CHAPTER 04

THE ACQUISITION ORDER

01 — THE UNSIGNED PAGE

The final page of Captain Deren's briefing file arrived in a separate envelope at six in the morning. Its delivery had been held until General Mara Venn returned to the Defense Secretariat. By then, an electronic copy had already reached several government departments that had not been permitted to attend the briefing.

Venn read the authorization in the presence of two witnesses. The civilian director was one of them.

The operation had acquired a legal basis in a national continuity provision. It did not require the army to establish whether Roy Batty had acted in self-defense when he killed Havel. Nor did it require a criminal conviction. It authorized the recovery of a manufactured person whose continued existence outside government custody had been designated a threat to national security.

"Recovery," Venn said. "That's the word you've chosen."

"It preserves the possibility of examination."

The director had brought a supplementary directive. In the event that recovery became impracticable, the army was authorized to terminate the subject and secure any surviving biological material.

Venn turned to the legal adviser.

"Does the independent charter recognize this authority?"

"The Secretariat's position is that the continuity provision takes precedence. The council would probably disagree."

"Probably?"

"It hasn't been informed."

Through the window Venn could see a maintenance worker replacing a light outside the compound. The man had come to work before sunrise. Nothing about the city below suggested that another institution had just been granted the right to end a life.

She required that the operation remain under a single military command. No civilian research official would be permitted to issue instructions directly to personnel in the field. The preservation of the subject's life would remain the primary objective unless she authorized a change.

The director accepted the conditions. They did not alter the underlying directive.

At six seventeen, Venn signed.

An aide collected the two documents and went downstairs. The unsigned page in Deren's file could now be replaced.

02 — THE APPOINTMENT

Roy had been awake for most of the night. His injured shoulder had developed a dull ache whenever he remained in one position for too long. He would shift in the chair, wait for the ache to diminish, and find that sleep had become less likely than before.

At breakfast Rachel showed him a government notice that had appeared on her terminal. It requested his attendance at a medical appointment in the northern administrative district. The stated purpose was an assessment of injuries arising from the death of the former minister.

The notice specified a time but contained no option to request another date. It also instructed him to attend unaccompanied.

"Imani didn't arrange this," Rachel said.

Roy examined the address. The appointment was at the medical annex they had been investigating.

"Perhaps they want to see what Havel did to me."

"Then they can ask your doctor."

He handed the terminal back. In the reflection on its glass he could see the restaurant across the street, where the chairs were being carried outside for the morning customers. He and Rachel had eaten there the previous evening.

A delivery driver entered the hospital courtyard and was stopped by a guard. They spoke briefly. The driver placed his boxes on a trolley and went inside.

Rachel called the legal office. The advocate asked them not to respond until she had obtained a copy of the authority under which the appointment had been issued.

Roy tried to remember the last time someone had described a compulsory examination as an invitation. He remembered a room in which the temperature had been kept low for the benefit of the equipment rather than the people lying beneath it. He remembered a voice telling him that discomfort would be temporary.

He could not place the room within the years he remembered living.

Rachel put her hand on the table near his.

"We don't have to decide anything until we know what this is."

A second notice appeared while they were speaking. It confirmed that transportation had been arranged.

Roy had never accepted the appointment.

03 — THE SECOND INSTRUCTION

Deren found the three grey-coated personnel in a room adjoining the transport hall. They had been given their equipment and an opportunity to read the revised directive. The man from the reconstructed street was standing beside a window, watching a vehicle being examined by a mechanic.

Deren asked whether they understood that their authority now extended beyond assessment.

One of the others answered.

"We understand the change of status."

Their service records identified them by abbreviated designations. Deren had been told that the designations were sufficient for communication in the field. He had also received an assurance from the medical service that all three were fit for deployment.

There was nothing in the assurance about how long they had served.

He introduced his sergeant, a woman named Elin Sato, who had been with his unit since its first deployment outside the capital. She acknowledged the three personnel individually. The man near the window returned her greeting a fraction later than the others.

Deren explained that the civilian medical facility remained in operation. There would be patients in the wards, staff moving between buildings and visitors who could not be expected to understand why the army was there. No one was to treat a civilian's failure to understand an instruction as evidence of hostility.

The man from the exercise asked a question.

"If the designated subject declines the invitation, does his refusal constitute resistance?"

"No."

"If he leaves?"

"Then we report that he has left. We don't make that decision here."

The man considered this.

"The supplementary instruction permits termination."

"Under conditions that have not been met," Deren replied. "You will receive an order if the authorization changes."

He knew his own soldiers. He knew which of them would ask for clarification under pressure and which would act before they had finished asking. He did not know how the three people in front of him would interpret a contradiction between instructions.

Sato asked the man by the window what she should call him.

He gave her his service designation.

She repeated it, then asked whether he had another name.

For the first time, Deren saw a question go unanswered for reasons that had nothing to do with military secrecy.

04 — THE RIGHT TO REFUSE

The hospital's legal advocate received the first official reply at nine thirty. It stated that the medical appointment was part of an acquisition process authorized by the Defense Secretariat. The department declined to release the accompanying operational documents.

She carried the printed reply to Imani's office.

"I'm going to challenge this," she said. "But I can't guarantee when a hearing will take place."

Imani read the word acquisition twice.

"They understand he's a person. They've seen the charter."

"Their argument is that the charter doesn't apply to this operation."

Rachel came in with Roy behind her. The advocate explained that she intended to request an immediate suspension of the order. She asked Roy whether he consented to examination at the military facility.

"No."

She wrote the answer down.

"Then that's what we'll put before the council."

For the next half hour, the four of them worked through the documents. Nothing in the correspondence established the nature of the proposed examination, the duration of confinement or the conditions under which Roy would be released. There was no named physician whom Imani could contact to discuss his treatment.

Rachel asked whether the army intended to take the research archive as well.

The advocate had found no separate transfer order. The existing restriction on the materials remained in force.

From the corridor came the sound of a wheelchair knocking against a doorframe. Imani went outside to help a nurse and returned a moment later. The interruptions continued. Somewhere in the building a woman was giving birth, and in another room a technician was trying to repair a failed monitor.

Roy had spent many nights thinking about what a final confrontation with the government might look like. He had imagined soldiers, a darkened street and an opportunity to answer force with force.

He had not imagined a hospital full of people who could not leave if he made the wrong decision.

"I can't stay here," he said.

Rachel looked at him.

"Not yet," she answered. "We need to know what's happening outside."

He agreed to wait a little longer. The advocate filed the request for a hearing.

05 — THE CHANGE IN THE CITY

By late morning, vehicles belonging to the Defense Secretariat had appeared at several administrative buildings in Okakyou. The city's public announcement described a temporary review of security arrangements following Havel's death.

The changes were most apparent to people whose records were incomplete. At the railway station, a man who had spent three months obtaining recognition of his restored identity found that his newly issued travel authorization required additional verification. A woman near the eastern market was told that the address at which she had lived for twelve years no longer matched an active record.

The exceptions were supposed to be reviewed individually. No one at the station could estimate how long the review would take.

Rachel learned about the delays from a message sent by a hospital employee. She did not know whether they were directly related to Roy's case. She asked EDEN to preserve the publicly available notices and distinguish verified changes from reports that had not been confirmed.

Adrian Tyrell was in the research room when the announcement reached him. He had taken delivery of a replacement sensor the previous afternoon. A second component was now being held pending clarification of the purchasing authority.

He showed Rachel the message.

"It could take days to resolve this."

"We have enough to continue the current observations?"

"Yes. We won't be able to start the next series of tests."

They decided to document the remaining observations rather than begin work for which the equipment was incomplete. The consequences of rushing the experiment would outlast the inconvenience of waiting.

Roy watched Adrian return a component to its protective packaging.

"They're not even in the room," he said.

Adrian looked up.

"Who?"

"The people stopping us."

The research room had no broken windows. Its instruments were undamaged. The staff could still enter it. Yet a decision made somewhere else in the city had already changed what could happen inside.

Roy remembered the force that had travelled beyond Havel's blade. He had been unable to see it until it struck him.

This was another kind of force.

06 — THE VISITOR

The first army vehicle entered the hospital grounds shortly after noon. Captain Deren arrived without the three personnel in grey coats. He was accompanied by Sergeant Sato and a government liaison officer carrying a sealed copy of the acquisition order.

Imani met them in the reception area. She asked whether they had come to speak to a patient or remove one.

The liaison officer stated that the army had been authorized to take custody of Roy Batty. He offered to arrange transportation and said that the receiving institution was equipped to provide medical care.

Imani requested the name of the responsible physician.

The officer referred her to the documents.

"There isn't a name in these documents."

Deren asked whether he could speak to Roy directly. She told him that Roy would have to agree.

When Roy arrived, the captain noticed the brace beneath his coat. The face in the briefing photograph had belonged to a man who was walking without visible difficulty. The person in front of him stood with his weight distributed unevenly and kept his right arm close to his body.

"Mr. Batty," Deren said, "my instructions are to accompany you to the northern medical annex."

"I was told I had an appointment."

"The authorization has been clarified."

"Will I be able to leave the annex when I want to?"

Deren could have answered that the conditions of release would be determined by the competent authority. It was the answer he had been given during his briefing.

"I can't promise that," he said instead.

Roy shook his head.

"Then I'm not going."

The liaison officer began to speak, but Deren raised his hand. He asked Roy whether he understood that his refusal would be reported to military command.

Roy said that he did.

Sato watched the people waiting near reception. Some of them had recognized Roy. Nobody had moved toward him. There was a child sitting beside a man with an oxygen tube, looking at the captain's boots.

Deren did not ask his soldiers to enter the building. He told the liaison officer that the first attempt to obtain voluntary compliance had concluded.

He left without shaking Roy's hand. He was not sure whether offering it would have been an act of courtesy or a way of making the encounter easier for himself.

07 — THE COST OF WAITING

The council's emergency hearing had been scheduled for four in the afternoon. At two twenty, the advocate received notice that the government would contest the council's jurisdiction. The hearing could proceed, but the Defense Secretariat would not recognize an interim ruling as binding on its personnel.

She called Rachel immediately.

Rachel found Roy in his room packing the few belongings he had brought to the hospital. He put a spare shirt into a bag, then took it out again to make room for a roll of bandages.

"The hearing is still going ahead," she said.

"I know."

"They haven't withdrawn the challenge to the order."

"I know that too."

He needed help securing the strap over his shoulder. Rachel held the bag while he adjusted it. His hand stopped twice before he finished.

"You can't carry much," she said.

"Then I won't."

He had not agreed to run when they first learned of the military program. He had wanted to see the people the government had manufactured and find out what had been done to them. He still wanted those answers. But remaining in the hospital now meant allowing the army to decide when and where that encounter would occur.

Rachel told him she would go with him. They discussed what had to happen before either of them left. The research group needed to retain lawful custody of its materials. Imani needed to know where she could reach him if his injury deteriorated. None of the patients should be asked to conceal their whereabouts or mislead a soldier on their behalf.

There were no arrangements that could make all those obligations compatible.

In the adjoining corridor, Sena stopped by to return a book Roy had lent her. She noticed his bag and asked whether he was being discharged.

"I'm leaving," he told her.

"Is that the same thing?"

He looked at Rachel. Neither of them found an answer that would not require an explanation of the entire afternoon.

Sena gave him the book.

"You can keep it," Roy said.

She carried it away. He heard her footsteps until the corridor became quiet again.

08 — THE CHANGE OF STATUS

General Venn received Deren's report while attending a briefing on the government's response to the provisional charter. The civilian director read the report before she had finished her conversation with the legal adviser.

"He has refused a lawful instruction."

Venn took the document from him.

"He's refused to accompany an officer. No one has been injured."

"If he leaves the facility, the opportunity for a controlled recovery will be lost."

The director requested activation of the supplementary directive. Venn rejected the request for termination authority but approved a transition from voluntary recovery to compulsory acquisition. She instructed Deren to assume command of the joint force.

For the first time in this operation, the three classified personnel were authorized to act directly against Roy.

Deren received the order in the hospital's outer courtyard. He read it to Sato without commentary. The grey-coated man from the exercise stepped down from a transport and waited beside them. The other two remained inside.

There was a moment during which they were all looking at the hospital rather than at one another. Children had painted a picture on a wall near the entrance. Blue birds crossed a yellow sky above a row of houses with red roofs. The paint had begun to peel where rainwater ran down the concrete.

Inside, Rachel was waiting for Roy near the treatment wing. A nurse informed them that the army had returned. Roy set his bag down and took off the brace. The injured arm remained close to his side.

"Don't," Rachel said.

He looked toward the entrance. He could see the captain through the glass and a man standing several steps behind him. The man was wearing a grey coat.

Their eyes met.

Roy had seen that kind of stillness before, in people who had been made to fight. But there was something in the stranger's balance that he could not account for. No visible preparation accompanied the movement when the man turned to follow Deren.

Roy watched him take a single step.

The distance between them suddenly seemed much smaller than it was.

END OF CHAPTER 04.