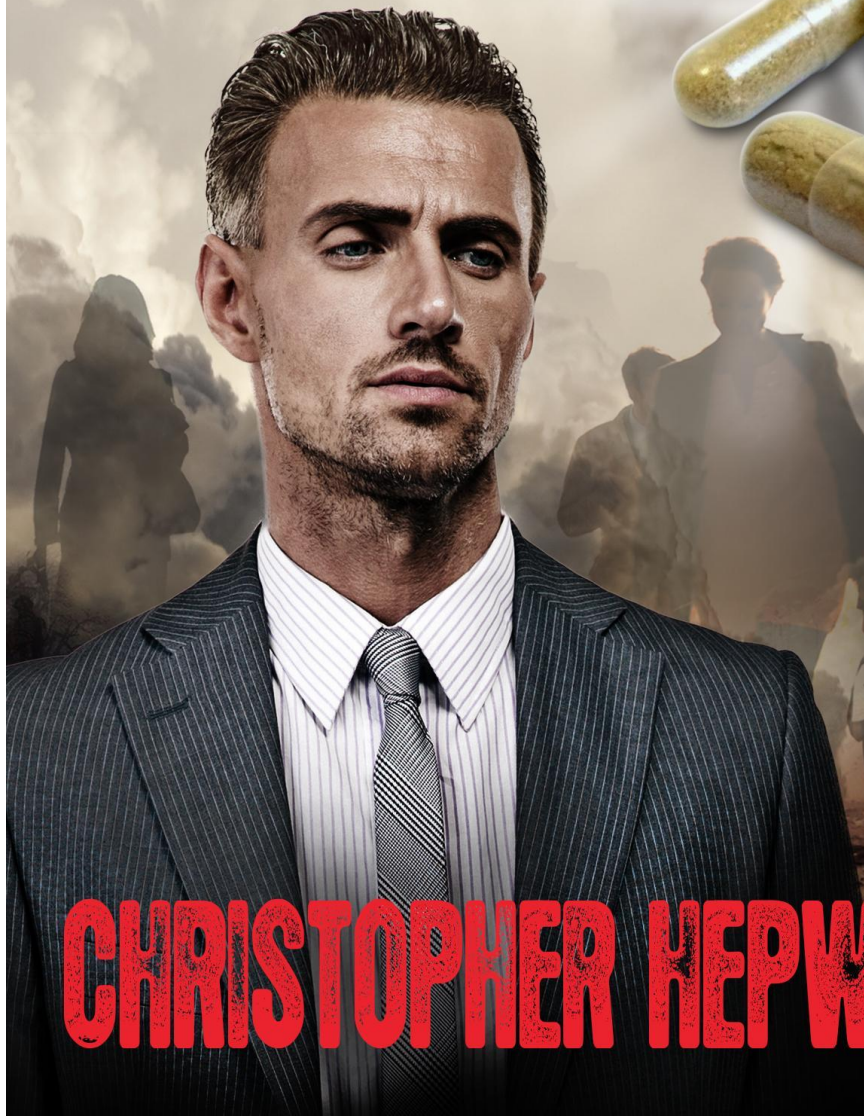


# THE SLEEPWALKER LEGACY



**CHRISTOPHER HEPWORTH**

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**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 Politbureau 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 Politbureau 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 Politbureau 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 Politbureau 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 percent 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 leant forward 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, its 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 leant 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 on to 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 forward 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 Politbureau 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 Politbureau 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 Politbureau 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 leant 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 finishline at the entrance to his workplace of 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 learnt 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 ratruns. 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 tranquilising 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 discretely, 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 into 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 leant 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 leant 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 leant 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, the warriors were harmed by neither fire nor iron; 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 with 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 Novalisor 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 spilt 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.

\* \* \*

END OF THIS SAMPLE

Did you enjoy this sample?

*The Sleepwalker Legacy* is now available from these online stores:

