CHAPTER 10

SOMEWHERE BEYOND

01 — THE MORNING AFTER

The first sound Roy heard in the morning was the sound of a chair being dragged along the floor downstairs. For a few seconds he could not remember where he was. He watched a line of pale light move across the ceiling as a vehicle passed in the street.

Rachel was asleep on the mattress beside the bed. Her coat lay over her feet. She had folded another blanket beneath her head because the pillow the man had given them was too thin.

Roy turned toward her. The movement displaced the support under his arm, and a pain that he recognized immediately prevented him from moving any farther.

He lay still until it subsided.

He had slept for several hours without waking. That in itself seemed unusual enough to deserve a moment of consideration. His body had once been able to tell him, with remarkable accuracy, how much sleep he would require before undertaking a particular task. It could no longer give him that information. It could tell him only that he had been awake too long, or that something he had done the previous day would not be possible again that morning.

Rachel opened her eyes.

"Is it late?"

"I don't think so."

She looked toward the window and sat up. For a little while they watched each other without speaking, as if each needed to establish that the other had not disappeared during the night.

There was water in a container on the table. Rachel poured some for him and asked whether he had been able to sleep.

"Yes."

"And the arm?"

"I haven't tried it."

"Good."

He smiled. She did not.

He understood that she was not amused by the extraordinary difficulty he had in distinguishing an examination of his ability from an unnecessary use of it. At the hospital he had regarded nearly every improvement as an opportunity to establish its extent. The encounters with the designated personnel had taught him something about the cost of doing that.

They went downstairs when the room began to fill with the smell of food. The man who had admitted them the night before was cutting bread on a board that bore the marks of many years of use. An elderly woman was arranging cups next to the water container.

The man asked if they intended to remain for another night.

Rachel said that they were trying to decide.

"You can have the room until this afternoon. After that I've got a woman coming with her son. The boy can't manage the stairs at the other place."

Roy thanked him. The man seemed embarrassed to have mentioned the arrangement and began to explain that the woman had been waiting for several days.

"You don't have to explain," Roy told him.

They ate beside the window. Across the road a shopkeeper was removing the metal covering from his window. The shop had been closed when they arrived, and neither of them had noticed that it sold shoes.

Rachel unfolded the note from Lian. She had read it twice during the night. There was nothing in it to indicate that Roy required continuous supervision, but neither did it provide a basis for undertaking a long journey without further examination.

"We need to speak to her."

Roy agreed.

"And we need to decide what we're going to do if she tells us we shouldn't go anywhere."

He looked out at the street. There were two possibilities he had been considering before Rachel woke. One involved getting out of the city at the earliest opportunity. The other involved remaining somewhere near the people who could help him. In either case, he could imagine being found.

"We could ask her what we can do before we decide what we can't," he said.

Rachel put the note back into her bag.

At the other end of the room the elderly woman was trying to open a new package of cups. Roy stood up to help her, then stopped when he realized that he would have to use both hands. Rachel went instead.

When she returned, he was still standing by the table.

"There are things I can do," he said.

"I know."

She handed him the two cups she had brought back. He carried them to the woman, one at a time.

It was the first work he had done that morning for which there was no need to establish the maximum extent of his ability.

02 — THE DURATION OF A LIFE

Adrian arrived at the association before the office opened. Sera Min found him sitting on a bench in the entrance hall, holding a folder between his knees. She had not expected to see him until the afternoon.

"Did you find something?"

"I found somebody who remembered the index."

He had spoken to a former employee of a research institution whose collections had been divided among several authorities. The employee had been willing to discuss the organization of the catalogue but had made it clear that he had never seen some of the documents to which it referred.

Min unlocked the office and asked Adrian to wait while she turned on the lights.

He laid three sheets on her desk. They contained the descriptions he and Imani had compared the previous evening, and a copy of an instruction concerning the transfer of research records.

The instruction had been issued before the later classification of the material. It contained a list of the kinds of information that were to be retained when the records were transferred. Among them were references to the observation of repair, the intervals between examinations, and the circumstances in which a series of observations was to be discontinued.

It did not contain any observations.

"This is an instruction to keep the documentation," Min said.

"Yes. But there are two different reasons for discontinuing it."

He pointed to a distinction in the instruction. One category concerned the impossibility of continuing the biological observation. The other concerned the expiry of authorization for a subject to remain in the study.

Min read the relevant passage again.

"Were the two categories applied?"

"We don't have the records that would tell us that."

"Then we can't say anyone was taken out of a study while still able to live."

"No. But somebody thought it necessary to keep those reasons separate."

Min looked at him. She understood why he had come before the office opened.

For years the administration of artificial life had depended on a description of its duration in which there was little room for a distinction of that kind. The life expected of a replicant was the life permitted to the replicant. When the two ceased, the terminology used in official documents suggested that a single event had taken place.

The document before her did not establish how long an artificial body could survive. It did establish that, at one point in the history of the research, a distinction between a biological event and an administrative event had been considered worth recording.

"What happens to that distinction in the military catalogue?"

Adrian said that he had not found it there. The abridged description in the later inventory contained only the reference to the material and the heading concerning operational service. It was impossible to tell whether the distinction had survived in the document itself.

They were both silent for a while.

Min asked whether the former employee would be prepared to provide a statement about the structure of the index. Adrian said that he would ask him, but that he did not want to expose the man to an inquiry concerning material he had never been allowed to see.

"Ask him whether he is willing to be contacted by me. Nothing more."

She made a copy of the transfer instruction and entered the source and the date on which it had been obtained. She then took out the statement that Adrian and Imani had sent the previous night.

They agreed on an addition to it. It was three sentences long. None of the sentences contained the words hundred years.

"Rachel should see this," Adrian said.

"When she can."

He nodded. He knew why Min had not proposed sending it to the address at which Rachel had been staying. He also knew that they could not plan the continuation of the work on the assumption that every person who had begun it would always be accessible.

He put the sheets back in the folder.

"I used to think we were looking for a method that had been lost."

Min waited for him to finish.

"Now I wonder whether some of the people who were looking for it were asking a different question from the one we were asking."

She looked at the reference to operational service.

"Then we should be careful not to inherit their question along with their records."

Adrian returned to the hospital by a route he had used before the acquisition operation began. He watched people crossing the road in the morning light. They were late for work, carrying food to somebody, or walking beside children who had not yet learned to hurry.

A century had once seemed to him a suitable name for the object of the research.

He was beginning to think that a more difficult object might be the right to decide what to do with a single afternoon.

03 — THE ORDER THAT REMAINED

Captain Deren was called to Colonel Vale's office shortly after nine. There was another officer in the room when he arrived, a woman from the legal division who had been asked to examine the relationship between the acquisition authorization and the instructions communicated to participating civilian authorities.

On the table was a list of fourteen institutions. Beside each name was a column describing the information that had been sought. In some cases the information related to Roy. In others there was no longer any means of identifying the person to whom the original inquiry had referred.

The woman asked Deren to describe the circumstances in which the designated personnel could be sent to any of the addresses.

He referred to the instruction he had recorded the previous evening.

"Confirmation of the subject's presence. Not confirmation that a request has been transmitted to the institution."

She made a note.

"Is that distinction being observed?"

"By my command, yes. I can't speak for the other departments."

Vale asked whether the difficulty could be resolved by issuing a new instruction concerning the exchange of information.

The woman said that it would be possible to define the information required for a deployment. The difficulty was that several of the civilian inquiries were now being conducted under provisions different from the one under which the original operation had been authorized.

Deren looked at the list again. There were people going to work that morning in all fourteen buildings. An instruction issued in an office where their names were unknown might change whether they could receive a patient or permit an employee to leave.

He had no illusion that the legal review would bring an end to the operation. There had been a death. The acquisition order had not been issued merely because an unusual person was difficult to locate. Those who had authorized it regarded the existence of the subject as a question of national security, and the death of Havel had given them an occasion to act on that conviction.

But it was becoming difficult to establish what another deployment could achieve that had not been achieved at the hospital. The subject had survived the earlier encounters. Two members of the designated personnel had undergone medical assessments as a consequence of the operation, and Roy's own medical condition was no longer known with sufficient certainty to support the assumptions under which the operation had been planned.

Deren asked to see the most recent assessment of M-08.

Vale gave him a copy. The movements the member of the personnel was permitted to perform had been revised again. He was still available, but a physician had expressed concern about the use of his injured hand under load.

"There isn't a corresponding restriction in the deployment instruction," Deren said.

"It can be added."

"It should have been there before he was made available."

Vale looked at him without replying.

The woman from the legal division closed her folder. She said that, pending the review of the civilian inquiries, she would recommend that deployments arising from those inquiries require confirmation by the command rather than a referral directly from another department.

Deren asked if an order to that effect could be issued before the afternoon.

She said that she could not promise it.

When the meeting was over, Vale asked him to remain.

"Do you think we should stop looking for him?"

Deren had been asked the question in several forms over the preceding days. This was the first time it had been put to him without reference to a particular location or a particular member of the personnel.

"I think we should stop pretending that looking for him and taking him are the same thing."

Vale walked to the window. In the distance a column of vehicles moved along the road leading out of the administrative district.

"The people who issued the authorization may not be inclined to make that distinction."

"Then they should be asked to say so."

The colonel remained at the window for a moment. He told Deren that the present restriction on deployment would remain in effect until he received a further instruction.

Deren returned to his office and entered the decision in the operational record. He then opened the map on which the positions of the command vehicles were displayed.

There were fewer markers than there had been the previous day. Some of the vehicles had been returned to other duties. Others were still available at their stations.

There was still no marker for the person they had been ordered to acquire.

04 — AN APPOINTMENT FOR HERSELF

M-06 was given a copy of the statement relating to her consultation late in the morning. A member of the administrative staff had removed two paragraphs that concerned departmental arrangements. The remaining portion contained a description of the matters she had been asked to confirm.

She read the statement standing beside the desk.

"It says that the nature of the consultation wasn't established."

The employee nodded.

"Established by whom?"

He explained that no description of the consultation had been provided to the department.

She considered whether she should object to the wording. It was true that no such description had been provided. It was not true that there was anything particularly difficult to establish about the consultation. She had been there, and so had the physician.

"Can I make a statement of my own?"

He said that she could submit a supplementary statement.

She asked for a sheet of paper. She wrote that she had requested the consultation for her own purposes, had attended it during a period in which she had been permitted to be absent, and wished to receive another consultation. The employee read the statement and asked if she wanted the last sentence put into a separate request.

"Yes. But I'd like it to remain here as well."

He took the paper. She watched him attach it to the statement she had been given.

It occurred to her that, if she had been able to make a record of the visit for herself at the time it took place, she would not have needed to spend the morning correcting the description somebody else had made of it.

She asked for a second sheet.

On this one she wrote the name of the practice, the date of the visit and the time at which she had arrived. Beneath those things she wrote what she remembered the physician saying about an appointment. She folded the sheet and put it in her pocket.

"Do you need that added to the file?" the employee asked.

"No."

In the common room she found M-08 sitting with his injured hand resting on a cushion. He had been told to return to the medical section at noon. He was watching a recording of an exercise in which he had taken part before the beginning of the acquisition operation.

M-06 watched the recording with him for a few minutes. There were several occasions on which she could predict what he would do before she saw him do it.

"Have you asked them about the pain?"

"I'm going to."

He stopped the recording.

"If I tell them it hurts, they'll want to know how much I can do with it."

She said that the answer to that question might be of interest to the physician. It was not the only thing a physician might be interested in.

He looked at her.

"What did the one you saw ask?"

She told him that some of the questions she had been asked had nothing to do with her ability to perform a task. The physician had been interested in what had happened to her, and in the circumstances in which she had begun to think about it differently.

M-08 turned the recording on again. On the screen he caught an object that had been thrown toward him. The person who operated the apparatus recorded the interval between the release of the object and the movement of his hand.

"I don't remember how that felt," he said.

Neither of them could tell whether he meant the movement itself or the occasion on which he had performed it.

A member of the staff called him to the medical section. He got up and left the cushion on the chair.

M-06 went to the window. The gates were open. A delivery vehicle was waiting to enter the facility, and a guard was talking to the driver.

She had no immediate intention of leaving without permission. She was still trying to determine why a consultation she had requested for herself could only be obtained by arranging an authorized absence from a place that other people regarded as her proper location.

In the pocket of her coat she could feel the edge of the physician's card.

There was still no date written on the back of it.

She went to the telephone in the corridor and called the administrative office. She wanted to know whether the second request she had made had been received.

The employee said that it had.

She asked him for the reference number.

This time she wrote it down before she was asked to end the call.

05 — THE JOURNEY THEY COULD MAKE

By noon the sun had dried the pavement outside the building. Rachel had been able to speak to Lian from a telephone belonging to the woman who ran the shop on the opposite side of the road. The physician had asked a number of questions about Roy's condition and had arranged to see him that afternoon.

The practice was not in the lower district. There were several roads along which municipal checks had been conducted since the previous morning, and Rachel was uncertain how long it would take them to reach it.

Lian called again twenty minutes later. She said that a physician who attended patients at a community clinic farther down the hill would be prepared to examine Roy with the information she could provide. Rachel asked Roy if he agreed to the information being sent.

He did.

They had to leave the room before the other patient arrived. Rachel folded the blankets while Roy sat on the edge of the bed. At the bottom of the stairs the man gave them a bag containing the food left over from breakfast.

Roy offered him the money he still had.

"Keep it," the man said. "You're going to need it more than we are."

Roy asked him if there was something else they could give him.

The man pointed to the repaired bed upstairs.

"You didn't move it. That's enough for today."

They left by the door through which Roy had entered the previous evening. The rain had washed a quantity of dirt into the shallow channels along the sides of the street. Water was still running through them.

Rachel carried the bag. She did not walk in front of Roy or attempt to lead him by his good arm. When he stopped she stopped too.

The journey to the clinic took considerably longer than she had expected. There were two occasions on which he needed to sit down. At the second he told her, without being asked, that he would like to remain where he was for a while.

She sat beside him on the low wall outside a closed shop.

"You don't have to keep telling me that you can go on," she said.

"I was going to tell you something else."

He was looking at a boy on the opposite side of the street who was helping his father carry a length of pipe.

"Do you remember the first time you asked me how old I was?"

Rachel did. She had not been certain that he understood the question in the way she intended it.

"You tried to give me two answers."

"I thought one of them would be useful to you."

"They both were."

He watched the boy and his father until they disappeared into a doorway. Then he asked how much time she thought the two of them had spent together in all the places they had stayed.

She said that she had once tried to count the days. There had been stretches during which she could remember what they had done but not which day of the week it had been. Some of their records had been lost. Others had been kept by people they could no longer contact.

"Would you want me to count again?"

"No."

He was thinking about the eleven years of which he had no memory. He had spent a great deal of time trying to understand the relationship between the absence of those years and the person he had become. There were now other periods for which he had no record except that he had been there with Rachel. He did not feel the same need to demonstrate that those periods belonged to him.

When he stood up he told her that he was ready. They continued down the hill.

At the clinic the physician had received Lian's description of the earlier examination. She introduced herself, obtained Roy's consent to a further examination, and told him that she did not intend to repeat any of the measurements for which she already had usable results.

He was grateful. He had begun to dread being asked to make the same movements in circumstances in which his physical condition had changed.

The physician asked about places in which the pain had appeared during the journey. She examined the arm and the surrounding tissues, compared what she found with the previous observations, and adjusted the support. She told him that there were some encouraging signs and that there were other things she could not yet assess. She did not recommend an immediate return to the activity that had caused the deterioration.

Rachel asked about travelling beyond the city.

"How far?"

She described the options they had discussed. They knew of a community in another district at which patients had once been accommodated. They did not know whether the facility was still operating.

The physician said that a seated journey with opportunities to rest might be possible, provided his condition remained stable and further assistance could be obtained at the destination. She would prefer him to remain somewhere close until those arrangements had been made. She gave them the circumstances in which they should seek medical attention rather than continue.

"I'm not telling you where to live," she said. "I'm telling you what I can establish about making the journey today."

Roy thanked her.

They waited in the corridor while the physician prepared a note for Lian. There was a map of the surrounding districts on the wall. The boundaries shown on it were boundaries between areas in which different clinics accepted patients. The roads did not end at them.

Rachel looked at the map and then at Roy.

"We don't have to get very far today."

"No."

She took out the bag of food the man had given them.

There was enough for both of them.

06 — THE RECORD THAT COULD BE KEPT

At the association a member of the staff brought Min a letter from the institution responsible for answering inquiries about the transferred research material. It had arrived in response to a request she had made before the previous evening.

The letter confirmed that the reference number appeared in a register of material received by an authority operating under the defense administration. It did not confirm that the material was held at the address to which the request had been sent. The institution was unable to authorize the release of documents concerning the contents of the referenced collection.

There was a name at the bottom of the letter. Min was permitted to write to the person whose name it was, although there was no indication that further questions would be answered.

She telephoned Adrian.

He came to the office with Imani. They read the letter together. It was the first time they had obtained, directly from an institution concerned with the later custody of the material, an acknowledgment of the reference they had been tracing.

Adrian wanted to know whether the institution could be required to say if the material had been destroyed.

Min explained the difficulty. The acknowledgment established that a record of receipt had survived. It said nothing about which documents or specimens might still exist. Even if the

authority were prepared to answer a question about destruction, it might answer with reference to a collection whose contents the three of them had never been permitted to establish.

"Can we keep the reply?" Imani asked.

"Yes."

"Then let's do that first."

Min gave her a copy.

They went through the sequence of documents from the earliest instruction to the letter that had arrived that morning. It was possible to demonstrate from the surviving records that some material associated with the original research into the duration of artificial life had entered the defense administration. That was a different proposition from a claim that the defense administration possessed a treatment capable of extending life.

Imani asked Adrian whether the experimental chamber at the hospital could be used again if the research were resumed elsewhere.

He said that some of the apparatus could be duplicated. There were problems in the original observations that would not be resolved by duplicating the apparatus, and there was no reason to undertake a more ambitious procedure before the preliminary ones could be interpreted with sufficient confidence.

He had hoped that the old records would save them years of work.

Now he could not even be sure that returning to the beginning would produce a different result from the one obtained by people who had proceeded in ignorance of what others intended to do with their discoveries.

Imani turned to the page on which their preliminary statement had been written.

"We would know why we were doing it."

Adrian looked at her.

"At least we'd be able to say what it wasn't for."

Min asked if they wanted that stated in a separate document relating to any continuation of the work. Imani thought it would be premature to prepare a research protocol. She did, however, want the existing conditions concerning consent and the custody of results retained with the material already collected.

They spent some time establishing which versions of those conditions had been agreed before the acquisition operation made it impossible to continue at the hospital. Adrian found a copy on which Rachel's comments had been recorded.

There was a sentence she had questioned. The sentence described the circumstances in which a participant might be removed from an experimental procedure.

In the margin she had asked whether a participant might leave without having to satisfy any of the circumstances listed.

Adrian remembered the discussion. They had changed the sentence.

He showed Imani the revised version.

Min made a separate copy of it and added it to the file. She told them that she would request acknowledgment of custody from another independent institution. She could not guarantee that any of the bodies retaining the documents would remain unaffected by government inquiries. She could establish what they had received and under what conditions they had agreed to hold it.

Later in the afternoon, a call came from Lian. She asked Min whether the office had a telephone number at which Adrian could be reached without requiring him to remain in the office.

Min did. She asked if there was anything she should tell him.

Lian said that she had been asked to inform the people at the association that two persons who knew them were together. Neither was asking for an appointment at the association.

Min understood.

"Can I tell him they're all right?"

"Tell him they're together."

The lawyer wrote the message on a piece of paper. She did not add a reference to the file number or the places at which she had previously been asked about the whereabouts of either person.

When Adrian returned to collect his folder she gave him the paper.

He read it twice. Then he asked if there was anything they were expected to do.

"Continue the work," Min said. "If that's what you want to do."

He put the message in his pocket rather than in the folder.

07 — AN UNCLASSIFIED QUESTION

The revised instruction reached the regional facility in the late afternoon. It provided that deployment in response to information obtained through participating civilian authorities required confirmation by the operational command. It also confirmed that the availability of particular personnel was to be assessed with reference to the proposed duties.

M-04 read the instruction on the screen in the briefing room. He had been asked to remain at the facility until the end of the day. In the event of a new operation he would be given a separate description of the requirements.

Across the room M-08 was speaking to the medical officer. His hand had been examined again, and an additional restriction had been placed on its use. The officer was explaining that the restriction would apply to his next assessment as well as to any duties that might be assigned to him.

M-08 looked at the hand.

"Until when?"

"Until it has been examined again."

He wanted to know if another examination had already been arranged. The officer said it would be arranged in accordance with the usual procedure.

M-08 nodded, then asked if he could have the time of the examination when it had been decided.

The officer seemed slightly surprised. He said that the staff would inform him.

M-06 was waiting in the corridor when M-08 came out. He told her that he had been given another restriction. She asked if the physician had said anything about the pain.

"He said they'd try something different."

"Is that what you wanted?"

He considered the question before answering.

"I wanted it to stop hurting."

She nodded.

They went to the common room. M-04 arrived a little later and told them what he had read on the screen. None of them had been given a new deployment instruction.

M-08 asked whether that meant the operation was over.

M-04 said that it did not.

They sat in silence. The room had been designed for people waiting to be told what to do. There were chairs, a screen, and a clock. There was nothing on the walls to distinguish it from many of the rooms in which they had waited before.

M-06 took the card from her pocket. The practice had agreed to receive her again if she could arrange to attend. Her request for another period of absence had not yet been decided.

She asked M-04 if he had ever been given any information about the duration for which he could expect to remain alive.

He looked at her.

"We were told about the period of service."

"That's not what I asked."

M-08 turned his head toward them. He had been following the movement of the second hand on the clock.

M-04 said that he remembered being given information about the conditions in which further assessments would be required. He could not recall a discussion in which the expected duration of his life had been distinguished from the conditions of his service.

M-06 asked what would happen at the end of a period of service if the person were still able to live.

Neither man answered.

She had not asked the question because she believed she had discovered something about herself. She did not know whether there was an answer that would apply to any of them. She had become interested in things that a physician might be able to tell her even if the answers had no bearing on the next instruction she received.

M-04 looked at the card.

"Are you going to ask the doctor?"

"Yes."

M-08 leaned back in his chair. He said that he would like to know the answer too.

In an office on the floor below, a member of the administrative staff was completing the description of the members of the personnel who remained available that evening. He had received information about M-08's latest examination. He entered the additional restriction and forwarded the revised description to the operational command.

There was no place in the description to enter a question that a member of the personnel might wish to ask about his or her life.

Upstairs M-06 borrowed a pencil from the desk near the window. On the piece of paper she had folded after her visit to the administrative office, she wrote the question she had asked the two men. She left a space underneath it for the answer.

08 — SOMEWHERE BEYOND

The place Lian had told them about was not the one Rachel remembered. The old facility had ceased accepting patients for overnight accommodation, but a smaller building at the edge of the adjoining district was still in use. The people there had agreed to receive Roy for a limited period while arrangements for further examinations were made.

They could not promise how long the arrangement would last. They had been affected by the interruptions to transport and by changes in the places from which they received supplies.

Rachel accepted the offer. She and Roy walked to the stop at which they could join a service that went part of the way there. It was getting dark. The buildings around them were beginning to turn their lights on, and there were people waiting beside the road with bags from the shops.

A bus arrived, but it was carrying more passengers than Roy could comfortably stand among. They waited for another. He apologized to Rachel for the delay.

She looked at him.

"Where do you think I have to be?"

He laughed. The laugh hurt, but not enough to prevent him from laughing again.

They boarded the next bus and found two seats near the rear. Roy sat with his right arm supported against his body. Rachel took the seat beside the window. She watched the roads in the upper part of the district disappear behind the buildings as the bus descended.

There was no announcement concerning the acquisition order. On the screen above the driver there was a notice about the restoration of a service that had been interrupted the previous day. Several passengers seemed relieved by it.

At the command centre, Deren received the last scheduled update from the civilian authorities. The locations mentioned in it had either already been examined or were the subject of inquiries for which no results had been returned. The acquisition order remained active. He forwarded the update with the instruction that no location in the report was to be treated as confirmed.

A member of the staff asked whether the map should be prepared again for the morning briefing.

Deren said that it should.

He watched the man remove the markers for vehicles that were no longer assigned to the operation. The city remained on the screen after the markers disappeared.

There was no place on it to indicate that the two people they had been seeking had found each other.

On the bus Rachel was telling Roy what Lian had said about the association. The message had been delivered. Adrian and Imani would continue to examine the records, and the material that had been placed in Min's custody would remain there.

Roy asked if she wanted to go back to the work when his condition permitted it.

"Yes," she said. "But I don't want to decide that the only thing we can do together is find a way to live longer."

He thought about this.

For much of the life he remembered, the idea of having more time had been inseparable from the things he would have to do to obtain it. He had not often been permitted to imagine a day of which the purpose was not determined in advance by the days that might remain.

"What else would you like to do?"

Rachel considered the question. She said that she would like to see the sea again. She would like to stay somewhere long enough to learn the names of the people who lived nearby. She wanted to read things that had no connection with the research she had been doing.

"And you?"

He looked out of the window. The lights beside the road were farther apart here than in the centre of the city. There were stretches between buildings through which he could see a dark expanse of land. He had no idea what was growing there.

"I don't know yet."

"That's all right," she said.

He had once been unable to answer certain questions about his past. Now it was a question about the future to which he had no answer. He found that the difference mattered to him.

The bus stopped at the last place to which the driver had agreed to take them. Rachel asked for directions to the building. A passenger who had got off with them pointed toward a row of lights at the end of the road and said that the building was on the other side of them.

They thanked her and began to walk.

The distance was short. Even so, after a while Roy asked if they could stop. There was a bench beside the road, with a tree growing behind it. They sat there until he felt able to continue.

Rachel looked up. The clouds had begun to separate above the darker part of the district. Through the opening she could see a few stars. They were not particularly bright.

She remembered the observations at the observatory and the questions they had been unable to answer. She thought of the records from which a person could be removed, the years Roy could not account for, and the lives that had been given a limit by people who were not obliged to live within it.

None of those things had been resolved by the fact that they had reached this road.

Somewhere in the city there were still people trying to establish where Roy was. Somewhere else there were people who had begun to establish what had been done with the research in which they were interested. And in a room neither of them had seen, a woman known by a number had written down a question about the duration of her own life.

Rachel did not know the woman. Roy had seen her only once outside the hospital. They did not know when, or whether, they would meet her again.

The wind moved the leaves above the bench. Roy looked toward the building they had been told about. There was a light at its entrance.

"Shall we go?" he asked.

Rachel stood up and waited beside him while he rose.

They walked toward the light, leaving the bench empty behind them. Beyond the building the road continued into an area where there were no streetlights. Rachel could not see where it went.

For tonight they had somewhere to stay.

Tomorrow there would be a road.

END OF CHAPTER 10