CHAPTER 06

THE MILITARY EXCEPTION

01 — THE EXCEPTION ON THE LAST PAGE

At seven in the morning the personnel assigned to the regional facility were told that the briefing would take place in the smaller of the two conference rooms. M-06 arrived before the appointed time. An employee was setting out documents on the table, placing them at intervals corresponding to the positions of the people who would be permitted to read them.

There was no document in front of the chair in which she was asked to sit.

M-04 came in a few moments later. He sat beside her and looked at the clock. M-08 arrived with an officer from the medical section. The mark on his left arm was concealed by his sleeve.

The officer who conducted the briefing had not been present at either of the previous encounters with Roy Batty. From the accounts supplied to him he had concluded that there were differences in the way the personnel understood the circumstances in which they were to use force.

He intended to eliminate those differences.

He began by reading the portion of the authorization that concerned the recovery of the subject. He did not read the part concerning the reason for the recovery. When M-06 asked whether their instructions had been changed, he told her that they were being clarified.

"Does that include the request concerning a medical examination?"

The officer turned to the representative of the medical section.

The representative said that the subject could be examined upon transfer to an approved facility. Assistance before the transfer could be provided if the condition of the subject made the transfer inadvisable.

"Who determines that condition?" M-06 asked.

"A physician, where one is available."

"And until then?"

The officer conducting the briefing said that the personnel were expected to act in accordance with their training.

M-06 looked at him. She had been given an instruction of that kind on several occasions. She had not previously had reason to consider how little it told the person to whom it was given.

M-08 asked whether the estimates of the subject's physical capabilities had been revised. The medical representative said that there was insufficient information to make a further estimate. The previous estimate was to be used in planning the next encounter.

"He was injured when I saw him," M-08 said.

"That is included in the assessment."

"It happened again during the encounter."

The representative looked down at the papers in front of him. He said that he had received no measurements made after the encounter.

M-08 explained that he had not been in a position to make any.

For a moment nobody spoke. The three personnel had given the command more information about Roy than any other people involved in the search. Yet the information available to the command was still not enough to tell it whether he should be approached by a physician or by another soldier.

The officer distributed a one-page statement of the conditions under which the operation was being conducted. Next to the reference to the national continuity provision there was a second reference, printed in much smaller type. M-06 had seen it on documents at the facility before, although never on a document that concerned somebody outside it.

She asked what it meant.

"It establishes the applicability of the military exception."

"To the subject?"

"To the operation."

She read the sentence again. It was possible to read it either way.

M-04 asked whether the personnel were to return their copies before leaving. They were told that they could retain the statement for the duration of the operation. The documents on the table were to remain in the room.

Outside, M-08 stopped beside the window. The vehicles that carried employees between the buildings were arriving in the courtyard. He watched two men unload a container from one of them.

"Did you see the physician's report?" he asked M-06.

"No."

"I thought they might have given it to you."

She asked him why.

"You asked for it."

He went down the stairs before she was able to explain that she had asked for an examination, not a report.

She remained by the window with the statement in her hand. There was a provision on the last page of a document she had never been permitted to see in full. It appeared to describe some of the things that could be done to a person. Until that morning she had assumed it described things that could be done only to people like herself.

02 — THE PUBLIC NUMBER

Roy found that his message was no longer marked as waiting to be sent when he turned on the telephone the next morning. He was sitting beneath the canopy of a closed shop. The woman at the business centre had allowed him to remain inside until the building was locked, and he had spent most of the intervening hours walking between places in which it was possible to sit without being asked what he was waiting for.

He had no indication that Rachel had read the message.

There was a second message from the service provider informing subscribers that a number of interruptions had been reported in the district. The message contained a link to a map. He did not open it.

He looked instead at the telephone number Rachel had sent him. There were several things he could do with it. He could attempt to speak to her. He could ask the association to pass on a message. He could find out whether the assistance to which she had referred was available to him.

He had not decided to do any of them when he discovered, in attempting to put the telephone away, that the fingers of his right hand would not close around it.

He sat quite still for a moment. The hand had not lost all sensation. He could feel the cold surface of the telephone against the side of his thumb. What disturbed him was the absence of the familiar relation between his intention and the movement that followed it.

He put the telephone on his knee and tried again.

There had been a time when he would have regarded an injury of this kind as an inconvenience during the brief period in which his body put itself right. In the hospital he had learned that there was more than one kind of repair. Some of the processes upon which his survival depended could proceed in a way that made the eventual use of the repaired tissue more difficult.

He did not know whether that was happening now.

A shopkeeper on the opposite side of the street was raising the metal shutter in front of his windows. Roy went over to ask if there was somewhere nearby from which a telephone call could be made. The shopkeeper pointed to the entrance of a municipal building halfway down the street.

Inside the building there was a desk at which residents could obtain information about public services. The woman at the desk directed him to a telephone beside a row of seats. He thanked her and read the number on the screen of his own telephone before putting it back into his pocket.

An employee at the medical association answered the call.

He asked whether the association could receive messages for a woman who had made an arrangement with it during the past few days.

"Has she given you a correspondence reference?"

"Only your number."

The employee said that she could ask the office responsible for the service to speak to him. He waited while the call was transferred.

A woman introduced herself as Sera Min. She asked if he wished to leave a message or to make an inquiry.

"Both, if that's possible."

He said Rachel's name. Min asked him to tell her what he would like the message to say. He told her that he had received the number and that he was alive.

"Would you like her to return the call?"

"No. Not to this number."

"I'll tell her."

He thanked her. He was about to end the call when he remembered that he had said he wished to make an inquiry as well.

"I understand that you might be able to arrange for someone to see a physician."

Min asked whether the person was able to speak for himself.

"I'm the person."

She explained that a physician had agreed to consider an inquiry concerning injuries for which hospital treatment might ordinarily be required. She could give him a number at which the physician could be contacted during the morning. She could not establish, on the physician's behalf, whether an examination would be sufficient.

Roy asked whether he would be required to give his address.

"I don't need it," she said. "The physician may have questions about where you're able to go. You can decide with her what to do next."

He wrote down the number on a piece of paper the woman at the desk had given him. The writing was slow and difficult. Eventually he asked her if she would mind writing the last few digits for him.

Min heard something of the exchange. She did not ask him what had happened.

When the call ended she wrote exactly the words he had asked her to convey. She had previously reserved a space in the correspondence register for a message of this kind. She entered the time of the call and left the space intended for a return address empty.

In the municipal building, Roy thanked the woman who had helped him. He remained beside the telephone for several moments, looking at the number he had been given.

It was the first time in several days that someone who did not know where he was had offered him something he could actually use.

03 — THE RECEIVING INSTITUTION

The entry Adrian had asked the records department to recover was made available to him shortly before noon. It consisted of a single page, the lower half of which contained a list of references entered during the transfer of a collection of experimental records. There was an additional notation in the margin indicating that the authority for the transfer had been renewed.

He had expected to find the name of an institution engaged in the manufacture of biological components. It seemed more likely, after he had examined the page, that the original institution had been responsible for the administration of the collection rather than the preparation of the material contained in it.

Two of the references appeared beside a symbol he recognized.

He had seen the symbol on a supply form at the hospital. In its earlier form it had been used to distinguish materials that were not to be held in the ordinary inventory of an institution. The procedure dated back to a period in which there had been more than one organization responsible for regulating the development of artificial human beings.

It did not necessarily indicate anything unusual about the material. It indicated that somebody else had retained responsibility for it.

Adrian took the page to Imani's office. She was examining a set of images sent by the physician of another hospital. He waited until she had finished.

"The reference was transferred with a collection of documents," he said. "It wasn't made by the hospital."

She looked at the page.

"Can you find the collection?"

"Perhaps part of it. I need the transfer authorization."

He pointed to the numbers in the margin. The physician asked him what concerned him about the notation.

"Someone renewed the authority to move the records. It happened after the date on the original entry."

The dates were several years apart. During the later of the two years, some of the arrangements under which civilian institutions had been permitted to carry out research on artificial tissue had changed.

He had an increasingly uncomfortable recollection of a meeting to which he had been invited as a representative of his family's business. The subject had been the ownership of materials supplied to research organizations. One of the participants had objected to the use of the word ownership in connection with a number of the materials. The objection had been resolved by adopting a different word for the papers that were to be circulated after the meeting.

Nothing else about the proposed arrangement had been altered.

"Do you think the material belonged to a military programme?" Imani asked.

"I think it was administered under an arrangement that the hospital couldn't change. That isn't quite the same thing."

She took a photograph of the page with the hospital's copying equipment, then asked whether he was permitted to retain the original. He said that he was permitted to retain the copy supplied to him. The records office was retaining the original register.

"Good. Mark which of these came from the register and which of them we worked out here."

He understood why she had asked him to do it. The more the documents seemed to support one another, the easier it would be to forget that some of the connections between them had been made by the two people standing in her office.

In the afternoon he met the records employee again. She told him that the old transfer schedule listed an office which no longer existed under its original name. She had found a reference to a successor authority in a directory of administrative reorganizations.

It was possible to make an inquiry to that authority. The hospital could not retrieve the documents itself.

He asked for the name.

She wrote it down for him. The name contained no reference to experimental medicine. It described a department responsible for the retention of assets under exceptional arrangements. The department reported to an office within the Defense Secretariat.

Adrian had no recollection of the name. He asked whether there was any information about the kinds of assets for which it was responsible.

"Not in the directory," the employee said.

She apologized for having taken so long. He told her that she had found precisely what he had been looking for.

When he returned to the research room, he laid the page beside the account of the preliminary experiment. On one of the pages a sample was identified by a combination of letters and digits. On the other a collection of records was identified by an entirely different combination of letters and digits. Between the two there was now a documentary reference to a military office.

There was still nothing to identify a person.

He telephoned the medical association and asked Min to arrange another conversation with Rachel. He said that he had obtained a reference which should be added to the record of their previous inquiry.

When asked whether he wished to include the name of the authority in the statement, he said that he did.

For the first time since the research had been interrupted, the people examining the documents would have the name of an institution to which a question could be addressed.

He was less certain than he had been in the morning that it was an institution at which an answer would be received.

04 — A REQUEST IN HER OWN NAME

M-06 went to the medical section after the afternoon instruction period. A physician was waiting for another member of the personnel to finish changing his clothes. She asked the employee outside the room whether she could make an appointment.

The employee took the form used to record examinations and asked what kind of examination she required.

She said that she wished to speak to a physician about the possibility of obtaining an examination outside the facility.

The employee looked at the form. He had entered her designation in the space in which the designation of a patient ordinarily appeared.

"Have you been instructed to do that?"

"No."

"Is there a problem with the examinations here?"

"I don't know. That's one of the reasons I'd like to speak to someone."

The employee was accustomed to inquiries concerning the next scheduled examination. If a member of the personnel experienced a change in performance between examinations, it was possible to request an additional assessment. He explained this to her.

She said that she was aware of the procedure.

"Then what do you want the physician to assess?"

"I haven't decided yet."

She could see that the answer made it difficult for him to complete the form. She told him that she was not asking for an assessment of her performance. She was asking whether it was possible for her to become a patient of a physician whose responsibilities did not include her availability for deployment.

He asked her to wait while he spoke to his supervisor.

In a room down the corridor, M-04 was sitting with a member of the civilian staff who had been asked to explain an alteration to the maintenance schedule. The employee had placed a diagram on the table between them. It showed which visits to the medical section could be combined with routine examinations of the equipment used during deployment.

M-04 asked whether a postponement of the routine examination of the equipment would affect the date of the medical examination.

The employee said that it could be arranged separately.

"Then I'd prefer that."

He was asked whether there was a particular reason. He said that he would prefer them to be separate. The employee made the alteration without asking him again.

When he left the room, he found M-06 sitting on a bench in the corridor. He asked her if she was ill.

"No. At least I don't think I am."

She told him what she had asked the employee.

He was silent for some time. Then he said that the last time he had had an examination he had been asked to sign a statement approving the disclosure of the results to the command. He had asked the physician whether he would be permitted to refuse the disclosure. The physician had told him that the provision under which the results were obtained did not require the statement to be signed.

"Why were you asked to sign it?" M-06 said.

"I don't know."

The employee returned. His supervisor had been unable to establish which procedure should be used. She could submit an inquiry in writing to the office responsible for her conditions of appointment.

He offered her a sheet of paper.

She thanked him and went to look for somewhere to write. M-04 accompanied her to the common room. There were several other people there, all of whom had been assigned to the facility for the remainder of the day.

She wrote her request in the form of a question. When she had finished, she added a sentence stating that the question concerned her own medical treatment and was not an amendment to any of the reports she had made during the operation.

M-04 read it at her invitation.

"They'll ask what's wrong with you," he said.

"Perhaps."

"What will you tell them?"

She looked down at the sheet. She had spent part of the previous evening trying to establish whether what had happened at the tram platform amounted to a failure to perform the duties for which she had been trained. Now she found herself wondering whether there was a place at which she could ask that question of a person who had no obligation to report the answer.

"I don't want to have to be ill before I can ask," she said.

She signed the request with the designation she had been given and returned it to the office.

The employee placed it in the tray with the other correspondence. Unlike her previous requests, it concerned no person the army had been instructed to find. It would therefore travel to a different office.

That, she thought as she walked away, might make it easier for somebody to answer it.

05 — WHAT THE LAW DID NOT SAY

Sera Min received the hospital's new statement while she was waiting for Rachel. The accompanying letter requested that the statement be retained with the documents already in the association's possession. It contained a reference to a department within the Defense Secretariat and a description of the way in which the reference had been obtained.

She made a copy of the letter and took it to the association's legal library.

The directory in which the hospital employee had found the department was also available there. Min discovered that the change of name had occurred in the course of a reorganization affecting several authorities whose activities were exempt from the ordinary reporting requirements of civilian institutions. The directory did not describe the activities themselves.

There was, however, a reference to the legislation under which the authorities had been constituted.

Min read the legislation and the subsequent amendments. The original provision was concerned with the supply of materials and the development of equipment needed for national defense. A later amendment permitted the creation of separate conditions of supervision in circumstances in which civilian supervision was held to be incompatible with the purpose of the activity.

The words were familiar to her. Several years earlier the association had been consulted about the effect of a similar provision upon physicians employed at government installations. The advice given at the time had concerned the conditions under which the physicians were permitted to disclose information obtained in the course of their work.

She found the association's opinion in the library's index. A note attached to it indicated that a revised opinion had been requested but never issued.

Rachel arrived a little after two. Min met her in the entrance hall.

"There's a message for you," she said.

They went upstairs. Min took the page from the correspondence register and gave Rachel the words Roy had asked her to convey. Rachel read them twice.

"Did you speak to him?"

"Yes."

"How did he sound?"

Min thought for a moment. She said that he had been able to explain what he wanted to do. She told Rachel that he had also asked to speak to a physician and that she had given him the contact number. She did not tell her that she had heard him ask someone to help him write it down.

"He asked you himself?"

"Yes."

Rachel sat down. She had tried to imagine what she would feel when she learned that he was alive. She found that the relief had very little effect on her desire to know where he was.

She looked at the space left empty on the page.

"He didn't leave a number?"

"He requested that we not return the call."

Rachel nodded. It was an arrangement she had asked him to accept. There was no reason for her to regret that he had accepted it.

Min waited a few minutes before showing her the new statement from the hospital. She explained what she had been able to learn about the administrative history of the department.

"Can they make an exception to the law concerning artificial people?" Rachel asked.

"They can establish some separate conditions of supervision. That's what the provision says. What they have actually done under it is a different question."

Rachel wanted to know whether the six-year restriction had applied to the people manufactured for military purposes. Adrian had discussed the question at the hospital. At the time they had not possessed a document that gave them an institution to which they could direct it.

Min said that nothing she had read provided an answer. It was possible that an order made under the provision contained such an answer. If it existed, it might not have been made public.

"They'd have to know how long those people would live," Rachel said. "Or at least have tried to find out."

"Probably."

She thought of the experimental results in which Adrian had found a response he had been unable to explain. They had been looking for an alteration to a document concerning materials used in the attempt to extend a life. It was possible that one of the institutions from which they were trying to obtain information had never been required to observe the limit they were attempting to remove.

She did not know whether the people at that institution had ever been told about the difference.

Min drew her attention to a passage in the amendment. The authority to issue a separate order was expressed in terms of an activity. It did not state that an individual who became involved in the activity ceased to be subject to all the protections available elsewhere.

"There may be a difference," she said, "between an exception to the requirements imposed on an institution and an exception to the rights of somebody who happens to be there."

Rachel asked if the government recognized the difference.

"That's something we may have to ask them."

06 — AN EXAMINATION WITHOUT A REPORT

Doctor Lian occupied two rooms on the second floor of a building in which several independent medical practitioners worked. She had been a surgeon at a municipal hospital before becoming one of the physicians to whom the association referred inquiries. She received Roy's call shortly before the end of her morning appointments.

He described the difficulty he was experiencing with his hand. At her request he also told her about the injury to his shoulder and the changes that had occurred since he left the hospital.

She asked him whether he was alone, and whether anyone was able to accompany him to a medical facility if his condition deteriorated.

He said he was alone.

They agreed that he would come to the practice during the afternoon. She warned him that some of the examinations he might require could not be undertaken there. He said that he understood.

When he arrived, he found an elderly man in the waiting room talking to the receptionist about a prescription. There was a clock above the door and a plant on a table beside the window. It was an ordinary room, and Roy was surprised by the difficulty he experienced in behaving as if he had an ordinary reason to be there.

Lian came out to call him herself.

In the examination room she asked whether he had any documents concerning the treatment he had received at the hospital. He explained that he had none with him. She showed him the statement the association had sent her, in which Imani had described the examinations that would be desirable.

"I think this concerns me," he said.

"May I contact the physician who prepared it?"

"Yes. About the medical questions."

She put the statement aside and began the examination.

The movements that he was able to perform against resistance were of less interest to her than the differences she observed when he performed the same movements without resistance. In one instance she asked him to repeat a movement with his eyes closed. He stopped before he reached the position she had indicated.

"I thought I'd moved it further," he said.

She made a note. There was sufficient uncertainty about the condition of several structures near the shoulder that she was unwilling to make a diagnosis from the examination alone. She explained what an imaging study might establish, and what it would not establish.

Roy asked how much he could safely use the arm.

"I can't give you a figure. I can tell you that you shouldn't be testing it to find out."

He smiled briefly. In the research room at the hospital he had become accustomed to the requests made of him by people who wanted to establish what he could do. It was a strange experience to be told that something he was capable of doing might not be something he should do.

The physician asked whether he was able to stay somewhere in which he could rest.

"For a little while, perhaps."

She looked at him. It had become apparent during the examination that he did not wish to explain certain things concerning his circumstances. She was willing to let him decide when to explain them. She was less willing to let him leave with the impression that his injuries could be managed indefinitely without additional treatment.

She described the circumstances in which he would need immediate assistance. She also asked him to return the following day, if he could, so that she could examine the changes in his condition.

Before the consultation ended, he asked what information she would be giving to the association.

"I'll tell them that I've seen you, if you wish me to. I don't need to give them my findings."

"And the hospital?"

"Only what I need to discuss with your physician, with your permission."

He looked at the sheet on which she had written the results of the examination. He knew that it would remain in the room after he left. The understanding that he had reached with her did not remove all of the possibilities of its leaving the room later.

"What happens if someone else asks you for that?" he said.

She explained that she would have to establish the authority and the purpose of any request. She had received no such request. She could not promise never to receive one.

He accepted the answer. It was more reassuring to him than a promise she had no power to keep.

While the receptionist was arranging the next appointment, he stood beside the window in the waiting room. On the other side of the street there was a woman helping a child into a small vehicle. The child had dropped something on the pavement. They spent a few moments looking for it before the woman closed the door.

Roy watched them drive away. For the duration of the examination he had been able to think about the future of his body as if it were a future of his own.

He had forgotten how much difference an hour could make.

07 — THE LIMITS OF THE AUTHORIZATION

The answer to Deren's request arrived at the command centre late that afternoon. The first paragraph confirmed that no alteration to the acquisition order was authorized. The second confirmed that medical assistance could be provided in the course of the operation. The third directed the command to consult the authority responsible for the subject's eventual custody about any proposed alternative arrangement.

The captain read the document with increasing irritation. He had asked whether an examination could take place without transfer to military custody. The question had now been answered by three paragraphs describing the conditions under which custody might be obtained.

He took the document to Vale.

"We have no recommendation regarding what to do if his condition makes recovery dangerous," he said.

Vale read the third paragraph. He reminded Deren that the original order permitted an acquisition to be postponed in certain circumstances.

"Then who has the authority to postpone it?"

"You may make a decision in the field. You can't suspend the order."

Deren had been aware of the distinction. He had hoped that the response would allow him to make the first decision without having to explain subsequently why it had not resulted in the second.

He asked whether authorization had been given to examine the communications of the association that had received the hospital's research records.

Vale said that the association had been identified as a relevant institution. An inquiry was being prepared concerning recent contacts with the hospital. It did not require the personnel engaged in the recovery to enter the association's premises.

"Does it concern medical inquiries made by private individuals?"

"The terms of the inquiry will be determined by the competent authority."

Deren looked at the paper he had brought. Two people in different buildings had asked him in the course of the week what they should do when they encountered somebody who appeared to need

medical attention. Neither of them had received a satisfactory answer. Yet another department had been given authority to obtain information about people who asked for it.

He asked Vale to consider a temporary restriction on the use of information obtained from physicians.

Vale told him that he could submit the proposal. The communications arrangements were not administered exclusively by their command.

When Deren returned to his office he found a notification from the personnel facility. M-06 had submitted an inquiry concerning an examination outside the facility. The administrative officer wished to establish whether the inquiry was connected with the outstanding requests concerning the subject of the operation.

Deren read the notification. The final sentence of the request was included in it. He wrote that he had no grounds on which to regard the inquiry as part of the operation.

He sent the answer to the facility.

At the bottom of his screen the number of reported observations increased by one. The observation had come from a member of the public. There was no photograph, and the description could have applied to a great many people.

He asked the district command to establish whether there was any further information before an officer was sent to the address.

The command acknowledged the instruction. A few moments later the system indicated that the observation had also been referred to the unit responsible for the extension of the search. The captain had not made the referral. He asked the liaison officer why it had been made.

The officer said that the observation met the criteria established for automatic referral to the unit.

Deren asked him to obtain the criteria.

As the liaison officer left the room, he looked at the map. Nothing that had appeared on it in the past hour had reduced the uncertainty concerning Roy Batty's whereabouts. What had changed was the number of authorities entitled to act upon the uncertainty.

08 — AN INSTITUTION OF YOUR OWN

By early evening, Lian had spoken to Imani. They had agreed on the examinations that would be required if the arrangement could be continued. The physician at the hospital offered to assist in interpreting the results, but Lian had no apparatus adequate for all of the studies that Imani believed necessary.

They would have to find another institution.

At the medical association Min received a letter requesting information about the arrangements made for the preservation of the hospital's documents. The letter came from an office acting under the authority of the national continuity provision. It requested, in addition, the identities of the persons with whom the association had corresponded in connection with those arrangements.

She read the letter with the chair of the legal committee. He asked whether it was possible to separate the information available in the association's research correspondence from the information available in its medical referral records.

"We have kept them separate," she said.

"Then we'd better make that clear in the response."

She agreed. The letter did not expressly authorize the examination of every medical inquiry received by the association. She intended to establish where the request ended before providing anything beyond the acknowledgment of receipt.

Rachel learned of the letter when she came to collect the statement Adrian had sent from the hospital. She asked Min whether she ought to leave the association's premises.

"It doesn't require you to be here or to go anywhere else."

"But will they come here?"

Min said she did not know.

She gave Rachel a copy of the research statement. They arranged that the original of the acknowledgment would remain with the preserved papers. Rachel was grateful for the arrangement. She had spent too many days carrying documents whose survival seemed to depend on what happened to the person carrying them.

Before she left, she wrote another message for Roy. It was brief. She told him that she had received his words. She asked the association to retain the message until he telephoned again.

Min entered it in the correspondence register.

In the regional facility, M-06 was given an acknowledgment of her inquiry. It stated that the conditions of her appointment contained no provision for obtaining civilian medical services without the approval of the authority responsible for her appointment.

She asked the employee whether that meant her request had been refused.

"It means you'll need approval."

"Then I'd like to request approval."

The employee looked for a form. He could not find one that described the purpose for which approval was being requested. He said he would make an inquiry in the morning.

M-06 thanked him and left the office.

Across the courtyard the medical building was still illuminated. She had never had any difficulty gaining admission to it. She wondered what it would be like to walk into a building of that kind and be asked what she wanted, rather than what she had been sent there to have done.

She folded the acknowledgment and put it in her pocket. For once, the document she carried did not describe an instruction she had been given.

In the upper district, Roy was walking toward a place Lian had suggested might be able to arrange overnight accommodation. He had taken her advice and kept the right arm close to his body. He could still feel the weight of his telephone in his pocket.

When he reached the street, two municipal officers were speaking to the person responsible for the entrance of the building. A third man was standing a little apart from them, looking at a handheld terminal.

Roy stopped. He could not hear enough of the conversation to establish what the officers were asking. It was possible that their presence had nothing to do with him. It was also possible that they would leave before the building opened for the evening.

He thought about the examination, and the sheet of paper upon which the physician had recorded the things he could no longer do.

There was a bench across the street. He went to sit on it.

He had an appointment for the following day. For the first time since leaving the hospital, there was a place at which someone would notice if he failed to arrive.

He watched the men at the entrance. The light above the door came on.

He wondered how long it would be before the places at which people had agreed to help him became places at which other people expected him to appear.

END OF CHAPTER 06