, but Rachael

was so single-minded, she had no time for anyone but herself. She had her grandfather's fortune, the looks, the brains and the popularity. It made me sick.'

'You don't seem to have done too badly yourself,' countered Sam.

'The difference is that Rachael was always her grandfather's golden girl while I barely made it outside the typing pool of my uncle's company.'

'But what's that got to do with the Chivington bid?'

'Chivington Laboratories won't allow me anywhere near the board. Yet I have more capability than the ten old men on the Chivington board put together. They insist I pursue a political career as private secretary to a senile old man before they allow me into an executive role at Chivington.'

'So you've been using the office of the vice-president to block Napier & Beckett's application for FDA approval of Senzar?'

'It's hardly my fault for spotting a business opportunity. Rachael's company was culpable for letting its drugs pipeline dry up so badly. I just happened to point out the counterarguments to Napier & Beckett's FDA application.'

'Then Chivington comes in with a rescue offer and takes over Napier & Beckett, including its Senzar and Berserker products.'

'It's just business, Sam. Survival of the fittest. It happens all the time.'

'Except that you used your position in government to negatively influence the FDA outcome for Napier & Beckett. That's not on, Tara.'

Tara picked the handcuffs up from the table and toyed with the rotating arm of one of the wrist restraints. The sound of the locking bar going through the ratchet mechanism made Sam squirm in his seat.

'What is not on, Sam, is tampering with a competitor's product. One of those dogs could have killed a child. I'm going to give you the opportunity to apologise on national TV. You can explain it any way you like. I will accept that you made a "tragic error" if you can find a line of argument to justify it as such.'

'So that way, Chivington can avoid the fine and the class action and resume its bid for Napier & Beckett.'

'You're learning fast. Maybe you are not so naïve after all.'

'I assume you will get your position on the Chivington board if the bid succeeds?'

‘It’s such a shame you will have to go to prison, Sam. I could have appointed you as my commercial assistant. Instead, I will have to put up with Rachael. She can be such a bore.’

‘I will take my chances in court. I have no knowledge of the fraud you are suggesting took place.’

‘What a pity,’ said Tara. She stood up from her chair with the handcuffs in her hand. ‘Suddenly I feel very unsafe. Perhaps I should push the panic button.’

‘That’s not a good idea, Tara. Antonio was itching to use his Magnum.’

‘It’s your choice, Sam. We do things my way or I have a bit of fun with the cuffs.’

‘Tara, I can’t confess to something I haven’t done.’

‘Come here,’ Tara said holding out the handcuffs.

Sam stared at her in disbelief.

‘I haven’t got all day.’ Tara took a step towards the panic button.

Sam did not want to risk a confrontation with the excitable, gun-toting Antonio. He stood up reluctantly, trudged across to Tara and held out his wrists.

‘You’re in America now,’ said Tara, rolling her eyes to the ceiling as if she were talking to an idiot. ‘Turn around and put your hands behind your back.’ She made a twirling motion with her fingers and her bright red nail polish gleamed in the fluorescent light.

Sam complied and felt Tara lock the steel of the cuffs into place against his wrists. She gave each cuff an extra click and then pushed him down into a chair.

‘I’m sure you will get used to wearing cuffs over the next hundred and twenty-five years,’ said Tara. She leaned down and adjusted Sam’s tie theatrically. ‘We need to have you looking smart for the federal justice system, don’t we? I can put in a good word at your trial if you cooperate,’ she suggested. She slowly brushed her fingertips down Sam’s cheek, then lifted his chin so that he was looking straight into her eyes. ‘Last chance, sweetie.’

‘Tara, I really can’t help you. I was unaware of the situation in Denver despite what you might think.’

Tara glared at Sam. ‘Then you can take your chances with the police. I’m going to fetch Antonio. Goodbye, Sam.’

Tara turned on her heel and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Sam sat for five minutes waiting for Antonio to return to the room. He shifted in his chair trying to ease himself into a more comfortable position but it was impossible. He was beginning to lose feeling in his hands and his bladder was starting to feel full. Just as he thought his situation could not get worse, he heard the *'beep, beep, beep'* of the fire alarm in the corridor. An announcement was made to wait for further instructions. Seconds later, the tone of the alarm changed and a more urgent *'whoop, whoop, whoop'* noise erupted from the Tannoy system. The pre-recorded tape urged the occupants of the White House to evacuate the building by the nearest exit and head to the assembly points. Sam sighed and waited a few more minutes for someone to collect him. It was just his luck that he was handcuffed and shut in a small holding room during a fire drill.

When Sam smelled smoke, he realised it was more than just a drill. He stood up from the chair and tried to reach the round door handle but with his hands cuffed behind his back, the handle was just out of reach. He kicked at the door in frustration as the smell of the smoke became stronger. He yelled for someone to open the door, but it became obvious that everyone had already headed for the exits. He saw the red panic button and after a few seconds' hesitation, pushed it hard with his head. He heard the sound of a buzzer whining in the dining room to add to the 'whooping' in the corridor. He hoped that whoever came into the room did not come rushing in waving a loaded firearm. A minute later, much to his relief, he saw the door handle turn and the door opened. A huge figure dressed in workman's overalls stooped to get through the door.

'Och, I was wondering where ye had got tae,' said Mungo. 'I cannae leave yer for five minutes wi'oot yer ending up in a tangle.'

'Mungo! I never thought I would be so glad to see you. Can you get me out of these handcuffs?'

'Is the Pope Catholic?' he said. 'Now let me see.' He leaned over to examine the cuffs. 'Standard Smith & Wesson 100s, swinging bow ratchet, double lock.'

He reached inside the waistband of his overalls and extracted a bobby pin.

'Never leave home wi'oot one,' he advised Sam. He bit the plastic tip off one end and inserted the straight end half way into the lock. He then made a right-angled bend, inserted the pin fully into the lock and bent the pin a second time. He showed the

resulting 'S' shape to Sam as if he were teaching him an essential life skill.

'This takes a wee bit of practice, but once yer have the knack, it's like riding a bike.'

He manoeuvred the pick against the bar of the double lock and turned it the way the key would have done. The bar moved and gave Mungo access to the single lock. He moved the pick so it was resting against the handcuff housing and then forced the pick towards the cuff's direction of travel. The first cuff sprang open and Sam brought his arms back in front of him. He massaged his freed wrist.

'Do ye nae want me tae unlock the other cuff?' said Mungo impatiently. Sam offered his other wrist to Mungo and within twenty seconds, he was free.

'Let's get out of here before the whole place burns down,' suggested Sam. Mungo looked insulted.

'Did ye think I'd let a fine building like this burn doon?' he said. 'It will nae get past the first fire door. I did make sure there'd be plenty of smoke though.'

Sam opened the door of the meeting room and peered into the corridor, but it was empty. The smell of smoke was much stronger.

Mungo reached into his pocket and handed Sam a White House staff badge. It had Sam's smiling photo on the badge with the name 'Chris Wilson' printed beneath the photo.

'What's this?' asked Sam.

'You'll need yer White Hoose staff badge tae access the doors or in case we're challenged. The Berserker staff have top level security status and we have our own wee side door. It's only a couple of minutes away.'

## CHAPTER 25

The small, white passenger-cargo ship *Iroquois* was taking on board its last pallet of industrial goods in the Port of Baltimore. She was well maintained and sparkled in the summer sun, unlike the drab, rusty container ships around her. Her new coat of white paint with contrasting pale blue lines made her attractive to both passengers and crew alike. The bow of the ship was dominated by two large cranes that served the cargo containers, but the stern had over twenty cabins, including three luxury berths for passengers who wished to experience something a little different and cheaper than the standard cruise liners. The United States government had chartered the *Iroquois* and reserved all the cabins except the luxury units, which it hoped would remain unsold to the public. Since the fiscal cliff budget crisis in 2013, the Democrat-led government was anxious to save unnecessary costs. There had been no passengers wishing to book luxury cabins on the trip to Taiwan but at the very last minute, an Englishman with a passport in the name of 'Chris Wilson' presented himself to the booking office at the port's departure terminal and asked to be checked in as far as Panama.

Mungo Dalgety adjusted his binoculars and focused on the small pallet that had been loaded onto the little white ship. He observed the scene from a deserted warehouse that had a perfect view of the activity on board the *Iroquois*. He picked up the drawings of the ship that lay next to him and marked in pen the spot where the pallet had been positioned. He removed a vacuum flask from inside his coat pocket and poured himself a steaming coffee, then continued to observe the ship. He could see the 'Napier & Beckett' logo on the side of the pallet. It contained the last remaining batch of Berserker anywhere in the world. The pallet was positioned next to hatch 'F' on his drawing. Assuming the pallet was not moved to another area of the ship, Mungo deduced it would be stored well away from the rest of the cargo in a strong room adjacent to the dormitory that catered for the lowest paying passengers. Mungo's research had revealed that this dormitory would be leased by a team of American special forces. Sure enough, five minutes later, Mungo spotted a group of men dressed in civilian clothes but with close-cropped hair and bulky physiques march onto the ship via a temporary walkway. They each carried an identical green canvas bag bulging with equipment and personal effects. Minutes later, Mungo

spotted the lone civilian passenger, Chris Wilson, saunter onto the walkway with an air of forced nonchalance. He was towing a big, black suitcase and was looking in all directions like a drugs mule crossing the Mexico-United States border. Mungo could not help but shake his head at the man's lack of fieldcraft. Despite two weeks of careful planning, Mungo had real doubts that the man he knew better as Sam Jardine would manage to accomplish their objective. Mungo's former SAS associates were ready and waiting in Panama to complete the heist of the Berserker pallet.

One hour later, the *Iroquois* slipped out of the Port of Baltimore and began its long trip to Taiwan via the Panama Canal with its cargo of military equipment, neurological drugs and special forces personnel aboard. Mungo pulled out his iPad and spent the next two hours composing a situation report and detailed instructions to his ex-colleagues, who were relaxing on the golden sands of the Isla Bastementos off Panama's Caribbean coast.

The only passenger bar in the *Iroquois* was decorated in the style of a traditional fisherman's den. Fishing nets and lobster pots were scattered around the room. Antique looking charts were hung on the wood-panelled walls and the American SEALs were relaxing around the tables. The gentle rocking motion of the ship through the ocean swell made it a relaxing and sociable atmosphere. The businessman Chris Wilson kept to himself for the first few days of the trip, although he was polite and sociable to all those around him. The Americans soon found out that he was the marketing manager of a famous Scottish whisky brand and generous with his employer's whisky samples. To those who were interested, it became known that he was a reluctant passenger on board the *Iroquois*. He was safeguarding a pallet of twenty-one-year-old, special edition, single malt whisky destined for the presidential palace of the Panama government. Each bottle was reputed to be worth well over one hundred and fifty dollars. The Scottish distillery did not trust the Panamanian freight handlers or customs with its cargo of special edition single malt and Chris Wilson was tasked with minding the pallet to its final destination.

The Navy SEALs were men of action who were used to intense activity and structured training routines. They would exercise on deck for five hours a day but it was evident that they resented the lack of purpose or sense of accomplishment on their current mission. They compensated by playing competitive games in the bar each evening. They

welcomed the distraction of the approachable, generous English passenger who shared their boredom and frustration during the long journey.

On the fourth day, Chris Wilson let slip that he was entitled to dispose of half of his pallet as goodwill marketing samples during his Panama business trip. He would be pleased to get through as many bottles as he could before the *Iroquois* reached the Panama Canal. Towards the end of the week, the marketing manager produced a full case of single malt whisky and made numerous toasts to the great job that the Navy SEALs were doing to protect freedom and liberty on behalf of all Western nations. The Americans acknowledged Chris Wilson's sentiments and agreed that his liquor was of such high-quality it must be the drink favoured by the gods. Chris Wilson hinted there was much more to come if they could liberate a few more cases from the pallet that was stuck in cargo hold 'F'. For a crew of bored, stir-crazy passengers, their whisky evening was the highlight of their trip to date.

For a man who was so ordinary, Chris Wilson had an extraordinary talent. He knew the rules to a host of obscure card games. To active men with nothing to do for the next five days, the Navy SEALs were drawn to his card table like mosquitos to a zapper.

'Anyone want to play Canasta?' asked Wilson, shuffling a double pack of cards on a corner table of the bar.

'Ain't Canasta grandma and grandpa's favourite card game?' said Petty Officer Daguerre. Petty Officer Daguerre had a slight French accent and his colleagues referred to him as 'Frog'. Petty Officer 'Eddie' Rickenbacker and Master Chief Petty Officer 'The Chief' Collins laughed at the joke, but approached Wilson's table nonetheless.

'No, I believe that's Bridge,' said Wilson, producing four whisky tumblers and an unopened bottle of Islay malt from his bag.

'I'm in,' said Collins. 'I played this game a few years ago but you had better remind me of the rules.' Collins was a tough, intelligent looking seaman with black hair and a square jaw. His huge hands and knuckles were scarred from hard physical activity and regular unarmed combat.

'It's critical you stay stone-cold sober to win at Canasta,' said Wilson, dealing out the cards to the players. 'So you guys had better not drink too much of this baby.' Wilson poured a measure of whisky for each SEAL and one for himself.

‘Is this the same blend as yesterday?’ asked Rickenbacker.

‘Are you kidding?’ scoffed Wilson. ‘This drop is only ever served to heads of state; it’s over fifty-years-old.’

‘No shit?’ said Daguerre, as he imitated the routine that Wilson went through of rolling, sniffing and slurping his drink.

Wilson topped up Collins’ glass. Daguerre sipped at the Islay malt and whistled through his teeth in appreciation.

‘I have a second bottle of this whisky to put up as a prize to any team that can beat me and The Chief at Canasta,’ Wilson said, showing his second bottle to the crowd who had gathered around the card table.

Chairs scraped around the bar as several SEALs rushed to join the card table.

\* \* \*

The *Iroquois* grand Canasta tournament took place the evening before the ship was due to sail into the Panama Canal. Only Chief Petty Officer Van Heugel had opted out of the tournament on religious and moral grounds, much to the annoyance of his brothers in arms. His Navy SEAL colleagues knew Van Heugel as ‘the Bishop’. He was a teetotaler and deplored gambling as the surest route to moral decrepitude. He sat in a corner reading a dog-eared Tolstoy classic, casting hostile glances at Wilson and deploring the antics of his colleagues. Two games were running in parallel; the winning pairs from each table would meet in a decider to be played at midnight. Petty Officer ‘Eddie’ Rickenbacker had discovered a flair for the game that was the envy of the other card players. He and Daguerre were on a three-game winning streak and were odds-on favourites to claim the generous prize of a case of Islay’s finest whisky.

‘What are you guys doing when we arrive at Panama City?’ queried Wilson as he dropped the eight of clubs on the table. Rickenbacker picked up Wilson’s eight and the massive discard pile. He smirked like a lottery winner as he laid out a succession of clean canastas and melds onto the table.

‘We have to stay on board to watch over our consignment,’ replied Collins with a scowl as he discarded the jack of spades on top of Rickenbacker’s king.

Wilson produced another bottle from his bag.

‘I suppose you will be schmoozing with the president of Panama?’ Collins said to Wilson.

‘Not till Thursday. I am hosting the ‘Best of the Hebrides’ whisky launch at the Ritz Carlton tomorrow night. I have to meet the models who will be providing the entertainment in the morning.’

‘Models?’ the SEALs chorused.

‘You can’t have a product launch without models,’ explained Wilson matter-of-factly. ‘They’re performing a pole dancing extravaganza at the function.’

‘Do you have any spare tickets to the launch?’ asked Rickenbacker. He looked at Collins, his eyes pleading to be let off the boat. Collins shook his head.

Rickenbacker looked like a dog that had been thrown out of the house into the rain.

‘Life’s tough when you have to stay on board to guard your Navy SEAL weaponry,’ said Wilson in mock sympathy.

‘It ain’t decent fighting man’s ordnance,’ grumbled Collins, who was struggling with his conscience. He had a state secret to protect but was uncomfortable with the magnitude of that secret. Wilson poured another shot of whisky into Collins’ half-full glass. ‘It’s some bullshit medication that’s supposed to make us fight better.’ He looked around nervously. He was anxious that Van Heugel did not overhear him. ‘It’s so freakin’ secret that all official records about its existence have been erased. If we are caught with this shit, the government will disown us. Don’t get me wrong, Mr Wilson, but the public ain’t got a clue what’s going on.’

‘Oh, you mean the pallet of Berserker in cargo bay “F”?’ Wilson said nonchalantly.

‘Well, I’ll be damned,’ said Collins, downing his drink in one swallow. Wilson topped him up.

‘I’m only repeating what the café manager told me in Baltimore.’

Collins looked at Wilson and raised an eyebrow.

‘Hey, don’t shoot the messenger,’ said Wilson holding up his hands.

‘Mishta Wilshon! I heard Bersherka hash sherious shide effectsh,’ slurred Daguerre.

‘Have another whisky, Frog!’ Collins said, mocking his colleague.

‘I used to work for Napier & Beckett a few years ago,’ said Wilson. ‘It was well-

known that it caused severe impotence. You will never be able to ... er, perform again.'

'I told you it was bad shit,' said Rickenbacker, looking at Collins.

There was a sudden outbreak of commotion on the second card table as one of the SEALs stood up, covered his mouth and made a rush for the door. The pitching motion of the ship made it difficult for him to make progress. Van Heugel looked up from his novel and muttered under his breath.

'Hey, Mr Wilson!' shouted Petty Officer 'Manny' Ramirez, the card partner of the unwell SEAL. 'We got this game in the bag.'

Wilson handed Ramirez his last bottle of whisky. 'Enjoy the bottle, that's the last of the stock unless I can somehow break into the cargo bay.'

'Sure thing, Mr Wilson.'

Wilson dropped a queen on the growing discard pack. He breathed a sigh of relief that Rickenbacker did not pounce on his card.

'Eddie Rickenbacker thinks you are bullshitting about the Berserker,' challenged Collins, who was studying his cards in a casual manner but the tone of his voice was hostile. To answer this insinuation, Wilson produced his Napier & Beckett photo ID. Napier & Beckett policy was not to have names displayed on their identity badges.

'I worked there three years ago but I left for reasons of principle,' he said, masking the lie by playing the jack of spades with a flourish. 'I worked in the Berserker research facilities. You would not believe what happened to some of the volunteers.' The SEALs were impressed with Wilson's ID. They regarded Wilson with growing respect.

'They are going to give us the medication in Taiwan,' said Rickenbacker. 'We are the guinea pigs for the US Army.' He looked distraught at the prospect.

For a moment, Wilson looked like a man who had forgotten his lines on opening night. He had developed a genuine bond of friendship with the Navy SEALs. He stared open-mouthed at Collins. 'Then you boys are making the ultimate sacrifice,' Wilson finally said, pulling himself together.

'What happened to the volunteers?'

He considered telling the warriors around him the truth about the vile nature of the drug that they were condemned to take. Whatever chance they may have had with the Novalis antidote had disappeared since the FDA had condemned the production line in

Alexandria. But he couldn't put such a dreadful prospect into the heads of a platoon of battle-ready but intoxicated young men. He needed time to think.

'One guy grew rather large breasts,' he said, for want of anything better to suggest.

'He grew titsh?' slurred Daguerre. He was not too drunk to be appalled at the prospect.

'Put a blond wig on him and he could have been Dolly Parton.'

'My God!' exclaimed Collins.

The room went silent. The companionship of the previous three evenings deserted them. Wilson realised he had misjudged the mood of the SEALs and that his strategy for gaining access to the cargo bay was in tatters.

'Hey, it's not that bad, guys. It may never happen; it only occurred in fifty per cent of the trials.'

'With all due respect, Mr Wilson, it's not your ass on the line. We appreciate your right to hold parties with models and all that, but becoming impotent and growing tits was not what we signed up for,' said Collins.

'Come on boys, let's finish the game.'

'Shtuff that!' slurred Daguerre angrily.

'I'm out!' said Rickenbacker throwing his cards onto the table in disgust.

Every other seaman at the card tables dropped their cards and made a move to leave.

'Look, how about you boys help me unlock the cargo bay and liberate a few cases of single malt? We can split the bottles.' Wilson was now desperate.

'I'm not exactly in the mood for a party. I'm going to call it a night,' said Collins.

'Me too,' Rickenbacker mumbled.

'Thanks for the whisky, Mr Wilson. Sorry to leave you like this. We know it ain't your fault,' Ramirez said, leaving the room.

The man who had checked in as Chris Wilson surveyed the detritus in the bar of the *Iroquois*. Only Van Heugel remained, reading his Tolstoy classic in the corner. The floor of the bar pitched under Sam's feet as the ship progressed closer to Panama in the warm waters of the Central American coastline. He made some effort to tidy up and then wandered towards the exit. His plans for accessing cargo bay 'F' were a complete failure. As he pushed open the exit door, Van Heugel looked up from his book.

‘Did you really work for Napier & Beckett?’

‘Yep.’ Sam continued to walk through the exit, anxious to send a communication to Mungo to call off the operation they had planned for later that night.

‘Were you telling the truth about the side effects?’

‘You don’t even know the half of it,’ Sam replied. ‘The drug will fry your brains to the extent that no-one will be able to help you. Good luck to you and your boys. I enjoyed their company – they deserve better.’ He walked out of the bar and down the corridor.

‘Mr Wilson!’ Van Heugel called after him.

‘What is it?’ said Sam irritably. The whiskies and the cruise had cost him a small fortune and he admitted to himself for the first time that he had taken on more than he could handle. His dreams of fulfilling his illustrious ancestor’s desires were no more than a pipe dream.

‘Could I have a word with you in the bar – in private?’

‘Look, I need to be up early and I have a busy day ahead of me.’

‘I have reason to believe you have not been honest with us,’ said Van Heugel, looking appalled at the behaviour that had taken place earlier in the bar.

Sam stopped in his tracks, his nerves jangling. ‘I could spare you five minutes,’ he said, hoping to bluff his way through the next conversation. He returned to the bar and sat opposite Van Heugel at the corner table.

‘How can I help you?’

He studied the strange man, who seemed out of place with his colleagues. Van Heugel had a mouthful of braces and wore John Lennon spectacles. He had the paranoid manner of someone who had spent his life justifying his religious beliefs and teetotaler lifestyle. He was short in stature but well-muscled and alert.

‘You came here to warn us about the medication, didn’t you?’

Sam considered his reply. If he misjudged the man sitting opposite him, he could spend a lot of time in prison. Or dead.

‘Despite what you have seen, I am a man of high principles. I came here not only to warn you about the drug but to attempt to destroy it.’

‘I knew it.’ He put his novel into his bag and closed the zipper. He leaned his big forearms on the table and his biceps strained against the stitching of his green T-shirt. ‘I

am a conscientious objector. I refuse to take drugs of any description.’

‘Then you are really going to object to this one.’

‘Why is this medication so bad?’

‘Contrary to what I may have said, it does not make you impotent.’

‘That’s pretty obvious. I wasn’t born yesterday.’

‘The drug will make you aggressive beyond all normal conventions. You will commit atrocities that would make your stomach turn if you had the ability to think rationally before you carried them out.’

‘It’s beginning to make sense. I can see why you would want to warn us about Berserker.’

‘If you do not take the antidote within twenty-four hours, you will end up in a permanent state of shellshock that will devour your mind. It will eventually drive you to murder or suicide – or both.’

‘So there is an antidote?’

‘There has been no effective antidote for two hundred years. There was a pale imitation in production, but its effectiveness was poor. The antidote known as Novalis was banned by the FDA last week.’

‘But the government still expects us to trial the medication?’

Sam shrugged his shoulders. ‘It looks that way. It has happened before.’

‘What does all this have to do with you, Mr Wilson?’

‘My ancestor, George Napier loved a girl who took the drug two hundred years ago. She was unable to take the herbal antidote that was available at the time and became a Sleepwalker. She had to roam the earth for the next fifty years in a state of mental torment.’

‘A Sleepwalker! What a creepy description for the condition.’

‘The condition is hereditary. It seems to affect the genetic code. It may skip a generation and may not be as severe, but it causes unbearable mental anguish. A good friend of mine is the descendant of a Sleepwalker. She has lost her battle to keep her sanity and now has to live out her life as a recluse.’ Sam’s head dropped and he fought to retain his composure.

‘So you came here to turn us against the drug that we will be trialling for the US

government?’

‘Something like that. I wish you luck. You have some great boys in your platoon. I will grieve for you all.’ Sam stood up to leave. Van Heugel grabbed Sam’s sleeve and pulled him back down.

‘There’s more to it than that. You wanted us to unlock cargo bay ‘F’ for you. Why was that?’

‘I can’t answer that, Van Heugel. I would put you in an impossible position.’

‘You wanted to protect us from this filthy drug. You wanted us to confront the Satan that is in our midst.’

‘You can use your own religious philosophy to describe Berserker, but nevertheless you are correct. But to my eternal shame, I have failed. The forces that control the drug are more powerful than I imagined and I’ve failed in my quest to destroy it. At least I will draw comfort knowing I did what I could to end this cycle of pain and grief.’

‘You haven’t failed, Mr Wilson.’

‘I wish that were the case but I’m afraid you are wrong.’

‘I have been observing my platoon colleagues. They are proud men. They are confident in their ability to defeat the enemy using their natural skills, intelligence and strength. They fear that they will not be able to do so if their judgement is compromised by this drug.’

‘But your men are patriots. They will not disobey orders.’

Van Heugel was silent for a moment as he thought through his decision.

‘My fellow SEALs think I’m strange and I make them nervous with my beliefs, but I know they will follow my lead on this issue.’

‘What are you suggesting?’

‘I can persuade the platoon to jettison the pallet overboard. They can blame me for its loss when they reach Taiwan. I will make this sacrifice so that they do not have to suffer the fate of the Sleepwalkers.’

‘You would be committing treason.’

‘I have thought about this for the entire trip. I’m prepared to commit treason for my beliefs. I will leave the ship at Panama and seek asylum.’

Sam stared at Van Heugel for a while as he considered his next words.

‘You don’t have to seek asylum. You can continue to serve your country as the loyal and dedicated patriot that you are. I can see a future of greatness ahead of you. Your country cannot afford to lose the services of someone like you.

‘What are you talking about, Mr Wilson?’

‘I have the capability to destroy the pallet of Berserker in the next two hours. I can replace the pallet with an identical one that looks like Berserker but contains only harmless vitamin C tablets. No-one will be any the wiser. All you have to do is unlock the hatch to cargo bay ‘F’ and look the other way for twenty minutes while my colleagues make the switch.’

‘Who are your colleagues?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t tell you that.’

‘I’m sorry, Mr Wilson, I can’t do what you have asked.’

Sam felt sick to the core at misjudging the evangelical nature of Van Heugel’s stance on drugs. ‘And I’m sorry I mistook your intentions,’ said Sam in a dejected manner. ‘I assume that you will report me. At least I have a clear conscience that my intentions were noble.’

‘You don’t understand. I can’t look the other way. We have sworn to keep the pallet out of foreign hands. My fellow SEALs must jettison the pallet with our own hands or it stays on the ship. Your colleagues can make the switch once we have seen the Berserker pallet go overboard.’

Sam closed his eyes and for the first time in years, he mouthed a silent prayer of thanks that he might have taken the final steps of his ancestor’s two hundred year pilgrimage. When he opened them again, Van Heugel was smiling in approval of Sam’s spiritual moment.

‘I will meet you on the deck by hatch ‘F’ in twenty minutes with Mr Collins and two other SEALs. I assume that your associates are in radio contact?’ asked Van Heugel. ‘Tell them to have their boat alongside the *Iroquois* with the replacement pallet at midnight.’

He held his hand out to Sam. ‘Do we have a deal, Mr Wilson?’

Sam pumped Van Heugel’s hand hard then ran back to his cabin to make contact with Mungo and his team.

## CHAPTER 26

The *Iroquois* was pitching and rolling through the waves parallel to the balmy Caribbean coastline off Panama. Sam could hear the throbbing of the ship's engines and the sound of the waves rushing past the ship's bow. The smell of marine diesel was strong on the deck and he had to pick his way carefully past the hooks and eyelets that were welded onto the deck near hatch 'F'. It was dark but the moon was bright enough for him to make progress. He could see the occasional light from other ships that were making their way to the Panama Canal in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. He spotted hatch 'F' protruding from the deck. It was already open and he heard noises coming from the cargo hold below. Sam assumed the SEALs must have already been starting to lift the pallet out of the hold.

He peered over the hatch and looked into the void below. 'Van Heugel?' he shouted down into the small hold.

'It's Petty Officer Daguerre. Come on down, Mr Wilson. I think the Bishop has dislocated his shoulder. He may need help. There's a ladder on the side of the hold.' Daguerre shone his flashlight onto the ladder and Sam made his way down the side of the hold onto the metal floor below. The smell of damp in the small hold was overpowering. Sam looked around. Cargo Bay 'F' was the smallest on the ship and designed for small, high-value goods. It was about the size of a squash court. Sam noticed the pallet of Berserker was near the port side wall of the hold. There was no other cargo. It was the first time he had come face-to-face with the drug. The thought made him shudder.

'Where's Van Heugel?' said Sam.

'He's propped up against the pallet. He's passed out from the pain.' Daguerre shone his torch at the pallet and sure enough, Sam noticed the prone figure of Van Heugel. Sam went over and bent down to examine the SEAL's shoulder. His hand touched something warm and sticky. With a shock, he realised that Van Heugel was covered in blood. There was a massive wound in his stomach and blood was pooling on the floor around him. Van Heugel's eyes were lifeless behind his spectacles and his mouth was open as if even in death he was protesting at the ultimate betrayal that had befallen him.

Sam felt a heavy blow to the back of his head and he crumpled to the ground next to

Van Heugel's body. He looked behind him and stared into Daguerre's blinding flashlight. He caught a glimpse of the steel knife that was in Daguerre's hand and noticed its wicked curved tip. It was dripping in Van Heugel's blood.

'Sam Jardine,' said Daguerre. 'I told you to get out of Napier & Beckett while you could, but you couldn't stop interfering.'

Sam rose up from the floor and stood to face Daguerre. The Navy SEAL stood over six feet tall. His body had been honed to perfection by thousands of hours of intense physical training and countless rounds of martial arts combat. The knife was poised to strike for a second time.

'Who are you?' asked Sam, his voice shaking with anger and fear.

The Navy SEAL laughed. 'I sometimes feel I know you like a brother, Sam. I warned you that you were out of your depth but you put on a command performance in the bar. Perhaps I misjudged you after all.'

'Jacques?'

'That is certainly one of my aliases.'

'And all this time I assumed you were an MHRA investigator!'

'Don't be too hard on yourself. When you have been in industrial espionage as long as I have you learn how to control people from every profession. Negotiators like you have an irrational respect for corporate regulators like the MHRA. You could not help yourself from being manipulated.'

'And I suppose De Souza fell for the same ruse?'

'Not at all. He was way too street smart for that. All I had to do was supply him with a regular cocktail of party drugs, except the ones I gave him made him compliant to my wishes.'

'And then you had him killed,' accused Sam angrily.

'Do I look like a cold-blooded murderer?' Jacques said without a trace of irony. 'It was actually his own fault. He overdosed on the compliancy drugs and the stupid bastard obeyed the first suggestion made to him by one of the schizophrenia patients, which was to go and hang himself.'

'How did you get on this boat?'

'I have a background with the French Marine Commandos, but for the last six years I

have been a sleeper in the US Navy SEALs. My orders were to wait for the first shipment of Berserker that was to be transported to the far east.'

'A sleeper with who?'

'Are you proposing to join me, Sam? My employer is very wealthy and he values the skills of a good negotiator like no-one else on earth.'

'Wang Jing? The rising star of the Chinese Politburo?'

'The very same. He sends his greetings, by the way. He wishes you a quick and honourable death if you choose not to assist us in delivering the pallet to his residence in Beijing.'

'You're going to assist a team of Chinese special forces onto the ship to take the pallet of Berserker!'

'Very good, Sam. The Chinese were planning to board the ship once we entered the South China Sea, but it appears you had other plans for the pallet. Of course, none of this would have been necessary had you triggered the Trojan horse when you had the chance.'

'You mean the Trojan horse would have delivered the entire Berserker research files to Wang Jing?' said Sam, shocked at his inadvertent complicity in Jacques' scheme.

'That's right. But your crazy girlfriend Cassie tried to be too clever and developed a trigger linked to Rachael Beckett's email account. It seems that Miss Beckett became suspicious and now you have given her control of the means of production. Rachael Beckett is a dangerous young woman, Sam. Who knows what she will do with that power.'

'She is committed to destroying the drug. She will delete the files.'

'Don't make me laugh. She could have destroyed the files already but she has chosen not to. Why do you think that is, Sam? She is a threat to world peace.'

'And you are not?'

'You must choose, Sam. Join me – or join your new friend Van Heugel in the underworld.' He pointed to the dead body by the pallet.

'I need more information.' Sam stalled.

'What more do you need? The choice is clear.'

'You can choose to throw this abomination overboard.'

Jacques clenched his fist in anger. Sam thought he was going to swing the knife at

him.

‘Time’s up, Sam. I have to move quickly before your SAS friends arrive. Unfortunately, you are going to have to take the blame for Van Heugel’s murder. I need to inform my fellow SEALs of what you have done and to expect a visit from your friends at midnight. One of my colleagues will probably kill you and throw your body overboard. Last chance, Sam. Are you with me?’

Sam looked away from Jacques in disgust.

‘Then you have ten minutes to live. You are going to stay down here in this hellhole while I get the boys. They are not going to take kindly to you killing one of their own. They will rip you limb from limb.’ Jacques threw a lightning fast punch at Sam’s head, which rocked his whole body. A flash of white light flared-up in his brain. He slumped to the floor next to Van Heugel’s body and lay stunned in the pool of the dead SEAL’s blood. Even in his semi-concussed state, Sam marvelled that he had not even seen Jacques’ punch coming. He heard Jacques climb the ladder and moments later, he was in total blackness as the hatch closed far above his throbbing head.

Sam was unable to move for at least five minutes. The blow had scrambled his wits. As he recovered, he searched his pockets and pulled out his mobile phone. He checked for a signal, but the ship was too far from shore. He used the dim light from the phone to check his surroundings but he was alone with the pallet and a dead SEAL with no means of escape. He picked himself up from the blood-slicked floor and started tearing at the packaging of the pallet until he had made a sizeable hole in its side. He reached through the polyethylene layers and extracted a container about the size of a shoebox. He ripped open the container and saw twenty-four identical pill bottles. He took note of the skull and crossbones warning on the side of each of the bottles and shuddered. His hands shook as he slowly unscrewed the lid from the bottle that he had selected. He tipped a handful of Berserker capsules into his open palm and considered the enormity of what he was about to do.

\* \* \*

The Panamanian spectacled owl soared over the *Iroquois* far from its natural habitat

of the Panamanian tropical rainforest. It was agitated and confused by a force in its primitive brain that was beyond its ability to comprehend. It noted the human activity on the ship below. The owl would habitually shy away from human creatures. But the strange force in its brain registered the movements below its beating wings as a threat to its territory and species. The bird flew around the ship three times as it tried to make sense of its instincts. Each time it circled the ship, the owl became more agitated and its sense of impending menace increased until it was unable to ignore the call of the wild. The raptor dipped in mid-flight, then executed a dive that it had honed over many years of hunting and killing. There were eight humans gathered on the deck of the ship near the cargo hatch but the spectacled owl instinctively picked out the eyes of the six-foot tall Navy SEAL with the chiselled physique. As it reached the point of impact, the owl extended its razor-sharp talons and struck. Jacques heard the beating of wings at the last moment and instinctively turned his head away from the attack. At the same time, he swung his knife with lightning fast reflexes. The owl had to shift its point of impact to avoid the knife and dragged its talons across the left cheek of its target, slicing the flesh almost off the bone. Jacques cried out in pain and put his hands to his face in an attempt to patch the damage. The other Navy SEALs all ducked. When they recovered their composure and scanned the night sky for the predator, it had long gone.

‘Are you a fuckin’ Jonah or something, Frog?’ said ‘Manny’ Ramirez. ‘First, you tell us that Mr Wilson is a Chinese agent and then a fuckin’ bird comes from nowhere and slices open your face.’

‘Something sure ain’t adding up,’ said Collins. ‘Tell me again how you came to find Mr Wilson standing over the Bishop’s dead body. I would have bet my life that he was telling the truth about Berserker.’

‘It’s true, Chief. Mr Wilson persuaded the Bishop to open the hatch on the pretext of gaining access to his pallet of whisky. Only it was a ruse. There ain’t no whisky in the hold. The Chinese are coming at midnight to hijack the Berserker pallet. Mr Wilson knifed the Bishop once he realised the truth.’

‘The Bishop would never help anyone gain access to a pallet of whisky. He’s a teetotaller,’ said ‘Eddie’ Rickenbacker, suspiciously. ‘And how come you’re so fucking sober? Twenty minutes ago, you could barely stand.’

‘Seeing a murder take place in front of your eyes sobers you up pretty quick,’ replied Jacques.

‘Okay, let’s take a look,’ said Collins. ‘Open up the hatch.’

Four of the SEALs unscrewed the bolts and lifted the hatch back on its hinges. Eight flashlights shone down into the depths below.

‘Holy shit,’ exclaimed Rickenbacker.

Van Heugel’s body had been laid out to the side of the hold in a reverential manner. His arms were folded across his chest and Sam’s jacket had been placed over his head as a mark of respect. The rest of the hold looked like it had been hit by a tornado. The pallet of Berserker had been destroyed. Polyethylene sheet fragments were scattered everywhere and the wooden base of the pallet had been reduced to tinder wood. Containers and pill bottles were strewn to all corners of the hold. Sam Jardine was pacing up and down the hold like a caged tiger. The Navy SEALs could sense the pent-up energy and anger coming from the hold below. Sam’s pacing unnerved the SEALs. Occasionally, he would bump into the side of the hold with considerable force before turning around and heading for the opposite wall. Sam looked up at the SEALs and the flashlights caught the demonic appearance of his evil red eyes. The SEALs recoiled in horror at the expression on Sam’s face.

When Sam had taken the five Berserker capsules, the drug had flooded into Sam’s brain like a tidal surge after a winter storm. Electrical impulses flashed between the neurons in his brain at twenty-times their normal rate. The initial rush of Berserker had confused his brain to the extent that he had suffered an out-of-body experience. The chemical had tricked him into thinking that he could soar with the eagles and look down on his surroundings. The drug then targeted the central region at the base of his brain. This most primitive region processes all responses necessary for the survival of the species including fear and aggression. As the neurotransmitters in this region went into overdrive, the receptors responsible for producing the feeling of fear present in every human gradually shut down. In turn, the receptors that governed the levels of aggression sprang open like the jaws of an alligator. At that point, Sam knew that neither fire nor iron could harm him and he had an overwhelming, primeval need to kill.

‘Mr Wilson. What happened down there?’ Collins called out. At first, the SEALs

thought he would not reply, but with a single-minded effort, Sam forced himself to think like a functioning human being.

‘You wanted to know about side effects? Well you are looking at them. It’s known as the “Sleepwalker Legacy” and it stays with you forever.’

‘What happened to Van Heugel?’

Sam looked malevolently at Jacques. ‘Ask Petty Officer Daguerre, the man you know as “Frog”. He’s a sleeper for the Chinese government. Things would have become a bloodbath for you boys when you entered the South China Sea.’

‘He’s lying!’ said Jacques. ‘He’s the Chinese agent and he’s just trying to protect his own skin.’ He clutched at the torn flesh of his cheek that was giving him considerable pain.

‘I have nothing to hide now. My life is over since I took the Berserker capsules. I would welcome a bullet in the back of my head.’

‘Why would the Chinese attack tonight off Panama when we are going to pass their backyard in a month’s time?’ said Rickenbacker. ‘It don’t make sense.’

‘I’m going to put an end to this bullshit,’ said Jacques. He did not like the way his fellow SEALs were looking at him. ‘You idiots might be fooled by his Sleepwalker freak show, but I feel that it’s my duty to make him pay for what he did to the Bishop.’ He pulled his six-inch, razor-sharp knife from his belt and put it between his teeth. He walked to the ladder and descended the ten metres to the bottom of cargo hold ‘F.’

Jacques realised he had made the worst decision of his life when he came face-to-face with Sam and looked him in the eyes. The energy and power that had built up inside Sam was a palpable force. Jacques felt like he had come face-to-face with a creature from hell. Sam closed in on Jacques like a cat stalking its prey and for a brief second, Jacques considered retreating back up the ladder. Only the resulting shame of facing his colleagues at the top of the cargo hold made him stay in the pit with Sam. The Navy SEALs were shining their flashlights down on the scene below that would result in the death of one of the combatants. The two fighters circled each other, looking for an opening. Jacques struck first. His lightning reflexes were legendary among the SEALs. No-one had ever beaten him in six years of single combat competition. Jacques’ left hand snaked out to distract Sam while his knife hand struck at his belly with the speed of a

cobra. But Sam had moved out of range before the knife could strike home.

‘Nice reflexes,’ Ramirez commented, looking down from the hatch.

Jacques struck again, his movement a blur. Sam again avoided the deadly curved tip of the blade that was aimed at his eyes. Five more times Jacques slashed his knife with devastating speed, without success. The speed of reaction of his adversary was not human. Jacques threw the knife into the corner of the hold in disgust and flew at Sam with his bare knuckles. Sam danced around Jacques as if he had anticipated every move that Jacques made. Jacques realised that Sam had not displayed the slightest shadow of fear or anxiety since the contest began and was inching closer to him after every thrust or lunge that he made. He realised he had discovered a weakness in his opponent.

‘Hey, Frog. Either finish him off or get back up here and tell us what is really going on,’ said Collins from above their heads.

Jacques threw another punch and as he anticipated, Sam ducked but moved half a step towards him. Jacques spun around and launched a taekwondo kick at where he knew Sam’s head would be. But Sam had already taken a step backwards to avoid Jacques’ boot and then stepped inside the arc of his pivoting left leg. Jacques was off balance for a mere fraction of a second and his head was exposed. Sam’s right fist exploded from his shoulder and caught Jacques under his jaw at the optimum point of his swing. Sam’s body continued to rotate beyond the point of impact like a fast bowler who had just delivered a lethal bouncer. Jacques’ neck snapped on impact and his body flew three feet into the air and slammed into the metal wall of the cargo hold. He was dead before his body slumped to the ground. Instantly, Sam’s rage drained from his body and was replaced by an overwhelming sense of shock and despair. His body started shaking and sweat flowed from every pore. He could no longer stand and staggered to the far corner where he slumped to the ground with his head in his hands.

The seven remaining SEALs came rushing down the ladder to check the dead bodies of their comrades. Rickenbacker drew his pistol and pointed it at Sam’s head.

‘Shall I finish him off, Chief?’ he asked Collins.

Sam looked up at the pistol and at Rickenbacker, barely comprehending what was about to happen.

‘Do it, Rickenbacker,’ said Sam as he gathered his wits. ‘It will save me a lifetime of

torment. All I ask is that you look at me now and decide if this condition is what you desire for yourselves in Taiwan. Decide also if this insanity is what you wish to inflict on the world.'

'Stand easy, Eddie,' said Collins. 'He has a point. We should jettison the cargo.'

'Too right, Chief,' said Ramirez.

'You should know that my colleagues are coming at midnight to take me home. They are no threat to you and have an identical pallet of harmless vitamins to replace what you throw overboard. No-one need know what happened. The authorities will just assume the Berserker trial was a failure.'

Collins walked over to Sam and helped him back to his feet. 'I don't fully understand what is going on, but I know an honourable man when I see one, Mr Wilson. We will release you to your colleagues when they come. I only hope you don't suffer too much as a Sleepwalker.' He turned to look at his colleagues. 'Right boys, let's get this shit overboard before we get too close to Panama.'

But Sam did not hear Collins. He had collapsed onto the floor of the hold and slipped into a coma.

\* \* \*

Mungo cradled Sam's limp form like a child. He swung down the netting that the Navy SEALs had thrown over the side of the *Iroquois*. He threw Sam over his shoulder like a rag doll and jumped the short distance to the high-speed motor launch that was running parallel to the big ship. He saluted Master Chief Petty Officer Collins, who was watching from the *Iroquois*, then ordered the captain of the SAS launch to take them back to their base at the Isla Bastementos. As the launch sped away from the *Iroquois*, he laid Sam on the deck. Sam was shuddering like a pneumonia patient. Mungo told one of his SAS colleagues to take good care of Sam while he went below to get his kit bag. He returned two minutes later with his bag and tipped its contents on the deck next to Sam, whose breathing was tortured and irregular.

'Now, where the hell are they?' He rummaged through his clothing and personal items but found nothing. He returned to the kit bag and unzipped a side pocket. 'Aye,

here we go.’ He pulled out two plastic bags, each containing half a dozen pills. ‘I always come home with a few souvenirs of ma handiwork,’ he said to his SAS colleagues, who had gathered around to check on Sam. He stared at the two plastic bags. They looked identical. ‘Now which ones are Berserker and which ones are Novalis?’ he wondered, frustrated knowing that the wrong choice would undoubtedly kill Sam. Mungo was a picture of indecision, even though he knew that the massive overdose of Berserker that Sam had taken was killing him with every breath.

‘Stay wi’ me, Sam. I could nae look yer great-uncle Roy in the eye again if ye die on ma watch.’

Somehow, Mungo’s words stirred an impulse deep within Sam and he opened his eyes with Herculean effort. ‘For God’s sake, Mungo, just open the bags. Berserker smells like PG tips. I’ll take the other ones,’ he muttered.

## CHAPTER 27

Roy had been up most of the night in his little house in Fort William. Sam heard his great-uncle's cries of anguish as Roy emerged from the depths of a nightmare that had gripped him during the night. For an hour, Roy had paced the floor of his kitchen and then as dawn broke, he slipped out into his greenhouse for some solitude and a smoke to calm his nerves. Sam looked at the radio alarm and saw that it was half past five in the morning. He tried to drift back to sleep but it was impossible. He pulled back the covers of his bed in the spare room and grabbed his dressing gown. He padded through the kitchen and put on the kettle. Through the kitchen window, he watched his uncle pottering in the greenhouse and leafing through his collection of tomatoes and other plants. Five minutes later, Sam picked up two mugs of steaming tea and headed towards the greenhouse to join his uncle.

'Bad night?' asked Sam as he pushed open the greenhouse door. Roy started in surprise. His nerves were still settling down after experiencing the night terrors. The greenhouse smelled of tomato plants and the 'roll up' cigarette that was in Roy's hand.

'Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up.' He took the mug of tea from Sam. 'I did not have the best of sleeps.' He smiled, trying to make light of his battle with the demons.

'You don't have to worry about me, Roy. I can handle the US justice system when the time comes.' Sam took a sip of his tea.

'I didn't expect you to get into trouble with the law when you flew off to America. I feel terrible about putting you up to it.'

'You didn't, Roy. It was something I had to do.'

'When do you get extradited to Denver?'

'I have to fly out on Wednesday.'

'That's terrible, Sam. Are you going to be okay?'

'I think so. They're going to have a hard job proving I had anything to do with the crime. I never set foot out of the Washington DC area so their case is circumstantial.'

'I should never have sent young Mungo Dalgety after you. He can get carried away with himself at times.' Roy finished his cigarette and rolled another.

'I thought your night terrors had stopped, Roy,' said Sam with a look of concern on

his face.

‘So had I. I was so sure of it that I ripped my more “exotic” plants out of the greenhouse and burned them.’ He indicated the roll up in his hand. ‘This is the very last of my stock.’

‘Perhaps it was my narration of Napier’s war memoirs that triggered your terrors last night?’

‘Perhaps. I was shocked to learn that Berserker triggered a hereditary side effect called the “Sleepwalker Legacy”. Do you think that my nightmares and your voices are side effects of Napier’s experience with Berserker?’

‘I don’t think so, Roy. Napier took the antidote almost immediately after he had consumed Berserker. I put my voices down to my experience in China. They have stopped completely now that the “Ku” is fully out of my system.’

‘I am sorry to hear that your friend Cassie is a Sleepwalker. Will she ever recover?’

‘The last effective antidote disappeared after the Battle of Lundy’s Lane. Cassie herself has given up all hope and is living in solitude in Colorado for her own safety.’

‘That was the other thing that kept me up last night, Sam. I remembered the real reason why Napier spent five years living in America after the Sand Creek massacre.’

Sam sat up fascinated. ‘What did you remember?’

‘Alice told me that General Napier suspected something was really wrong with Nova’s granddaughter, Tiva. He believed that if he searched the ancient lands of the Shawnee thoroughly enough, he would eventually come across isolated cultures of a plant that could help Tiva’s condition. Alice must have been referring to the Maneto antidote plant that he wrote about in his memoirs.’

‘Did he find anything?’ asked Sam.

‘Despite a thorough search, he found no traces of the plant – although I noticed he included a chapter on Native American herbal remedies in his memoirs.’

‘Did you ever meet Tiva?’

‘No, she died when she was still quite young. Alice talked about her a lot.’

‘How did she die?’

‘Alice said that she died of a broken heart. She missed the plains of Colorado and the call of the wild. But that couldn’t have been true. Alice said that in the last few years of

her life she found peace and happiness. She reconciled with her daughter and seemed to cast aside all the symptoms of the illness that had plagued her entire life.’

‘She had a daughter?’

‘Yes. Tiva had an affair with the local laird when they returned to Scotland. Alice said that Tiva was a very pretty woman. Unfortunately, her daughter was taken away from her as a child because of her illness, but the daughter sought Tiva out years later.’

Sam was intrigued. ‘Do you have a photo of Tiva or her daughter?’

‘Unfortunately not. Why do you ask?’

Sam’s disappointment was palpable. ‘No reason. But I am interested to find out how Tiva managed to recover in later life.’

‘I have a theory, but it is probably nonsense.’

Sam sat up, intrigued. ‘What’s your theory, Roy?’

‘Alice said that Tiva continued Napier’s interest in herbal remedies throughout her life, but only as a hobby. She must have found something that helped.’

‘Is that why you grew your own exotic plants? To help you with your night terrors?’

Roy looked embarrassed. ‘Something like that. Alice brought back a few pots from Tiva’s nursing home in Edinburgh when she died. She still had a few with her when she moved in with us in Barnsley.’

Sam leaned forwards in his chair. ‘This is important, Roy. Do you think you could have been growing Maneto all these years?’

Roy laughed. ‘You are barking up the wrong tree, Sam. I am fully aware of what I was growing – and it wasn’t Maneto.’

Sam was disappointed. ‘Would you mind taking a look at Napier’s illustrations once more, just to be sure?’

‘If it helps to put your mind at rest.’

Roy and Sam went back into the house and into the spare bedroom. Sam picked up Napier’s memoirs, flicked past the beautiful copperplate script handwriting and turned to the pages where he had hand drawn dozens of plants and herbs from the American continent.

‘Napier was quite an artist,’ said Sam, admiring the drawings.

‘He certainly was. He must have drawn the Maneto plant from memory fifty years

after he visited Nova's camp.'

Sure enough, Napier had included several illustrations of the Maneto plant. It had a hooded flower similar to a cobra's head and distinctive waxy leaves. Roy shook his head.

'Sorry, Sam. In any case, Alice said that Tiva never returned to America in her lifetime, even though her heart yearned for the plains of Colorado. She could not have grown the Maneto.'

Sam could not contain his disappointment. He continued to gaze at Napier's illustrations and examined the last drawing of the Maneto plant. It was a sad looking specimen that was almost desiccated. It had gone to seed and Sam examined the large red berries that hung from its stem. Something in the picture looked familiar.

'Roy, you said that you had a few of Alice's items in a suitcase somewhere. May I have a look at them?'

Roy bent down and pulled out a battered old suitcase from under the bed. He unclipped the two latches and rummaged through the contents. Roy pulled out several artefacts that looked as if they belonged in a museum. He produced a faded patchwork leather and cloth bag that looked as if it once might have been very colourful. Sam untied the string and glanced inside. Discoloured beads of various shades were inside the bag. Sam retied the string and swapped them for the slingshot that Roy handed him. It was made of a single thin length of buffalo leather with a rectangular pouch sewn into the middle section.

'Alice said that Tiva was an amazing shot with the sling,' said Roy before passing Sam a child's doll exquisitely carved from bison bone no bigger than the length of his index finger.

Sam wasn't listening. He walked over to his overnight bag and pulled out the Black Kettle photograph that was in a folder with his other research on Novalis. He studied the photograph for a minute and passed it to Roy.

'Can you see what Alice is playing with in the photograph?'

Roy pulled out his reading glasses from his top pocket and examined the photo. 'Well I never.' He picked up the patchwork bag of beads and compared it to the one that Alice was playing with as she sat on the lap of Black Kettle. They looked identical. 'Black Kettle must have given the bag to Alice.' Roy opened the bag and spilled the beads out

onto the bed. Sam picked up a bead and squeezed it hard. As he did so, it crumbled into dust. He picked up a different coloured bead and squeezed it in a similar manner. It too crumbled to dust.

‘These are not beads, Roy. They are seeds. Do you think Alice may have given these artefacts to Tiva at any stage?’

Roy fingered through the remaining seeds and compared them to the illustrations in Napier’s memoir. ‘Alice always referred to the artefacts as “Tiva’s toys”. She said that when Tiva died they were the only possessions of hers that she wanted to keep, along with the pot plants.’

‘So do you think that Tiva may have stumbled on a Maneto seed in the patchwork bag?’ said Sam.

‘That may be possible. But unfortunately for your friend Cassie, there are no seeds in the bag that remotely resemble the ones in Napier’s illustration, even allowing for their poor condition due to the passage of time.’

Sam exhaled deeply in frustration. He picked up the Black Kettle photo and stared at the image of the famous Native American chief who seemed to be mocking him for missing the obvious clue. He looked at the image of Alice, who was staring directly at Black Kettle’s headdress. Sam followed her gaze and it dawned on him where he had seen a similar headdress and patchwork bag of seeds to the ones in the photo. The main difference was that in the temperature controlled glass display cabinet in Alexandria, the headdress had belonged to a Shawnee chief not a Cheyenne like Black Kettle. The more subtle difference was that among the collection of multi-coloured ‘beads’ spilling out of the bag in the display case in Alexandria, there were several large red seeds that looked identical to those in Napier’s Maneto illustration.

Sam whistled. ‘How ironic,’ he said to Roy. ‘Napier & Beckett must have spent billions trying to develop a synthetic antidote to Berserker when they had the real thing sitting under their noses for nearly two hundred years in their own boardroom.’

## CHAPTER 28

The British government had agreed to Sam's extradition on condition that the State of Colorado did not detain him in prison until his trial. He was under house arrest at the Hilton Garden Inn in downtown Denver. Sam was not seen as a flight risk or a danger to the public. The hotel was comfortable but not extravagant and Sam was able to fill his days reading newspapers and working out in the hotel's gym. Sam enjoyed the late autumn views of the distant Rocky Mountains from his balcony and the Denver air was fresh and invigorating. His phone calls and visits were strictly monitored so Sam was unable to contact Cassie in case he incriminated her in any way. He knew that the Denver police were watching his every move. He received daily phone calls from the British Consulate to check he was being treated well. Sam was able to report that the Colorado police were conducting their investigation in a polite and efficient manner. Sam read the financial pages of the *Denver Post* and out of habit checked the share price of Napier & Beckett. Since the FDA had granted the company approval for its blockbuster Alzheimer's drug in September, its share price had trebled in value and production of Senzar could not keep up with demand. Rachael Beckett, the new CEO, was constantly in the business section of the media.

Sam's phone rang. It was his Denver police liaison officer phoning from reception.

'I have a lady in reception who wants to see you,' said Sergeant Jennifer Davidson. 'Would you like to come down? The hotel has arranged a conference room for you.'

'Thank you, Sergeant. I will be down in ten minutes.'

Sam tidied himself up and put on a fresh collared shirt and tie. He had a quick shave then splashed on a few dabs of cologne. He had seen a number of reporters over the last couple of weeks. He knew the value of good public relations. He wanted to portray himself as the respectable victim of a corporate vendetta carried out by the malicious executives of Chivington Laboratories. He met Sergeant Davidson at the concierge desk.

'How you doing, honey?' said Davidson. The forty-year-old police officer was convinced that Sam could not have carried out the fraud of which he was accused.

'Bearing up,' replied Sam. 'Which paper is the reporter from?'

'She didn't say, but she is all class and elegance. She may be from one of the TV

stations because I have seen her before somewhere.'

Sam and Sergeant Davidson chatted as they walked to the conference room. Davidson knocked on the door and stood aside for Sam to enter.

'Good morning, Sam. How are you coping?' asked Rachael with a look of deep concern on her face.

Sam looked at Rachael. He was dealing with a string of conflicting emotions. He did not know for sure whether Rachael had been involved in the charges that were laid against him. He wanted to look defiant and proud, but could not summon the necessary anger to do so.

'Do either of you guys need me in the room?' asked Sergeant Davidson, sensing the tension.

'No, we're fine,' said Rachael.

'Sam?' queried the sergeant, looking directly at him.

'It's fine, Jennifer. I will let you know when we've finished.'

As Davidson left the room, Rachael stood up and embraced Sam. Her familiar perfume played havoc with Sam's senses and emotions. Sam pulled away once he judged it was polite to do so.

'It's so good to see you, Sam.'

'I see that you are quite the darling of the financial press since I arrived back in the States,' he replied. He took Rachael's cream cashmere coat from her shoulders and placed it on a stand in the corner of the room. Then he pulled Rachael's seat back for her and she sat down gracefully. Sam walked round the table and took his seat.

'The company is doing well but things are not the same since you left, Sam.'

'The thing is, Rachael, I never did work out whether we were playing on the same team or whether I was just corporate fodder to be thrown to Mendel's wolves.'

'Really? You surprise me. I always thought you were one step ahead of me. You had me reacting to events the minute you set foot in DC.'

'Don't give me that,' replied Sam annoyed. You disappeared without trace for two weeks while you put a deal together with Chivington Laboratories. Why didn't you let me know?'

'I was not certain of your priorities, Sam. I was worried that your desire to wipe

Berserker and Novalis off the face of the earth would take my company with it. I also had a secondary matter to attend to.'

'I may have eliminated the two drugs, but you still retain the files necessary to restart production whenever the mood takes you,' Sam countered.

'Would you mind getting me some water, Sam? I haven't had a drink since I stepped off the plane.' Sam stood up and hurried to the fridge before he reminded himself that he no longer worked for Rachael. Old habits die hard, he thought. He grabbed a bottle and two glasses and poured each of them a drink.

'Ever the gentleman.' Rachael smiled as she took a sip from her glass.

'So what was the secondary matter?' asked Sam.

'As soon as I got wind that your shadowy friend Jacques was after Berserker again, I had to organise our counter-response with the CIA. It took me the best part of a week.'

Sam looked shamefaced. 'Rachael. I don't know what to say. I really screwed up when I trusted Jacques! How come the CIA didn't come after me?'

'You didn't screw up. The CIA and MI5 had Jacques under surveillance before you even joined us. They needed someone who was a touch naïve to draw Jacques out of his lair.'

'I am so pleased I could have been of assistance,' said Sam, feeling like a complete mug.

'We knew he was working for the Chinese government, we just did not suspect that he was also a sleeper in the US special forces.'

'Where did De Souza fit in with this?'

'He was a genuine procurement manager who we hired as a fall guy to draw out Jacques. He turned out to be a very bitter and twisted man with peculiar habits and a vivid imagination. He had a personal grudge against Napier & Beckett. He thought he was whistleblowing to the MHRA but his information was going straight to Jacques and Chinese intelligence.'

'Was I just a fall guy too?' asked Sam, humiliated.

For the first time since he had met her, Rachael blushed. 'Not at all!' She crossed her elegant legs and looked away from Sam towards the door.

'You would make a lousy negotiator,' said Sam. 'It's lucky you weren't at the

meetings with Mendel or the US vice-president in July.’

‘Exactly!’ said Rachael. ‘I hired you purely for your negotiation skills. They are the best I have seen. It’s just that you are the least streetwise person I have ever met. Please do not ever set foot in New York.’

‘What are you going to do with the Berserker files?’

‘I have had your Trojan horse program cleaned up and the virus now works as you intended.’

‘Except that it doesn’t send the files to Beijing first,’ said Sam looking embarrassed.

‘Exactly.’ Rachael pulled out her iPhone and tapped out a brief email before pressing ‘send’. An instant later, Sam’s phone beeped and he saw that Rachael’s email had been sent to him.

‘I thought I had been disconnected from Napier & Beckett’s email list?’ said Sam.

‘The email that I have sent you has triggered the malware. As we speak, every record relating to Berserker and Novalis is being deleted from Napier & Beckett’s files. The whole process will take approximately half an hour.’

After all the danger that Sam had put himself through to rid the world of the threat of Berserker, the moment somehow felt anti-climactic. He felt uneasy and dissatisfied.

‘Aren’t you going to read your email?’ asked Rachael.

Sam regathered his composure and read her email.

*‘Dear Sam. I would be delighted if you would rejoin Napier & Beckett in an executive capacity. We could do with more gentlemen in our company. Your true friend and colleague, Rachael.’*

‘You don’t have to give me an answer straight away,’ said Rachael. She looked distracted for a while. ‘I asked Cassie if she would come back too, but she is unwell, Sam. She is communing with her so-called ancestors in a desolate spot called Sand Creek. She asked me to give you a message, but it was gibberish.’

‘What did it say?’ asked Sam, intrigued.

Rachael fished through her bag and pulled out a scrap of paper. ‘It says, “*Be careful that the panther does not fall under the spell of the seductress, or the coyote will seize his quarry from under his nose.*” I am not sure she will ever recover, Sam. It’s clear that her mind has gone. She was such a pretty little thing and very good at her job.’

Sam smiled. 'I don't think she is as unwell as you think. Cassie wants me to answer your email.'

'How did you work that out?'

'Watch this.' Sam tapped away at his iPhone and waited for Rachael's phone to beep. Rachael read Sam's email.

*'Dear Rachael. I am happy to consider your offer on condition that you will never again keep any secrets from me. Your true and loyal friend, Sam.'*

'Are you saying that you still don't trust me, Sam?' said Rachael looking disappointed.

'I am just following Cassie's instructions. She would want you to reply by email.' Rachael shrugged her shoulders and sent her reply to Sam.

*'Dear Sam. I promise that I will take you into my fullest confidence if you rejoin my company. Your dearest friend, Rachael.'*

Two seconds later, Sam's phone lit up like a Christmas tree. A string of endless code flashed across his screen so fast that it was impossible to read. For a brief instant, the code paused and Sam read the text. It said, *'Berserker file 1032.1 deleted. Commencing destruction of file 1033 of 10,771.'* The unreadable string of code resumed its relentless progress of destruction.

'What's happening to your iPhone?' asked Rachael, intrigued.

'It's an app designed to tell me when Jacques' malware really is destroying the Berserker files. Your first email was sent from a new email account that you had cleaned up against possible virus attack,' said Sam. 'It was never going to destroy the files. I sent my reply to your old account and when you replied, it triggered the malware program.'

'And I suppose there is nothing I can do to stop it?'

'Not a thing.'

Rachael smiled. 'Didn't I just say that you were always one step ahead? Well, now you have fulfilled your ancestor's destiny, I can't begrudge you that victory.' She reached over and took his hand. 'I still want you to join Napier & Beckett, Sam. Hopefully that little – oversight on my part won't impact your decision?'

'That depends on whether Napier & Beckett has an office at the Denver State Penitentiary,' he said bitterly.

Rachael dipped into her bag and retrieved an envelope. It had a Chivington Laboratories logo embossed in the corner. It was addressed to Samuel Jardine and Rachael handed it over to him. Sam opened the envelope and looked at the letter. It was from the managing director, John Chivington. It stated there had been an unfortunate misunderstanding and they were requesting that all charges against him be dropped. It offered a profound and unconditional apology for the inconvenience that Chivington Laboratories had caused him.

‘How did you manage to get this?’ Sam asked, astonished at what he was reading.

‘Chivington Laboratories are in a dire financial state as a result of falling sales and a damaged reputation. They have accepted an offer that I put to them to acquire their company. One of the terms of the offer was that they withdrew their allegations against you. Of course, I would be most grateful if you would refrain from taking any legal action against them.’

‘I was never a vindictive person,’ Sam conceded.

‘That’s lucky, because John Chivington resigned this morning and I am hoping that you will take up the newly created position of general manager of what will become Napier & Beckett Laboratories here in Denver. I have assigned you a personal assistant by the name of Tara Vannier. She can be a bit insubordinate at times so I expect you to be strict in your dealings with her. Let me know if you need any help dispensing the necessary discipline.’

Sam grimaced at the thought of Tara becoming his personal assistant. In any case, he was still processing the feelings of relief that he would not be spending time in prison to take Rachael seriously about her job offer.

‘It may sound ungracious of me, but I need time to think.’

‘Take as long as you need, Sam. I appreciate that you have been through a lot in the last few months. Now, would you mind helping me with my coat?’ she said as she stood up to leave.

Sam looked at Rachael and made no move to help her with her coat. Rachael looked awkward at Sam’s uncharacteristic lack of chivalry.

‘Aren’t you going to give me that last piece of information that you have been withholding?’ asked Sam.

Rachael sat down again and looked annoyed. ‘I don’t know what you mean. I have told you everything.’

Sam said nothing but raised a quizzical eyebrow. He held her gaze while Rachael shifted awkwardly in her seat. Sam tapped his fingers impatiently on the table while he waited for Rachael to fill the awkward silence.

‘Samuel Jardine. You are incorrigible! How can you tell?’

‘Your email. You could not bring yourself to answer me plainly. He read from his iPhone, “*I will take you into my fullest confidence if you rejoin my company.*” How evasive can you get?’

Rachael blushed for the second time since he had met her. ‘I have been censured by the MHRA in London.’

‘About the Novalis trials?’

‘Yes. We were only days from getting the data that we needed when the motorcycle courier incident happened. Many people argued that the death of the cyclist was a simple case of road rage unrelated to the drug.’

‘So you reopened the trials to get the necessary data?’

‘I only needed a week and all the patients were in full agreement. We recorded their interviews on video then closed the ward down again. No harm was done.’

‘What about Josh? What happened to him?’

‘I am afraid that Jacques’ henchmen got to him before we could pull him out of the ward. Josh was about to expose Jacques and the fact that he was attempting to poison you each time you went down into B2.’

‘Jacques learnt the secrets of the Ku while he was training in China.’

‘What’s the Ku?’ asked Rachael.

‘Jacques was trying to poison me so he could acquire my powers.’

Rachael looked confused. ‘But you don’t have any powers.’

‘Thanks a lot,’ said Sam, looking offended. ‘Let’s just say I had already learned how to counter his threat. I just didn’t know Jacques was behind it.’ Sam took a sip of his water. ‘How did the MHRA find out that you had continued with the Novalis trials?’ he asked.

‘I informed them after Josh’s suicide. It seemed the right thing to do. There was an

inquest into his death and my censure was the outcome. They have fined Napier & Beckett one million pounds and recommended that the Napier & Beckett board suspend me as their CEO for two years.'

'How did the Napier & Beckett board handle the outcome?'

'Not very well. I survived a vote to terminate my employment by one vote. I can remain on the board but they have insisted that I undertake counselling in morals and ethics. They want me to report to someone of outstanding moral character and unblemished reputation on a weekly basis. That person will report my progress back to the board every three months.' Rachael sighed. 'They mean you, Sam. Paul Knight and Dr Jed Kearney said there was only one person who has ever worked at Napier & Beckett that fitted that description.'

'What happens if I put in an unfavourable report?'

'Do I have to say it? The board will sack me. But I am sure that all your reports will be favourable.'

Sam smiled. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs in a casual manner. 'Rachael Beckett, you have to earn my respect before you get that kind of report!'

Rachael aimed a kick at Sam under the table. 'Just remember that the shackles come off after two years. I have a long memory!'

Sam laughed. 'I haven't agreed to rejoin Napier & Beckett yet and you already have a black mark on your report!'

Rachael reached over and took Sam's hand once more. 'I would have asked you to rejoin with or without the board's recommendation. I happen to agree with Paul and Jed's opinion of you.'

'Then my answer is "yes". There is so much that we should be proud of now that the black shadow of Berserker no longer hangs over our ancestors' company. Now let me help you with your coat.'

After Sam helped Rachael pull on her coat, she turned to face him. In her heels, she was eye to eye with Sam. They were standing so close, Sam could feel her breath on his face. Her ice blue eyes stared straight into his, as if they were searching his soul. For a moment, Sam thought she was going to kiss him. With his heart pounding, he gently put his hands either side of her shoulders, took a step back, and swallowed. 'Have a safe trip

back to Washington, Rachael,' was all he managed to say.

## CHAPTER 29

Cindy Reineker clutched the US Army letter to her chest and dabbed at the tears of joy that rolled down her cheeks with a soft white tissue. The army had accepted her application to rejoin her old unit and she had let the nursing staff of Napier & Beckett know that she would no longer be returning to her cleaning job. The nursing staff hugged her on hearing the news. One of the nurses had insisted on dressing her up in attractive clothes and had worked on her make-up for over an hour as a final gift to the popular Medal of Honor heroine. When the nurse showed Reineker her image in the mirror, she felt overjoyed and confident in her ability to re-enter society on her own terms. However, before she did so, she had one piece of unfinished business to complete.

Reineker stood outside the Mendel residence in the fashionable waterfront section of Alexandria Old Town and considered the months of abuse that the ex-CEO of Napier & Beckett had inflicted on her. She recounted the beatings and punishments she had endured for imaginary lapses in her cleaning duties. She shuddered at the memories of the blatant sexual advances that became more frequent as the months progressed. She held the key to the three-storey mansion in her hand and double-checked the bottom of her bag to reassure herself that the item was still there. Satisfied, she unlocked the front door of the house and let herself in. She knew the house well. Mendel had insisted that she scrub the carpet and tiles daily and polished every item of wood by hand twice a week. Mendel's study was on the ground floor at the back of the house. He had not left the study since the fateful day of his resignation from Napier & Beckett when his life had changed forever. Reineker walked through the house like a predator, her silent footsteps padding on the thick carpet. She pushed the study door ajar and drew the object from her canvas bag. It was dark but she saw the silhouette of the tall, elegant man in his chair at his desk staring out of the window as he had done every day for the past few months. She walked up behind him like a cat stalking its prey.

The light of a side lamp flicked on and dazzled her for a brief moment. Barbara Mendel was sitting on an easy chair clutching a gin and tonic in her hand.

'Have you brought it?' she asked, swirling her drink. The ice cubes clinked in the glass.

‘Yes ma’am.’

Reineker handed over the small packet of Cerebulin antidote to Barbara. A gurgling sound emanated from Walter Mendel’s throat. Reineker stared at the ex-CEO and could only feel pity at his lapse into an imbecilic state. He was drooling like a child and it was obvious that he had soiled himself again. He was playing with a toy car and using his desk as a make-believe racetrack.

‘Did they say how long it would take to get Walter back to normal?’ asked Barbara.

‘About a week.’

‘I never thought the young Englishman would go through with it. He seemed too much of a gentleman.’

‘I told him that Walter would kill him within a day if he did not incapacitate your husband with Cerebulin during the negotiation. The Englishman is more ruthless than you think.’

‘Walter was trying to organise a hit on him even as the Cerebulin was taking effect. And not for the first time either. Walter was furious when the London hit failed,’ said Barbara, taking a sip of her gin and tonic. ‘Will Dr Clayton keep her mouth shut about the drug?’

‘Of course. It was her idea in the first place.’

They were interrupted by the sound of Walter Mendel imitating the sound of a car screeching its wheels around a corner of his desk and crashed it into the toy truck he held in his left hand.

‘Do keep the noise down, Walter dear,’ said Barbara, as she took a sip from her gin and tonic.

‘When are you going to give him the antidote?’ asked Reineker.

‘When I think he has learnt his lesson. Next month? Maybe next year? He still has to pay for abusing Rachael when she was a young girl.’ Barbara looked at Reineker. ‘You don’t approve, do you, dear?’

‘No ma’am. I know what it’s like to have suffered from a terrible mental condition. Despite his cruelty, he is still a human being.’ Reineker delved back into her bag and pulled out a sealed plastic bag containing five large red beads. ‘These are the beads from the display cabinet that the Englishman asked for. He said you would pass them on to

him.’

‘Thank you, dear. I am not sure why he would want them, but if it keeps him quiet about Walter’s nasty little habits then that’s fine by me.’

Walter Mendel used his hands to imitate a World War II fighter bomber. He made the sound of an aircraft attacking the toy car and the truck that he had piled up to look like an accident on the corner of his desk.

## EPILOGUE

It took three weeks of tedious negotiations for Sam to get to the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary memorial service. He turned up his collar against the bitter winds that swept across the Colorado plains and bowed his head at the memorial dedicated to the fallen at Sand Creek. Over three hundred other people were also paying their respects. The cold weather had arrived without warning and Sam was not dressed properly for the freezing chill. His fingers and toes were numb. Not everyone was happy that the pharmaceutical company rumoured to be present at the massacre was represented at the service. The objectors to Sam's presence were mainly white and middle class. The overwhelming majority of the participants were Arapahos and Cheyenne. They were aware that Sam was the direct descendant of General George Napier who had loved Nova, the warrior princess and daughter of Tecumseh. John 'Two Bears' Rivers and the imposing bulk of Mungo Dalgety flanked Sam. Their presence kept any potential protesters subdued. Mungo was carrying a large canvas bag in his hand.

'How is she?' Sam asked John Rivers once the service had ended. His freezing breath streamed out in front of him. They walked towards Rivers' car, their footsteps crunching on the frosty ground.

'Not good,' he replied. 'Her moods are dark and troubling. She has not seen anyone for two weeks.'

'Will she see me?'

'She did not promise anything. She kept repeating that she would prefer you to remember her as she was in London.'

'Tecumseh's daughters have always been so stubborn,' grumbled Sam. 'This time we won't take no for an answer.'

Rivers laughed. He opened the doors to his Jeep and the three men climbed in.

'We are going to a little hut about twenty minutes away,' said Rivers. He was a big, imposing Native American. He was dressed in jeans and a black leather jacket, but his handsome features were reminiscent of his warrior ancestors and he braided his hair in the traditional style. Rivers started the car and they set off across the plains. They drove along a narrow track, taking in the bleak, windswept landscape. After fifteen minutes,

Rivers turned off the road and drove across the undulating fields. Every so often, they would hit a deep rut. Mungo swore as he hit his head on the roof. Five minutes later, they came to the ruins of a Native American hut. It had no roof or windows, but the ancient wooden walls were still standing. It had one room and the timber floors were rotten in places. As the men left the car, snowflakes began to fall and the wind moaned softly. Sam shivered and wished that he were wearing a thick coat instead of his flimsy suit jacket. The men entered what used to be the main entrance door and had to tread carefully for fear of falling through the rotten floorboards.

‘I took the liberty of putting up a temporary canvas shelter over one section of the walls,’ said Rivers. ‘It may not deter some of the ancient spirits from gathering today, but it is the living that need protection from the cold.’

‘How come no-one has taken the timbers after so many years?’ Sam asked.

‘This was Nova’s house during her long exile from her people. Everyone is scared of her ghost.’

Rivers produced three foldaway chairs and a pile of blankets from the trunk of his Jeep. He placed them in a corner of the hut under the makeshift canvas shelter. Mungo grabbed his small tent and sleeping bag and set up his camp about two hundred metres away from the hut. He made a small fire and began boiling water to make some tea for himself and Sam.

‘I will return at five o’clock. I hope that Cassie will come, but please don’t get your hopes up. She is a very sick woman,’ said Rivers.

‘Thank you, John. I appreciate what you have done for us.’

‘You are welcome. See you at five.’

The Native American drove off into the snow as the temperature continued to drop and the snowflakes became evermore intense. Sam shivered – he was not sure whether from the cold or from the ghosts that seemed to gather around the little hut. Mungo brought him a large mug of steaming tea and Sam wrapped his freezing hands around it. He had one of River’s blankets draped over his shoulders.

‘It gets much colder in the Highlands,’ said Mungo without conviction.

‘Is it my imagination or is it getting darker?’

‘It’s midday, so it must be yer imagination,’ replied Mungo, although his bravado was

disappearing. ‘Look, I’m going tae get some kip in ma tent. Just shout if ye need me.’ He looked around the damp walls of the hut and shuddered. ‘I hope yer lass comes.’ He slapped Sam hard on the shoulder, causing him to spill some tea.

Sam spent the next hour huddled in a pile of blankets facing outwards towards the bleak horizon. Eventually, he dozed off and dreamed of ancient battles and modern corporate skullduggery. He woke with a start at the sound of horse’s hooves pounding across the plain. In the distance, he saw a magnificent black stallion galloping towards him. On its back was a slim woman dressed in deerskin clothing. Her black hair was streaming out behind her.

‘Sam! Sam!’ the woman yelled as she approached.

Sam dumped the blankets and ran out of the hut to greet her. She did not slow down as she approached, but continued to gallop, leaning out and holding her left arm towards him. Sam ran alongside her horse, took hold of her hand and launched himself into the saddle behind her. He gripped her by the waist and whispered, ‘My beautiful Cassie, you came back!’

Cassie spurred on her horse and punched the air with her fist. As the horse galloped towards the distant woods, she whooped with joy.

\* \* \*

‘I can’t return to Denver with you, Sam. I have discovered my true calling here on the plains of Colorado.’

‘But I need you, Cassie. Everything I have endured since I first met you in London has been for you.’

Cassie moved closer to Mungo’s fire and took the mug that he offered her. Clouds of steam escaped the scalding liquid into the freezing air.

‘You didn’t do this for me, Sam. You did it to resolve your ancestor’s quest from centuries ago.’

‘That’s not true!’

‘It is, Sam. If I asked you to leave your new job and spend your life here with me on the plains, would you do it? Would you dedicate yourself to closing the gap between the

quality of life of the Native Americans and the white Americans? Would you campaign every day to improve infant mortality, life expectancy, education and employment opportunities for Native Americans?’

‘That’s not fair, Cassie. I’m not from the Native American culture.’

‘No-one expects you to do these things. Even General Napier had to return to his own people in the end. He agonised about the plight of the Native Americans and felt betrayed by the British government when they did not create an Indian homeland. But like you, he was British and he could not stop himself from taking advantage of all that the new America had to offer.’

‘I feel the sorrow of every generation of Native Americans since the death of Tecumseh. I understand that it isn’t right. I want to help, Cassie, but I can’t live out here with you in the wilderness,’ said Sam.

‘I don’t expect you to, but you can help with the George Napier Foundation.

‘What’s that?’ asked Mungo.

‘Sam told me that George Napier left his five per cent shareholding not to Alice, but to Tiva. As her closest living descendant, I am setting up a foundation in his name. It will establish Native American role models and the promise of a better life for the next generations. This day is the anniversary of the death of Nova, the warrior princess. I am hoping that we can make it a day for America to reflect on what it still has to achieve for the Native Americans. It would be an annual reminder of the things that we are yet to get right. It is what he would have wanted.’

Mungo moved closer to Cassie. ‘Sam may have responsibilities in the business world, but I din’nae. I would like tae help yer set up yer foundation if ye will accept me.’

Cassie smiled at the giant of a man. ‘You would be most welcome, Mungo. We could do with someone of your strength and practicality.’ She looked at Sam. ‘We both know that the best contribution you can make would be to keep Napier & Beckett’s profits flowing to the foundation.’ She took Sam’s hand. ‘I was afraid you would choose Rachael over me. It’s obvious you are attracted to her.’

‘Rachael would never fall for someone like me,’ said Sam shocked. ‘She is a billionaire and way too classy for me.’

‘She loves you, Sam. I admit that she has a funny way of showing it, but it’s true.’

Sam shook his head, refusing to believe her.

‘Are yer going to drink the brew from the Maneto leaf afore it gets cold?’ asked Mungo.

Cassie nodded. She sat down on one of the foldaway chairs and sipped tentatively from the mug. For several minutes, nothing happened, but then Cassie’s face lit up.

‘I can see him, Sam.’

‘Who?’

‘It’s your ancestor, George Napier. Just there. He’s wearing his lieutenant’s uniform. He looks so young and dashing. Can’t you see him?’

‘I can’t see anything, Cassie. What is he doing?’

‘He is walking towards the plain. He’s calling out Nova’s name. There she is! She’s in the distance under the tree and she has heard him.’

‘What are they doing now?’

‘Nova has stopped walking and is turning towards the sound of Napier’s voice. She has seen him. She is running towards him, faster and faster. She is so young and pretty. She has an eagle feather in her hair. Now Napier is running towards her and has scooped her up in his arms. They are embracing. Oh, Sam, can’t you see them?’

Tears were rolling down Cassie’s cheeks. Sam gazed out towards the plain. He did not see anything but he noticed it had stopped snowing and that the sun had come out.

‘Are they still there?’

‘Sam, they have gone.’ Cassie sounded distressed and disappointed. ‘But look! There are two eagles circling in the sky right above where they were. Can you see them?’

Sam looked at where Cassie was pointing and his heart leapt when he saw two noble golden eagles circling and playing together in the sky. He ran to the point below where they were circling and noticed a magnificent eagle tailfeather that had fallen to the ground. He picked it up and carried it back to Cassie. After he threaded it through her hair, Cassie stood up from the chair and gathered Mungo’s canvas bag, the contents of which Sam hoped would end the curse of the Sleepwalker Legacy once and for all. She carefully strapped the Maneto-laden bag to her horse’s saddle. She turned to embrace Sam and held him for several minutes. She kissed him on the lips and then whispered in his ear. ‘Don’t ever forget me, Sam. Come back and see me when you get the chance.’

Cassie turned away and mounted her splendid black horse. Before Sam could say another word, she coaxed the stallion into a gallop and headed towards the setting sun.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I hope you enjoyed reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. I'd be very grateful if you'd post a short review on Amazon. Your support really does make a difference.

You may also enjoy my second book, *The Wulff Agenda*. Further details are available from my website or on Amazon.com.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B015Y5PRAS/>

### **The Wulff Agenda**

When sociopathic media tycoon, Leo Wulff acquires elite British social media company, Smart Lifestyle, he creates a secret database known as Nocrista to manipulate his victims' Internet profiles to the extent it costs them their job, reputation, or even their life.

When Smart Lifestyle runs into commercial trouble, Wulff sends in brilliant negotiator, Sam Jardine to war-torn Ukraine where he collaborates with some dangerous characters to secure the largest data centre in the world. But Sam finds himself in direct competition with the Russians, who need the data centre to fuel their next generation spy program.

Wulff becomes the 'Keeper', extends his zealous campaign of assassination into Russian elite society, and destabilises an already volatile region, plunging the world into crisis. His murderous social algorithm uncovers a conspiracy by a group of Ukrainian monks, intent on restoring the Tsarist Rurikid regime personified by the notorious Ivan the Terrible.

As Sam falls for a stunning local politician, Natalya Alexandrova, he becomes a pawn in her ambitious plans for the rebel Donetsk People's Republic. Only his extraordinary negotiation skills and his beautiful, but volatile Cossack protégé, Xenia stand in the way of the new ultra-nationalist regime seeking to reconstruct the Russian empire.

# THE WULFF AGENDA EXCERPT

## PROLOGUE

*September 1970*

The possibility of discovery was ever present for Leo, but the bravado of youth led the young schoolboy to downplay the risk. He knew he was unpopular with the other boys in his school, so he gained some solace by writing an extensive secret journal that documented their cruel taunts and tricks. He catalogued the behaviours of his fellow classmates and teachers in meticulous detail. Each night, Leo would record which teachers were conducting illicit liaisons with their pupils, how much money the boys spent at the little tuckshop in the playground and listed their hobbies and interests. He paid particular attention to conversations, such as when they talked about the girls in the neighbouring school, and noted any emerging religious or political opinions. No aspect of his peers' and teachers' lives was excluded from his journal.

Within six months, Leo's diary was a trove of explosive information he knew would be a source of great power within the school. He also knew it could do untold harm if it ever fell into the wrong hands.

Leo lived in a rundown house in a poor neighbourhood. His father had died in an industrial accident five years earlier and his profligate mother had wasted the meagre payout on a wardrobe of fur coats, gaudy jewellery and liquor. She lived her lonely life in a cocoon of bitterness and blamed her eccentric thirteen-year-old son for her misery. Leo went to extraordinary lengths to hide his journal from his domineering mother but in recent weeks, he had become careless and merely hid it under his mattress.

Leo could sense the aura of hostility hanging over the house even before he pushed open the front door. He felt his heart race and his stomach churn as he entered the tiny hallway. He hung up his school jacket on a wall hook and placed his satchel on the little stool by the cupboard. He composed himself for five seconds before he entered the kitchen to greet his mother.

'What the hell is this?' screeched the skinny, prematurely grey-haired woman thrusting the thick diary inches from Leo's face. In her other hand was a half-empty

bottle of cheap wine.

‘It’s private. You shouldn’t be reading it.’ Leo tried to snatch it from his mother’s hands.

‘I read what you said about me!’ she shrieked, ‘I am not a drunk!’

Leo had been tempted to write down the complete litany of his mother’s abusive behaviour; at this moment, he was relieved he merely catalogued her excessive drinking habit.

‘Give it back. It’s not yours,’ he pleaded.

A triumphant look flashed in Leo’s mother’s eyes as she inched towards the fireplace. She tossed the diary into the middle of the blazing fire, and then picked up a poker to stoke the flames even higher, warding off attempts by her son to rescue his treasured journal.

‘How many times have I told you that everything you write down will come back to haunt you?’ she said, her eyes flashing with anger. ‘Don’t blame me if the Night Hag returns tonight to punish you.’

Leo felt a sense of terror at the mention of the Night Hag, who had been violating his dreams with increasing frequency for the last three years.

‘The doctor says she is not a real person,’ argued Leo, looking in distress as the fire took possession of his precious journal. ‘He says it’s a medical condition and I will grow out of it. You were there when he said that, Mother.’

‘The doctor is a liar. The Night Hag comes to punish your evil thoughts and deeds. Now go to your room and don’t expect me to wake you up when she comes to smother you with a pillow.’

\* \* \*

It was late into the night when he smelled the familiar, fetid odour of soiled underwear and damp grass permeate his bedroom. He knew the Night Hag came when he entered the zone between wakefulness and sleep, but his fear kept him alert. The temperature dropped to the point where his breath billowed out in front of him. Leo heard the ancient creature shuffling her way across the room towards his bed. He tried to grasp

the broken broom handle lying next to him in his bed but her paralysing powers had already immobilised him. Trying to move his head to stare at the creature that was about to climb on his chest, he found he was unable to move a muscle. Leo did not attempt to scream; he knew no sound would emerge from his mouth.

Leo's bed rocked as the Night Hag climbed onto his chest and he felt unable to breathe. The pressure of her bony knees dug into his rib cage as she settled herself down and waited several minutes for the terror to build up inside Leo's head. The odour of her putrid body was overpowering but he sensed she was agitated and not entirely in control of the situation. Leo felt her probing his mind to discover evil thoughts that had summoned her to his bedroom and to determine the appropriate punishment he should receive.

But this time, Leo was awake. The anger he felt at his mother burning his diary made him determined to resist the Night Hag. He filled his head with positive energy, making it hard for her to overpower him. Leo imagined himself a leader; a man whom people looked up to and respected. He imagined a glorious future where for once, he was in command and people shook in fear at his name.

The Hag hissed angrily through the gaps in her teeth as she failed to penetrate the wall of defensive energy Leo put up to thwart her. He felt the effects of her paralysis wane throughout his body and he managed to turn his head so he could stare deep into the dark pits of her eyes. The hideous creature that kneeled on his chest shimmered in and out of focus and then whimpered with distress.

'Your three years of terror and control are over, old woman,' Leo said so clearly that he surprised even himself.

From deep inside his head he heard the Night Hag sneer, 'You may think you have conquered your terrors, but I will remain a shadow in your consciousness, never to disappear entirely.'

'That may be so but from now on, you will do *my* bidding,' Leo replied. As the pressure on his chest abated, the Night Hag faded from view.

## CHAPTER 1

### *March 2014. Pushkin Centre, Donetsk*

The English negotiator realised he had made a serious miscalculation in coming to Donetsk. Indeed, he would be lucky to escape the city alive. He had defied travel warnings and advice from his work colleagues, insisting the recent Ukrainian demonstrations were just a storm in a teacup. In fact, he had dodged no fewer than three separate armed gangs on his way to the Pushkin Centre that morning while they were in the act of storming the strategic administrative buildings in the centre of the city.

He looked at the large, broad-shouldered Cossack sitting across the desk from him and watched as his expression changed from mild annoyance to outright hostility. He silently acknowledged he had almost certainly overplayed his hand and prepared himself for a violent reaction.

‘You dare insult me with derisory offer? You get best software engineer in world for your pitiful English pound.’

The bottom of the nearby Kalmius River in Donetsk was littered with the bodies of those who had dared to cross software oligarch, Sergei Kaledin. Sam Jardine looked around the luxurious office, considering his reply. Framed ancestral portraits of moustachioed Cossack warriors on horseback glared down at him from every angle. ‘Sergei, I’m giving you twenty million pounds a year for the exclusive use of two hundred of your best software engineers and unlimited storage space on your data servers for the next two years. There can be no conditions or favours as part of the contract.’

‘We build brand new extension to Kyivskyi data centre. It be most advanced in world and you not get better price, even in India. No matter, I give it to Russia.’ Kaledin made a show of packing away his paperwork and swivelled in his seat, turning his broad back on Sam.

Sam’s employer, Smart Lifestyle had just become a major force in the social media industry but it was burning through mountains of cash at an alarming rate. In the last eighteen months, the company had experienced a thousand-fold increase in high net-worth clients. But the company could no longer contain its costs, nor could it provide

sufficient storage space to cope with the tsunami of personal data flooding into the company's servers. Smart Lifestyle was weeks away from bankruptcy and if he returned from Donetsk empty-handed, it was the end of the road for Smart Lifestyle.

'Don't mistake me. I spent months researching your company,' Sam countered, 'that's why I am offering you a long-term deal with a top British company that has created a whole new niche in the social media industry. We have eighty per cent of Western Europe's top business elite and forty per cent of America's top earning celebrities as our customers. We have just broken into the Russian political and business market. In the last three months, Smart Lifestyle has become the social media company of choice for Russia's power brokers. There has been nothing like it in the history of social media. But if you don't want to share in our East European success story, Sergei, just say the word.'

At that moment, Sam knew he had him. Try as he might, Kaledin could not disguise his enthusiasm for the deal. Sam had done his homework and knew how badly Kaledin craved to be accepted by mainstream Russian business and the political elite. They had shunned him for the last twenty years and considered him an ill-educated, provincial bumpkin.

'I understand. If you are not interested, well ...' Sam shrugged, as if he had a line of alternative suppliers banging down his door.

'Twenty million is fair price,' Sergei admitted reluctantly. He held out his hand to Sam, who shook it with gusto. 'Together, we create biggest company in Ukraine. No?' He pulled out a magnificent silver fountain pen from his jacket pocket and signed the contract with a flourish before pushing it across the desk to Sam. The big Cossack pushed himself up from his leather-backed chair and walked across to his liquor cabinet. He pulled out a bottle of vodka and poured two generous measures into separate glasses. He handed one to Sam and drained his own in one swallow. Sam refused to be intimidated and followed Kaledin's lead before slamming the vodka glass onto the desk. He blinked back the tears and stifled the cough erupting in his throat.

'*Na Zdorovie*,' Sam said – 'To your health.' It was the only Russian phrase he knew.

'Now you do me small favour,' Kaledin said enthusiastically.

Sam exhaled in exasperation. Nothing was ever simple in Donetsk. 'What is it,

Sergei?’

Kaledin pulled a photo out of his jacket pocket and handed it to Sam, who stared at the image of a raven-haired beauty. ‘You make my niece, Xenia, director of Smart Lifestyle in London.’

‘Sergei, there are at least a dozen European Union rules preventing her from working in the UK – and that’s without taking into account my own personal integrity.’

‘She not pretty enough? Is that it?’ Kaledin scoffed. He placed the photo of his niece back in his top pocket, reached across the desk and snatched the multi-million pound contract out of Sam’s hands. His face was black as thunder and Sam realised how volatile the Cossack could be.

‘Look, it’s nothing to do with her looks, Sergei. London is a dangerous place for such a young woman. Why would you want to send her there?’

‘She wild and a bit ...’ Sergei tapped the side of his head as he searched for the appropriate English word.

‘Crazy?’

‘... stubborn. But she work hard. You turn her into smart woman with elegant English manner.’

‘Sergei, I can’t give her a senior management position in a British company without completing a tonne of paperwork. It’s just not done. Ukraine is not even a member of the European Union yet. Look, send me her CV and I will give it to the appropriate people.’

Sam reached across the desk and snatched the contract back out of Kaledin’s hands. The Cossack seemed mollified by Sam’s response. ‘Now we go celebrate in gentlemen’s club.’

Sam sighed again. ‘I can assure you, Sergei, that is not necessary. A quiet restaurant would be more than sufficient.’ The ominous atmosphere of Donetsk unnerved him and Sam had to admit he was something of a prude when it came to visiting ‘gentlemen’s clubs’. He had plans to catch an early plane to London the next morning.

‘You not like girl?’ Kaledin asked, eyeing Sam’s lean, six-foot frame. ‘You young and handsome. Beautiful Donetsk girl throw themselves at you.’

Sam was as partial to ladies as the next man, and his rugged northern English features made him a popular catch, although he was bemused by his sexual magnetism. ‘Of course

I do,' Sam answered hastily, 'but I have a girlfriend in London.' It was a lie. Sam's neurotic girlfriend, Sally had walked out on him yet again lamenting his lack of class and ambition.

'Okay. Alexis take you to "quiet restaurant". I join later when I finish paperwork.' Kaledin stood and slapped Sam on the back. Two minutes later, Kaledin Corporation's sales manager, Alexis Martynov walked into the office. Unlike his boss, he was urbane and spoke perfect English. Sam resigned himself to Kaledin's hospitality and suspected it would be a long night.

\* \* \*

'You take me to London,' the tall stripper who had sat herself in Alexis' lap said to Sam. 'They have many good club in Soho. I earn thousand pound a night.'

'I have already told you, Svetlana, I can't take you to London. There are rules.'

'Go to hell, Englishman.' Svetlana pouted and glared at Sam as she stood and stormed off to the other side of the room.

Sam shrugged his shoulders. He had protested when Alexis took him to the nearest gentleman's club, but eventually decided that diplomacy was best served by going with the flow. He did not want to antagonise his hosts any further.

'You have done well, Sam.' Alexis sipped his vodka rather than gulp it down. 'Sergei likes you. He says you are an astute businessman and will be a good mentor for his niece, Xenia.'

'Actually, I won't be mentoring his niece,' Sam replied as he raised his beer glass to Alexis, 'but Sergei is an incredible entrepreneur. I believe our two companies will forge an enduring partnership.'

'There are not many international companies willing to invest in Ukraine while we are experiencing civil unrest. But I suppose you knew that when you drove such a hard bargain.'

'Will the Russians move in?' Sam asked, taking a sip of his Obolon beer.

Alexis shrugged his shoulders. 'Who knows? Russia is nervous about the politicians in Kiev talking about joining the European Union and NATO.'

‘Why did the armed gangs take over the buildings this morning? I thought Donetsk was safe and all the trouble was in Kiev.’

‘Most of the people here are ethnic Russians and do not trust the new government in Kiev.’ He swallowed another shot of vodka and scanned the room, looking for trouble. ‘They believe the revolution has been hijacked by extreme right-wing ultra-nationalists in Kiev. The politicians have proposed repressive legislation against Russian speakers, and have purged the parliament of pro-Russians. That’s virtually all the politicians from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Most of us wish to remain part of Ukraine, but we fear we are being persecuted by the new government.’

Alexis stared at an outburst of activity at the other side of the club. Six large men in army jackets descended upon a table of businessmen. The three strippers at the table scattered as wooden clubs and fists flew in all directions. Alexis relaxed once he decided the fracas had nothing to do with him.

‘Shouldn’t we call the police?’ Sam asked nervously, as a man in a dark grey suit was beaten across the head with a large wooden stick. Chairs were upturned and plates fell to the floor.

‘Sometimes I weep for Ukraine,’ Alexis commented, ignoring Sam’s question, unconcerned by the violence taking place across the room. ‘The vast majority of Ukrainians just want to live their lives in peace.’

Two army-jacketed brutes pulled an Asiatic looking man from his chair and pinned him against the wall. They took it in turns to pummel him in the stomach. A bottle of vodka crashed to the floor before the violence ended abruptly. The patrons of the gentlemen’s club relaxed and resumed their conversations.

‘Is the Asian man all right?’ Sam asked. He jumped as a shot was fired at another table. The room went silent until it was evident no-one had actually been killed or maimed.

‘Unfortunately, Donetsk has been ruined by separatist paramilitary thugs who take things too far. We have become a magnet for every Russian lunatic with a spare AK-47 and an army surplus jacket who fancies himself as a bit of a Rambo.’

‘I think the Russian lunatics are headed our way,’ said Sam in alarm.

‘The unrest brings unwelcome attention on Donetsk and it’s bad for business,’ Alexis

continued, ‘We’re losing market share to the Indians and the Filipinos. But of course, you knew that when you low-balled Sergei with your twenty-million pound offer.’

‘Alexis, I really think we should get out of here. They are heading straight for our table.’

Four thugs had now surrounded their table. A stocky man with a military haircut and a tattoo on his neck drew a handgun from beneath his jacket.

‘Don’t worry about them, Sam, they won’t open fire. It’s how business is done here. They probably want Sergei to increase his offer for the new office in Mariupol. I’ll deal with it.’

Sam nudged Alexis hard. ‘Alexis, for God’s sake. That old guy has just drawn a bloody great rifle from his bag.’

The rifleman was much more purposeful than the other hoodlums. He had a round face with a receding hairline and a thick moustache. Sam could not recall seeing such a menacing expression since his encounter with hired killer Jacques on board the *Iroquois* a couple of years earlier.

At last, Alexis focused on the gunman, and paled. ‘My God, it’s you! Anton Zhirkov – the Kalashnikov!’ exclaimed Alexis in English. His eyes widened with fear as he tried to rise from his chair. ‘So you finally emerged from your lair. May God have mercy upon the poor people of Donetsk.’

The gun erupted with an ear-splitting roar and Alexis collapsed to the floor. Before Sam could take in this horrific spectacle, the Kalashnikov had swivelled his rifle and pointed it at him.

\* \* \*

It wasn’t long before the Kalashnikov vanished from the club, along with the remaining patrons. One of his goons stood guarding the doorway. The stocky man with the neck tattoo set up a video camera on a tripod opposite Sam’s table. The only sound in the nearly deserted club was the incessant whining of an industrial vacuum cleaner being manoeuvred around the tables by a tall woman in ill-fitting jeans, a dirty apron and an unattractive hairnet. Every so often, she tut-tutted at the spilled drinks and upturned

tables from the recent fracas. A second cleaning lady wheeled a trolley around the room, collecting empty bottles, glasses and rubbish from the tables. She found a half-smoked cigarette in an overflowing ashtray and gleefully placed it between her lips. She paused as she lit up and then continued to push the trolley around the room, puffing on the cigarette as she went. Both women ignored preparations for Sam's presumed execution in the far corner of the club.

Meanwhile, another man known to Ukrainian authorities as 'the Ticket Collector', or just 'the Collector' to his associates, laid his instruments of death on the table in front of Sam with a bored expression on his face. Sam watched with increasing concern as a roll of electrical tape, a balaclava, a stick of RDX explosives and a timing device were placed on the table next to the dirty glasses.

The Collector connected the stick of explosive to a thin copper wire and then completed the circuit by wiring the whole contraption to the timing device. He checked his watch and set the timer so the device would explode in ten minutes. When he had completed his preparations, he placed the explosive stick in Sam's jacket and buttoned it up. There was enough nitroglycerine in the cigar-shaped device to send Sam and half the building into the next dimension.

Suddenly, three strippers appeared from a side door and walked nonchalantly across the dance floor towards the exit without glancing in Sam's direction. Sam noticed they had changed out of their skimpy club attire and were dressed in jeans and long, thick coats to protect themselves against the blast of Siberian air that would hit them as they exited onto the street. He saw one of the women write something, presumably her phone number, on a piece of paper and slip it into the shirt pocket of the thug guarding the door.

The man behind the camera raised a thumb to signal he was ready and the Collector slipped the balaclava over his head, picked up the thick roll of black electrical tape and signalled to Sam to put his hands behind his back. Sam glanced around the room in desperation, knowing it was his last chance to make a break for it. The cameraman anticipated Sam's reaction and grunted a warning, fingering an AK-47 slung over his shoulder.

The whine of the vacuum cleaner intensified in pitch as the cleaning woman headed towards Sam's table. She gestured to him to raise his feet as she ran the machine

backwards and forwards under the table. The woman recoiled in horror when she discovered Alexis' corpse slumped against the wall, turned to face the Collector and glared at him. Sam watched on as she berated him and the cameraman in Russian. From her mannerisms, he guessed she was complaining about the mess and how long it would take her to clean the blood spatter off the wall. Sam was astonished at the woman's bravado, as the verbal exchange escalated into a full-blown argument. The lady who was collecting empty glasses purposefully stubbed out her cigarette and wheeled her fully laden trolley towards the ruckus.

The Collector finally lost his patience. '*Otvali dam!*' he swore rudely at the two female cleaners in Russian and signalled with his thumb for them to leave the club immediately.

The tall woman sighed loudly, leaned down and switched off her noisy vacuum cleaner. When she straightened up, she was brandishing an MP-443 Grach pistol in her right hand and rammed it hard against the Collector's temple. At the same moment, the second cleaner pulled out a Makarov pistol from under a pile of vodka-soaked cleaning cloths on her trolley. She whipped the pistol butt hard against the side of the cameraman's head before he could react. The cameraman fell unconscious at her feet and his AK-47 clattered noisily to the floor.

'Actually, it be you who need to fuck off,' she said in broken English, pulling the Collector's balaclava off his head. 'Gregor Dimitriov! I knew it was you, you piece of shit,' she said, recognising the would-be assassin. She pulled off her hairnet and shook out a mane of lustrous, raven-black hair.

'You!' the Collector was shocked as he recognised his assailant, his eyes glistening with fear and beads of sweat popped onto his forehead.

Sam glanced at the doorway and saw that the guard had also been disarmed and forced to lie on the ground by the three strippers in long coats. One of them was holding a pistol against the back of his head.

'Sit!' commanded the raven-haired woman as she pushed the Grach pistol barrel hard against the Collector's temple. The man complied and began babbling for his life in Russian.

'You want cigar?' she asked the Collector. Sam watched as she sauntered over,

winked at him cheekily and pulled the stick of high explosive RDX out of his jacket pocket. She walked back to the seated assassin.

*‘Otkroy rot,’* she said to the squirming assassin – ‘Open your mouth.’ She removed the timing device and stuffed the lethal cigar-shaped explosive package in his open mouth.

The second woman now focused the camera on the shaking Collector as the raven-haired woman walked behind the Collector and put her arms around the whimpering man’s shoulders. He jumped at her touch, as if a deadly viper had slithered down his collar.

‘Good evening, Anton Zhirkov,’ she purred for the benefit of the camera, ‘You send this filth to Sergei Kaledin’s club.’ She patted the assassin on the cheek. ‘Next time he come to club, he get proper Donetsk blow job.’ The woman produced a disposable Bic lighter and flicked it perilously close to the stick of high-grade RDX explosive quivering like a jelly in the Collector’s lips. Having made her point to the camera, she walked over to the unconscious cameraman and picked up his AK-47 from the floor. She then walked over to a speechless Sam, took his hand and pulled him up from his chair. His legs were still shaking and he felt unsteady on his feet. Threading her arm through his, she walked him to the door of the club, stepping over the prone guard as they made their way out.

‘Uncle Sergei say you look at my résumé?’ Xenia said cheerfully, as she pulled out a flimsy, folded single sheet of paper from the back pocket of her jeans and placed it neatly into Sam’s inside jacket pocket.

## CHAPTER 2

As the black taxicab pulled into the factory gates of Smart Lifestyle's head office in South-East London, Sam knew something was wrong. A stream of office workers were heading to their vehicles carrying personal effects in an assortment of cardboard boxes. A group of employees were huddled outside the reception area under the Smart Lifestyle logo. Sam recognised his colleagues from the procurement team. The three women in the group were in tears and giving each other hugs while the men muttered mutinously. Sam stepped out of the taxi with his wheeled cabin bag and headed towards his second-in-command, Juliette Woodgate.

'Juliette, what's happening?'

Juliette tried to smile, but could only sniffle into her tissue. 'Sam. We thought you wouldn't be coming back. Haven't you heard?'

'Heard what?' he replied in alarm.

'The executives have sold Smart Lifestyle to the American company, Wulff Communications. They thought your Ukraine negotiation was just a pipedream and would never work. As part of the sale, they're making two hundred administration staff redundant. They have sacked the entire procurement team, including you, most of finance and half of human resources. They gave us two hours' notice to clear our desks.'

'Here, let me help you.' Sam handed Juliette the handle of his cabin bag, took her box and walked with her to her bright red Mini Cooper. 'Juliette, I have to get into the building to find out what's going on. Please round up the team and tell them not to go home. I'll see if I can get their jobs back by lunchtime.'

The petite blonde forced a smile. Sam placed the box on the bonnet of her car and she handed him back his cabin bag. She extracted a fresh tissue from her handbag and blew her button nose, shifting her silver-framed glasses to wipe her eyes. As a single mother with an eight-year-old son, losing her job was devastating. Pushing back her pixie-cut hair over her ears she said, 'Leo Wulff himself is in the building. He's holding a conference in the boardroom with the executive team. Andrew has been told to clear his desk by midday.'

'Thanks Juliette. I'll let you know how I go.'

Sam strolled back to the building, his mind in a whirl. Wulff Communications was a multinational media company based in New York. It owned a string of publications, TV stations and advertising agencies. It was typical of the predatory American company to swoop on a growing business suffering severe cash flow problems. Sam's Ukraine strategy had come twenty-four hours too late.

The reception area was crowded with redundant employees making their way out of the building with their personal possessions. Adding to the crush of people was a group of sharp-suited American executives, who were busy signing in on the visitors' register. Many had come straight from the airport and like Sam, were pulling wheeled baggage. Sam assumed they were headed to the boardroom conference on the second floor. Two burly security guards stood near the reception desk and watched for potential troublemakers. Sam bypassed the reception desk. A security guard looked at Sam and checked his clipboard with a frown on his face, but he was encircled by a party of Americans asking for directions. Sam entered one of the lifts while the security guard was distracted. He held his identity badge to the card reader and pushed the button for the second floor. The lift refused to move. The gaggle of Americans walked in behind Sam and as one of them held their visitor pass to the card reader, the lift sprang into action.

'Have you just flown in from New York?' asked a tall, well-dressed American looking down at Sam's luggage. At fifty-eight-years-old and with movie star good looks, Leo Wulff exuded confidence. Only his greying temples betrayed his age. 'I don't think we've met.' The other men in the lift turned to look at Sam, envious he had managed to monopolise the great man's attention.

'I just arrived from Donetsk,' replied Sam casually.

'You don't say? I have been meaning to go there. Did you check out any companies worth buying? There should be some great opportunities for those of us with balls of steel.'

There were murmurs of assent from those in the lift as if they had all been thinking the same thing.

'No, sir. That wasn't the purpose of my visit. But I did manage to secure the services of two hundred of the best software programmers in the world and enough data storage space to last two years.'

‘How much did that cost?’

‘Twenty million a year.’

‘Good Lord! That’s incredible.’ The big American was impressed. The suits that surrounded him all nodded in unison while one of their number echoed, ‘That’s incredible.’ The man held out his hand to Sam as the lift doors opened on the second floor. ‘Leonard Wulff. Catch me after the boardroom conference.’

Sam grasped Wulff’s hand and shook it. ‘Sam Jardine.’

‘Pleased to meet you, Sam. Now let’s show these workshy Limey bastards how a company should be run.’

\* \* \*

Leo Wulff was both charming and intimidating as he made a well-executed presentation to Smart Lifestyle’s executive team on how things were going to be different from here on. Wulff expected total dedication to the job and loyalty to the company. Anyone looking for an easy life was free to walk out the door with a redundancy cheque in his or her pocket.

‘Any takers? There’s a hundred grand for anyone who can’t take the heat. I only want men and women with fire in their bellies and loyalty in their hearts. Smart Lifestyle will be a household name around the world within twelve months.’

Sam watched chief operations officer, Doug Firth step forward. He was an honest, hard-working man in his early sixties. ‘To be honest, Mr Wulff, I don’t need this crap. I hate your TV stations and their right-wing agenda. They’re nothing but mouthpieces for religious extremists and Republican Party hawks. Your so-called newspapers are an insult to the intelligence. You can count me out.’

‘You have the right to your opinions, misguided as they may be,’ Wulff replied evenly. With a flourish, he wrote out a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds. Doug Firth took the cheque and with his grey-haired head held high, walked out of the boardroom. ‘Anyone else?’

There was silence in the room, but Sam could sense the discontent and negativity building among the remaining senior executives. Two more managers came forward to

collect their cheques. Both were in the twilight of their careers and had been doing the maths in their heads.

Wulff resumed his presentation and pointed to a number of charts displayed on the screen behind him. They projected spectacular growth in specialised social media products. Smart Lifestyle's revolutionary 'LifeSmart' communication device would become the must-have accessory of the decade among the world's elite.

Whilst Wulff spoke, Sam studied the American executives who shadowed their enigmatic boss like adoring puppies. They were mostly in their mid-thirties he guessed, and good-looking with perfect white teeth.

'My change management people you see here will help make the transition as easy as possible for you,' said Wulff, indicating his team of suits. He paused to take a drink of water. As he did so, he looked around the room and caught Sam's eye. 'As an example of my commitment to you, I have flown in Wulff Communication's special negotiator all the way from Ukraine to be with us this morning. Mr Sam Jardine is one of my brightest managers and I have asked him to be at your service during the entire transition period. This talented young man has just procured the services of two hundred of the world's best software engineers. Our leadership in the field of artificial intelligence in the social media industry is assured by his actions.' Wulff let the significance of Sam's achievement sink in for a moment. 'Not only that, he has secured enough data storage space to accommodate the company's growth for the next two years. All this for the incredibly low sum of twenty million dollars a year.'

Wulff looked at Sam and smiled. Sam wondered whether he should correct Wulff's misinterpretation of his role or the fact he'd mixed up his currencies, but somehow the moment passed. Besides, it would have been unthinkable to interrupt the great man while he was in full flow. 'Sam is one of Wulff Communication's brilliant new leaders, destined for great things. Sam, would you introduce yourself to the British executive team and say a few words about yourself?'

Sam hesitantly stood. He could see the consternation on the faces of Smart Lifestyle's executives. Sure, he was a great negotiator and head of the procurement team but in their eyes, he barely deserved to be in the same room. He could see them struggling to understand the connection between Wulff Communications' takeover of their firm and

Sam's sudden elevation in status. But like Sam, they did not feel brave enough to question Wulff's summary of the situation.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' Sam began, trying to avoid direct eye contact with his former bosses, 'We are fortunate today to be in the company of one of the world's great businessmen. Mr Leonard Wulff has shown us a vision of what will be achieved under his dynamic leadership. My recent negotiations in Donetsk may have secured a bright future for this factory,' Sam paused for effect, 'but I can assure you there will be bigger and better deals to come. The eight dynamic men and women of the Penge procurement team have pledged their loyalty to Wulff Communications and are looking for more opportunities to make Mr Wulff's vision a reality.'

Sam glanced across at Wulff, who was nodding his head. The American management team all nodded in vigorous agreement. The British finance director, Jim Blyth looked like he was about to speak but Sam stared him down. The two had never seen eye to eye.

'Thank you, Mr Jardine. That was most impressive,' said Wulff as Sam sat down. Jim Blyth put up his hand, but Wulff ignored him. 'I will be keeping the name of Smart Lifestyle for the time being and London will be the headquarters of our new social media division. This company has been badly run and needs decisive management. My first decision is to appoint Sam Jardine as acting general manager of the new division during the three-month transition. He will report to me all instances of negativity or lack of commitment. He has my complete authority to dismiss anyone whose loyalty to Wulff Communications is questionable.' He pointed to Jim Blyth. 'You had a question, sir?'

Blyth shifted in his seat. 'I – I was just going to say we all agree with Mr Jardine, Mr Wulff.'

'Excellent. I am glad we see eye to eye.'

\* \* \*

Leo Wulff and Sam waited in silence as the outgoing CEO of Smart Lifestyle cleared the remaining items from his desk. Andrew Sinclair was a proud man and a brilliant engineer who had built the company from scratch. The company had grown bigger than he ever imagined possible but he had not been able to lead the company through the

resulting cash flow crisis. As an engineer, he was much happier bringing innovative new products and services to market. He felt the crushing responsibility for the two hundred staff who had been made redundant that day. He put the last memento into his box, walked over to Wulff and shook him by the hand. As he walked past Sam on the way to the door, he tucked his box under one arm and grasped Sam's shoulder.

'Mr Jardine, living proof of how the meek shall inherit the earth! I must congratulate you on your unexpected rise to the top.'

'Thank you, Mr Sinclair.'

'I hand over to you the welfare of the fine men and women of this company. Use your responsibility wisely and ensure your actions are guided by the highest ethical principles. Carry your successes with humility and bear your failures with grace, young man.'

'Thank you for your advice, Mr Sinclair. It means a lot to me.'

The gifted electronic engineer walked out of the door without looking back.

'You know Mr Sinclair?' Wulff asked, impressed.

'We go back a long way,' replied Sam, 'You have done well to acquire his company just as it is on the threshold of success.'

Wulff and Sam negotiated long and hard about the future direction of Smart Lifestyle under the ownership and direction of Wulff Communications Corporation. Sam was firm on the need to reinstate the procurement team under the leadership of his protégé, Juliette Woodgate. As the meeting ended, Wulff called in the HR Director and dictated the terms of Sam's contract as the acting general manager of the new social media division. With a flourish of his large silver pen, he put his signature to Sam's contract.

Wulff leaned back in the chair that had only recently belonged to Andrew Sinclair. 'I can tell a good man when I meet one, Sam. I see you as an investment in the future of my communications empire. If you can keep my new social media division on an even keel for the next three months, the job is yours on a permanent basis.'

'I won't let you down, Mr Wulff. This new division means everything to me.'

'I can tell that, Sam. We have common values. In fact, I am going to ask you a question and if you answer it correctly, I'm going to raise your salary by fifty per cent.'

'Really?' Sam felt his heart rate quicken. A fifty per cent pay rise would make a massive difference to his cashflow. He had been left with a hefty credit card debt after his

ex-girlfriend Sally went on a West End shopping spree just before she walked out on him.

‘No-one has ever responded correctly to this question, Sam, yet the answer is obvious. It pains me that people are so shallow.’

‘And the question?’

Wulff leaned back in his leather chair and his eyes narrowed, his expression as fanatical as a TV evangelist. ‘Tell me, Sam. What is the most precious commodity on the planet?’

Sam racked his brains. His mind ran through the list of precious metals but he rejected that particular line of thinking as being too obvious. Wulff was a well-known religious zealot, but Wulff was comfortable with that aspect of his life so Sam reasoned religion would not be the answer. Then he remembered how Doug Firth’s outburst in the boardroom criticising his right-wing agenda had unsettled Wulff.

‘Democracy,’ Sam replied with absolute conviction.

‘I knew it the moment I saw you in the lift. You’re a kindred spirit.’ Wulff picked up Sam’s contract, wrote in the new inflated salary in spidery writing and initialled his changes.

‘Thank you, sir,’ replied Sam, although he was appalled at the thought of having his personal values likened to those of the arch-conservative Wulff.

‘Sam, I need to ask you if the decision to negotiate with the Ukrainians was yours alone.’

‘It was, sir.’

‘I have to say that was a masterstroke. I understand Ukraine is intending to join the EU and NATO. The Ukrainians are America’s newest allies and are located on Russia’s doorstep. How delicious is that irony?’

‘I think the people of Donetsk have a different perspective from those in Kiev.’

‘Nonsense. The values of democracy and freedom are universal. It will be just like the fall of the Berlin Wall all over again.’

Sam looked at Wulff doubtfully. The ‘Kalashnikov’ had not seemed too concerned about the values of democracy and freedom when he blew Alexis’ brains out at the gentlemen’s club.

Wulff continued. ‘We need to commence the campaign for the democratisation of

Ukraine right here in London, Sam. We should appoint a high-profile citizen of Donetsk to the executive ranks of our social media division and plant the seeds of democracy where they can be harvested for generations to come.’ Sam was surprised how Wulff’s demeanour suddenly became almost fanatical. ‘If I have judged you correctly, Sam, then I assume you already have a high-calibre Ukrainian national in mind? Someone well connected, energetic and full of potential. Someone who would do our bidding once they return to Donetsk?’

For a moment, Sam was lost for words. The thought had not even entered his mind. Then he reached into his inside pocket and pulled out the flimsy one page résumé of Kaledin’s niece, which Xenia had slipped to him the previous night. He handed it to Wulff.

‘I am assured she has all the qualities you mention and she is the niece of one of Ukraine’s richest oligarchs.’

Wulff skimmed through the flimsy, badly written résumé and raised an eyebrow at Sam.

‘It’s an unusual choice to say the least, Sam, but I’m going to trust your judgement.’ Wulff leaned back once more in the executive leather chair. He gazed out of the window at the dreary London skyline. It was threatening to snow.

‘Have you considered what we can do with this company?’ Wulff asked Sam. ‘Big Data is the new source of power in the twenty-first century. With Smart Lifestyle’s technology and its global access to personal information, we can change the way humans behave. No-one will be able to resist the lure of our Smart Lifestyle products once my marketing team in New York gets to work. Just think, Sam, we have the ability to identify those with a wholesome lifestyle and a strong work ethic and give them a helping hand. We can thwart the immoral and the scroungers. We can write intelligent software that will identify society’s depraved individuals and punish them for their misdeeds. We can harvest the innermost secrets of the rich and powerful for the greater good of society. Sam, thanks to the deal you struck in Donetsk, our data will be safe from the prying eyes of liberal Western regulators. It’s social engineering on a massive scale and we hold the keys.’

But Sam had stopped listening minutes ago. The combined effects of his near-death

experience in Donetsk and chronic jetlag were taking their toll. Forcing himself to be polite, he excused himself and left the office with his new contract in his hand.

\* \* \*

Wulff had half an hour to spare before his limousine was due to spirit him away to Heathrow. He used the time to open his Smart Lifestyle account on his laptop. He looked in wonder at the marvellous website that promised wealth, fame and connections with the rich and famous. Sinclair had a natural gift for creating a world of enticing possibilities for his customers. Wulff inserted a USB into his Lenovo computer and downloaded the program that had been specially written for him in New York. It was an algorithm that sorted the vast numbers of personal profiles on the Smart Lifestyle database into different personality types. He had spent the last three months working with a team of eminent psychologists in New York to define which human characteristics and personality traits most closely conformed to his own conservative view of the ‘American way’. Wulff leaned back in satisfaction as his algorithm searched every tweet, email and photo of every customer in the Smart Lifestyle database and ranked them in order based on his own sense of conservative values.

When the algorithm had completed its work, he entered the name ‘Andrew Sinclair’ into the search engine and retrieved a full profile of the prolific inventor and software engineer. He was disappointed to see that the previous owner of Smart Lifestyle was considered by the algorithm to be a model citizen, even if he did not fit Wulff’s ideal of the ‘American Way’. Sinclair and his cohort of senior directors epitomised the haughty, overbearing teachers of his childhood who had belittled him and destroyed his self-esteem. Forty-five years on, Wulff had finally made his mark on the world. Now, Sinclair and many others like him would feel the full force of his retribution.

He looked at the various tabs that ran down the left-hand side of Sinclair’s personal profile. Ignoring the tabs labelled ‘Political Affiliations’ and ‘Sexual Preferences’, Wulff clicked on the ‘Financial Transactions’ tab. He saw the four hundred and fifty million dollar deposit that had been credited to Sinclair’s account by Wulff Communications the previous day. Wulff then opened the tab labelled ‘Emails’ and reviewed Sinclair’s

personal email history. Wulff sorted Sinclair's emails by sender and searched for the name 'Doug Firth'. Wulff still felt humiliated by the insults the outgoing chief operations officer had heaped on him at the executive meeting a few hours earlier.

Sinclair had received over seventy emails from Firth in the last ten days. As Wulff suspected, Sinclair had been plotting with Firth to start up a new social media company that would be in direct competition with Smart Lifestyle. The emails provided a list of a dozen of the company's best salesmen and software engineers who would be willing to jump ship.

Wulff sighed at the perfidious nature of humanity. Left with no choice, he picked up his phone and sent a coded instruction to his two operatives who were tailing Andrew Sinclair on the M25 just past the Waltham Abbey junction.

\* \* \*

'Hey Geoff, are you still in visual contact with grey Volvo AK54 UHB?'

'Affirmative,' came the response from the van driver.

'Okay. I have just received a message from the Keeper. He says it's time to unleash the Night Hag.'

'Roger that.'

Geoff looked in the rear-view mirror at the bearded East European man seated in the back of the van among an array of technical equipment. A faint smile appeared on the bearded man's face as his fingers flashed across a computer keyboard. The white van's cameras zoomed in on the grey Volvo and he received a crystal-clear image on his computer display. His fingers clattered once more and he stared at the image of the Volvo's tail-lights. At first, nothing happened. But as the M25 motorway twisted away to the left, the Volvo continued to travel in a straight direction. An angry driver in a BMW blared its horn as the Volvo in the neighbouring lane sideswiped his car. The grey car crossed into the busy right-hand lane and continued on its straight arrow trajectory. The Volvo's tail-lights illuminated repeatedly as the Volvo driver pumped his brakes to no apparent effect. The Volvo continued ever faster towards the edge of the motorway as if pulled by an unseen magnet. The wheels of the stricken vehicle left the bitumen surface

of the motorway just as a concrete bridge spanning the M25 came into view. The Volvo headed serenely towards the massive concrete pillar like a ghost embracing its lover. Andrew Sinclair slammed headlong into the bridge's enormous precast concrete column at a speed in excess of one hundred miles per hour. One of the great entrepreneurs of British industry was vaporised in a fireball of concrete and metal.

\* \* \*

'The Wulff Agenda' is available on Amazon at this link

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B015GYZNWE/>

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