CHAPTER 08

THE LAST TRANSMISSION

01 — THE VOICE AT THE OTHER END

The telephone on the table had a small display on which the time was indicated. It was two minutes slower than the clock on the wall. Roy had discovered the difference while waiting for the medical association to receive the person he wanted to speak to.

He decided to believe the clock on the wall.

Outside the room someone was replacing the paper in a machine. There was a succession of ordinary noises, followed by the sound of the machine beginning to operate. The physician had promised him the use of the room for an hour. Nobody had promised him the use of the building for any longer than that.

He lifted the receiver with his left hand and called the association.

The employee who answered asked for his name. He said that Sera Min was expecting his call. A moment later he heard the lawyer's voice.

"She's here," Min said. "I'll give her the telephone."

There was a movement at the other end of the line. He could hear somebody putting something down on a desk.

"Roy?"

"Yes."

For several seconds neither of them spoke. He had thought he knew what Rachel would sound like when he heard her again. What he had not remembered was the way her breathing changed when she was about to ask a question whose answer she did not want to hear.

"Did the examination hurt?" she asked.

"Less than some of the things that made it necessary."

He heard her laugh. The sound was very brief.

"Is your arm any better?"

"They don't know yet. I can move my hand. I'm not supposed to do much more than that."

Rachel was sitting at Min's desk. The lawyer had gone into the adjoining office, leaving the door half open. There was still a copy of the statement Rachel had signed on the desk in front of her.

"Have you got somewhere to sleep?" she asked.

"Not at the moment."

"Neither have I, then."

He asked what she meant. She told him that the owner of the building had been asked to supply information about the occupants. She had brought the things she needed with her to the association. She was trying to decide whether to return.

Roy asked if the research documents were with her.

"The documents are safe for now. And Adrian's statement is here."

"That's not what I asked."

"I know."

She looked at her bag. There had been a time when she could have described everything of importance that was in it. The things that mattered now were distributed among people, some of whom she did not know, in buildings to which she might never be able to return.

"I don't have to carry the only copy anymore," she said.

Roy was glad to hear it. He had not been able to think of a way of protecting both Rachel and the work they had begun at the hospital. The knowledge that she had made arrangements for the work to survive independently of her gave him a sense of relief he could not entirely explain.

He asked whether she had continued to think about the experiment.

"Every day."

"You still think it's possible?"

"I think we can find out more than we knew when we started. That isn't the same thing."

A trolley passed the door of the examination room. Roy waited until its wheels could no longer be heard.

"Good," he said.

Rachel put her hand over the statement on the desk.

"I want to see you."

"I want that too."

She asked if the physician could allow him to remain where he was until she came. He explained that he had been given the room for a limited period and that an inquiry had already reached the institution. He did not tell her the address. He had been trying to decide whether it would be right to give it to her when she asked the next question.

"Would you stay there if I were coming?"

"Probably."

"Even if the doctor asked you to leave?"

He looked toward the window. On the opposite wall of the building across from him a light had come on.

"I'd ask her for more time."

"Then I won't ask you for the address."

It was a decision Rachel made with considerable difficulty. She had spent the time since their separation imagining a place in which they would recognize each other across a room and walk toward each other without having to think about what the movement might mean to anyone else.

There was nothing wrong with the place in her imagination. It was the people who might arrive before her that she could not account for.

"We'll ask Min to help us make other arrangements," she said.

He agreed.

A faint sound came from the telephone. It resembled the sound produced when an instrument was connected to another line. Roy had heard it before in buildings where several extensions shared a single connection. He had no means of knowing whether it signified anything else.

Rachel heard it too.

"Are you still there?"

"Yes."

He wanted to tell her that everything would be all right. He had been alive long enough to understand the value of the words and the circumstances in which they ceased to be of any use.

"I'm very glad you answered," he said instead.

02 — A COPY OF THE CONVERSATION

The application for access to the association's communications had not been submitted through the office responsible for the acquisition order. It had been submitted by the department coordinating the additional inquiries in the upper district. The distinction was preserved in the administrative record but was not visible to most of the people receiving instructions as a consequence of the application.

A civilian employee at the communications authority had been given a list of numbers and a reference to a provision concerning the continuity of essential government activities. The list included the general number of the medical association and three numbers used by institutions maintaining records that had become relevant to the inquiry.

She asked whether the instructions concerned the contents of the calls or the records of the connections.

Her supervisor said that the initial measure concerned the records of the connections. An additional authorization would be required to obtain the contents of a particular conversation. The request did not specify a person whose conversations might be obtained.

"Do we need to know which calls are medical?" she asked.

The supervisor read the request again. He said that the department receiving the information would be responsible for establishing whether any particular record could be used.

She returned to her terminal.

At the command centre, Captain Deren received a notice concerning the arrangements shortly before the end of his duty period. It identified the association as an institution from which information might soon be available. The notice included a column headed Priority Connections.

There were no entries in the column.

Deren called the liaison officer and asked who would determine which connections were of priority.

"The inquiry department will send us a selection."

"On what basis?"

"They haven't furnished the criteria."

He asked whether a physician telephoning the association to obtain advice about a patient could be identified in the material. The officer said that it would depend on the records received.

"And if the patient is the subject?"

"That would be relevant."

Deren looked at his copy of the acquisition order. Next to the description of the subject there was a reference to an annex concerning the extraordinary capacities attributed to him. The order did not contain a list of persons whose ordinary activities might be interrupted while he was being sought.

He went to Vale's office with the notice.

Vale was speaking to an officer about a request for additional transport. When the officer left, he asked Deren to be brief. Deren laid the document on the table.

"We could discover where somebody has arranged a medical examination before we know he's been examined."

Vale said that this was one of the ways an inquiry could produce a useful result. The identity of the person receiving treatment would still have to be established.

"I asked for a restriction on using that information."

"I know."

Vale had the request on his terminal. He showed Deren the acknowledgment that had been returned. It had been referred to the department responsible for determining the scope of the additional measures.

"There isn't a decision," Deren said.

"There isn't a refusal either."

Deren was silent for a moment. He knew what it was like to wait for permission to undertake an operation. Waiting had a very definite meaning when it concerned something that had not yet begun. He was less certain what it meant in this case.

"Does the department wait while it considers the restriction?"

Vale said that the existing instructions remained in effect.

Deren folded the notice. Before leaving he asked whether any of the confidential medical information collected at the hospital had been made available to the people examining the connections. Vale said that he did not know.

There was no alteration to the arrangements that evening.

In an office at the communications authority, the civilian employee received an amended reference number for the work she was doing. It gave the department examining the records access to results received after the request had been approved. She added the reference to the record of the work.

The result of the changes was not immediately apparent to a person using the telephone. Most calls were completed in much the same way as they had been completed the previous day. A small number were referred for further examination.

One of those connections was between the association and a diagnostic institution in the upper district.

It was not yet known to the employee who had spoken on either end of the line.

03 — THE THINGS THAT HAD BEEN OMITTED

Adrian received the first of the documents shortly after dusk. Imani had been told that the hospital's administration would permit certain material to be copied for the purpose of establishing the extent of the preserved records. She had requested that a copy of the old experimental inventory be included.

The inventory had been prepared a long time before the work they had conducted in the hospital. Most of the entries described apparatus or materials in terms that could be understood without knowledge of the experiments in which they had been used. A few referred to documents that could no longer be located.

Adrian had already seen a different version of the inventory. He placed the two copies beside each other.

In the earlier version, the entry corresponding to the reference they had found in the transfer record was followed by a description of the accompanying observations. In the version he had received that evening, the description had been replaced by a short statement indicating that the technical material was retained separately.

There was no date next to the change.

He called Imani and told her what he had found.

"Can you tell when that happened?" she asked.

"Not from these alone."

She said that the hospital's copy had been made from an older collection of reference documents. The member of the staff who found it had no knowledge of how the collection had been assembled.

Adrian asked whether the original page could be preserved with the other material. Imani promised to ask the staff not to remove it from the collection.

He spent the next half hour comparing the documents. He made a list of the entries for which the description remained the same and another of the entries for which he could find no equivalent. From time to time he returned to the transfer record that had given them the name of the department within the Defense Secretariat.

It was the first time he had possessed enough of the documents to establish that the missing observations had once been identified independently of the apparatus.

The distinction mattered. A list of equipment could tell him what someone might have been capable of doing. The existence of observations indicated that somebody had actually done something with it, although he had still not established what that was.

On his desk was a note Rachel had sent him through the association. In it she had described the questions she thought could be investigated if they were able to resume their work. One concerned the failure of the old experimental sample to respond in the way they had expected.

He had intended to send her a reply about the proposed examination of the sample. Instead, he wrote that there was evidence of a separate set of observations made in the course of earlier work, and that the location of those observations remained unknown.

He read the sentence twice before sending it to Min for preservation. He had not used the words military experiment. They could not yet establish the purpose of the experiment, or the conditions under which it had been conducted.

The fact that the words occurred to him was not evidence.

He took from a drawer a notebook in which he had recorded some of the questions that had been asked during Roy's treatment. Several had concerned the relationship between the rate at which tissue could be repaired and the conditions under which the process ceased to be effective. He had become increasingly convinced that an attempt to extend a life by altering one of those conditions could have consequences that would not be apparent in a short series of examinations.

He was thinking about that problem when Imani came to see him.

She had brought the preserved copy of the inventory. He showed her the comparison he had made, pointing to the entry that had been changed.

"What would they have had to measure?" she asked.

"That depends on whether they wanted to make something last or find out why it stopped."

She looked at the notebook on his desk.

"Would the measurements be different?"

"Some of them."

He explained that an investigation intended to establish the duration of a process might omit information that would be essential to someone intending to prevent the process from ending. It was possible to test a device by determining the conditions under which it failed without ever attempting to modify those conditions.

Imani had been looking at the description in the older inventory.

"It seems a very expensive way of finding out how long something takes to stop."

Adrian did not answer immediately.

The question she had raised was one they could not resolve by examining Roy's medical record. Nor could they resolve it by persuading him to undergo another experiment. Somewhere there were observations made by people who had not been asking the questions they were asking now.

He wanted to know what those people had wanted to discover.

04 — THE REQUEST TO STAY

Lian was at the desk outside the examination area when an employee came to tell her that the physician wished to speak to her again. The administration had received a request for further information concerning the examinations undertaken that afternoon. It had been sent to the institution rather than to the referring physicians.

The physician had been trying to establish whether the request was an extension of the earlier notice concerning the preservation of records. The administrator had referred the matter to the person responsible for legal inquiries. Nobody had asked him to provide a medical opinion.

"Have we been asked to identify the patients?" Lian said.

"They want to establish which institutions referred them."

She asked whether the request specified any examination. He said that it concerned a number of examinations for which information might exist elsewhere. He showed her the portion he had been permitted to read.

There was a reference to the medical association.

Lian looked at the time. Roy had been permitted to use the room for another hour, of which a little less than twenty minutes remained. She had not heard him speaking for some time.

The physician said that there was still no instruction requiring the patient to leave or preventing him from leaving. The difficulty was that the institution closed the examination area in the evening. It would not be possible to keep it open indefinitely without making arrangements with the administration.

"I've asked for a room elsewhere," he said. "They haven't answered."

Lian thanked him. She knew he had already given them more time than he had been asked to give when she arranged the examination.

She went back along the corridor. Roy opened the door when she knocked.

"Are they closing?" he asked.

"Soon. Have you finished your call?"

"For now."

He told her that he had spoken to the person he had been trying to reach. He had promised to call the association again before leaving. Lian told him that there had been another inquiry and explained what they knew of it.

She did not tell him to whom he might speak or what he might say. It was not her decision to make. She did, however, tell him that his injury might become more difficult to treat if he did not get some rest.

He asked if there was any possibility of staying at the institution until morning.

"Not in this room. I've been trying to arrange somewhere else."

Roy looked at the chair beside the table. It had not occurred to him when he arrived that he might ask to spend the night in it.

"I can wait for a little while," he said.

Lian offered to remain until the examination area closed. She was about to go back to the desk when he asked if she intended to return to her own practice that evening.

She said that she did not have any more appointments there that day.

"Could you go home instead?"

"When we've found somewhere for you to go."

He looked at her. There were several reasons why she might have preferred to leave before another inquiry arrived. He wondered how many of them she had needed to consider before coming into the room.

She pulled the chair out from the table and sat down for a moment. She told him that it was possible to remain at an institution at which he had received treatment without making the physicians responsible for the decisions of the people conducting the search. She could not give him an assurance about what those people might do. She could give him an opinion about his arm.

"And my opinion is that you've done enough walking today."

He smiled.

At the desk an employee was attempting to connect a call from a hospital that might have a room. The physician had been asked to provide a further explanation of the referral. He went to his office to receive the call.

Lian was still sitting with Roy when the telephone on the table gave a short, unexpected ring. There was nobody on the line when he lifted the receiver.

He put it down again.

Neither of them had been told that the institution's connection with the medical association had been referred for examination.

05 — AN INSTRUCTION TO LISTEN

M-06 was sitting in the common room when an employee told her that she was required at the briefing. She put the civilian physician's card into the pocket of her coat before going upstairs. M-04 was already in the room. He had been asked to examine a list of places in the upper district at which members of the personnel might be required to assist in a subsequent operation.

There was no indication that an operation had been authorized at any of those places.

M-08 entered after her. He was no longer accompanied by an officer from the medical section. He sat at the opposite end of the table and placed his left hand on the surface in front of him. Although the injury was concealed by his sleeve, M-06 thought she recognized the care with which he moved the arm.

She had not spoken to him about his encounter with Roy. She wanted to ask him a question about it, but there was never a time at which they were permitted to be alone for very long.

The officer conducting the briefing explained that there might be further information concerning the subject before morning. The personnel were asked to remain available. Pending receipt of the information, the three were to familiarize themselves with the conditions prevailing at institutions they might be required to enter.

He displayed a photograph of the entrance to a building occupied by a civilian medical practice.

M-06 recognized the door through which she had gone that afternoon.

She asked whether a person had been observed entering the building who was thought to be the subject. The officer said that there had been no such observation. The possibility that the subject had obtained assistance through a civilian referral arrangement was under examination.

M-08 asked whether their instructions would differ if they were to approach a person within a medical institution rather than in a public place.

The officer told him that the situation would be assessed at the time of the operation. The personnel were reminded of the conditions applicable to the use of force.

M-04 turned a page of the document in front of him.

"If the person is a patient, who establishes the conditions in which he can be moved?"

The officer said that the command had sought advice about the matter. Until the advice had been received, the existing authorization remained valid.

M-06 looked at the photograph. There was a little sign beside the door which gave the number of the floor on which the physician's practice was situated. It had been difficult to find the building from the street. The photograph had been taken from nearly the same position in which she had stood with the physician's card in her hand after leaving the practice.

"Have any of the people at that address been asked to do something?" she said.

"The inquiries are being made by a civilian office."

"The physician there told me that he wasn't required to give my employer a record of an examination."

There was a silence in the room. M-04 stopped turning the pages of the document.

The officer looked at her.

"You attended an examination there?"

"A consultation. Today."

He asked whether the visit had been arranged by the facility. She said that she had arranged it herself during the period for which she had been permitted to leave. She offered to show him the acknowledgment she had received of her request for an independent examination.

He said that he would have to refer the matter to the administrative office. She asked whether she had done something that she was not permitted to do.

"That isn't a question I can answer here."

She thought it was a curious answer to receive in the room in which she was usually told what she could and could not do.

The officer continued with the briefing. M-06 remained in her seat until the personnel were dismissed. No one asked her again about the consultation.

In the corridor, M-04 waited for her.

"Why did you tell him?" he asked.

She said that the photograph had been shown to them in the course of an operation in which they were expected to take part. She knew something about the place, and she did not know what would happen if another person obtained the same information about her from a record.

"You could have waited."

"Until somebody else told him?"

M-04 considered this. He did not know how the administrative office would regard her visit. He had previously been able to offer her advice about the forms she should use in making a request. The forms did not give him any reason to suppose that the person making the request would become a subject of an inquiry merely by doing so.

"I can tell them what was said at the briefing," he said.

She thanked him.

M-08 was standing near the stairway. He had waited for the two of them to finish speaking before approaching them. He asked M-06 whether the physician had given her any advice about the use of force.

"We talked about a decision I'd made," she said.

He seemed dissatisfied with the answer. He looked down at his left hand.

"Did he say you made the right one?"

"No. He asked why I'd made it."

M-08 did not ask her anything else. He went downstairs, walking more slowly than he ordinarily did.

M-06 watched him go. There were things she wanted to ask him about his arm. She thought that he might be able to answer them better when there was nobody there to measure his answers.

06 — THE SECOND AUTHORIZATION

The request concerning the connection between the diagnostic institution and the association reached the department responsible for the additional inquiries at twenty-three minutes past six. It was accompanied by a record of earlier calls made from the same institution. The duration of the longest call was indicated. The identity of the person who had made it was not.

An employee compared the record with a list of recent referrals and forwarded a recommendation to the liaison office. The institution had been identified as a place at which an examination relevant to the inquiry might have taken place. It was now considered a place at which somebody connected to the association might still be present.

Deren read the recommendation when it appeared on his terminal. It was the most specific piece of information concerning a possible location that he had received since the incident involving M-08. It was also an inference from two other pieces of information, neither of which established the subject's presence.

He requested the observations on which the recommendation was based.

The answer consisted of a time, the identity of the institution, and the duration of the connection.

He asked if there was a record of the contents of the conversation. The liaison officer explained that a further authorization had been sought and that the authority responsible for the communications had not yet indicated whether the request could be satisfied.

Deren told him that a medical examination and a telephone call did not constitute an observation of the subject.

"I don't disagree," the officer said. "But the department has asked for confirmation by other means."

"What means?"

He was informed that an officer from the municipal authority would be sent to the institution. Military personnel could be made available if the officer obtained information indicating that their presence might be required.

Deren asked to be informed before any such personnel were directed to the building. He then requested a copy of the instructions issued to the municipal officer.

The liaison officer told him that a copy could be supplied when the instructions had been issued.

He went to see Vale again. The colonel was reading a document concerning a change in the status of the operation. On a separate screen was a map on which the diagnostic institution had already been identified. Deren looked at the screen before placing his own document on the table.

"We haven't established that he's there."

Vale said that he did not intend to send the personnel into the building without further information.

"Somebody else is already going there."

"To obtain information."

Deren explained that the earlier encounter at the hospital had demonstrated how little distinction there might be between the appearance of an officer seeking information and the beginning of an operation. The subject had already been injured. The next encounter might have consequences they would not be able to reverse.

Vale looked at the acquisition order.

"Your objection has been recorded, Captain."

"It's not an objection to finding him."

"Then what would you like me to do?"

Deren asked for an instruction requiring verification of the subject's presence and a medical assessment before another acquisition was attempted in a civilian institution. Vale said he could make a recommendation to the authority directing the operation. He advised Deren not to confuse the measures under consideration with the original instructions given to the personnel.

Deren had not confused them. It was their increasing overlap that he was trying to describe.

When he returned to his office, he found a report from the regional facility. It concerned an authorized absence from the facility and a civilian consultation obtained during that absence by one of the designated personnel. The personnel office had asked whether the visit constituted an activity relevant to the operation.

The designation was M-06.

He read the report twice. Earlier he had been asked whether her request for a medical examination was connected with the inquiries concerning Roy. He had still not been furnished with a reason for connecting the two, other than the fact that both involved civilian physicians.

He wrote that no operational instruction had been issued to the member of the personnel requiring her to consult that physician. He could not establish an operational purpose for the consultation. Any further question about it should be addressed to the authority competent to determine matters concerning her medical care.

Before sending the reply he added a sentence stating that the consultation did not constitute evidence of the subject's presence at the address.

It was the second statement he had been required to write that evening explaining what a fact did not establish.

07 — THE INTERRUPTION

At the association Rachel had been listening to a woman in the adjoining office describe the arrangements for retaining the research material. She understood that it would be possible to obtain another copy of the statement she had signed without returning to the hospital. The original records would remain where they were unless the arrangements were changed by agreement or by an enforceable order.

She thanked the woman. When she returned to Min's office the chair behind the desk was empty.

The lawyer came in a moment later carrying a printed notice. An employee from the evening service had been told that there might be an interruption to some of the association's telephone connections. There was no indication of the duration of the interruption.

"When?" Rachel said.

"They don't know."

Min asked the employee to leave the line available for incoming calls for as long as it was possible to do so. She went back into the office and closed the door.

"Roy said he'd call again," Rachel told her.

"We'll be here."

There was a knock at the door. The chairman of the legal committee had received an inquiry concerning recent communications between the association and institutions at which inquiries about the preserved hospital records had been made. He wanted Min to read it before responding.

The request did not identify the records about which inquiries had been made. It listed a period during which relevant communication might have taken place. He pointed to a paragraph that called for the association to indicate whether contact had occurred with any institution with which it did not ordinarily communicate.

Min asked if the chairman knew what the information would be used for.

He said the request had been made in connection with a government inquiry.

"That isn't a description of the use."

He put the document on her desk. He had been told that a response was expected the following morning.

Rachel watched the two of them read it. She thought of the telephone on the desk. For all she knew, Roy was waiting for a hospital room, or sitting on the chair in the room from which he had called her. She had told him that she would not ask him for the address. She now understood that there might be other people asking for exactly that information without asking him.

Min went to speak to the person responsible for the association's records. Rachel remained in the office. She could hear the telephone in the adjoining room ringing. It went on ringing for longer than usual, and then stopped.

At the diagnostic institution Lian was told that a hospital had agreed to consider admitting Roy if a bed could be made available. They had requested the physician's opinion and confirmation that the patient wished to be admitted. No bed had yet been promised.

She explained this to Roy. He asked how long it might take.

"I don't know."

He looked at the clock. There were only a few minutes left of the hour for which he had been given the room.

"I'll make the other call now, if that's all right."

She went into the corridor while he used the telephone.

At first there was the usual signal. Then he heard a recorded voice saying that the call could not be completed. He put the receiver down and tried again. On the second occasion he heard nothing for a while, followed by a sound that indicated that the instrument was available for use.

He called the desk outside the room. An employee answered immediately.

"Is there something wrong with the telephone?" he asked.

The employee said that another person had reported difficulty reaching a number outside the institution. She offered to ask the person responsible for the telephones whether there was a problem with the service.

Roy thanked her and put down the receiver.

Lian came back a few moments later. He told her that the call had not been completed. She took the telephone she carried from her bag and asked whether he knew the number. He said he did, but that he did not think she should use her own telephone for the purpose.

She understood his meaning. She did not put the telephone away immediately.

"What were you going to tell her?"

"That I was leaving."

"You don't have to go yet."

He heard voices at the desk. A man had arrived at the institution and had requested to speak to the administrator. The employee explained that the examination area was about to close. The man said that his inquiry concerned the examinations that had been conducted earlier in the day.

Lian turned toward the door.

Roy stood up.

08 — THE LAST TRANSMISSION

Rachel heard her own telephone vibrate while she was looking out of the office window. It was a message from the woman who had let her use the room. The owner had decided not to provide any information about the occupants until the notice and the request accompanying it had been examined. The woman wanted to know if Rachel would be returning that evening.

She wrote that she did not know. She thanked her for everything she had done.

Min returned. The connection used by the main office had begun working intermittently. They had not been able to determine whether the difficulties concerned the association's equipment or the external service. The lawyer sat down, lifted the receiver, and listened.

She was able to obtain the usual signal.

Rachel asked if it was possible that Roy had already tried to call. Min said it was possible. They could not be sure that he would be given a further opportunity to do so.

"Can somebody find out whether the call was made?"

The lawyer looked at her. The question had an answer, but the answer involved a record of precisely the kind the government had been seeking. She explained that the employee could check

whether a call had reached the association's own service. It was not certain that a call from which no connection had been established would appear in the record.

Rachel asked her not to make any inquiry beyond that.

They waited.

In the examination room Roy put on his coat. Lian told him that there had been no demand for him to present himself to the man at the desk. The physician was speaking to the administrator. She wanted Roy to remain while they established what the inquiry concerned.

"If I stay, what will you have to tell them?" he said.

"Nothing that I'm not required to tell them."

He had no reason to doubt her. What he doubted was whether the distinction she drew would remain the same for the remainder of the evening.

He told her that he would seek another examination when it was possible. He asked her to retain the results of the one he had undergone that day.

"You need treatment, not just a record of an examination."

"I know."

For a moment he remained by the table. The telephone had given him the only conversation with Rachel he had had since they left each other. The prospect of walking away from it was harder to accept than he had expected. He asked Lian if she would allow him one more attempt.

She nodded.

He called the association. For several seconds there was no sound. He was about to replace the receiver when an employee answered. He asked for Min. There was a delay, and then he heard Rachel's voice.

"Roy?"

He closed his eyes.

"I'm here."

"We thought the line had stopped working."

"It did. Listen, I have to leave."

She asked if he was in danger. He told her that a man had arrived at the institution and that he did not know what the man had been sent to do. He said that he intended to leave before the question was settled.

"Do you know where you're going?"

"Not yet. Don't wait there all night."

She looked at Min, who was standing on the other side of the desk. She asked him to consider the places where they had been before coming to the hospital. There had been somewhere they had been treated as people who needed help rather than people whose presence had to be explained. She did not say the name of the place.

"I remember," he said.

"When you can, tell somebody you need to see me. I'll do the same."

He said that he would.

She was going to ask him to promise that he would look after himself. Then she realized that he had been doing precisely that in circumstances neither of them could have anticipated. Instead, she told him that she intended to continue the work when they were able to begin again.

"Not because somebody promised us a hundred years."

"I know."

"Because we ought to be able to find out."

He heard another sound on the line.

"Rachel."

There was a pause. She said his name. He did not know whether she had heard him, and before he could answer, the signal disappeared.

He held the receiver for several seconds longer. Lian was beside him now. She did not ask what had been said. When he finally put the receiver down she gave him a note describing the examinations and the contact details of the practice. She told him that he could use it if he needed to explain the injury to another physician.

He thanked her and asked which of the doors led to the public entrance.

She showed him the way. When they reached the desk the physician was still speaking to the administrator. The man who had arrived was sitting in a chair with a document across his knees. He looked up as Roy and Lian passed, but there was nothing in his manner to indicate that he had recognized either of them.

On the pavement Lian asked if Roy wanted her to accompany him any farther.

He said that he did not.

She watched him walk toward the junction. He stopped once to adjust the position of his arm. A vehicle passed between them, and when she could see the other side of the street again he had gone.

At the association Rachel was still holding the receiver. Min asked if she had heard the last thing he had said.

"He said my name."

She put the telephone down and went to collect her coat. On the desk was the statement establishing where the research records would remain. She checked that Min had retained the signed copy.

"If I don't come back tomorrow, you don't need to wait for me before you do anything with that."

Min said she understood. She asked whether Rachel had somewhere to go.

Rachel picked up the small bag she had brought from the room.

"I think I know where to begin."

At the command centre, a report arrived stating that the connection referred for examination had ceased before further information could be obtained. The identity of the caller had not been established in the report. Deren read it and requested confirmation of the situation at the institution.

There was still no verified observation.

He looked at the map. There were several addresses marked on it at which it had been considered possible that Roy might be found. The number had increased during the day. He had no reason to suppose that the number of places to which Roy could go had increased with it.

Outside the association Rachel stood under the light above the door. There was still time to return to the room she had been using. She looked at the street in that direction and then at the street leading toward the lower district.

She had spent several days hoping that she would be able to hear Roy's voice again.

It was no longer enough to wait beside a telephone.

END OF CHAPTER 08