



## The Sleepwalker (CHERUB #9)

By Robert Muchamore

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...

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A distressed twelve-year-old calls a police hotline and blames his father for the explosion. It could be a breakthrough, but there's no hard evidence and the boy has a history of violence and emotional problems.

Only CHERUB agents can unearth the truth. They're trained professionals with one essential advantage: adults never suspect that children are spying on them.

For official purposes, these children do not exist.

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**The Sleepwalker (CHERUB #9) By Robert Muchamore Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

'A really good book that you could re-read over and over again.'?Guardian

Praise for books in the CHERUB series: 'Punchy, exciting, glamorous and, what's more, you'll completely wish it was true.'?Sunday Express

'Pacy writing, punchy dialogue and a gripping plot, it's got it all.'?Daily Express

'Fast-moving action ... and cool gadgets!'?The Times

'Crackling tension and high-octane drama.'?Daily Mail

### **About the Author**

Robert Muchamore was born in Islington in 1972 and spent thirteen years working as a private investigator. He loves Arsenal and watching people fall down holes. He hates swimming and getting chased by cows. He was inspired to start writing by his nephew's complaints about the lack of anything for him to read! His books are now bestsellers in many countries around the world. For more information, go to [www.muchamore.com](http://www.muchamore.com).

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The Sleepwalker



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACK**

Bethany Parker had been away on a mission for eight months, which was long enough for plenty to change on CHERUB campus. There was a line of freshly planted saplings along the path that led to the main entrance, new floor tiles in the main building, and an enormous satellite dish in the gravel outside the mission preparation building.

But it was the other cherubs that really made Bethany feel like she'd missed out: Girls had different hairstyles and cute boys had succumbed to acne; there were qualified agents she'd never even seen and new red shirts who seemed impossibly tiny.

As she stepped out of the elevator on the ground floor, Bethany spotted the handler Meryl Spencer. The athletically built Kenyan broke into a warm smile.

"Nice tan, Bethany. We've been hearing good things about you."

Bethany was slightly embarrassed by the compliment. "Thanks, miss . . . I'm looking for Lauren, have you seen her around?"

“She’s probably over by the vehicle shop. There’s supposed to be some kind of race or something. I expect your brother, Jake, will be up there too.”

Bethany felt guilty as she realized she’d prioritized finding her best friend over her kid brother. After jogging down a short corridor, she stepped through the back doors of the campus’s main building and ran down the path between the all-weather tennis courts. Her combat trousers and boots felt clumsy after eight months in parts of Brazil and the United States, where she’d rarely worn anything heavier than shorts and sandals.

The sun was dropping below the horizon as she crossed the deserted playing fields. Orange light pierced the trees and made her squint, but being back on campus felt good. The cool evening air was a change from the humidity, and she deliberately ran through the muddiest part of a goalmouth because she felt more at home with a bit of CHERUB campus stuck to her brand-new boots: after a struggle she’d discovered that her old pair didn’t fit.

“Lauren,” Bethany shouted as she came over the brow of a slight hill. Down below, a crowd of thirty kids were gathered in the parking lot. They mostly faced toward a squat workshop with aluminium sides. The three sets of hangar-style doors along the front were open. Inside were brightly lit workstations covered with tools, and four cars in various states of disassembly.

All vehicles in the CHERUB fleet got upgraded in this workshop: stiffer suspension, satellite tracking, performance-tuned engine, plus tinted glass and subtly altered controls to make life easier for underaged drivers. To ensure the highest standards of reliability, routine servicing and repair work was also done on campus, along with occasional special jobs, such as fitting a car with a hidden compartment or installing listening devices.

Quite a few people turned to see who was shouting. Lauren Adams gasped as she recognized her best friend. She backed out of the crowd and charged up the hill to give Bethany a hug.

“My god,” Lauren screamed happily as the two girls pulled each other tight. “I didn’t even know you were back. Why didn’t you text me?”

Bethany smiled and made a little squealing sound. “I wanted it to be a surprise.”

“When did you get back from Brazil?”

Bethany looked at her watch. “Our jet landed at the RAF base down the road five hours ago, but I had to go straight into an emergency debriefing with Maureen Evans, and then I had to see the chairwoman.”

Lauren looked at her friend’s navy CHERUB T-shirt. “Promotion, too. Well done!”

“Zara told me I deserved black,” Bethany said. “But you only get that for outstanding performance on more than one mission, no matter how long you’re away.”

Lauren nodded sympathetically, though she was secretly pleased that she still outranked her friend. “So how was the mission?”

“Hard work, but we took care of business in the end. How about you, are you still suspended?”

Lauren shrugged. “I spent a few days doing security tests on RAF bases, and I helped a pair of new agents

settle into a mission over in Northern Ireland, but I'm still banned from going on any big missions of my own for another month."

"I brought you back a present, but I thought I'd save it for your birthday next week," Bethany said before stopping to give a curious look at a small girl dashing up the hill toward them.

"This is Coral," Lauren explained as the six-year-old sidled up to her. "When I got punished I had to go and help out in the junior block. You know, putting the little red shirts to bed and reading them stories and stuff? But I enjoyed it, so I still go over there to help out, and I get enough learning credits out of it that I don't have to do stupid dance or drama classes anymore."

"Cool." Bethany smiled. "Though I've never understood what you've got against drama classes."

Lauren tutted as Coral slid her hand in Lauren's trouser pocket and shyly nuzzled her leg.

"Drama's so moronic," Lauren moaned. "Remember that time Mrs. Dickerson had us waving our arms around pretending to be trees for a whole hour?"

Bethany laughed as she imitated the teacher's voice. "Breathe deeeeeep and feel your body move with the wind rushing through your branches."

"I wouldn't mind so much, but you can't breathe deep," Lauren said. "That drama studio has no windows and it always stinks of feet."

The two girls laughed harder than the joke deserved, because it felt good being back together.

"Coral, this is my friend Bethany," Lauren said as she pulled the little girl out from behind her legs. "Stop acting daft and say hello."

Bethany squatted down and gave the tiny girl a smile.

"Coral's only been on campus a few days," Lauren explained. "Her big brother's already rumbling with the other red shirts, but Coral's a bit overwhelmed, so I'm keeping an eye until she settles in."

"Hello, Bethany," Coral said as she reached out to shake hands.

Bethany noticed chips of Lauren's black nail polish on Coral's fingernails as she took her little hand. "Aren't you formal!" she said. "Nice to meet you, Coral."

Coral seemed less shy after the introductions. Lauren and Bethany each took one of her hands and stretched the youngster between them as they walked downhill toward the gathering in front of the vehicle workshop.

"So what's going on in the garage?" Bethany asked.

"It's mainly about boys flexing their egos and getting grease on their overalls," Lauren said. "You can cut the testosterone down there with a knife."

"I see," Bethany said, though she clearly didn't.

“They retired a couple of the old golf carts the staff use for getting around campus,” Lauren continued. “But instead of scrapping them, Terry Campbell has been helping some of the boys convert them into racing carts by fitting motorbike engines. You know what James is like about anything even slightly to do with motorbikes? I’ve hardly seen him since we got back from summer hostel.”

“And my brother’s involved too?”

Lauren nodded. “Jake’s part of James’s crew.”

With Coral still holding their hands, Lauren and Bethany eased between the crowd and stepped through the open front of the garage. There were two golf carts, each surrounded by boys in blue overalls.

The carts were dented and rusty after more than a decade of plying the paths around campus, but instead of being allowed to die with dignity, they’d had their batteries and electric motors stripped out and replaced by the engine and transmission from a motorbike, and a selection of dubious accessories stuck on the outside. James’s team had added four sets of wing mirrors, gold paint, and go-faster stripes.

“What a heap of crap,” Bethany said, making sure everyone heard as she stepped up to James Adams’s stocky legs, which poked from beneath the jacked-up cart.

“Hey, sis,” Bethany’s eleven-year-old brother, Jake, said as he turned away from a tool chest. “Did you bring me a prezzie?”

“I’ve got three loads of dirty laundry you can have if you like,” Bethany said before giving him a brief hug. Like most siblings, Jake and Bethany loved each other deep down, but in their case, you needed a submarine with a powerful searchlight to get there.

James slid out from under the cart and spoke to his three teammates as he sat up. “I put a clamp and half a roll of sticky tape over the seals, so we shouldn’t have any more problems with oil pressure.”

“I’m back, James,” Bethany said, grinning and holding her arms out exuberantly. “Are you pleased to see me?”

James shook his head with contempt as he lifted up the cart and kicked away the jacks before lowering it to the ground. He was shocked at how different Bethany looked. She’d grown eight centimeters, she had much nicer boobs, and the tan made her look older than thirteen. If she’d been a couple of years older, she was the kind of girl he’d probably try getting off with.

“You’ve certainly changed,” James said as he looked around and saw that the other two members of his crew—thirteen-year-olds Rat and Andy—practically had their tongues hanging out.

“Bethany, listen to this baby when we fire her up,” Rat said eagerly as he lunged toward the cockpit and reached in to press the starter button.

“I’m nearest,” Andy said as the two boys leaned into the golf cart from opposite sides and almost cracked skulls.

Andy reached the button first, and there was a clattering sound, followed by a huge plume of foul-smelling exhaust and finally a roaring noise that made the metal walls of the workshop shudder.

“Mr. Campbell showed us how to tune the exhaust to make it as noisy as possible,” Andy shouted as he studied Bethany’s reaction.

“Pretty cool, eh, sis?” Jake yelled.

The noise made Coral squeeze her hands over her ears as Lauren and Bethany looked at each other and shook their heads. Lauren leaned across, shouting into her best friend’s ear, “I think we’re supposed to be impressed by this.”

Bethany shook her head and laughed. “They’re so manly! How can we possibly resist them?”

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Diana Sturgill:**

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