

Death By Design

Dr Sharon Blake, epidemiologist, geneticist and pediatric oncologist stood in the ante room. She had been recruited, after several refusals, to at least listen to an offer that could open her career to significant advancement. She didn't yet know that it would also allow her to research her deadliest nightmare.

Her daughter Sally had a rare form of leukemia. Diseases of the blood were infamously difficult to track, treat or heal. Most sufferers simply died. Most suffered horribly. Fewer than 40% survived. Those that did waited in the dark for the return of their deadly companion.

She was being offered much more than a new position. She was to become the Managing Director of an entirely new firm with an annual nine figure budget. It would have direct ties to the FDA fast track authority - without a single purposeful solution on hand.

She only had to run the operation. She however only wished to seek and destroy her nemesis, leukemia.

T-cell-prolymphocytic leukemia (T-PLL) is the most deadly form of the disease. It almost always affects adults. Almost. Sally began showing signs of it at six. She was nearly seven now and had a prognosis of less than a year to live. T-PLL was the evil horror of

Dr. Blake's life. She had no interest in anything that distracted her from her mission. Her mission was simple. Keep her child alive until she could find a solution.

The door opened. The executive secretary had only to look at Dr. Blake, who stood tall and stepped across the dark wooden threshold.

'Welcome. Please have a seat wherever you'd like.' Several comfortable chairs surrounded the deep view of the Bay through tinted windows.

'I prefer to stand. I doubt I shall be here long.' Her answer was direct without being rude. She quickly established control of the meeting. 'What you propose is intriguing, certainly. I cannot accept. Thank you.'

Her gaze swept across the water long enough to show a telltale of curiosity. A new building partially obscured the view to the south.

'Perhaps you are correct. I have been wrong before. If so, I offer my apologies for taking valuable time from your research.' He paused.

'Perhaps, however, you would like to consider my deeper proposal...'

'Which is?'

'T-PLL research.'

'Are you being rude by tempting me or simply ignorant?' She maintained control despite her rising blood pressure. She suspected he could sense the slight flush to her face.

'Please forgive me, but I am neither rude nor ignorant.'

'My turn to apologize.' Her words were clipped, without emotion.

He had to match her to his strength, that he knew. She had too powerful an intellect and personality. She was not to be outwitted or indulged. He had already lost the opening gambit and was down a pawn after four moves.

'I - we - propose the Directorship as an autonomous position. You will research what you chose. You will determine who works with you, what assays they move down, how they progress. You alone will dictate every aspect of the firm's executive decisions. All other decisions will be delegated by you to whom you choose. Your contacts in the FDA already await your discretion.

'My role is to provide you with an infinite supply of something to which you have, at best, limited access. Capital.'

'Which always comes with a thicket of legal constraints. I doubt you can or should cut through such a morass.' Her comment was the first sign that he had advanced a piece across the board. She had asked him a question - in her own manner.

'I - we - have established a charity in Switzerland, a stiftung. It's sole purpose it to discover a cure for leukemia, with a particular

emphasis upon T-PLL. It currently has more than \$1B Swiss francs on deposit. The Swiss franc currently trades near par with the US dollar.

'You are to be nominated as 'participating director'. You will have all voting rights, excepting funding discovery. The other five members, while discreet, have asked my firm to suggest you as the best candidate for the position.

'Do you have any reason why I should not make such a suggestion?' He paused and gazed at the bridges crossing the Bay.

Her pause was conjunctive. 'My passport has less than six months to expiration.'

'I have a new Swiss passport for you here. Here is a packet already prepared for your US renewal, along with a GOES approval of course.

'Also, you will find the keys to your research building - look, it's just there.' He pointed to the south. 'Obscurans' was titled across its leading arch.

'You will also find a directory of names you may find worthy of consideration for your lead teams. Of course, you have full discretion in building such a team, within the confines of the labor regulatory world.

'You will also discover a wide variety of communications and transportation devices at your immediate disposal. If I may suggest, my personal executive manager whom you just met outside has offered to interview with you as head of HR.

'If you decide to accept, your first trip to Geneva can occur at your best convenient time.'

'By the way, Sally can be involved, should be involved, as quickly as she is psychologically prepared to do so. Her proximity is of both family and research value.'

'What do you mean by 'funding discovery'?

'Discretion of the other members as to their wealth and its sources.'

'No other funding discoveries? No constraints upon funding discernments, dispersals or deposits?'

'None.'

'Keep your list. I know exactly who to invite.'

'Of course.'

'Mary Blakslee, isn't it? Your executive manager?'

'Yes. She has been involved with our recruitment of you. She has a significant interest in your field. She prefers medical research to... human engineering.'

He slipped it past her. She missed the cue. She was in, he knew.

'How much time do I have to decide?'

'None. If you are to move forward, you have no time. You are already late. T-PLL is far ahead of you and you are losing ground. Unless you have something better...'

'Count me in.'

'I did before you walked in the door.'

Checkmate.